Teacher's and User's Guide for:

STANISLAVSKY

FROM THE OUTSIDE IN:

React and Act

Censoring Stanislavsky: An Acting Revolution Begins

- *A Tradition of Acting* (F2689DVD)
- *A Basic Shift Occurs* (F2690DVD)

Materializing Stanislavsky: Body Over Mind

- *The Weight Model* (F2691DVD)
- *The Four Circles of Attention Model* (F2692DVD)
- *The Three-Part Model of an Action Model* (F2693DVD)

Rehabilitating Stanislavsky: The Actor's Process in the 21st Century

- *The Materials Model* (F2694DVD)
- *The Feelings Model* (F2695DVD)
- Rehearsal Models/Questions/In Class with Stella Adler (F2696DVD)

A First Light Video DVD Presentation

Stanislavsky from the Outside In
React and Act

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How to use this guide

"It isn't acting unless you can see it."

Ron Burrus

It’s difficult to learn acting solely from a book. Acting is a process, and, as with any process, it requires time and practice. However, by using the models and exercises presented in *Stanislavsky from the Outside In: React and Act*, it will be possible to position yourself immediately to start asking the right questions about the human behavior you observe every day, and to begin applying these concepts directly to your own acting, directing and writing.

With this in mind, this booklet is designed as both a reference and a supplement to the information presented in the video presentation on the DVD.

As a reference, look to this guide to provide historical dates, model and exercise sequence information “at-a-glance” and diagrams of the material presented in the video of the DVD.

As a supplement, (and without the time constraints imposed by video), this guide presents additional technique information and exercises in a format that gives you the ability to absorb and proceed step-by-step as if you were actually participating in a weekly class. Additionally, because the goal of *Stanislavsky from the Outside In* is to externalize the movements of acting, the descriptions of each exercise will tell you specifically how your body will look and move while you’re experiencing the exercises.

As an aid to learning, after watching each of the DVD videos, I recommend spending at least one week per user’s guide chapter studying, thinking about, and performing the exercises that are presented there. As you read, the temptation might be to only read the descriptions of the exercises and not to take the time to actually let your body experience the movements. However, I encourage you to treat both your mind and your body to the exercises. As you'll see, it's your body that must experience the physical movements of the exercises in order for you to completely learn from them.

A great idea would be to videotape yourself while you're doing the exercises. The more you can see the Models in motion and how your body looks while you're doing them, the more you'll learn.

As I've learned from years of teaching, questions, of course, will arise. Everyone learns in his or her own way. I regret that I won't be there to personally guide you through the discoveries that occur from knocking down old walls in order to construct new walls in their places (with windows, I hope!).

Above all, don't be afraid to ask yourself questions without receiving immediate answers. It's okay not to know something right away. Use the models presented as guides for not only answering questions but for teaching yourself how to ask even more questions about life and about acting.

Stanislavsky from the Outside In is VISUAL. Go to life and OBSERVE when you have a question about acting just as Stanislavsky did. See how your question can be answered from life.

Introduction

The origins of *Stanislavsky from the Outside In: React and Act*

Imagine we're driving on our way to work. The traffic seems unusually heavy. We're late. We decide to take a different route. It's not the shortest way to go but it winds through a residential area so traffic should be lighter. In fact, it is: only a few cars in front of us, and there's a long stretch of road with a park on one side so we can really make up some time. We speed up. After the park, we come to a stop sign. Then we see it: the "Slow, School Zone" sign.

And then we see the police car pull up behind us. . .

From these events and these perceptions, it's clear that our bodies and our movements go through changes – inwardly and outwardly. And it happens to us every waking moment – anytime we perceive something new.

For example, we move inside a cathedral or a mosque differently than we move when we're inside a nightclub. We talk to a two-year-old differently than we talk to a doctor who is taking care of our father who has just had a heart attack.

This is the origin of *Stanislavsky from the Outside In*: the realization that how we move and feel comes from outside of us – from our perceptions of events.

Surprisingly, it took many actors and a long time to apply this realization to acting.

The most recognized person to have investigated acting training was the Russian-born actor, Konstantin Sergeyevich Stanislavsky (1863–1938). He asked himself the simple question, "Why are great actors considered to be great?" He was able to watch actors all over the world, and he observed simply what they "did." From his observations, he began developing exercises which he thought might aid him and other actors in learning to "do" what the great actors often "did" naturally without any type of formal training. He attempted to "de-mystify" how the "magic" was done.

In the United States, in the 1920s and 1930s, Stanislavsky's teachings were imported and interpreted. For example, an American actor, Lee Strasberg took a set of exercises known as "Affective Memory" that he had learned from students of Stanislavsky and began teaching them as sufficient for a total acting technique. Stella Adler, already considered one of the great actresses of the time (and the only member of The Group Theater to actually study personally with Stanislavsky), concentrated on the imagination and "the given circumstances" as ways of approaching a role. Sanford Meisner, also a member of

the original Group Theater, created acting exercises that can seem to be techniques which would distract an actor's (censuring) attention long enough for the actor to experience truthful moments when acting a part.

Since the 1940s, these basic formulations of Stanislavsky's theories have continued being handed down, reinterpreted, and re-marketed in the United States. But most Americans are unaware that the study and research of acting continued on independently after Stanislavsky's death in the Soviet Union as well. There, acting "labs" were set up to begin studying human behavior and to apply this knowledge to acting.1

For my research for written documentation of this period of Soviet acting research, I am hugely indebted to Sharon Marie Carnicke, Professor of Theatre and Slavic Languages at the University of Southern California. In her authoritative book, *Stanislavsky In Focus, 2nd Edition* (Carnicke 2009:104–9), her research reveals the large amount of censorship and "rehabilitation" inflicted upon Stanislavsky's theories and writings to make them conform to a politically-driven "rhetoric of Realism," while he was alive, after his death, and continuing up until the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Under these conditions, it's understandable that fundamental differences developed between the acting research work being done in the Soviet Union acting labs and the continuation of Stanislavsky's theories in the United States. For example, from my study of the acting models which arose out of the Soviet acting labs after Stanislavsky's death (SEE Chapter Three for a description of an acting model), it's my belief that, enforced and coerced by the Socialist Realism and Marxist ideology of its political system, the acting research in the Soviet Union turned its attention away from "acting and performers" and began concentrating instead on life and non-performers, namely, everyday people. In essence, the Soviet actors began studying and observing what real-life people do in real-life situations, and why people do what they do.

It was from this new research that the Soviet actors came up with a very clear formula: *the quality of human movement is determined by the purposes that are formed in our minds when we're presented with new information.*

This understanding became the basis for creating models of human behavior taken from observing life. Taken as a whole, these models create a system which allows actors to accurately "do" in front of an audience what people do in real life.

I was most fortunate to have attended classes in New York City through the Stella Adler Conservatory of Acting in the early 1980s that were given by master Soviet acting teacher, Evgeny Lanskoy, in which he taught and demonstrated these acting models of human behavior. To this day, he remains the best authority for them. In the years since, I've adapted and combined his information with the foundational acting techniques I learned directly from Stella Adler and her protégé, Ron Burrus and the other wonderful technique teachers at the New York City Stella Adler Conservatory of Acting from 1976 through 1979: Mario Siletti, Pearl Pearson, Marlene Pennison, Irene Kling and Sondra Lee. *Stanislavsky from the Outside In: React and Act* would not be possible without the brilliance and lore of each of them.

1 A tradition of acting

"Great acting has a tradition, and in the Western world, actors must have the necessary techniques at their disposal."

Stella Adler

Stanislavsky in the United States

No one learns to act in a day, a month, or a year. In the West, including Europe and Russia, the study of acting and acting training has had a tradition (Figure 1.1). (Traditions are useful for not having to reinvent the wheel every time we want to create something new.) This tradition in the West was started by a man named Constantin Sergeyevich Stanislavsky (1863–1938). Stanislavsky was born long before the Russian Revolution, and as early as 1877, Stanislavski started asking himself, "What is acting?" "Why do we think someone is a good actor?" (Benedetti 1999:14)

Stanislavsky came from a very wealthy family, and I mention this simply for two reasons. One, it shows that Stanislavsky began his interest in acting as an amateur (free from pre-conceived ideas about acting), and two, it was probably his family's wealth which allowed him to take the time to travel and observe. When he was only fourteen years old, he was able to observe “performances given by foreign star actors such as Ernesto Rossi performing Shakespearean protagonists” (Benedetti 1999:17). When he was nineteen, he was profoundly affected by Tommaso Salvini’s performance of Othello in Moscow (Gordon 1987:10–11). When he was twenty-five, he spent the summer of 1888 studying the classes and performances of the Comédie-Francaise in Paris (Benedetti 1999:29–30). As much as he could, Stanislavsky traveled and watched famous actors and performers. He talked to them, and he interviewed them. He asked himself why audiences considered these actors to be good. Why did people pay money to come and watch these great actors perform? He began developing theories in answer to his questions. In the beginning, he started an acting company – strictly amateur at first – but using the profits from his family's factory, he was able to form a professional theater and school, the Society of Art and Literature (Benedetti 1999:29–30).

Eventually, Stanislavsky's acting company began being well-known in Russia for its excellence in acting and reformed itself in 1897 into what became to be known as the Moscow Art Theatre (Benedetti 1999:59). By the time the Russian Revolution occurred in 1917, Stanislavsky's actors and techniques were well-enough established that the Soviet government allowed Stanislavsky to continue with his work – at the same time dictating that what he would be presenting to the rest of the world would be “tired realistic repertoire” (Carnicke 2009:37) that in actuality Stanislavsky was already moving away from in his research. It was under these conditions that Stanislavsky and his company

toured and came to the United States in 1923.

Close to this same time, there was a famous actress living in New York City. Quite differently from Stanislavsky, she had grown up in a professional acting family. Her name was Stella Adler and her father was Jacob Adler, a Yiddish actor with his own theatre company. Jacob Adler's Yiddish theatre had its own favorite repertoire of plays and actors and was world-known for its performances. In 1919, Stella began making a name for herself as an actress in London and then in 1922 on Broadway.

The Moscow Art Theatre's productions in New York in 1923 were a revelation to American actors. Both Stella and another young American actor, Lee Strasberg, saw them.

So what was so revolutionary about Stanislavsky's performances and the style of acting with which he used to present them?

First of all, what must be understood about theatre in the United States is that, up until the 1930s, dramatic plays that were produced were almost always about certain classes of people: kings and queens and the aristocracy or about poor people who were immutably locked into a servant class or into their poverty. They didn't have plays as we have now. The repertoire consisted largely of the classics such as Shakespeare and Molière, classic Greek plays, religious morality plays or melodramas. More-modern playwrights such as Ibsen and O'Neill were beginning to be performed but most often in a melodramatic style that had little to do with realistic acting.1

Secondly, although Stanislavsky's actors were still performing plays about specific classes of people (the Russian bourgeoisie, for example), their characters on stage spoke in everyday speech, not in poetry. Furthermore, Stanislavsky re-created a certain style of believability and reality on stage. For example, sound effects were used. Crickets could be heard chirping; church bells would chime. If the scene in a play was occurring out-of-doors, the actors would slap at mosquitoes as if they were being bitten. In fact, in most aspects of these American productions, there was much attention to life-like detail, and accordingly, Stanislavsky's early style became known in the United States as "Realism."2

Thirdly, looming on the horizon was the economic depression of the 1930s. The end of World War I and a political re-ordering of much of the world encouraged the questioning of the current American political system and social conditions and cleared the way for attempting new forms of many social institutions – including the Arts.

Taken altogether, the Moscow Art Theatre's productions – to the American actors – were new, fresh and brought with them the promise of social change.

Newly inspired, American actors began learning all they could about Stanislavsky and his new training. In 1925, Stella studied with two students of Stanislavsky's, Maria

Ouspenskaya and Richard Boleslavsky and acted in some of their American Laboratory Theatre productions in New York City (Adler 1988:128).

Lee Strasberg also studied with Ouspenskaya and Boleslavsky at the American Laboratory Theatre (Carnicke 2009:67). Both of these teachers taught Strasberg one of Stanislavsky's earliest acting theories, "Affective Memory" (later to be the starting-off point for Strasberg's "Sense Memory).

In 1931, Stella Adler formally joined with Lee Strasberg and other American actors in New York City to form the Group Theatre. Their goal was to act in a new style of acting in new plays that would speak to a working-class audience in its own language. And they hoped and believed that Stanislavsky's teachings were a way to achieve this.

Nevertheless, Stella continued touring with other professional acting companies throughout the world (Adler 1988:128). However, she had become increasingly disturbed with her acting after seeing Stanislavsky's company of actors perform using their new acting techniques in New York City in 1923. She began realizing how much her own acting training was in the old style. She didn't know how to achieve the results of the new style; she only knew that she wanted desperately to learn.

In June of 1934 in Paris, she was finally introduced personally to Stanislavsky. According to Stella, after refusing to talk to him, she finally blurted out, "Mr. Stanislavsky, I loved the theatre until you came along, and now I hate it!" (Adler 1988:120) In reply to her confession, Stanislavsky agreed to meet with Stella and work with her on her acting which he did every afternoon for at least a month (Carnicke 2009:66).

After her training with Stanislavsky, Stella brought Stanislavsky's newer exercises and ideas back with her to the United States and presented them to the actors of The Group Theatre. What Stella brought back from her work with Stanislavsky was different from the Affective Memory exercises that Lee Strasberg had learned from Boleslavsky and had been in turn advocating and teaching to the Group Theatre. With Stella, Stanislavsky had approached acting through the imagination and "given circumstances."

"Lee Strasberg had not necessarily misunderstood the exercise on Emotion Memory. He was using material passed on by Boleslavsky and Ouspenskaya neither of whom had any knowledge of the Method of Physical Action" (Benedetti 1988:329). However, American actors were so anxious to have a new style of acting that they accepted these exercises from Strasberg and interpreted them to be an entire style and technique of acting in and of themselves.

Strasberg and Adler began fighting about who was right.

The Method versus the imagination

Strasberg created (and marketed) what came to be known later as "Method" acting. Actors we tend to associate with this style of acting (whether rightly or wrongly) are, for example, Al Pacino and Dustin Hoffman.

What is it we think of when we think of "Method" acting? Too much reality might be one (wry) way to think of it. In Method acting, Strasberg expanded upon the idea, "if we want something to be real, then what we as actors have to do is think back to an event in our own lives where this exact event that we want to communicate happened to us."

For example, if you were playing Hamlet, and you wanted to know how to communicate how Hamlet feels when he thinks about the death of his father, you could think back to your own life and ask yourself, "Well, what was it like when my own father died?" Admittedly, this is an extreme example but it demonstrates the problem this technique poses for actors for whom their fathers have not yet died. How would these actors be able to experience Hamlet's emotion? This was solved by another concept referred to as "substitution" (Carnicke 2009:221).

At that time (and still today), American actors were much concerned with creating inside themselves the emotions of the characters they played and spent much thought on how these internal emotions could be communicated out to their audiences. However, some American actors became confused with this use of their own emotions as a method for communicating the emotions of characters they were trying to play – characters who could be vastly different from themselves. Nevertheless, Strasberg encouraged them as if saying, "This is the answer. Use your own life on stage as a way for being truthful and for bringing reality into your acting."

Stella had been taught by Stanislavsky something different from this "Method" or "feeling" technique of acting. "What struck Stella Adler most was Stanislavsky's insistence on physical action as the basis for building a performance – his rejection of any direct approach to feelings and his abandonment, except as a last resort, of Emotion Memory, which, under the influence of Boleslavsky, had become a feature of Stanislavskian acting in America" (Benedetti 1988:328).

Stanislavsky didn't seem to have worked with Stella much on "feeling" or what's also been called "Emotional Memory." Instead, Stanislavsky concentrated on teaching Stella about the power of the human imagination to create the truthfulness on stage the actor needs for realism. Imagination is something that is evoked in us by using the words "as if" or "what if." For example, actors playing characters whose fathers have just died will ask themselves, "What if my character's father has just died? How will my character react? What will my character's body do? How will my character hold his or her head? How will

my character walk? Will my character refuse to eat?"

Stella eventually concluded that it's not only crazy for actors to believe that they can re-create and experience on stage, for example, their own feelings at the time of their fathers' deaths but it's also a waste of time since actors aren't playing themselves on stage anyway but rather characters who may be quite different types of persons to begin with – perhaps characters who never mourned the deaths of their dead fathers at all.

Use of the imagination never contends that actors are actually experiencing the emotions of the characters they're playing. In the first place, as we'll see in later discussions about feeling and emotion, it's not even necessary. In the second place, actors' personal emotions can actually interfere with the messages they're trying to communicate to the audience.

"Method" acting, on the other hand, tries to recreate inside actors the feelings their characters are feeling at the time, and maintains that when actors are successful at achieving this, their characters' feelings will accurately be communicated to an audience.

In reply to this approach, Stella Adler might say, "It's impossible to actually feel the character's feelings; so, let's not pretend; let's not lie. This 'event' is not really happening. This is a stage; there's an audience out there watching. We can achieve a much clearer result by asking ourselves, 'what if this event had happened?' and by using our imaginations and our bodies to 'play back' the answer to the audience."

Stanislavsky continued directing theatre and pursuing his development of techniques for training actors in the Soviet Union up until his death in 1938 – albeit under virtual house arrest by Stalin and strict government oversight during his last years (Carnicke 2009:85). In the United States, the developments of Strasberg's "the Method" and Adler's "Imagination" were the first big split in the American interpretation of the tradition of the new style of acting based on Stanislavsky's teachings. In fact, the fighting and disagreements between advocates of "Method" acting and advocates of the use of the imagination for realistic acting continue up to this day (Carnicke 2009:66).

Stella Adler herself continued observing and asking questions about what acting was well into the 1980s and developed many new ideas which she incorporated into her own acting techniques and methods for teaching these techniques. Her main conservatory was on 56th Street in New York City for many years up until her death in 1992. There are movies she acted in which can be viewed on video, for example, *Shadow of the Thin Man* (1941).

The realistic tradition

Stella Adler knew as well as anyone that realistic acting and playwrighting changed theatre and film forever. But she also lamented and railed against the fact that contemporary American society does little to teach American actors about the realistic tradition. And with so many styles of acting going on today (e.g., Romantic Comedy, Situation Comedy, British Comedy, Action/Adventure, Broadway musicals, Shakespeare, television commercials, "reality television"), how does anyone distinguish realistic acting from other styles of acting?

What's more, not every actor uses the same style of acting technique to achieve what we've come to call "realistic" acting. A "Method" actor, for example, might not do "what if" when he acts. He may actually go out and do the character's actions in his own life first in order to then play the character's actions later when filming the movie. For example, Robert de Niro first ate to increase his own body's weight by forty pounds for later playing the character of Jake LaMotta, the boxer, in the film, *Raging Bull*. A non-Method actor might simply strap weights to his body to feel forty pounds heavier during performances.

Additionally, Stella often pointed out the difference between acting in "a theatre of ideas" (which she referred to as "Big T" meaning Theatre with a capital T), where the purpose "is to make an audience think and learn about the larger questions of life" (Adler 1988:106) and acting in "a theatre of entertainment" (which she referred to as "Little t" meaning theatre with a lowercase t) where ideas are not a primary consideration.

Today, the difference between these two types of performing is almost totally obscured in many actors' minds. I once had a young actor defend an exercise he had performed for me as being "realistic" because it was "just like Eddie Murphy did it on *Saturday Night Live*." Unfortunately, the beginning actor cannot look to popular American culture to show him the realistic tradition first examined by Stanislavsky.

So where do people look today to find Realism? There are at least three places, and not surprisingly, two of these places are where Stanislavsky himself first looked.

The actor as artist

The first place where people can look to find the realistic tradition of acting is at realistic artists themselves.

An important reason for people to become actors is because they know more about life than other people. Since they know more about life, they can provide a service to other people by teaching them things that they don't already know. Certainly there is always the

element of people paying actors for entertainment. Entertainment is something actors have always been good at, and that is undeniably a part of being an actor. But, there is another side of acting, and this is the side of teaching. The great artists – the great actors – are mostly teachers when they act because they're able to teach audiences things about life that the audiences didn't know before.

Because actors are artists, they don't just entertain. This is not to say that entertainers are not necessarily artists. They also interpret. But it's the artist-side of acting that goes out and sees life, then says, "I understand something about life, and now I'm going to communicate what I understand back to my audience."

The reason actors have the right to be on a stage or the reason producers pay them to be in front of a camera is because actors understand life more than other people. This understanding of life gives actors a size when they act that people are drawn to and makes them want to watch when they perform. Actors' understanding of life gives them a right to be up there acting.

The actor as performer

The second place people can look for the realistic tradition of acting is at some of the great realistic performances given by actors. We have an advantage over Stanislavsky in that many realistic performances have been recorded on film and videotape. Of course, not every professional performance we see is realism, so we need to be selective.

Who are some examples of actors we've learned things about life from? Probably the most famous is Marlon Brando. He originally studied acting with Stella Adler and not with Lee Strasberg as most people think (Brando 1994:85).

Often Brando is thought of as being a "Method" actor but he's not for two reasons. First of all, Brando isn't concerned with re-creating emotion within him when he acts. His acting is always "doable." For this reason alone it's interesting and informative for actors to watch him for his sense of realism and truth on the stage or on film. Secondly, Brando always teaches us something about human behavior. He's not as concerned with "what" his characters do as he is with "how" his characters do them.

Insights into human behavior – not just imitations of general ideas about how people behave (clichés) – are what an audience pays for when it sees performances by Brando, Anna Magnani, Glenda Jackson, or Angelica Huston, for example.

EXERCISE 1.1 Observing a great performance

To do this exercise, you'll need:

1. A video player and monitor;

2. A (rented) video copy of *The Teahouse of the August Moon* (1956; directed by Daniel Mann, screenplay by John Patrick) with Marlon Brando playing the part of an Okinawan interpreter. This video should be available at most video outlets that carry Marlon Brando or "classics" videos or even online at Youtube.

As you watch the video, ask yourself why Marlon Brando, an Irish–American, was hired to play this part (other than because of racial discrimination against Asian actors in Hollywood in 1956)? What does he bring to the acting of this part that perhaps even an Okinowan actor wouldn't bring? In other words, what are you learning about Okinawan behavior and culture and the way Okinawans understood their American "conquerors" from what Brando DOES in his performance?

(The places for you to put this guide down and do the exercise are indicated below in bold print.)

Get the video and watch the entire movie before reading further. Then continue reading.

After you've watched the whole movie, go back to the very first scene, Brando's opening speech that begins, "Tutti-frutti. Most generous gift. . . ."

Go back now to the first scene, then continue reading.

Here, Brando's character is seated on the ground in front of a tree. First of all, what is it about Brando's acting that is realistic? For example, see how he picks at grass between his crossed legs while he talks? Watch the hand gesture he uses to describe American "locks on doors." Notice how he uses his fingers to enumerate the different times throughout history that Okinawa has been invaded and by whom.

Watch Brando's opening speech on the video two or three times to observe how Brando makes the speech realistic. Then continue reading.

Another notable speech to observe for realism occurs later in the movie when Brando's character explains to the American sergeant what men pay for a geisha girl to do.

Now, watch the movie a second time by fast forwarding the video to scenes with Marlon Brando in them.

For example, notice how Brando's character throughout the movie tends to rush his words at the ends of sentences, especially when he's making a point? With this, Brando has chosen a "doable" way of realistically portraying the speech of an Okinawan interpreter instead of playing a generalized cliché or stereotype of an Okinawan. Brando's acting is "doable" because rushing words at the ends of sentences is specific and quantifiable – anyone can do it. Try it yourself. Even with all ethnic considerations aside, by using this rushing of words, Brando gives his character a clear and definable rhythm that distinguishes him from other characters in the movie.

Without it ever being spoken in the dialogue, notice how Brando usually finds ways to reveal to us through gesture and movement exactly what his character thinks about his American employers (this is his character's overall "action"). For example, when the American sergeant (Glen Ford) first greets the young man who presents him with a pair of wooden sandals at the first "Kopiki town meeting," Brando's character, in three short strokes, orchestrates their bowing to each other. Brando first uses his left hand to gesture to the American sergeant to bow, then uses his right hand to gesture to the young Okinawan (who has already bowed) to stand, and finally uses both of his hands to gesture in a "cut" gesture indicating that they should both just stop bowing after having performed a single bow.

In other words, we don't see Brando's character merely performing the plot of the movie; we see HOW his character performs the plot. Time and again Brando's character reveals to us through gesture and movement the different ways he puts his American employers through the paces of a foreign occupation – an occupation that is old hat to Okinawans: Japanese, Chinese, or American conquerors, it makes no difference, Okinawans have been "host" to and seen them all.

Continue watching Brando's scenes for other examples of HOW his character puts the Americans through the paces of a foreign occupation.

2 The third way: take it from life

"If we could stand on stage with as much truth as a chair – any chair – we'd all be stars."
Mario Siletti

What many American actors don't realize is that, while Adler and Strasberg were encouraging the use of Stanislavsky's techniques in the United States, Russian actors and directors also continued studying, researching, and changing Stanislavsky's techniques independently in the Soviet Union. In fact, by the 1970s, the Russian techniques for observing human behavior and for applying this knowledge to acting were acquiring newfound sophistication and precision.

By this time, the Russians were stressing a new approach: actors learning to observe everyday life, not just great acting, as the inspiration for their own acting. And if the goal of a realistic style of acting is to allow actors to be doing actions "as if" they're doing those actions in real life, then actors need to learn to be as truthful on a stage or in front of a camera as they are in their own lives.

Can it be done?

Non-presentational acting

In life, we certainly don't always behave as if someone is watching us, do we? We eat breakfast, read the newspaper, go to work, go to the bank and argue with our mates all largely unobserved for the most part. Even if we *are* observed in life, we don't really care. It's nobody's business. We don't have to show anyone anything. We've got nothing to prove.

Let's call our behavior when we don't care if anyone is watching us, NON-PRESENTATIONAL BEHAVIOR. This is our most common type of behavior in life.

Now, what happens when actors get up on a stage? Suddenly, they're being watched. Suddenly, they care what somebody else sees them do. Suddenly, it's not like life anymore, is it? Most importantly, if some or all of an actor's movements reveal that the actor knows someone is watching, then the actor's movements are not true-to-life because in life we behave as if no one is watching us.

Let's call our behavior when we care if somebody is watching us, PRESENTATIONAL BEHAVIOR. Presentational means that we change our behavior to present and display our actions for other people to see.

In general, when actors are "showing" or "indicating" that they're performing, we can tell by these actors' movements that they know somebody is watching them and that they want other people to see what they're doing. In fact, these actors will clearly go out of their way to make sure other people see what they're doing. Let's call this, PRESENTATIONAL ACTING.

Of course, it's possible actors may want to purposely portray characters who know at certain times they're being watched. This is a different matter. In this case, for example, actors can ask themselves what they know about people's behavior when people know they're being watched. The answer is, in life, when we know someone is watching us, it changes how we do things. When we know someone is watching us in life, we begin watching ourselves, and we become self-conscious, often clumsy, and presentational: we present our actions for the other person to see. With this understanding, actors can "present" their actions to an audience and thereby accurately portray characters who know that they're being watched.

Non-presentational behavior is the foundation of *Stanislavsky from the Outside In: React and Act*. Unfortunately, faced with a lifetime of preconditioning about what acting is and a ubiquitous entertainment media that often replaces acting with selling, our understanding of "truthful" or non-presentational movement is not always clear to us. And certainly, the ability to stand in front of a camera, movie lights, and a whole film crew or to stand on a stage in front of hundreds of people and perform non-presentationally isn't necessarily inborn in us. In that case, it needs to be learned.

Truth or untruth?

What I want you to start asking yourself, and how I want you to start looking at life is to say, "What is my sense of truth?" There's no need to get too philosophical about it. Define "truth" simply as what we observe from life when people don't care if they're being watched (non-presentational). We'll talk later on about the fact that the reality of the stage can be different than the reality of life. But, for now, think about human behavior in general and ask yourself, "What is truthful movement?"

For example, how much energy does it take for me to pick up a pen to use to write a letter to my best friend? Not much energy, right? Pick up a pen in order to write a letter then put it back down. Now, pick up a good book in order to read a story. How much energy? A little more than for the pen, perhaps but still we do it with ease and with not much attention to the fact that we're picking it up. This simple movement of picking up a pen or a book can be described as "the sense of truth" we all know and recognize from non-presentational life.

I stress again how important it is to think of this on a physical level first and leave the psychical question of "truth" until later. Certainly, on a physical level, we know "the truth of life" in human behavior and how much energy it takes to do something. We, ourselves, perform these truths every day.

And we watch other people's movements for information about them. For example, how does a child eat food that he or she really hates? Similarly, we do our own movements to get things we want from other people. For example, how do we eat food we secretly hate in front of our children in order to make them eat precisely the same food we hate?

Now, pick up a pen again, but this time show yourself that you are picking it up (presentational). As you pick it up, say out loud, "Look at me. I'm picking up this incredibly beautiful pen for everyone to see. In fact, this is probably the most incredible pen ever made. Make sure you see *the pen*, everybody!"

What was the difference in your movement this time picking up the pen? Did your movement *look* different? Did you move in a different *way*? Did you hold up the pen at a different angle or hold it with a different part of your hand? (Did it seem, for example, as if you were acting in a pen commercial?)

Your movement of picking up the pen the second time probably had a different QUALITY OF MOVEMENT (a presentational quality) as opposed to "the truth" of your movement the first time when you picked up the pen to write a letter to your best friend (a non-presentational quality).

I make a pact with my students at the beginning of each course I teach that there will be no "untruths" during the class. Of course, the use of the word "untruth" makes presentational behavior or acting sound negative, and this isn't the point at all; I've already listed at least two times where presentational behavior is called for. What’s important is, rather, for people to know the *difference* between presentational and non-presentational behavior and to realize that each behavior has a different purpose. (And not to kid ourselves that selling a pen in a pen commercial, for example, is necessarily an action we know from life.)

How to describe what we observe

It's most helpful to talk about the behavior we observe in terms of what we can *see*. For example, saying that we saw someone walking "very fast" is clearly something that we saw someone do. If other people are with us observing the same person walking, then they will see the same movement we do.

Of course, what may seem like fast walking to one person may not necessarily be considered to be fast walking by everyone else. The important thing, however, is that the

source of the discussion will still be something that was *external* and something that was *observed* by both of us. Under these conditions, we can at least be specific with each other when we talk about people's behavior or about acting.

What's not helpful in communicating ideas about behavior we've observed is describing people's behavior as general "feeling states." For example, saying that we saw someone who was "afraid" doesn't describe at all what we saw them do. It doesn't tell us *how* that person moved or *what* that person did.

As observers of life, our goal is to be as precise as possible about what we see so that the information we have can eventually be used by us or by someone else to communicate back what we saw to an audience. Making sure we describe at first only what we can *see* is one way of doing this.

DEMONSTRATION 2.1 Describing movements instead of feeling states

Situation 1

Description: I saw a woman quickly put on her gloves before she put on her coat. After she put on her coat, she realized she couldn't button her coat with her gloves already on, so she had to take her gloves off. But the gloves didn't seem to want to come off her hands, and she had to struggle hard to pull them off. Then she buttoned her coat, but she buttoned the top button into the buttonhole second from the top so that the whole coat was buttoned mismatched at an angle.

Instead of: I saw a woman who was nervous.

Situation 2

Description: I saw a man walking across the street but after getting halfway across, he stopped. Then I saw him search all of his pockets and finally take out a sandwich. But without biting into the sandwich, he turned and walked back to the same side of the street he started from. Suddenly, he bent down and picked up a cigarette butt and put it to his lips. Then, just as suddenly, he put both the cigarette butt and the sandwich back into his pocket.

Instead of: I saw a man who was crazy.

Situation 3

Description: I saw a woman slowly and deliberately place a small stuffed animal in front of a large, framed photograph of a young child. Then I saw the woman carefully wipe away some dust from the picture frame. Then I saw her light a candle in front of the picture.

Instead of: I saw a woman who was wistful.

EXERCISE 2.1 The Addition of Truth Model

Part A: Drinking hot coffee

To do this exercise, you'll need:

1. a coffee cup;
2. some cold tap water;
3. some hot tap water;
4. a table to sit at.

(The places for you to put this guide down and go through the exercise with your body are indicated below in bold print.)

Go get these now and place them on the table in front of you.

Sit down at the table and do your best to truthfully drink a cup of hot coffee (or any other hot beverage you choose to imagine) but WITHOUT USING A CUP AT ALL. This means you'll have to mime the movements with your hands and mouth.

Try this now. Then continue reading.

Now, pick up the real empty coffee cup with your hand. This time, using only the empty coffee cup WITHOUT ANY LIQUID in it, do your best to truthfully drink a cup of hot coffee.

Try this now. Then continue reading.

Is this harder or easier to do than without using the coffee cup? Easier, of course. How about in terms of "truthfulness?" Is using the empty coffee cup to drink a cup of hot coffee more or less truthful than not using a cup at all? The answer is, "more truthful."

Now, fill the coffee cup with cold water. As before, do your best to truthfully drink a cup of hot coffee but this time by using COLD WATER in the coffee cup.

Try this now. Then continue reading.

Is this easier or harder than it is using only the empty coffee cup? “Easier,” of course. More truthful or less truthful? “More truthful.”

Finally, fill the coffee cup with hot water. Do your best to truthfully drink a cup of hot coffee using a coffee cup filled with HOT WATER.

Try this now. Then continue reading.

By now, you should be understanding that the movement of drinking a cup of coffee has become very easy and truthful.

We can list these movements in order of relative difficulty and truthfulness (starting with the least truthful and most difficult):

1. Drinking a cup of hot coffee using no cup at all;
2. Drinking a cup of hot coffee using an empty coffee cup;
3. Drinking a cup of hot coffee using a coffee cup filled with cold water;
4. Drinking a cup of hot coffee using a coffee cup filled with hot water;
5. Drinking a cup of hot coffee using a coffee cup filled with hot coffee.

Many actors have been taught (erroneously) that drinking a cup of coffee by using a real cup of coffee *isn't acting*. They've been taught that true acting is drinking a cup of hot coffee only when there's no cup at all. This erroneous idea often comes to us from our childhood sense of "play acting" or being taught that miming something that isn’t there and making the audience “see” it is a goal of acting.1 But our life sense would certainly tell us that it is more truthful to drink a cup of coffee using a real cup of coffee than it is to drink a cup of coffee without using anything at all!

Part B: Signing your name

Now practice "adding" the truthfulness of another physical activity. For example:

1. Signing your name without using paper or pen (miming);

2. Signing your name on a real piece of paper without using a pen;

3. Signing your name on a piece of paper with a real pen with no ink in it;

4. Signing your name on a piece of paper with a pen that works.

Of course, with sufficient practice, actors may be able to PROVE the writing of their names truthfully at all four of the above "additions" of truthfulness. (For example, Marcel Marceau, a world-famous mime, would have no trouble at all signing his name truthfully without using paper or pen). What actors don't realize is that the choice is usually left to them (especially during rehearsals) to decide at what level of truth they're capable of performing.

Unfortunately, beginning actors will often attempt the most difficult movement (signing without using paper or pen at all) as readily as attempting the easier movement of signing with real pen and paper simply because they've been taught that acting is lying.

My teachers at the Adler Studio often commented how they wished the physical requirements of acting movements were as obvious (even as dangerous!) as the physical requirements of dance movements. Dancers know right away if they're capable of attempting a new jump or a difficult lift or if, instead, they need to practice first before they attempt the move. But because actors work with everyday movements so often, beginning actors are rarely forced to decide at what level of truth they should "attempt" a movement on stage.

EXERCISE 2.2 “Truth or untruth?”

To do this exercise, you'll need:

1. A television set.

Here's one you'll love. Simply turn on your television and watch it, but only under one condition: you must turn OFF the sound.

Part A: Picture without sound

Now observe the movement that you see. Which movements do you believe (which ones are "truthful" and non-presentational?). Which movements don't you believe (which movements are "untruthful" and presentational?). Why?

Can you tell what the program's story is *only* from the movements of the actors? Why or why not?

When there's a commercial, have you ever had someone look like that when they're talking

to you? When? (Hint: when they're selling you something?)

Observe the positioning of the actors within the frame of the television screen. Do the actors somehow always stand perfectly side by side facing the camera? Or do they just as often perfectly face each other in profile if there are two of them talking to each other?

Now, don't watch *what* the actors do, but instead watch *how* they do what they do. Do the speed and quality of everyone's movements tend to look the same regardless of the changing situations they're in? This may be difficult to observe if it's a situation comedy that uses only one set. (What does this tell you about how circumstances and environment affect the quality of the movements that occur within them?)

Continue watching with the sound off all week, all the time asking yourself, "What's truth, and what's untruth?"

Part B: Sound without picture

If you can, also do the opposite: Turn off the picture on the television monitor but continue listening to only the sound of the television. Can you tell what the stories are without seeing the pictures?

Usually you can with no problem. Surprised? What do we need the picture for then? Why not just listen to radio dramas? Because it isn’t acting unless you can see it. (Read on!)

3 A basic shift occurs: Soviet acting models

"Life is more complicated than acting; but to study acting, we can break life apart."
Evgeny Lanskoy

Acting models

An acting model is simply a structure or a blueprint of patterns or rules that have been observed in human behavior and then made bigger than life so that they can be worked with and discussed. As such, acting models are useful for at least two reasons:

1. Acting models give us a more expressive and precise vocabulary for describing what we see in life or in a performance and help us define basic concepts so that we can talk to each other about what we've observed in human behavior with less of a chance of being misunderstood. In other words, acting models give us a systematic and objective way of observing and talking about life.

With acting models, descriptions of behavior or acting we see are no longer limited to only "this was good," "this was bad," or "I liked that," or "I didn't like that." Now people can objectively describe to each other not only *what* they see but *why* they think what they see is "truthful" (non-presentational).

For example, how could we prove that 2 + 2 = 4? We could take two pieces of chalk in one hand, and then add two more pieces of chalk from our other hand so that we were finally left holding four pieces of chalk all in one hand. models can work much the same way by breaking down movement and behavior into physically recognizable parts so that they may be observed and identified.

Using models, when we're watching actors perform, we can ask ourselves, "Did they "prove" their ideas according to one of the models of human behavior?" In other words, "Did their performances match our understanding of what we've already observed from life to be some of the rules of human behavior?" In this way, acting models can give us objective, agreed-upon reference points for evaluating both human and acting behavior.

2. Acting models are useful as exercises for improving our own acting.

As actors, we can experiment with performing different types of behavior to prove or disprove whether or not that behavior agrees with one or more of the models of behavior we've noticed from observing life.

For example, can we prove that people who are experiencing life-threatening, painful heart attacks can nevertheless tear their attentions away from the pain long enough to dial telephones for help? Or, can we prove that they can tear themselves away long enough to calmly fix themselves gin and tonics? Try these actions. Experiment with them. You'll start experiencing and understanding which actions you can prove and which actions you can't prove.1

Think of acting models as you would think of practicing scales on a piano. Learning to play scales assists us in our piano playing because scales are necessarily incorporated into the pieces that we play. However, we wouldn’t give a concert that consisted entirely of scales. In the same way, acting models help our bodies and minds become available to the actions a script will call upon us to perform.

What acting models are not

By no means do acting models imply that we're necessarily aware in life of the patterns of behavior which models are designed to point out to us. In life, we're not usually too conscious of our own behaviors. For example, if we were inside a burning house, we wouldn't think to ourselves first, "What's my action?" before trying to escape. We would just escape.

Accordingly, don't think that an acting model is exactly the same as human behavior. Acting models make things bigger than life to allow us to observe life. For example, acting models might exaggerate or slow down certain aspects of human behavior so that the behaviors become more obvious to us and so that we can observe them. If they didn't do this, they wouldn't help us in seeing patterns and rules, in making us more aware, and in making us think about life.

It's also not too helpful to mix acting models when you're first learning them. Don't assume that all the rules for one model will necessarily apply to all the rules of another model. Each model examines human behavior from a different angle, and as such, each model has its own structure. You'll probably find it helpful to compare and contrast the rules of each model with other models as you learn them, but try not to assume that any one part of one model is necessarily interchangeable with any one part of another model.

An acting model is simply a test or a gauge to be used for checking actions on different levels. Other than using acting models for evaluating and talking about acting performances and for observation, they should be used by actors during rehearsals or performances only if there is a problem and if they're having difficulty doing a particular action. This seems paradoxical, but if the goal for actors is to do actions on stage as they're done in life (non-presentationally), then actors can't be thinking about acting models when they act because people don't think about acting models in life (unless they're reading this

guide!).

A primary usefulness of acting models, then, is that they give us a vocabulary and a way to judge and evaluate movement that we see, and this in turn allows us to be very precise in communicating what we see back to actors, directors, writers or just people with whom we go to see movies.

4 The Materials Model

“Actors are professional athletes.”

Timothy Craig

Every profession has a "material" that it works with (Figure 4.1). For example, a bricklayer's material is bricks and mortar. Bricklayers have to know everything there is to know about bricks and mortar. They need to know bricks' weights, their thickness, which bricks can be used for which jobs, which bricks are durable, which are only for show. They have to know how much water to add to the mortar, at what temperature the mortar will dry. Bricks and mortar are their "material."

Did bricklayers grow up just knowing about bricks and mortar or did they have to learn this information from someone? Of course, they had to learn it. True, they could eventually learn this information on their own through trial and error if they were given a long time, but they probably wouldn't be hired to learn "on the job" for building their very first wall or house.

Let's take another profession. How about a painter? What's the painter's material? Not a brush or paint, these are the painter's tools. Think about it. What does the painter "shape?" What does the painter actually work with?

Painters work with color. And there are three basic or "primary" pigments: yellow, blue, and red. So, painters have three colors as their "material." From these three colors, painters mix and create all the other colors needed to do their job.

How about a musician? What does the musician work with?

Musicians work with musical tones. In Western music, there are eight tones, an octave. Of course, other cultures have developed different scales. Some use twelve or fourteen tones. But for most American musicians, their material is eight notes. That's it. Everything they play makes use of these eight tones, and they learn everything they can about different ways, rhythms, keys, and speeds of arranging these eight notes.

All right then, what is the actor's material? Actors get paid (sometimes) to act; it's a profession, right? So what is the actor's material? Not feelings and not emotions (although this seems to be what "Method" acting is saying is the actor's material). Not voice or speech; these, again, are only tools which actors use to shape their material.

Remember that Stella Adler began working with the imagination? Well, how does an audience see the results of actors using their imaginations on stage or on film? By seeing

the actors' bodies moving. We can't read the actors' minds, but we can "read" their movements.

For example, let's say a woman is inside her house, and there is a big fire in the room behind her. She goes to the front door, and she opens it. What is her MOVEMENT in purely physical terms? *What* did she do? She went to the door, and she opened it. This describes her physical movement, *what she did*.

Now, *why* did she go to the door and open it? She went to the door and opened it because she realized there was a fire behind her. So, we can say that she went to the door and opened it *in order to* escape from the fire. What we do *in order to* do something is what we call a PURPOSE.

Together, the movement and the purpose determine *how* she went to the door. In this case, she most likely ran.

Let's look at another example. The same woman from the previous example, on a Sunday morning, about 9:30 a.m. (forget the fire), comes downstairs, goes to the front door and opens it. She leans down and picks up the Sunday newspaper on the other side of the door. What's her movement? The same as in the previous example, right?; namely, she goes to the door and opens it. But now, what's her purpose?

The word "Sunday" is a key clue here. She also could have a cup of coffee in her hand, she could be wearing slippers, and she probably doesn't have to go to work. She goes to the door and opens it *in order to* get the Sunday paper she predicts is on the other side. Her movement (going to the door and opening it) is the same, but her purpose (in order to get the Sunday paper) is now different. Together, her going to the door and opening it (her movement) *in order to* get the Sunday paper (her purpose) give us information about *how* she went to the door. In this case, she most likely walked (slowly and in slippers).

With a different purpose, we can see that "the quality" of a person's movement changes. For example, what was the woman's "speed" when her purpose was to escape the fire? Probably fast. What was "the weight" of her body when her purpose was to escape the fire? Probably light if she was running. Her speed was fast and her weight was light. This is what her purpose "to escape the fire" put into her body.

When the woman was going to the door and opening it to get the newspaper, her speed was most likely slow and her weight was most likely heavy. In sum, the physical movement can be the same, but the *quality* of the movement can change. And, the quality of movement can change because the purposes are different. Don't worry, I'll re-phrase this formula over and over again for you, and I'll examine it in different directions and from both sides.

Getting back to our question then: what is the actor's material? What do actors work with? The actor's material is ACTIONS and actions come made up of two parts: MOVEMENT with PURPOSE. Both parts must be taken together, or there isn't an action. And just as bricklayers don't grow up knowing everything there is to know about bricks, actors don't grow up knowing everything there is to know about actions. Actors must learn about them. Actions are the actor's material.1

5 The Two-Part Model of an Action

"We saw a person with a problem; therefore, that person came with an action."

Evgeny Lanskoy

What are actions?

We already know what actions are because we do them every day, and we see other people doing actions. By definition, because we see people in life moving, we see them in action (all human movement has purpose). Similarly, because we also move in our own lives, we also do actions.

For example, if each of us had to go to a door and open it because there was a fire, we'd know exactly how to do it. We'd know how our bodies would move right away; we wouldn't have to stop and think about how to do it. This is the case with most actions.

In life, there are three different ways we all participate in and learn about actions:

1. We experience actions. For example, we can eat a meal in such a way (the movement) so as to annoy our roommate (the purpose);

2. We observe actions. For example, when eating, we observe our roommate slurping soup, getting crumbs in the butter, and drinking all of the milk so there's none left for the coffee (here we're observing the movements of an action which is annoying to us);

3. We imagine actions. For example, what if my roommate's body were taken over by a Martian who had never been in a human body before and didn't have the first idea of how to eat a meal like a human? (This is an action I could imagine my roommate to be doing when eating a meal.)

Other identifiable characteristics of actions are:

● Actions are two-part: *movement* with *purpose*.

● The movement depends on the purpose; therefore, if the purpose changes, then the quality (weight) and rhythm (speed) of the movement will also change.

● If there is no change in the quality and rhythm of the movement, then there is no change of action.

● Actions each have their own individual logic.

● Even physical activities, for example, washing the dishes, depend upon purposes and therefore are results of actions.

● Actions can be irrational: people want one thing, but they show or display something else. For example, they really don't want an oatmeal cookie but they take one because that’s the only kind of cookie available at the time.

● Actions can be unconscious (but are still externally identifiable and definable).

The parts are reversible

By placing MOVEMENT in relation to PURPOSE, the Two-Part Model of an Action (Figure 5.1) gives us a method and a structure for describing actions in a way that compensates for the limitations of language when it's used in describing visual events.

The Two-Part Model of an Action allows us to begin looking at actions in two ways: we can start with the PURPOSES first and observe how they affect people's movements or we can observe how people's bodies are MOVING first and then ask ourselves what their purposes are. It can work either way. We know that what goes on in people's minds is reflected in their bodies and vice versa.

For example, if there is confusion going on in people's minds, confusion will be reflected somewhere in their bodies. In fact, in life, it's very difficult for our bodies not to reflect what's going on in our minds (since we're not usually that conscious of our own bodies' movements to begin with). I had a teacher once who used to say, "Words can lie, but movement can't." Poker players have always known the advantages of having a "poker face," that is to say, a face that doesn't reflect what's going on in its owner's mind. Con men pay careful attention to make sure their own bodies don't give away their hidden swindles to their victims.

In the opposite direction, if, for example, you take your fist and begin banging it hard and fast on the hood of a car, we can say that something must be going on in your mind that's causing you to bang your fist on the car.

As actors, we can learn and practice approaching actions from these two different directions. If we have a particular purpose first (psychical), then we can ask ourselves, "How is it affecting my body's movement (physical)?" Or, if we observe someone else moving in a particular way first (physical), we can ask ourselves, "If they're moving that way, what are they thinking about (psychical)?"

In the models we observe and work with in this technique, I sometimes ask you to

approach actions from the movements first (physical), and sometimes I ask you to examine actions from the purposes first (psychical). For example, if I ask you to observe an actor performing, I'll probably start discussing the performance based upon what you *saw* that actor do and that means we'll talk about the actor's movement first.

You'll start seeing that if we can train ourselves to recognize *how* people move in life, we will begin recognizing people's purposes because THE PURPOSE IS ALMOST ALWAYS REFLECTED IN A PERSON'S MOVEMENT. We can gather information about what's in people's minds by how we see them move. And once we know a person's purpose, we, as actors, will be able to perform this person's action.1 Of course, this takes observation and practice. We're not used to thinking about actions in everyday life.

Catching and defining actions

In acting, the actual performance of actions is usually not difficult because we all "act" and do actions in life. Instead, the difficult part of acting is learning to ask ourselves the right questions during rehearsals in order to identify precisely what the actions are we want to perform. The actions we finally choose are then put together in a sequence (a scene is simply a sequence of two or more actions) and shaped to create a portrait – a portrait in movement – of the character we've created.

Admittedly, not everyone "catches" actions or recognizes them and defines them in the same way. For example, one actor may define an action as, "leaving the room (the movement) IN ORDER TO not throw up (the purpose)," while a second actor may understand the exact same action as, "walking out of the room AS IF I'm balancing a book on my head." Even a third actor may identify the exact same action as, "LIKE a baby seal walking on a frozen pond." However different the descriptions of an action may be in different actors' minds, if the audience gets the same information from the actors' movements, then the actions are the same.

What is consistent about actions, on the other hand, is that when actors understand an action – both the movement and the purpose – this triggers a recognition in them, and they can do that action right away. Once the purpose is identified, WE KNOW EXACTLY HOW TO DO THE MOVEMENT.

This is why actions make acting more doable and more fun – not more studied and ponderous. Again, the difficulty comes most often in choosing which actions to perform. When actions are correctly identified and defined, the performance of them becomes easier, not harder.

What do actions do for acting?

Actions, by definition, are *doable*. And because they're doable, they offer an excellent way for us to act non-presentationally. Because we're able to "do" an action on stage, we don't have to be concerned or distracted with "showing" our behavior to an audience. The doing takes up all of our attention.

Secondly, being able to consciously define actions enhances our ability to see what's going on in life. As we begin seeing more in life, we begin having more to say about life and more information to communicate back to an audience through our acting.

DEMONSTRATION 5.1 Doing Two-Part Actions

To experience this model you'll need:

1. A perfume or cologne bottle filled with water.
2. A bowl of steamed Brussels sprouts.

Go get these now, then continue reading.

When doing the following descriptions of actions, keep these ideas in mind:

1. The movement depends on the purpose; therefore, if the purpose changes, then the quality (weight) and rhythm (speed) of the movement will also change.

2. If there is no change in the quality and rhythm of the movement, then there is no change of action.

3. A single movement can be done with an infinite number of purposes.

(The places for you to put this guide down and do the exercises are indicated below in bold print.)

Movement #1: Putting on cologne or perfume

Try the movement "putting on cologne or perfume" with the following purposes:

Purpose #1: How would you move if you put on perfume or cologne IN ORDER TO give yourself confidence? For example, would you move fast or slow? Would the weight of your movements be heavy or light? Would you do the

movement only once or many times?

Take the perfume or cologne bottle filled with water and do the action "to put on perfume or cologne in order to give yourself confidence." Observe the speed and weight of your movements. Then continue reading.

Purpose #2: How would you move if you put on perfume or cologne IN ORDER TO cover up the smell of the garlic sauce you just spilled all over yourself?

Take the perfume or cologne bottle filled with water and do the action "to put on perfume or cologne in order to cover up the smell of garlic on you." Observe the speed and weight of your movements. How are they different from the previous action you did? Then continue reading.

Continue doing the same movement but with the following purposes each time observing the speed and the weight of your movements:

Purpose #3: How would you move if you put on perfume or cologne IN ORDER TO protect yourself?

Purpose #4: How would you move if you put on perfume or cologne IN ORDER TO disguise the fact that you've been drinking alcohol?

Purpose #5: How would you move if you put on perfume or cologne IN ORDER TO keep from giving yourself a rash?

Purpose #6: How would you move if you put on perfume or cologne IN ORDER TO cool yourself off?

The list, you can see, is endless. Yet, every one of these purposes affects and alters the simple movement of putting on perfume or cologne. *How* we put on the cologne or perfume changes when our purposes for putting it on changes.

Let's look at a second action, but describe it this time using *as if* instead of *in order to* to provide the different purposes.

Movement #2: Serving a bowl of Brussels sprouts

Try the movement "serving a bowl of Brussels sprouts for dinner" with the following purposes:

Purpose #1: How would you move if you served a bowl of Brussels sprouts for dinner AS IF each individual Brussels sprout was a tiny, human baby? For example, how would you carry the bowl? How would you use the spoon to dish them up? Would your movements be fast or slow? Would the weight of your movements be heavy or light?

Take the bowl filled with Brussels sprouts and do the action "serving a bowl of Brussels sprouts for dinner as if the Brussels sprouts were babies." Observe the speed and weight of your movements. Then continue reading.

Purpose #2: How would you move if you served a bowl of Brussels sprouts for dinner AS IF each individual Brussels sprout was a science specimen?

Take the bowl filled with Brussels sprouts and do the action "serving a bowl of Brussels sprouts for dinner as if the Brussels sprouts were science specimens." Observe the speed and weight of your movements. How are they different from the previous action you did? Then continue reading.

Continue doing the same movement but with the following purposes each time observing the speed and weight of your movements:

Purpose #3: How would you move if you served a bowl of Brussels sprouts for dinner AS IF each individual Brussels sprout was a time bomb?

Purpose #4: How would you move if you served a bowl of Brussels sprouts for dinner AS IF each individual Brussels sprout was a sexual aid?

As you can tell, purposes have the potential for creating humor but unless the audience is told specifically that the Brussels sprouts represent, for example, sexual aids for the character, the movement might just as easily be seen by them to be the same action as "serving a bowl of Brussels sprouts for dinner IN ORDER TO turn my spouse on." The choice is left to the actor. Again, actors catch actions in different ways.

EXERCISE 5.1 Drawing actions

To do this exercise, you'll need:

1. A pad of drawing paper at least 8 1/2" x 11."
2. A pen or a pencil.

Go get these now, then continue reading.

(The places for you to put this guide down and do the exercises are indicated below in bold print.)

Part A: From line to movement

Take the pen or pencil and draw a line – any kind of line on a sheet of paper. Do this now, then continue reading.

Now, look at the line you've drawn. You've just drawn an action. If you were to describe the line you've drawn in words, how would you describe it? For example, is the line straight or curved? Is it smooth or rough? Is it even or uneven? Is it graceful or scattered?

For example, look at Figure 5.2. How would you describe this line in words? Jagged? Rough? Pointed? All of these words could describe this line.

If I were to ask you to get up and move like the line you've just drawn, could you do it? Of course you could.

Similarly, how would you move like the line in Figure 5.2? What kind of person would move jaggedly, roughly or pointedly?

I knew a high school librarian once who sat in a low-backed office chair on wheels in front of the card catalogue files (this is how library books were searched for in libraries before there were computers) and moved jaggedly from file to file looking up references. Even the way she looked down at the cards she pulled and the movements of her arms and head were jagged and pointed. She even wore pointy, "cat-woman-type" glasses!

How would you walk like the line in Figure 5.2? What if, each time you put your foot down, you bend deeply at the knee, then to take your next step, you rise up onto your toes on this foot and land onto the next foot with a deep bend now in this knee? This could be one way of moving like this line.

Get up and move however you think is like the movement of the line in Figure 5.2. Try this now, then continue reading.

Now, ask yourself, "What would somebody be like who would walk this way?" "What could have made him or her start walking this way?" "Why does she continue walking like this?" This, of course, is adding the purpose to the movement of the walking.

Part B: From movement to line

Let's do the same process as above, but in reverse. Think of someone's movement you've seen before and can remember well. It could be a relative or a friend – anyone whose movement sticks out clearly in your mind.

Take your pen or pencil and, on a new sheet of paper, draw a line that describes this person's movement you remember seeing. Do this now, then continue reading.

How would you describe the line you've just drawn in words? For example, careful or reckless? Simple or ornate? Direct or indirect?

Figure 5.3 is a line describing Charlie Chaplin's walk as the Little Tramp.2 From looking at this line, how could we describe his movement in words? Swinging? Skating? Erratic?

Draw your own description of Charlie Chaplin's walk as the Little Tramp. Do this from memory or download or go online and observe his walk. Do this first before you continue reading.

Part C: From line to action

Finally, look at Figure 5.4. Starting with the straight line and ending with the vortex line, how many different kinds of movement do you count there?

Go ahead and count the different kinds of movement now, then continue reading.

How many did you count? They are:

1. straight line, followed by;
2. jagged line, followed by;
3. curly line, followed by;
4. box-like or squared line, followed by;
5. wavy line, followed by;
6. whirling line (vortex).

Probably you had no difficulty identifying these six different lines. Identifying different movements in life is just as easy. We recognize actions in life because each action has a unique and identifiable kind or QUALITY of movement. The six kinds of movement represented by the lines in Figure 5.4 could just as easily be said to represent an actor's six different actions (*movements with purpose*) in a scene.

EXERCISE 5.2 Observing actions

Part A: Observing the different ways that different people do the SAME movement

For example, how does your boyfriend or girlfriend wash dishes? Is it different than how you wash dishes? Different than how your mother washes dishes? Different than how a dentist washes dishes?

Don't just guess. Take the time to observe people's movements. For example:

1. How do they move when they brush their teeth?

2. How do they move when they watch television?

3. How do they move when they read a newspaper?

Part B: Asking yourself what people's purposes are in relation to their movements

Practice defining these clearly.

For example, does your boyfriend wash dishes IN ORDER TO not be asked to wash dishes again?

I once broke so many glasses while I was washing dishes for a friend that I was asked to leave the kitchen and never come back. It didn't matter that I wasn't consciously trying to break the glasses. Remember, purposes don't have to be conscious, but we can still define them. The end result was that I never had to wash dishes at my friend's house again.

Check the purposes you choose when defining people's actions by remembering that, once you know the purpose of an action, YOU KNOW EXACTLY HOW TO DO THE MOVEMENT of that action.

For example, how do we move if we're washing dishes IN ORDER TO not be asked to wash dishes again? Do we move slowly and carefully? No. More probably we move quickly, recklessly, even lightly. For example, we barely skim the sponge over the plates, not getting all the food off of them, or we practice balancing the plates on one finger or we only dunk the glasses in the sink without scrubbing them before rinsing them.

What are some different purposes to describe the way a mother could wash dishes?

For example:

1. She could wash dishes AS IF she's working on an assembly line in a Ford motor plant.

How would she move if this were her purpose?

2. She could wash dishes IN ORDER TO make herself feel important.

How would she move if this were her purpose?

3. She could wash dishes LIKE a circus juggler.

How would she move if this were her purpose?

6 The Four Circles of Attention Model

"First the mind, then the body."

Ancient Taoist saying

Reading purposes from bodies

Now that we know what an action is, let's continue examining the discovery that our bodies can reflect what our minds are thinking.

The Four Circles of Attention Model is an *attention* model (Figure 6.1). The Soviets observed that humans can place their attentions into different locations. Where the attention is placed becomes reflected in the body and can be observed and identified.

To experience this model, we're going to use a sample action: "hearing" (the *movement*) in order to "catch a sound" (the *purpose*). However, don't become confused and think that this model applies only to this action. The Four Circles of Attention Model can be applied to many different actions.

For example, for practice, what could be some other purposes for "hearing?"

Hearing:

- IN ORDER TO pass an exam;
- IN ORDER TO relax;
- IN ORDER TO eavesdrop;
- IN ORDER TO detect a burglar in the house.

Now, adjust your body to hear in each of these different purposes.

For example, what do your eyes do when you're hearing in order to pass an exam? Are they alert and looking directly looking at the teacher?

What do your eyes do when you're hearing in order to relax? Are they closed and "looking in?"

How do you hold your head when you're eavesdropping? Is it cocked slightly to side with the back of your neck stretched up?

The "movement" (sound waves entering the ear canal, activating the membranes, bones, tendons, and fluids of the inside of the middle and inner ear) changes our bodies according

to the “purpose” our minds are using it for.

The “movement,” to hear, remains the same but the “purpose” changes the *quality* of how the movement is done.

DEMONSTRATION 6.1 The Four Circles of Attention Model

To do this model (Figure 6.1), you'll need:

1. A chair to sit on;
2. A good-sized room such as a living room or a classroom.

(The places for you to put this guide down and go through the model with your body are indicated below in bold print.)

Part A: First Circle

Sitting in a chair in a good-sized room, imagine a circle that would surround your own body from head to toe and extend out from around it by no more than three inches. This space, and all it includes, let's call First Circle. (For the most part, it's easiest to think of First Circle referring to the entire space that your own body takes up.)

What happens to our bodies when we put our attentions onto our own bodies and listen to them? What noises do our bodies make that our ears can hear?

As you go ahead and try this – using the action "hearing in order to catch a sound inside your own body" – you'll discover that in order to listen to yourself, your body first "adjusts" itself to allow you to do the action. Here's what you should notice happening in your own body:

1. Your body's weight gets heavier. You lean forward and drop your head. Your arms lie loosely in your lap.

2. Your eyes close. It's as if you're closing out the rest of the world in order to be alone with yourself.

Once these things have happened, your body has adjusted itself to allow you to optimally put your attention onto it in order to listen to it.

Be sure to keep your attention in First Circle the whole time: this means not allowing yourself to be distracted by any sound outside the circle of your own body. Sounds you

might hear inside your body, for example, are the sounds of your own breathing – air flowing in and out of your nose – your joints cracking, or your stomach growling.

Adjust your body. Now "hear in order to catch the sounds" your body makes when your attention is on your own body. Try this now. Then continue reading.

What did you hear? At the very least, you should have heard your breathing. What else? Swallowing? Clearing your throat? Your stomach rumbling?

What else did you notice about your body while you were listening in First Circle? You might realize that this movement is very similar to many forms of meditation or concentration. What's most important to recognize, however, is the physical adjustment your body made in response to the placing of your mind's attention onto your own body: your eyes closing, your head dropping forward, your body leaning forward, and your body's weight feeling heavier. This is the physical influence that putting your mind's attention into First Circle has on your body.

When you feel that you've experienced your attention and your body in First Circle, continue.

Part B Second Circle

Second Circle refers to an area which includes your immediate surroundings, usually the distance around you to which you can see clearly, or for example, the area of a normal-sized room.

What happens to our bodies when we place our attentions into this Second Circle? How do our bodies adjust to allow us to put our attentions there?

Go ahead and try this – do the action "hearing in order to catch a sound" when your attention is on your immediate surroundings. Here's what you should notice happening in your body as you begin listening to noises occurring in the Second Circle:

1. You sit up a little straighter than you did when your attention was on your own body. In other words, your body's weight is lighter and more open.

2. Your eyes are open and seeing things around you and going directly to the things you see.

When these two changes occur, your body is adjusted to optimally put your attention onto your immediate surroundings (Second Circle).

As you proceed to do the movement "hearing" with your attention in Second Circle, you might hear sounds like a clock ticking, or a pen dropping to the floor, or the door to your room opening.

If you don't allow yourself to be distracted, and you DON'T hear your stomach growling (First Circle), or the sounds of cars honking two blocks away on a busy street (you can't see them, can you?), or the sound of a telephone ringing in another room, but rather your attention is on hearing only the sounds that you can SEE in your own immediate surroundings, then you'll be listening in the Second Circle of Attention.

Adjust your body first: 1. sit up straighter, and 2. open your eyes. Now, "hear in order to catch a sound" with your attention in Second Circle. Try this now for two or three minutes. Then continue reading.

What did you notice about your body's movement while you were listening in Second Circle?

For one thing, you probably noticed that your eyes had an entirely different kind of movement than they had when your attention was in First Circle. Your eyes were open and they moved and looked at the source of whatever you heard making the sound in your immediate surroundings.

Secondly, if you imagine that we don't only use our eyes and ears to take in information about what's going on around us, but that we use our entire bodies and skin to take in information, you'll realize that your entire body was more open this time because the area you were gathering information from in Second Circle was larger.

Think about these examples:

1. When you write some notes on a piece of paper, your attention is in which Circle of Attention?1

2. When you ask someone a question, which Circle of Attention are you in?2

3. If you accidentally hit your elbow against a table, and you're suddenly in great pain, your attention shifts into which Circle of Attention?3

To review, where do our minds go when our attentions are focused on Second Circle? Our minds go to our immediate surroundings, that is, to what we can see. And what does this do to our bodies? One, our bodies become straighter and more open. Two, our eyes are open.

When you feel that you've experienced your attention and your body in Second Circle, continue.

Part C Third Circle

The Third Circle of Attention refers to an area that is *outside* of our immediate surroundings, that is to say, we can't see this area. Think in terms of physical space first. If we can see the object our attention is on, our minds are probably in the Second Circle of Attention. However, in a room with no windows, if we hear a bus going by in the street outside, our attention has shifted into the Third Circle.

What happens to our bodies when our attentions are placed into Third Circle? How do our bodies adjust to allow us to put our attentions there? Go ahead and try this – do the action "hearing in order to catch a sound" when your attention is outside of your immediate surroundings. Here's what you should notice happening in your body as you begin listening to noises occurring in the Third Circle:

1. Your body gets even lighter and more open than it was in Second Circle.

What does this mean, "your body gets lighter?" Well, for example, you're definitely not leaning forward now like you were when your attention was in First Circle; in fact, you're probably even leaning slightly back now and your chin is going slightly up. And, as your body was when your attention was in Second Circle, you still have an overall quality of readiness and alertness about you.

However, in Third Circle, your head becomes somehow slightly detached from the rest of your body; it may even cock slightly to one side. Remember: the area your body is gathering information from now in Third Circle is even wider than the area of Second Circle your attention was in before, and accordingly, your body opens up even more to adjust to this.

2. When your attention is placed in Third Circle, your eyes don't focus on objects in your immediate surroundings as they did in Second Circle; in fact, your eyes may appear to just glaze over and not look at anything at all even though they remain open. Or your eyes may drift slightly but not because they're focusing on anything in particular.

As you proceed to do the movement "hearing" with your attention outside of your immediate surroundings (Third Circle), you might hear things such as footsteps in the hallway, traffic noises, birds chirping, dogs barking – any noise your ears can hear but for which your eyes can't see the source.

Adjust your body first: 1. lean back slightly, 2. raise your chin, and 3. don't focus

your eyes on anything in particular or "short focus" your eyes on a spot in space about two feet in front of you. Now, “hear in order to catch a sound” with your attention in Third Circle. Try this for two or three minutes. Then continue reading.

What did you hear? If you heard your chair squeak, your attention wasn't in Third Circle (it was in Second Circle, right?). Regardless of where you live, you will probably hear something in Third Circle if you take the time to listen (crickets or a plane or traffic sounds, for example).

There are two more *psychical* aspects of Third Circle that distinguish it from Second Circle:

1. Third Circle isn’t restricted in regards to time or space.

Not only is Third Circle *physically* outside of your immediate surroundings, it can also be *psychically* outside your immediate surroundings because an event you're thinking about is taking place in a different time.

For example, imagine with your mind an event that isn't actually happening in the present moment – an event you're not actually seeing. Thinking of this event puts your attention into either the future or into the past and thus, into Third Circle.

2. Third Circle requires that the event your attention is on contains some element of conflict or issue for you.

For example, say you're thinking about a party you're planning to throw next Saturday night. True, you expect the party itself to be pleasurable, but imagining all the work, the errands, and the timing of the cooking of the food that have to be done to prepare for the party is worrisome, and it is these thoughts about the future – outside of your immediate surroundings – that put your attention into Third Circle.

Or think about what happened to you the last time you went to the dentist to have a cavity filled, and you'll find your attention in Third Circle.

When you feel that you've experienced your attention and your body in Third Circle, continue.

Part D Fourth Circle

Fourth Circle refers to an area that is also outside of your immediate surroundings, and, as with Third Circle, it's an area that can occur in a different time.

However, in Fourth Circle, there is absolutely no element of conflict or displeasure. Fourth Circle is when your attention is no longer acting upon objects or events but instead has no will of its own and is rather the object being acted upon. It's an area which many people in our society spend their entire lives trying to put their attentions into as often as possible.

We can say that Fourth Circle is when we are "one with the universe."

When are our attentions in Fourth Circle in life? For example, when we're asleep and dreaming; when we're awake and daydreaming; when we're drunk or in any of the other drug states; when we're sunbathing (becoming one with the sun); or, when we're in deep meditation.

If you imagine yourself as a small pebble on the beach being washed over by the waves of the ocean, and you imagine the sea gulls flying over you, and you imagine having no will of your own and that you move only when the waves wash over you, then your attention will be in Fourth Circle. There is no conflict and no displeasure there.

If our attentions are placed into Fourth Circle, how do our bodies respond? As you proceed to experience the action "hearing in order to catch a sound" when your attention is "one with the universe," here's what you should notice happening in your body:

1. Your body totally opens up as if to gather information from all corners of the universe. Your head drops completely back, you're reclining as much as it's possible to recline in a chair, and your arms drop limply down by your sides.

2. Your eyes close – your attention is focused on objects so far away that physical sight is totally unnecessary.

In this body position, imagine yourself as some inanimate object in beautiful surroundings. For example, imagine you're a leaf on a tree being blown by a soft spring breeze.

Now do the movement "hearing" in this Fourth Circle of Attention. What might you hear in this place with no conflict? Birds singing, the sound of the breeze moving through the branches, or a church bell in the distance, for example? There is no conflict. You have no will. You are simply acted upon by whatever is around you in your circumstances.

Of course, in the strictest sense of the *physicality* of the action we're using to experience this model, "hearing in order to catch a sound," we would need to be physically in the places we're imagining – otherwise there would be no actual sound waves striking our eardrums.

For the case of testing this model, however, we can use our *imaginations* for this action in this circle. We can place our attentions in an environment where there is no conflict – we

can be a leaf blowing gently in the wind – and we can *imagine* what sound waves might flow into our ear canals.

Adjust your body first: 1. lean back completely, 2. drop your arms and all of your body's tension and 3. close your eyes. Next, imagine that you're an inanimate object in peaceful surroundings and "hear in order to catch a sound" with your attention in Fourth Circle. Try this for two or three minutes. Then continue reading.

What did you hear in your imagination?

One reason that acting models are so useful is that they make it possible to test and to prove or disprove the rules of the human behavior which they examine.

For example: if dreaming means our attentions are in Fourth Circle, where are our attentions if our dreams become nightmares?4

Drug states can have a different quality than dreaming in Fourth Circle but they still meet the criteria for Fourth Circle when our attention is put there by being, for example, drunk or high.

I saw a man standing in the middle of a busy Los Angeles street in the middle of the day greeting each of the passing cars as if it were a congenial old acquaintance just out for a Sunday stroll. He would bow to them if they honked their horns at him. Was his attention on how fast the cars were coming at him so he could cross the street safely without being hit by one of them (Second Circle)? No. Or, was his attention on the fact that he would be struck and killed if he made one wrong step on either side of the dividing lines (Third Circle)? Hardly. His attention was far away in another era when transportation was slower, and not at all dangerous, and people could take the time to greet the other people they happened to meet along a shady boulevard (Fourth Circle).

Think back now over all four of the Circles of Attention starting with First Circle (Figure 4.1).

What does this model teach us about life? For example, what did you notice about the overall movement of your body as your attention went from First Circle through Fourth Circle? Remember how closed-off and heavy your body was in First Circle? But by the time your body had reached Fourth Circle, it was completely open and its weight was light.

The Four Circles of Attention Model shows us that what our minds do affects what our bodies do. This is what happens in life; therefore, it's our work as non-presentational actors to make this happen on stage as well.

EXERCISE 6.1 Waking up

To do this exercise, you'll need:

1. Room to lie down;
2. An alarm clock (or an egg timer).

A movement that actors are frequently required to do is the movement of waking up from sleep. Once we identify the different Circles of Attention people can pass through when they're waking up, the movement becomes doable and clear.

Answers to the questions posed can be found in the endnotes.

(The places for you to put this guide down and go through the exercise with your body are indicated below in bold print.)

Part A: Sleeping

Practice the movement "sleeping" by lying down and putting your attention in Fourth Circle (body open, eyes closed, no conflict). Take the time to imagine yourself in circumstances that are pleasant and without conflict – where you are being acted upon and not the agent.

Go ahead and lie down and practice the movement "sleeping" with your attention in Fourth Circle for at least a minute. Then continue reading.

What do we call the type of pleasant thinking we have when we're asleep?5

Part B: The Alarm Clock

Set your alarm clock (or use an egg timer) to go off while you're practicing the movement "sleeping." Observe what Circle of Attention your mind goes into when the alarm or bell sounds. Then continue reading.

What Circle of Attention did your mind first go into when your alarm clock went off?6

When you first open your eyes after hearing the alarm, what are your eyes looking at? Does your body move immediately to allow your eyes to look at the alarm clock? If your eyes aren't immediately looking at the source of the sound that woke you up, your attention is in Third Circle when you first open your eyes. Your attention isn't in Second Circle until you finally move your head and physically see the alarm.7

This doesn't mean that it's impossible for our attentions to go directly into Second Circle or First Circle when we wake up. This only shows us that we need to know the *purposes* for where our attentions go as well.

For example, what's a possible purpose for our attentions going into Third Circle when we wake up? Because we're trying to *remember* where we are after being asleep. Memory is in the past – which puts our attentions into Third Circle.

Or what could be a possible purpose for our attentions going directly into First Circle when we wake up? Because we have a horrible hangover from last night's Super Bowl party and this has given us a terrible headache. The headache is in our heads on our own bodies which puts our attentions into First Circle.

Part C: Rude awakenings

What could be a circumstance or purpose that would take our attentions from Fourth Circle *directly* into Second Circle? What would our bodies look like if this happens?

For example, what if you were sleeping and you opened your eyes to see a revolver pointed directly at your face? (What could be some reasons why you opened your eyes in the first place? A metallic click from the gun being cocked? The barrel of the gun touching your forehead?)

What if you were sleeping and your dog licked your face?

What if you were sleeping and someone suddenly opened the curtains which caused sunlight to fall directly onto your face?

Go ahead and practice waking up going from sleeping in Fourth Circle to putting your attention into Second Circle by letting your attention go *directly* to the object or person that wakes you up. Then continue reading.

Part D: Dreaming

Go back to doing the movement of "sleeping" but now – *keeping your eyes closed* – put your attention into Third Circle (conflict) by imagining a problem in your pleasant surroundings, for example, the sound of someone crying but you can't tell from where the sound is coming so you can't help them.

Keeping your eyes closed the entire time, practice going from Fourth Circle into

Third Circle because of a conflict in your imagination and observe what effect this has on your body while doing the movement "sleeping." Do this now, and then continue reading.

What happened to your body when your attention went from pleasant surroundings into a circumstance where there was a conflict? Most probably, tension came into your face. Your eyes closed tighter trying to get away from the problem. You might even have turned your head trying to get away from the sound.

If this conflict gets bad enough while we're doing the movement of "sleeping," what do we call it?8

Part E: Do not disturb

Which circle is a more pleasant circle to be in, Fourth Circle or Second Circle? Fourth Circle, right? We aren't usually pleased to come out of Fourth Circle and go into Second Circle in order to wake up.

Realizing that our bodies want to stay in Fourth Circle when we wake up, practice the movement "sleeping" again and observe what your body does to try to stay in Fourth Circle when, for example, someone calls your name and pulls your attention into Third Circle to wake you up.

Try this now. Then continue reading.

What happened to your body? First of all, your body probably moved as little as possible. Your eyes barely opened, then slowly re-closed. Your whole face probably went into a frown, and you looked out of the corners of your eyes to warn whoever it was that woke you up that you still wanted to stay asleep.

EXERCISE 6.2 Attention from Second Circle to Third Circle

To do this exercise, you'll need:

1. A person to talk to.

Try this as an experiment on someone you know. Engage him or her in a conversation, and while they're talking to you, adjust your body to be in Third Circle. Then focus your eyes on one of their shoulders and silently in your mind ask yourself the question, "I wonder what her shirt would look like if I squirted a whole bottle of ketchup on it?" In your mind, imagine squirting the bottle and visualize exactly where on her shirt the ketchup would hit.

Imagine how the ketchup would drip and flow down the front of the shirt.

If you really focus your attention on imagining this event while your friend is talking to you, I can guarantee you that he or she will noticeably flinch: They'll become aware that your attention is no longer on what they're saying to you (Second Circle) but has shifted instead to something else (Third Circle).

Your purpose in this exercise is not to make your partner flinch, but rather to get feedback from them on how clearly you're able to control your attention.

7 The Weight Model

"As actors come to understand that everything they do on stage says something, they'll begin to be more precise with their movements."

Evgeny Lanskoy

Talking heads

The computer age, and with it computer-generated moving images, is upon us. What can actors do that animated cartoon characters can't do? If the answer is nothing, then human actors have become obsolete. If the answer is, however, that actors can communicate the infinite subtlety and meaning of human movement that machines can't, then actors will realize that they're uniquely qualified to advise a computer-literate world about visual literacy.

Think back to Exercise 1.1 and what you observed from watching television with and without the sound on. What percentage of the information communicated to us on television is non-verbal? How important is it for us to see how the actors move as opposed to only hearing them talk?

When dramatic material is communicated primarily through words and not through movement, it's often referred to as "talking heads." Watching actors act without seeing them move is like only reading about a basketball game or only hearing a ballet through a radio commentary. Words, because they're linear, are incapable of communicating information to us the way we get information from seeing a person move. If actors don't use movement to communicate when they act, then they're only using a small percentage of themselves to communicate to an audience.

The Weight Model

The Weight Model (Figure 7.1) gives us a structure for evaluating people's purposes (what they want to do) according to the psychical "weight" we observe their bodies in.

Note that this has very little to do with a person's actual weight in pounds or whether we consider them as "fat" or "skinny." I've seen many fat people who live most of their lives in light weight and many skinny people who live mostly in heavy weight.

The Four Circles of Attention Model made us aware of how the mind's "attention" influences the movements we make with our bodies. The Weight Model instead starts first with movement, shape and even color. Since we very often see people moving before we know who they are or what they want, this is a useful model.

Weight in life

The following is a typical scenario of how our bodies' "weights" can change over the course of a day:

> In the mornings going to our jobs, when we'd rather have stayed in our beds or we'd rather be going to the beach or to the mountains, our "weights" can be "heavy."
>
> When we get to our jobs, we shift into "equal weight," that is to say, we perform our jobs whether we want to or not; otherwise, if we continued on in heavy weight at work too long or too often, we might be fired. We can slip back into heavy weight during coffee breaks (we use coffee for bringing us out of heavy weight) or during our lunch hour but mostly we accomplish our work with calm, even movements not too fast and not too slow.
>
> Finally, eight hours have gone by at work, and it's time for us to go home. We suddenly go into "light weight." We have new-found energy. We head straight for the door and straight for our cars or the subway, and we can hardly wait to go somewhere, anywhere, other than where we've been for the last eight hours.

Something we can also notice about weight in life is that it is possible for our minds to go into a particular weight without a large change being reflected in our bodies or a change will be reflected in only one part of our bodies. For example, our arms could be in light weight while our legs are still in heavy weight. This "mixed signal" is often seen in classrooms where student's minds are taking in information in light weight but their bodies are curved, slumped, and reclining in heavy weight.

Another example is having people tell you that they're ready to go somewhere when their bodies don't look at all as if they're ready to go (their bodies are still in heavy weight). Their minds may be ready, but their bodies haven't reflected their minds' weight yet.

Additionally, as actors, we need to know and be aware of our own weights and what our bodies communicate normally in our own lives if we wish to play characters who may live in character weights that are different from our personal weights. Otherwise, we may end up playing every character in our own personal weight instead of playing them in the

weight their actions and personalities require.

DEMONSTRATION 7.1 The Weight Model

To do this model, you'll need:

1. Access to different types of clothing and jewelry (you might want to do this model in your bedroom).

2. A hairbrush and hairspray or bobby pins.

3. A full-length or dresser mirror (not essential, but it helps you to see what you're doing if you're by yourself).

4. A writing pad and a pen.

5. A chair.

According to the Weight Model, we can divide the physical weight in which we observe people's bodies in everyday life into three categories: Heavy Weight, Equal Weight, and Light Weight. Keep in mind that, even though you know from life that "mixed signals" often occur in people's bodies, to maximize your understanding of the model, you should practice it first "pure," that is to say, without allowing mixed signals to occur in your own body. If you understand the model first in its pure, exaggerated form, you'll feel more confident about experimenting with variations of it later on.

(Again, the places for you to put this guide down and go through the model with your body are indicated below in bold print.)

Part A Heavy Weight

First, ask yourself, "What kind of *speed* do people have when they're in Heavy Weight?" Because their weight is heavy, can they move very quickly?

No. People's speed in Heavy Weight is slow.

Similarly, ask yourself, "What kind of *shape* do people have when they're in Heavy Weight?" This can apply to the clothing and jewelry they've chosen to wear as well as to the shape of their movement.

People who are in Heavy Weight most often have a curved or rounded shape. For example,

their arms may curve into their laps, or their heads might be tilted to one side, or their shoulders are relaxed and sloping. A woman in Heavy Weight may be wearing a leotard with a rounded neckline or tear-shaped earrings on her ears. A man in Heavy Weight may be wearing a stocking cap that fits tightly to the curvature of his head making it appear rounded or large or he might wear round cufflinks on his shirt cuffs.

9Finally, ask yourself, "What kind of *purpose* do people have when they're in Heavy Weight?" Do we want to get up and do things when we're in Heavy Weight? Do we feel that we need to do anything quickly or in a hurry?

No. We don't really need willpower to be in Heavy Weight. For this reason, we can say that when we're in Heavy Weight, we have "no will." For example, people who are dozing in their living room armchairs in front of the eleven o'clock news and are too tired to get up and go to bed are in Heavy Weight.

To review, then, we can describe people as being in Heavy Weight if:

1. Their speed is SLOW;

2. The shape of their bodies or, for example, their hair, their clothing, the jewelry they're wearing, the way they hold their shoulders or their arms or the way they cross their legs is CURVED or ROUNDED; and,

3. Their purpose has NO WILL.

Go ahead now and adjust your body to be in Heavy Weight (watch yourself in a mirror if you have one). Let your shoulders drop so they slope down, clasp your hands together so your arms are curved, cross your legs so they're curved. If you're seated at a desk or table, you might even rest your folded arms on the table and put your chin on top of your hands. If your hair is long enough, you can arrange it to be down around your face or curly. You can choose to wear tennis shoes (round) as opposed to wearing high heels or cowboy boots (pointed), for example, or you can put on a big floppy hat (curved) instead of wearing no hat (less curved).

Go ahead and gather any curved pieces of clothing or jewelry you choose to wear, then adjust your body to be in Heavy Weight. Now, do the following three activities:

1. sit down in a chair IN ORDER TO take a nap;

2. walk across the room IN ORDER TO wait in a line for two hours;

3. sign your name on a sheet of paper IN ORDER TO authorize a veterinarian to put your favorite pet to sleep.

Remember that the movement you're doing (sitting down, walking across the room, signing your name) is one part of the action, and the purpose is the other part of the action. The purpose affects *how* you do the movement of the action. Try these activities now. Then continue reading.

When you feel that you've experienced Heavy Weight with your body and your purpose, continue.

Part B Equal Weight

Ask yourself, "What kind of *speed* do people have who are in Equal Weight?"

Equal means even or evenly proportioned, so our speed when we're in Equal Weight is not fast and not slow but equally proportioned to whatever we're doing. "Middle" is another way of looking at equal weight, halfway between fast and slow. For example, the speed at which the teller at a bank counts out your money to you when you cash a check is most often the speed of Equal Weight: not too fast and not too slow.

Next, ask yourself, "What kind of *shape* do people have who are in Equal Weight?"

There is a symbol that represents equal: "=." Notice that it is two parallel lines that are even. We can say that the shape of Equal Weight is anything that is parallel and even. For example, pinstripe suits are a favorite of business people (a fabric with parallel lines). A person standing on both feet is more likely to be in Equal Weight than a person leaning against a wall or a person standing on one foot.

Finally, ask yourself, "What kind of *purpose* do people have when they're in Equal Weight?"

What kind of weight do we have when we're working? We may not always be thrilled to be working where we are, but, for at least eight hours a day, our manner is agreeable and social enough to our co-workers or our customers that we don't get ourselves fired. Our purpose when we're in equal weight, then, is the same purpose we're in (mostly) when we're working: attentive, orderly, competent, and paced-out enough to allow us to do the tasks that we're doing fifty weeks a year without having heart attacks (although, obviously, not everyone works totally in Equal Weight all of the time). There's a sense of confidence and knowing what we're doing when we're working. Of course, if we're rushed or in a hurry at our jobs, or if we're learning how to do a new job, it's possible to slip out of Equal Weight and into Heavy or Light Weight.

For example, how would a teller at a bank count out your change to you if you were

cashing a four-hundred-dollar check? Would the teller count it out to you very fast? Or, would the teller ask if you could come back tomorrow because there was no time to count out the money for you at that time? Or would they instead count the money in such a way as to make sure for both of you that exactly four hundred dollars is handed to you?1

Equal Weight is also the weight of diplomats, and this means that when we're in Equal Weight, we respond to others in such a way that both sides get what they want.

To review, then, we can describe people as being in Equal Weight if:

1. Their *speed* is NOT FAST and NOT SLOW;

2. The *shape* of their bodies and what they're wearing is PARALLEL and EVEN (for example, standing equally on both feet or wearing earrings of the same size and shape on both ears or wearing striped clothing); and

3. Their *purpose* is BUSINESS-LIKE or the weight we have when we're WORKING (often something to do with money).

Go ahead now and adjust your body to be in Equal Weight (again, watch yourself in a mirror if you can). Square your shoulders so they're even. Adjust your arms to be hanging evenly at your sides or resting on your knees. Plant your feet flatly on the floor with your knees pointing straight out. If your hair is long enough, you can arrange it to be parted in the center and hanging evenly on both sides of your head. You can choose to wear a business suit and a tie, for example, or you could even wear equal amounts of two different colors.

Go ahead and gather any parallel pieces of clothing or jewelry you choose to wear, then adjust your body to be in Equal Weight. Now, do the following three activities:

1. Sit down in a chair IN ORDER TO write out a receipt for money that someone's paid you;

2. Walk across the room IN ORDER TO see who has entered the store;

3. Sign your name on a sheet of paper IN ORDER TO accept shipment of a box of supplies.

Remember that the movement you're doing (sitting down, walking across the room, signing your name) is one part of the action, and the purpose is the other part of the action. The purpose affects how you do the movement of the action. Try these activities now. Then continue reading.

When you feel that you've experienced Equal Weight with your body and your purpose, continue.

Part C Light Weight

Ask yourself, "What kind of *speed* do people have when they're in Light Weight?"

Precisely because their weights are light, people are able to move quickly; therefore, people's speed in Light Weight is fast – they're "ready to jump."

Next, ask yourself, "What kind of *shape* do people have when they're in Light Weight?

The shortest distance between two points is always a line, and a person in Light Weight does things the fastest way; therefore, a person in Light Weight can be described by a straight line.

Straight lines can be reflected in people's body and clothing. For example, people can be seated leaning forward with their elbows on a desk and with their chins supported by their index fingers pointed up in a line. This creates lines and angles in their bodies that can be read as Light Weight. This is a different weight than a man with his elbows on the desk and his chin weighing down on his hands placed one on top of the other (curved and thus Heavy Weight). Or contrast this with a woman seated behind the same desk with her hands simply folded and resting on the desk in front of her – no elbows at all (Equal Weight).

Finally, ask yourself, "What is the *purpose* of people when they're in Light Weight?"

Light weight is reflected by an attention to detail and a desire to respond to someone or to a situation with immediate action. People's purpose in Light Weight is to respond and to be active. People who are in Light Weight are "ready to jump."

For example, we described the movement and purpose of bank tellers counting out bills from a cashed check as being in Equal Weight but how would their weight change if they were counting out the money in front of a bank robber pointing a gun at them (okay – in the Wild West before there were bullet-proof Plexiglas security windows)? They would count out the money in Light Weight: faster, not as precisely, with much more attention paid to the eyes of the robber than to seeing if the bill count is exactly correct.

People can be in Light Weight if they're hurried or rushed, especially if they're rushing themselves in order to please or to serve someone else. However, if people feel rushed or hurried and they resent it, they're more likely to go into heavy weight and move more slowly (think of the movement of clerks in a crowded store – or the Post Office! – where everyone is demanding immediate service from them at the same time).

To review, we describe people as being in Light Weight if:

1. Their *speed* is FAST;

2. The *shape* of their bodies and what they're wearing is STRAIGHT (for example, standing or sitting up straight, or their hair is cut box-like in a crew cut); and

3. Their *purpose* is READY TO JUMP or has WILLPOWER or A DESIRE TO BE INVOLVED (for example, "on the edge of their seats").

Adjust your body's weight to be in Light Weight (watch in a mirror). As with Heavy and Equal Weight, you can adjust your body's weight without actually performing fast or straight movements. For example, if you're ready to jump, then you're not sitting back. If you're seated now, slide forward in your chair until you're sitting on the very edge of it. This will cause you to slide your feet back further under you to counter-balance your weight. Of course, your legs will be uncrossed and both of your feet will be on the floor. Place your hands on your knees or on top of your desk or table. Look straight ahead. Tell yourself, "I'd do it in a second!" Your body is now in Light Weight even without actually jumping. You look as if you're ready to jump.

To adjust your body's weight into Light Weight if you're standing, rock your weight forward onto the balls of your feet or even put one foot slightly ahead of the other as a runner does at the starting line of a race. Slightly bend your knees. You may even have a slight rocking motion, like a defensive football player waiting anxiously for the ball to be hiked.

If your hair is long enough, you can slick it straight back or pull it tightly to your head. Sometimes people have difficulty distinguishing between the *shapes* of EQUAL and STRAIGHT. A way to distinguish the two is to realize that in an equal shape there is always two or more objects being compared (for example, two earrings, or two legs, or a shirt with many parallel stripes). In a straight shape, however, there is only one object that attracts our eye (for example, the person is wearing all one color, or a woman's shoes perfectly match her handbag and dress, or people are wearing jumpsuits or leotards that are all one piece – think of the streamlined outfits Olympic athletes wear these days for speed).

Go ahead and gather any straight pieces of clothing or jewelry you choose to wear, then adjust your body to be in Light Weight. Now, do the following three activities in light weight:

1. Sit down in a chair in order to encourage a baby who's just learning how to walk to come to you.

2. Walk (or run) across the room in order to save your elderly grandmother from tripping over a box on the floor; and

3. Sign your name on a sheet of paper in order to sign up for a class you've wanted to take for over a year but the class has always been full.

Remember that the movement you're doing (sitting down, walking across the room, signing your name) is one part of the action, and the purpose is the other part of the action. The purpose affects how you do the movement of the action. Try these activities now. Then continue reading.

When you feel that you've experienced Light Weight with your body and your purpose, refer to Figure 5.1 for an overview of the complete Weight Model you've just experienced.

As you review and think about the Weight Model, be careful not to confuse the adjustments of your body in the Four Circles of Attention Model with the adjustments of your body in the Weight Model. Although you may note some similarities between them (for example, bodies in the First Circle of Attention often appear to be in heavy weight), the two models diverge as much as they agree (for example, bodies in the Fourth Circle of Attention have no willpower at all even though their weight is light).

EXERCISE 7.1 What weight do you live in most?

To do this exercise, you'll need:

1. A pen or a pencil.

Not everyone lives in the same weight. For example, some people live their lives wishing they were someplace else and resist doing anything in their present circumstances (Heavy Weight). Other people are always so eager to help other people that we find them being nosy and always in the way (Light Weight).

Of course, most of us find ourselves passing through all three of the weights described in the Weight Model during the course of a day. If we think about and observe ourselves carefully, however, in the long run there's usually one weight we spend most of our time in. Knowing the weight that each of us lives in most gives us more control over our acting. The weight is an important part of any character's action.

Part A: Clothing weight

Look at yourself now and observe what you're wearing. What weight do your clothes say you're in? For example, do your clothes say that you're going to a job? Think how equal and parallel most work clothes are, for example, uniforms. A man's work tie is very often striped. Or, on the other hand, are the clothes you're wearing for relaxing and for being in Heavy Weight? Are they soft, billowy, shapeless pullovers or sweat pants? Or, are your clothes cut close to your body to allow for a maximum freedom of fast, Light-Weight movement as thin nylon or spandex would be?

Look in your closet and dressers if you need to and identify which type of clothing you prefer to wear most. Now, answer the following question:

From the clothes that I wear, I live mostly in _____ weight.
(Heavy/Equal/Light)

Part B: Purpose weight

Now, ask yourself what weight *purpose* during the course of a day you live in most ("no will," "work," or "willpower"). For example, if you work ten or more hours per day, you may feel as if you live mostly in equal weight. This means that most of the day you move methodically, you get things done on a schedule, you get to places on time, and you're very orderly.

If you watch a lot of television, you'll find yourself in Heavy Weight a lot of the time because it doesn't require you to be active or to do anything (no will). Reading, on the other hand, requires willpower and a desire to be involved (now you can realize why parents try to get their children to read).

Are you ready to jump to do things for yourself or for other people? If someone asks you to stand up, do you do it right away? If so, you may be living mostly in Light Weight. Or, would you rather be someplace other than where you are most of the time (Heavy Weight)?

Some cultures allow more time for different weights than others. What weight does a sidewalk cafe in Paris allow, for example? How about a Spanish siesta?

If you're a student during most of the day, you'll find that it's very difficult for you to spend much of your time in Equal Weight. Why? Because Equal Weight means you know what you're doing – it's routine for you. It's doubtful that, as a student, things are routine. More probably, new information is being given to you, and you're either eager to take it in (which puts you in Light Weight) or you're resisting this new information because it seems

like too much work to you (you're resisting in Heavy Weight).

Now, answer the following question:

2. The purpose weight I live in most during the day is _____ .
(no will/work/willpower)

If you wrote that you prefer to be in "no will" all of the time, be honest with yourself and really question if you 1) like to move slowly, 2) don't want to think, and 3) allow others to act upon you without responding back to them. If you can honestly answer yes to all three of these requirements, then you probably really do live mostly in Heavy Weight.

Look at your answers to questions one and two. Do your answers both belong to the same weight? For example, if your clothes are mostly “parallel,” do you consider your purpose to be mostly "work" as well? There is no rule that says your answers must match. It's entirely possible to wear clothes that are mostly heavy and to live mostly in a purpose of willpower at the same time. In life, we call this "mixed signals."

Part C: Why this weight?

Once you've identified which weight you live in most of the time, ask yourself why you live in this weight. To help you do this, answer the following questions:

1. How long have you lived in this weight?

2. If you haven't always lived in this weight, what weight did you live in before this weight?

3. Did you ever consciously make a choice to live in this weight?

4. Was there a specific event that occurred in your life when you chose to start living in this weight? (For example, you may realize that you grew up in a very cold climate, and even though you may no longer live in that climate, your weight is still very heavy in the mornings and lighter in the afternoons. This is because, as a child, getting up in the morning in a very cold house was uncomfortable, and you resisted this. This made you move slowly in the mornings, and this habit has stayed with you ever since – even if you live in a climate now where the mornings aren't cold.)

5. Is there a weight you prefer being in most of the time (even though you may have a job or other circumstances that don't allow you to be in this weight as much as you'd like to be)?

You may not know the answers to these questions right away. Take your time and think about them. Be honest with yourself. Ask other people their opinions about your weight but be sure to give them enough information about the model so that their observations will apply to the questions you're asking them.

If you're able to identify why you live in the weight you live in most, you may realize that you have control over this weight. All of us can choose which weights to live in – and to act in.

Figure 1.1 *Acting events timeline*

1863	**Stanislavsky born (Jan. 5, 1863).**
1897	**Stanislavsky founds the Moscow Art Theatre when he is 34.**
1917	**Russian Revolution.**
1918-1921	**Russian Civil War.**
1922-1923	**Soviet Union established.**
1922-1923	**Moscow Art Theatre tours the U.S.**
1923	**Members of the not-yet-established Group Theatre see the MAT perform in New York City.**
1923-1953	**Stalin rules.**
1924	**Lenin dies.**
1931	**Group Theatre forms in New York City.**
1934	**Adler works with Stanislavsky in Paris.**
1935	**Strasberg leaves the Group Theatre.**
1938	**Stanislavsky dies (Aug. 7, 1938).**
1970's (late)	**Evgeny Lanskoy emigrates from the Soviet Union to the United States.**
1991	**The Belavezha Accords declare the Soviet Union dissolved (Dec. 8).**
1992	**Stella Adler dies (Dec. 21, 1992).**

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FIG. 1.1

Figure 4.1 *The Materials Model*

the BRICKLAYER'S material	is	bricks and mortar
the PAINTER'S material	is	color (red, blue, yellow)
the MUSICIAN'S material	is	notes (8 notes in a scale)
the POET'S material	is	words
the ACTOR'S material	is	Actions (Movement with Purpose)
the WRITER'S material	is	Sequence (of Actions)
the DIRECTOR'S material	is	Relationships (between Actions)

FIG. 4.1

Figure 5.1 *The Two-Part Model of an Action*

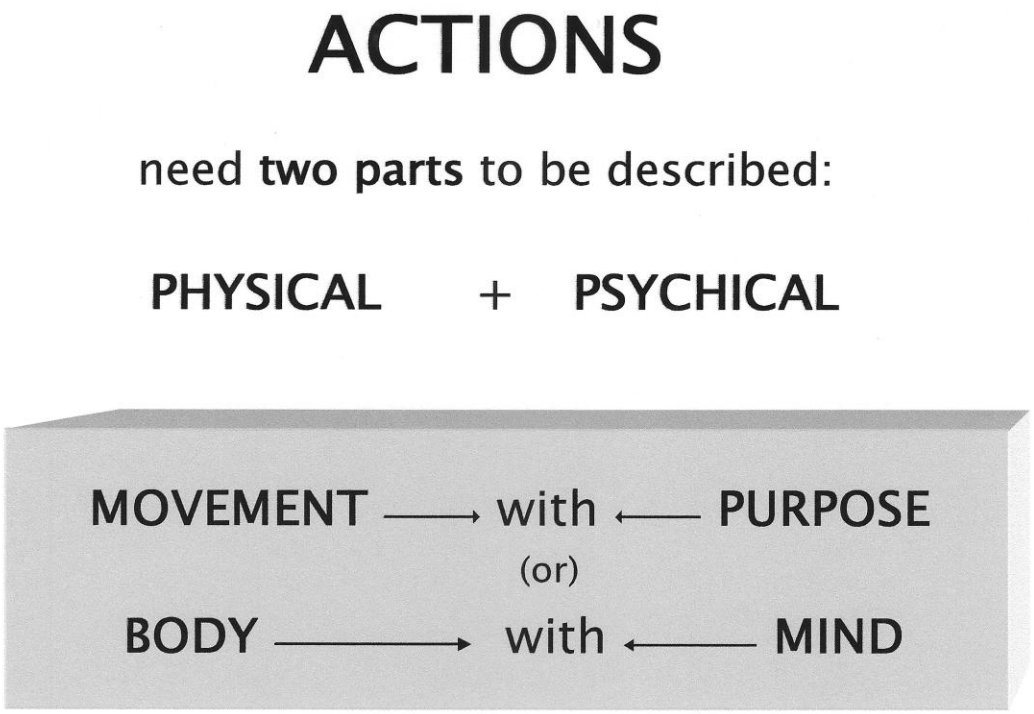

FIG. 5.1

Figure 5.2 *A line describing an Action*

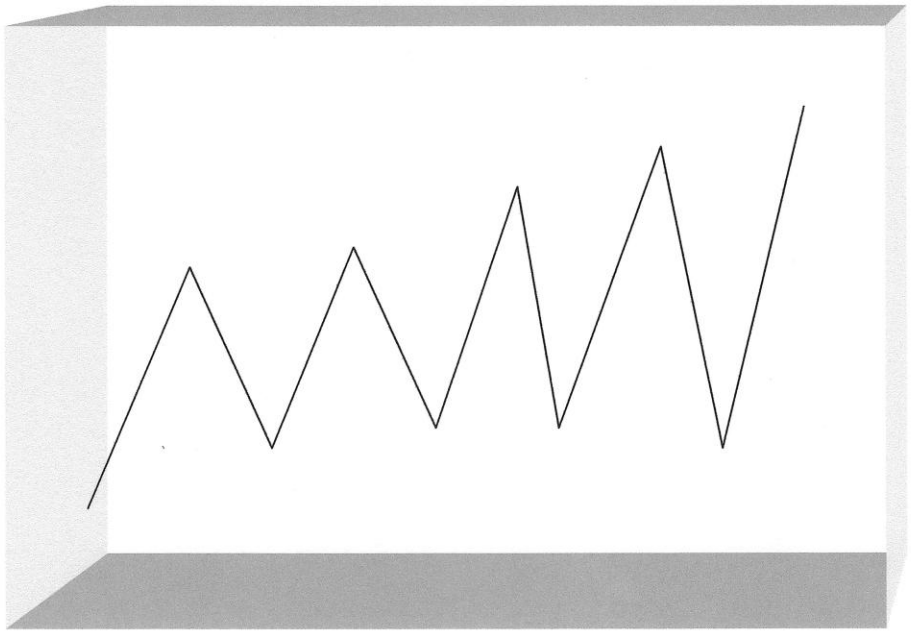

FIG. 5.2

Figure 5.3 *A line describing Charlie Chaplin's walk as The Little Tramp*

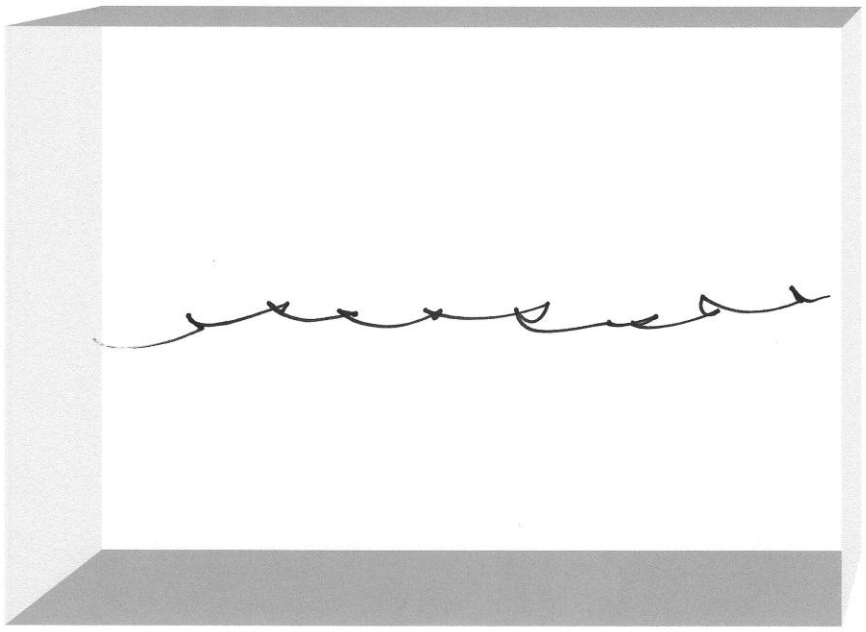

FIG. 5.3

Figure 5.4 *Linear representations of different movements*

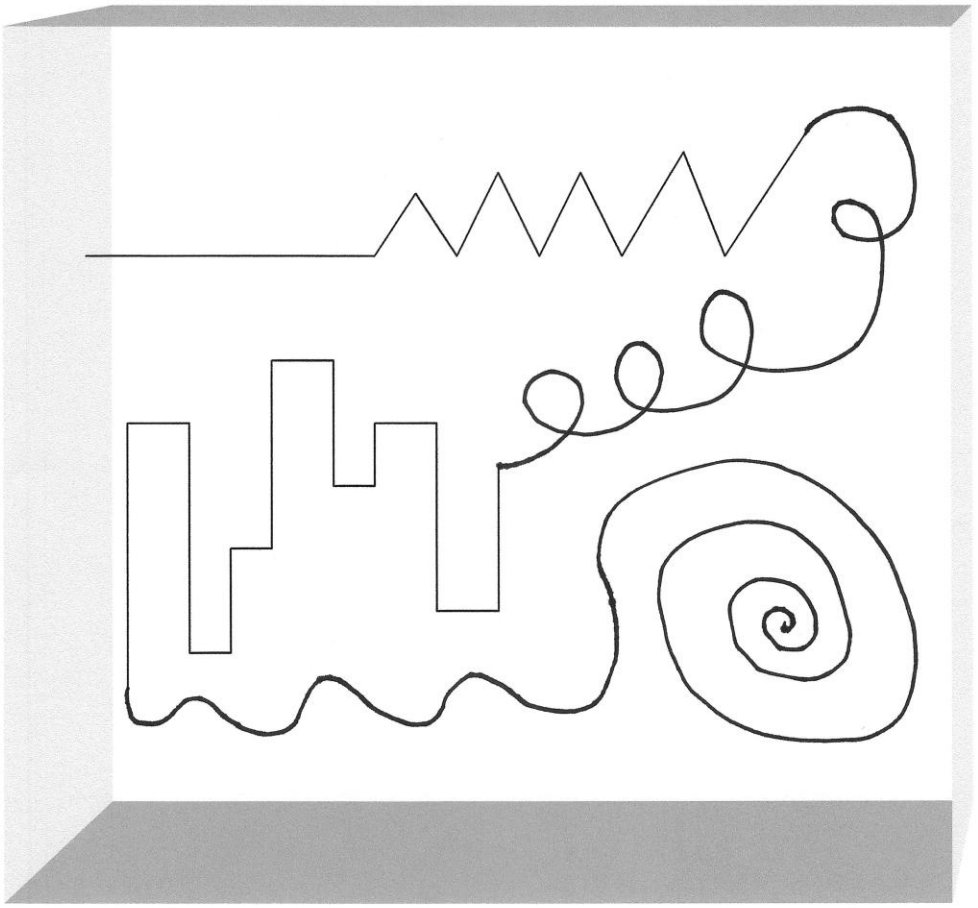

FIG. 5.4

Figure 6.1 *The Four Circles of Attention Model*

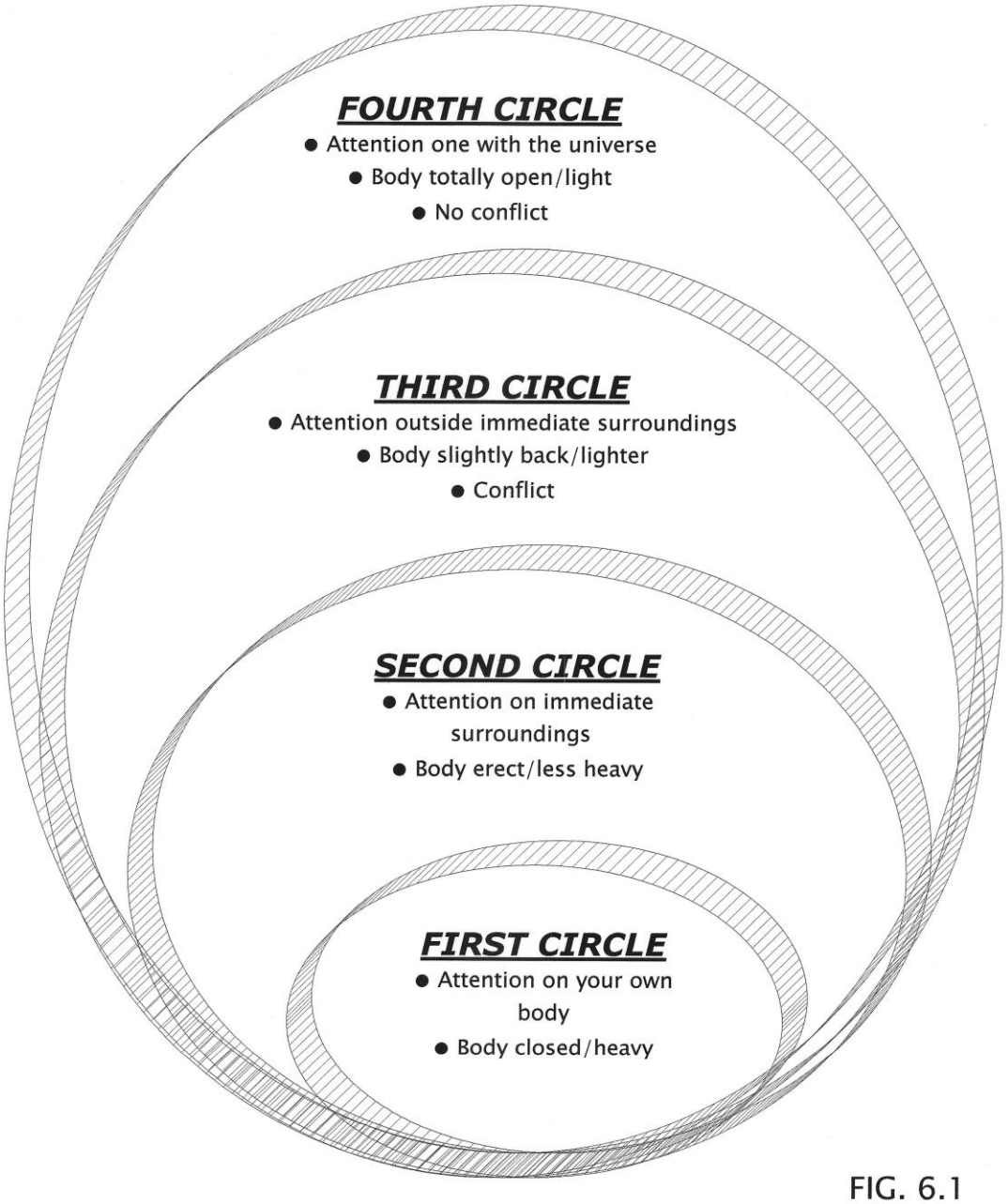

FIG. 6.1

Figure 7.1 *The Weight Model*

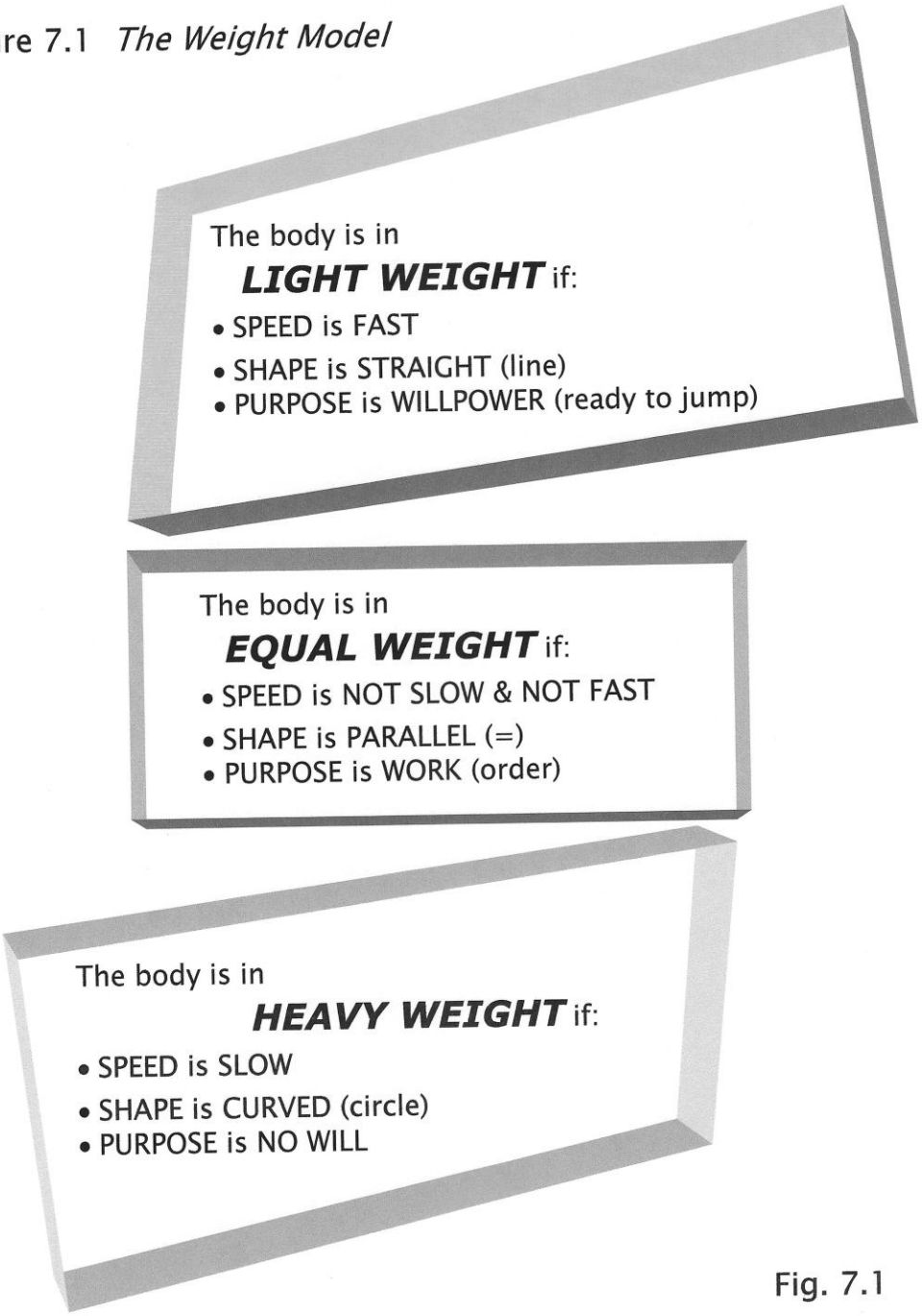

Fig. 7.1

Figure 8A.1 *The Three-Part Model of an Action*

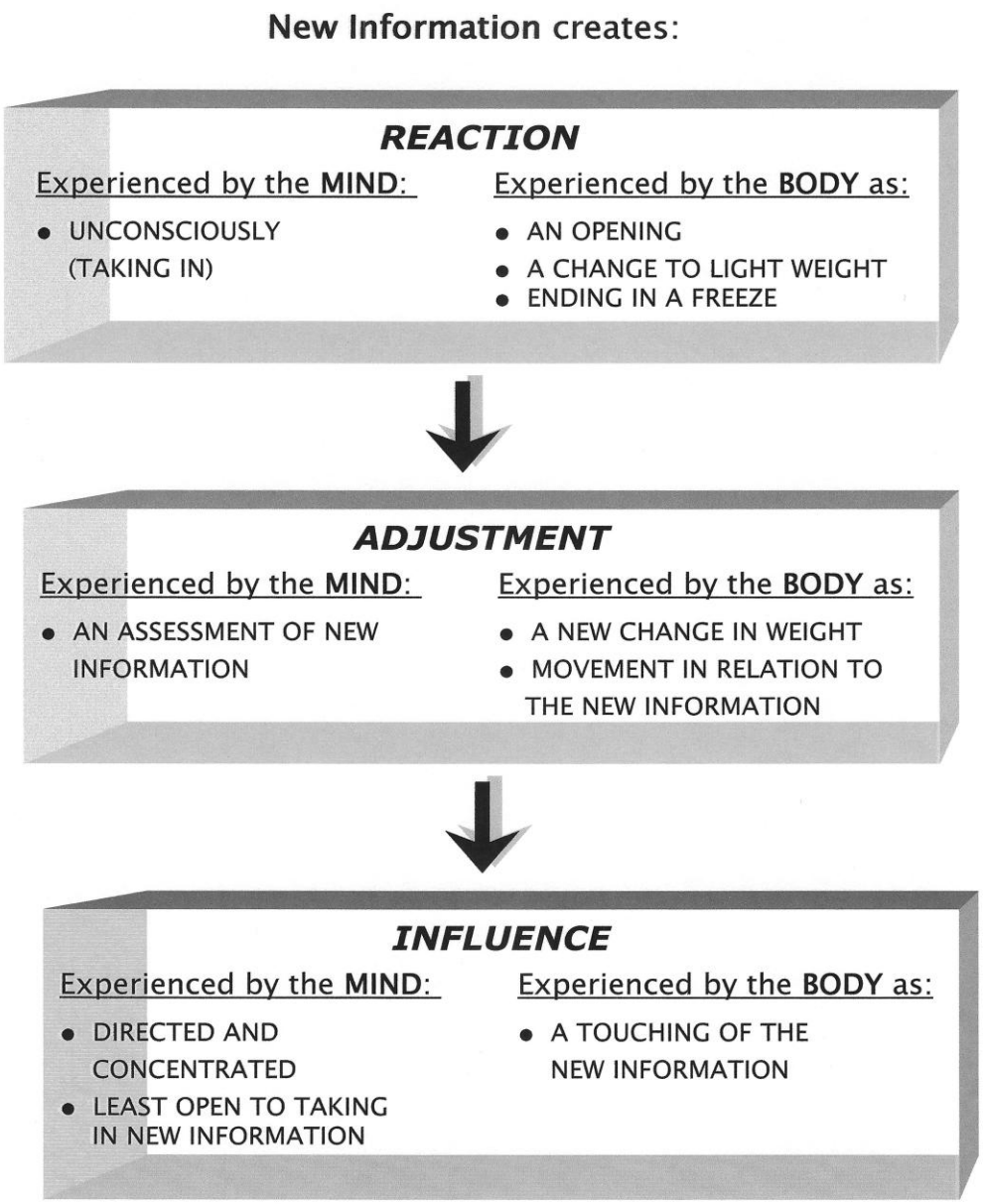

FIG. 8A.1

Figure 8A.2 *Points of new movement*

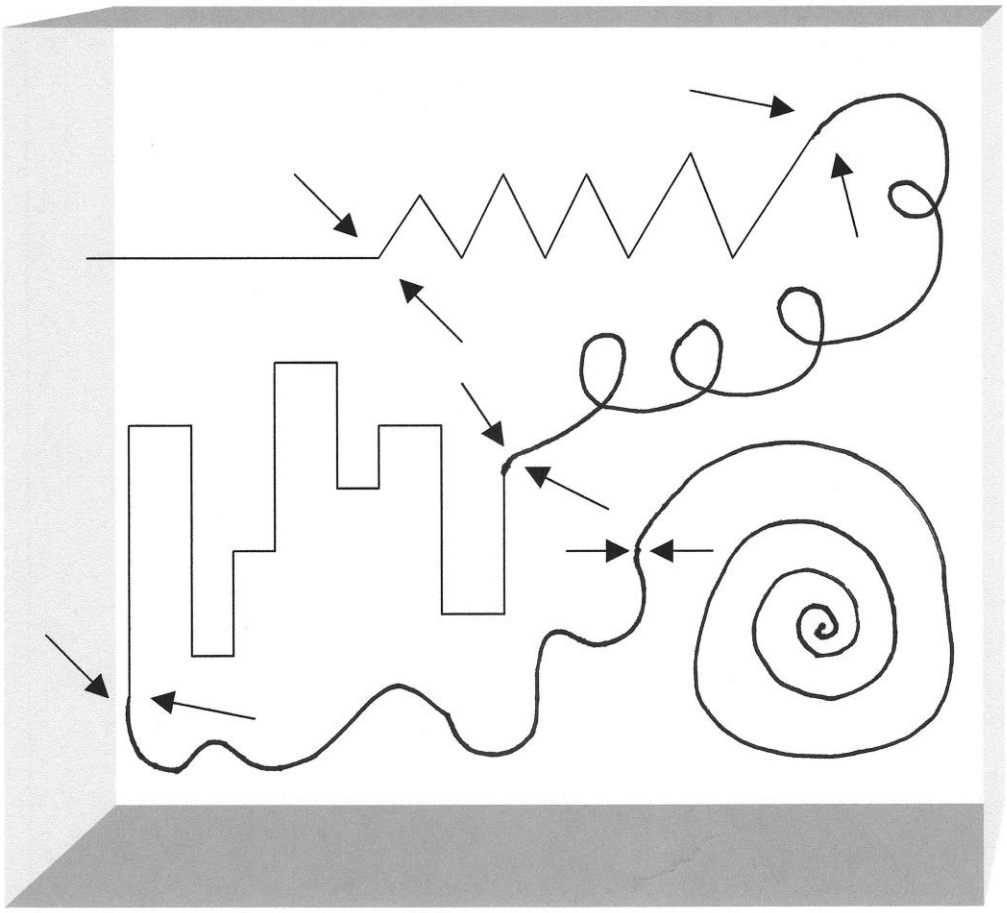

FIG. 8A.2

Figure 8A.3 *The psycho-physical nature of Reactions*

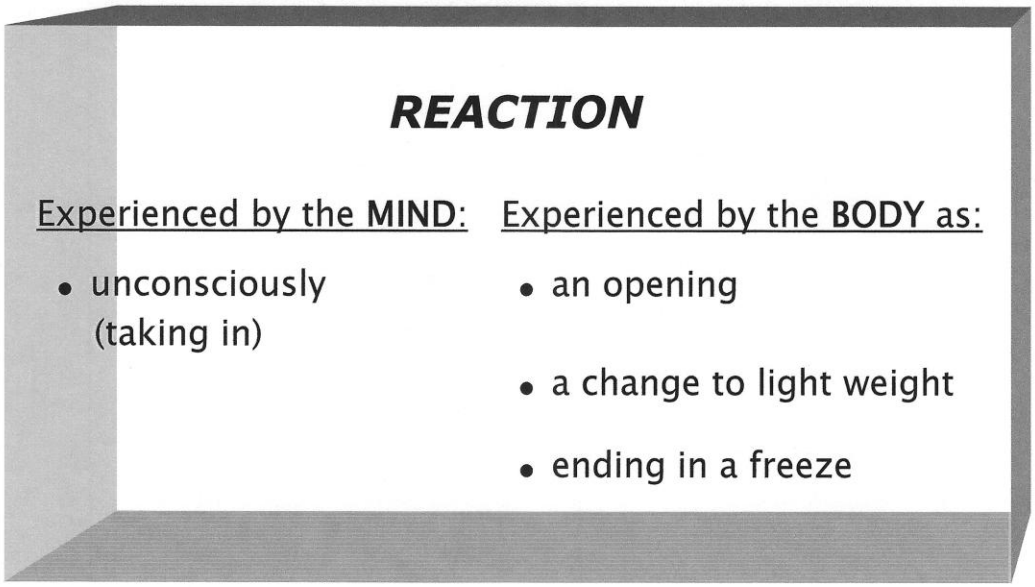

FIG. 8A.3

Figure 8B.1 *The psycho-physical nature of Adjustments*

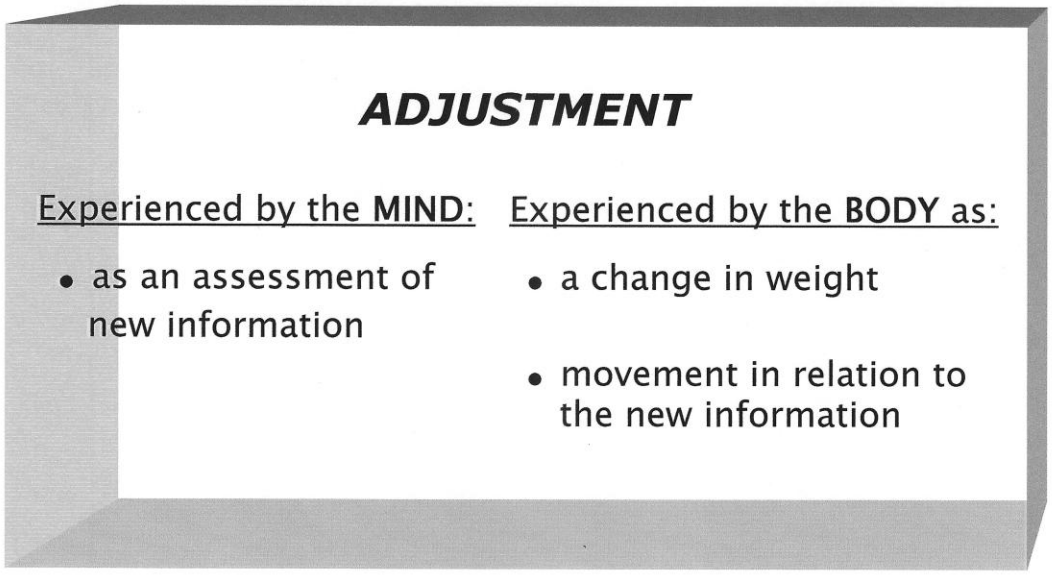

FIG. 8B.1

Figure 8B.2 *The sunburn in Adjustment*

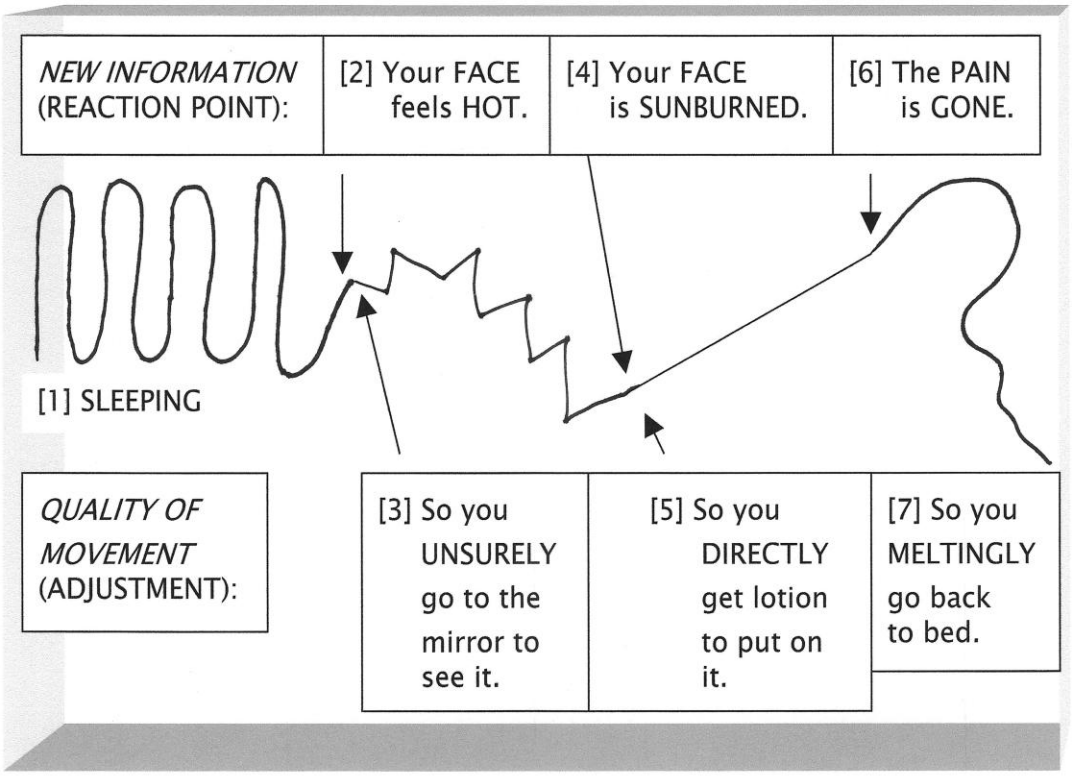

FIG. 8B.2

Figure 8B.3 *Adjustment to killing a bug like a ballet dancer*

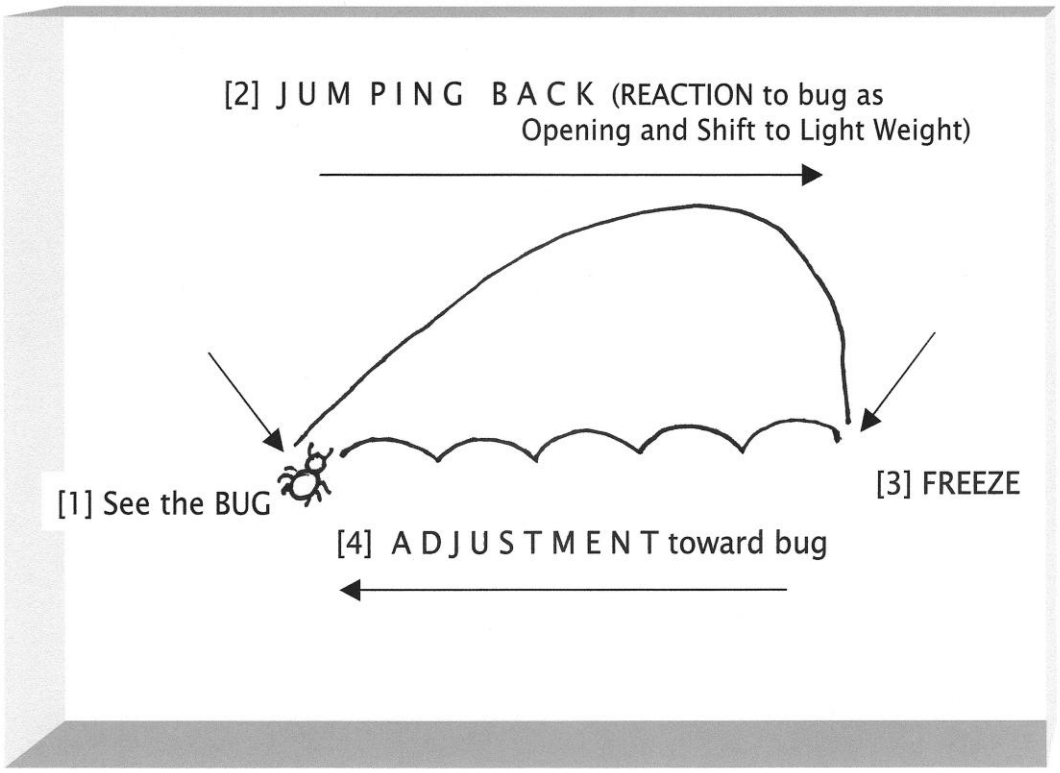

FIG. 8B.3

Figure 8C.1 *The psycho-physical nature of Influences*

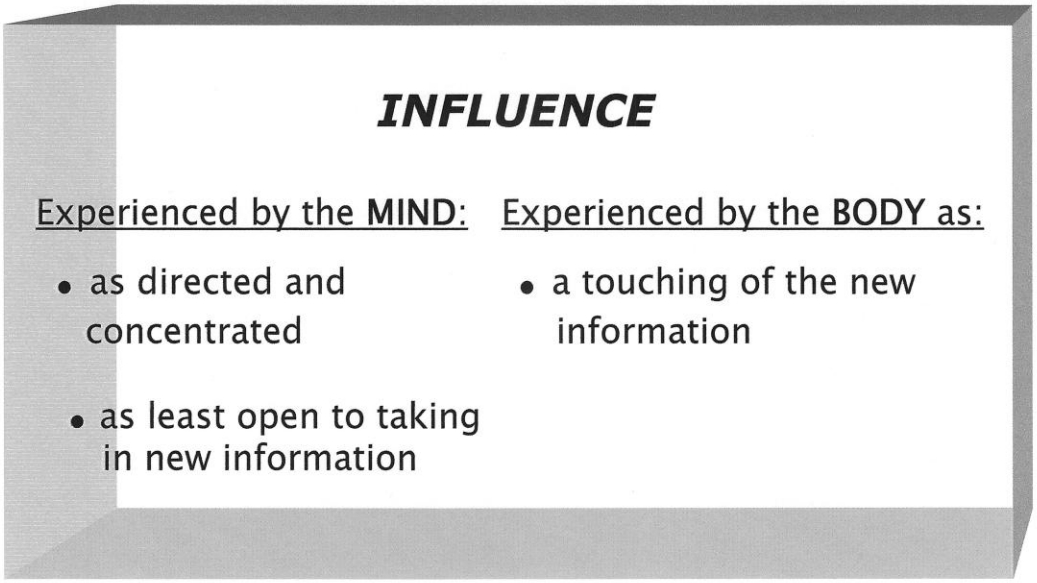

FIG. 8C.1

8A The Three-Part Model of an Action: *Reactions*

"Acting is reacting."

Stella Adler

As we observed in Chapter Five, the Two-Part Model of an Action gives us a structure for verbally identifying actions we see in life and those we perform. The Three-Part Model of an Action, however, allows us to see how these actions *change* and fit together. It does this by breaking this change into three basic components: Reactions (Chapter 8A), Adjustments (Chapter 8B), and Influences (Chapter 8C).

Similarly, just as the Two-Part Model of an Action allows us to observe that actions need two parts (movement and purpose) in order to be adequately described (Figure 3.1), the Three-Part Model of an Action reveals that actions change through both *psychical* (purpose) and *physical* (movement) levels as well (Figure 8.1).

PART ONE *REACTIONS*

A. New information

What causes actions to change?

All movement communicates. Whenever we see movement, we're getting information. For example, we learn how fast a car is coming towards us by how fast we see it getting bigger in our field of vision. Or, we see leaves blowing in the air, and we know that it's a windy day.

The movement we're most used to thinking about in life is "moving" or "active." For example, we see our hand reaching out for a pen or we see a dog chasing a cat.

In a very general sense, however, there is another kind of movement we can observe in life. This second kind of movement is actually no movement at all but instead what we call a *freeze*.

Think about the times when we're totally frozen in life. When do these freezes occur? For example, how about the phrase, "frozen with fear?"

Freezes occur naturally and spontaneously in life when we're presented with *new information*. For example, a very loud noise can cause a freeze in our bodies. It's new, unexpected, surprising. Sometimes it's shocking. If it was something we expected or hoped

might happen, then it was not new information. New information is not something we look for or try to make happen.

For example, say you're riding your bicycle, when suddenly you hear the screeching sound of a car's brakes. Your head comes up, your eyes open wide, and you see the car skidding straight at you. Suddenly, you are frozen.

So, what was the new information?1

DEMONSTRATION 8A.1 The atom bomb reaction

Let's observe what happens when we receive new information.

To do this demonstration you'll need:

1. A chair.

(The places for you to put this guide down and go through the exercise with your body are indicated below in bold print.)

Here's a demonstration for what a Reaction does to the body. Sitting in a chair, stretch your body out as far and as wide as you can, including your face, your fingers, your feet. Open your eyes, lift your eyebrows, stretch open your mouth. When every part of your body is stretched as wide as it can go, I want you to FREEZE all of your movement for at least twenty seconds – don't move.

Do your best to observe your body while it's in this open and frozen position.

Go ahead and try this now. Then continue reading.

The position you were just frozen in is an extreme Reaction – for example, a Reaction to an atom bomb explosion.

An explosion is definitely new information to our minds – something we're not expecting or something we don't know exactly at what point will happen. When you were stretched out and frozen, did you feel like a cartoon character who's just seen a ghost? (In fact, animated cartoon characters are excellent for observing Reactions.)

Of course, this extreme doesn't happen to our bodies every time we get new information. Reactions can be of any speed, size, or duration with our bodies opening in any number of ways. In fact, as humans, we've become very adept at disguising not only large movements but any movement whatsoever each time we get new information.2

What I want you to understand from this demonstration is that specific, observable events happen to both our minds and our bodies when we receive new information. And one of the most observable events that happens is that our bodies freeze.

Reactions are interruptions of the action

An everyday usage of the word "reaction" would tell us that a reaction is responding, that is to say, responding with movement. For example, you see a ghost and your "reaction" is to run. Or, you see a baby fall and your "reaction" is to pick the baby up. Or, returning to your bicycle accident, after seeing the car coming straight at you, in the next second, your "reaction" is to jump from your bike to safety just as the car hits the bike sending it flying.

However, our acting sense tells us that Reactions interrupt the action. So how can Reactions be parts of actions if there's no movement? How do Reactions relate to movement and to freezes?

Look again at the line representations of different movements in Figure 5.4. Figure 8A.2 shows the same six lines you counted in Figure 5.4 but with arrows pointing to the points where one kind of movement ends and the next kind of movement begins.

We know now that something happened at these spots that made the line change direction and quality. Some force – some interruption – changed the shape of the line.

The interruptions were new information, and new information creates Reactions.

From Figure 8A.2, we can also see that if there are six different types of movement then we can be sure that there are six different points where new information interrupted one movement and caused a new movement.

In general, we can state the following about Reactions and their relationship to actions:

1. A Reaction is a response to an event which gives us new information that is big enough to change our movement.3

2. Technically, every action starts with no movement (a freeze).

3. Not every action is always completed but an action always begins with a Reaction.

For example, someone offers you a new job at double your current salary. This is new information that makes you stop and think, at least, about changing jobs. It's still possible, however, that you might return to your original job if, even though the new job pays twice

the money, it also requires you to work double the number of hours and it increases your commute time by two hours each day.

Now that we know that new information creates Reactions, let's look at the psycho–physical nature of Reactions (Figure 8A.3) by itself in detail. As with all actions, each part of the Three-Part Model of an Action contains both psychical (mind) and physical (body) elements.

B. The psychical (mind) nature of Reactions

1. Reactions are taken in and experienced by the mind *unconsciously*.

Think back to the very first class we took on biology in school. What did we learn about an organism's first response when it's faced with danger? "Fight or flight." Each of these is a response that sends signals to the body as if to say, "I don't have time to think about what I'm going to do, I just need to respond – now!"

The mind's taking in of new information is exactly the same. At each "reaction" point, the mind doesn't make conscious sense of the new information.

2. Because Reactions are experienced unconsciously, they can be illogical.

If our minds aren't aware of our bodies when new information occurs, our bodies' movements might be imprecise and without purpose.

For example, let's return to the outcome of your bicycle accident. After you've recovered from seeing your bicycle sent crashing through the air into some bushes, you realize that you're still holding the plastic handlebar grips in your hands (torn free from the handlebar, of course). "How did this happen?" you ask yourself. The illogic of tearing the handlebar grips from the handlebars WITHOUT EVEN REALIZING that you did it, shows that you experienced a Reaction.

Another example: a woman with her head propped up by her arm on a table while she's listening tiredly to her daughter talk will have her elbow suddenly slip off the edge of the table when her daughter tells her that she's pregnant (surprise! – new information). It's illogical for her elbow to slip off the table when it's supporting the woman's head but as we'll see in the next section on how the body experiences new information, the change in her weight when she hears this new information is enough to dislodge her elbow and to throw her off balance.

How can we apply our knowledge of the illogical nature of Reactions to our acting?

The more illogical the opening of the body (the shock), the changing of the weight of the body to light weight (the physical appraisal) and the end position of the body in the freeze when new information happens, the more these movements will read to an observer to be a Reaction.

Therefore, we can clue in our audiences to seeing when our characters are having Reactions by choosing to perform some sort of illogical movement when our characters experience Reactions. Of course, not every Reaction we have is a large enough shock to cause illogical movement in our bodies every time. However, if we start observing people's Reactions in life, we'll get ideas for illogical movements in Reactions that go beyond the Reaction movement clichés of dropping objects or choking on drinks, for example.

C. The physical (body) nature of Reactions

Since we've seen that Reactions are experienced unconsciously by our minds, it makes sense that it's easiest for us to observe how Reactions are experienced *physically* (Figure 8A.3).

Think back to the atom bomb Reaction demonstration and to what your body experienced doing it. Even though it was an extreme example of a Reaction to new information, we can still use it to observe what happens to the body when it reacts.

1. The body OPENS.

The first thing that happens to the body when it receives new information is that it opens. (Technically, we refer to this as "the shock.") The eyes open. The eyebrows and forehead go up as if we're asking the question, "What?" The jaw drops. The head rises up, the arms go out.

Admittedly, it was an extreme Reaction when we stretched our bodies completely out as if we were reacting to an atom bomb explosion. This extreme doesn't happen to our bodies every time we get new information. Reactions can be of any speed, size, or duration. In fact, our bodies can open in many ways. For example, less extreme ways are the hands opening, the legs splitting apart, the elbows jutting up and out, or the nostrils flaring open. All of these can occur in Reactions.

So why do our bodies open when they receive new information? Think back to that biology class again: because our survival minds need to know what's going on – sometimes very fast – and our bodies open up to let the new information in. If our bodies closed down when they were presented with new information, the information wouldn't get passed unconsciously through our minds to our bodies, and we wouldn't react quickly enough with a physical course of action to accomplish our flight or fight.

In fact, it's not possible for our bodies to close and for us to have a Reaction at the same time. A Reaction must open the body so the new information can come in.

2. The body shifts into LIGHT WEIGHT.

The second thing that happens to the body during a Reaction is that the body changes its weight to Light Weight. (Technically, we call this "the physical appraisal" meaning the way the body records the “shock.”)

If you think back to the Weight Model, you'll remember that Light Weight means the body is ready, willing, and able to jump. This makes sense when we realize that the Reaction is preparing our bodies for action.

3. The body ends in a FREEZE.

Finally, the third thing that happens to the body during a Reaction is that it freezes, waiting for more information. The body has no purpose until it learns more, so there is nothing for it to do but freeze.

In physical terms, since the freeze happens after the first two changes have already occurred, this means that freezes are open and in Light Weight.

Again, our everyday usage of the word "reaction" would tell us that a reaction is responding with movement. However, our non-presentational acting sense tells us that:

> A Reaction only puts us into a state where our bodies and minds are open and ready to appraise the situation, that is to say, it puts us into a freeze. A Reaction only prepares our bodies for action.

The next two chapters will deal with the moving parts of an action. For now, this part of the model requires you to think about and experience the non-moving part of an action: the Reaction.

Why Reactions are important

This is one of the revolutionary observations of the Three-Part Model of an Action:

1. Unless people in an audience see NO MOVEMENT in an actor's body (a freeze), they don't know that new information has occurred.

It’s at this moment in the class when I ask the question: “How many people here can read

minds?" When none of the students say that they can, I even tell them, "I'm thinking of a number between one and ten." After they try to guess the number (usually "seven" is the first number guessed), I tell them that I wasn't even thinking of a number!

The point is: We can't read people's minds. So how do we know what people (or actors) are thinking? The answer is: by how they're moving – or freezing.

For example, if we don't see Queen Gertrude freeze when she first realizes that Hamlet is having delusions, how else will we know that she's thinking something new about her son? She can't come out and say that she thinks Hamlet's crazy to his face. Nevertheless, at this point in the play it becomes important for the audience to know that the Queen thinks Hamlet is mad. A change in the Queen's body weight and a freeze when she first recognizes Hamlet's madness gives the audience this information even when her words can't.

Unfortunately, because actors often aren't trained to observe and recognize Reactions, they usually leave Reactions out of their movements altogether when they act. It's harder than we think it is to freeze our bodies' movements consciously when we act. It's not until most actors see their own acting played back for them on videotape that they realize how seldom, if ever, they open their bodies, change their weight, and come to a full freeze for a Reaction. There's usually a hand or a foot or an eye still moving.

Or, if actors do perform Reactions, they often don't hold the freezes long enough for anyone else to see them. This is because actors can feel the freezes they're doing in their own bodies but they mistakenly assume that others can automatically see every freeze an actor feels. To make matters worse, when actors begin making their freezes visible, they often begin feeling uncomfortable because the freezing feels mechanical or artificial or "too big" to them.

This is where the acting models become so useful to actors. By identifying human behavior and giving a vocabulary to it, actors are able to have the confidence to recreate life from an *acting sense* to communicate to an audience instead of trying to rely on a *life sense* and merely guessing what an audience understands.

And precisely because Reactions are taken from human behavior, if actors leave Reactions out of their acting, it will be very difficult for them to act non-presentationally. The audience will necessarily see that something is missing.

2. On a character level, actors need to realize that the size and speed of their characters' Reactions are fully ONE-THIRD of the ways of revealing visual information about their characters' relationships to new information. (Adjustments and Influences make up the other two-thirds. SEE Chapters 8B and 8C). Seasoned actors have learned to be as expressive with their freezes as they are with their movements. What a character reacts to

gives us a great deal of visual information about that character.

a. For example, would someone seeing a naked person at a nude beach for the first time react the same as a lifeguard who works there and sees naked people every day? Not at all. We learn about people through what they react to.

b. If you were in a room and suddenly a lion walked through the door, what would the *quality* of your Reaction be? A sudden, large opening, an extreme change into Light Weight and a long freeze?

But what if you were a lion tamer and the lion that walks into the room is your oldest lion that is almost blind and that you know has no teeth? Would the quality of your Reaction be the same?

c. On the other hand, who's an American comic book superhero who never has a Reaction? Superman. If he's the strongest man in the world, then nothing can hurt him, and if nothing can hurt him, then there's no reason for him to be surprised by anything. If he can see through walls, then he knows already who or what's on the other side. Nothing comes as a surprise (except human love and relationships, interestingly enough). We learn about who Superman is by what he reacts to – in his case, nothing. Of course, this gets a little predictable after a while. Superman is the exception – everyone else has Reactions at some point.

Begin observing yourself and others in Reaction. Watch when people freeze their movements. Remember, not all Reactions are extreme: Reactions can be of any speed, size, or duration. People's bodies can open in many ways.

Reactions checklist

Use the following checklist for observing Reactions in life and in performance:

1. What was the story (what happened)?
2. What is the new information?
3. How did the change to Light Weight occur?
4. Where was the freeze?
5. Was the Reaction logical or illogical?

EXERCISE 8A.1 Observations of animal Reactions

As an exercise, observe animal behavior (preferably at a zoo, but a pet dog or cat will do if that's the only contact with animals you can find). Watch the animal (or set up an

experiment) until you observe it experience a Reaction.

Identify for yourself:

1. What is the new information the animal reacted to?

2. How did the animal's body open?

3. How did the animal's body change its weight to Light Weight?

4. How and at what point did the animal's body freeze?

5. Did the animal's Reaction fit the Reaction Model?

Remember that our everyday life sense would tell us that a reaction is "responding," for example, that a cat's "reaction" to a loud noise is to run away and hide. Our acting sense, however, tells us that a Reaction only puts a cat into a state where it is open and ready to appraise the situation.

For example, if you've ever been holding a cat when a very loud noise goes off (the new information), you might observe the cat's ears going up and the eyes opening wide (the body opening), and you'll probably feel a jerk in your arms (the body's change to Light Weight) all before the cat struggles and jumps from your arms to run and hide.

If the cat scratched you during this process, you'll have to decide for yourself if the opening of its claws was part of the illogical movement of its change of weight during the Reaction or whether this movement was its NEXT action of "to scratch you in order to escape from your arms." The movement the cat does AFTER its Reaction to the loud noise becomes its next action.

It's a good idea to choose an animal that we usually observe moving (as opposed to observing a snake) because it will be easier to see when a moving animal freezes. Unfortunately, often in zoos, there's very little that's new information to an animal that's spent years or maybe even its entire life in a cage. For animals that we don't observe moving, however, it may still be possible to see their breathing freeze, or their eyes stop blinking, or their tongues stop darting out.

Realize that, according to our Reaction Model, if we see a snake coiling its body up as if for protection, we can assume that it's already reacted to the new information of people or some other kind of danger being nearby. It's already experienced a freeze and is now beginning its next action of coiling its body up in order to protect itself.

EXERCISE 8A.2 What's new to you?

Start thinking about things you would react to as new information in your own life. Be careful not to imagine clichés of how you might respond to this new information. Concentrate instead on the information itself and simply on whether or not it would be NEW INFORMATION for you.

For example:

1. Would you react to getting a new car for your birthday?

What if your parents owned a car dealership and you'd gotten a new car for every birthday you'd had since you were sixteen? Would getting a new car still be new information to you at age twenty-one?

2. Would you react to seeing someone cut their finger?

What if you were a seasoned surgeon? Would seeing someone cut into her skin still be new information for you?

3. What things or events would you react to as being new information that someone else, for example, your brother or your sister, wouldn't think was new?

8B The Three-Part Model of an Action: *Adjustments*

"Slowly I turned. . . step by step. . . inch by inch."
Well-known vaudeville skit introduced by Joey Faye

The second component of the Three-Part Model of an Action is the Adjustment. The Adjustment comes after the Reaction and has its own identifiable *psychical* and *physical* elements. Figure 8B.1 shows the psycho–physical nature of Adjustments.

PART TWO *ADJUSTMENTS*

Think back to where we found ourselves left at the end of a Reaction: frozen, without purpose, waiting for more information about what's going to happen next. Our minds have opened up totally, but before we can move, they need something more.

For example, say that you're slicing carrots in order to get them into a pot before the water boils, and the knife slips and cuts deep into your finger: REACTION! (this ends in a freeze).

What's the new information? Your finger's been cut. So why aren't you moving? Because your mind needs more information first about a lot of questions: how deep did the knife go – maybe it only nicked the skin – is there going to be pain, is there going to be blood, will you pass out?

Luckily, our minds don't leave us sitting around in the shock of new information for long. Decisions have to be made, especially if the new information is dangerous or threatening to us in some way. Adjustments come to our rescue.

The psychical (mind) nature of Adjustments

Whereas our minds' experience of Reactions is mostly unconscious, we experience Adjustments on a much more CONSCIOUS level. Our minds get over the initial shock of the new information (a cut to a finger) and quickly begin gathering data about it: yes, the cut is deeper than just a nick; yes, the blood is starting to come; yes, the finger feels strange. We call this mental appraisal of the new information our minds go through after the initial shock the *assessment* and once the assessment has been reached by our minds, movement (finally) begins.

But what kind of movement? For example, do you go right back to the same rhythm you

had when you were slicing carrots before you cut your finger? Of course not. Think what you'd do if the cut were deep, and it was starting to bleed. You'd start a NEW rhythm of movement – a new rhythm that shows you're "adjusting" to the new information.

The physical (body) nature of Adjustments

As with Reactions, new information comes into our minds, but now a conscious appraisal of this new information occurs and the resulting decision that's reached causes certain things to happen to our bodies.

1. The body shifts its Weight (again).

After our minds have assessed the new information and consciously reached a decision about it, there is a noticeable shift in our weight – a change from the Light Weight our bodies went into during the Reaction – to a different weight which can be either Heavy, Equal, or even another degree of Light. What the new weight is depends upon the decision our minds reached during the mental appraisal.

The weights our bodies go into during the Adjustment give out information about the decisions our minds have reached regarding this new information. For example, if your body goes into very Light Weight (ready to jump) after cutting your finger, we'll see from this that the cut must be serious. Or, if your body goes into Equal Weight (neither fast nor slow speed), we'll see from this that the cut isn't much for you or us to think about.

2. The body moves *in relation to* the new information.

Whereas Reactions end in freezes, Adjustments begin and end in movement. Technically, then, once we start moving after we've experienced a Reaction, we're in Adjustment.

The body’s movement might be toward the new information (for example, a young child trips on a rug and lands hard onto the bare floor, hitting his head and we go to him). Or, the movement might be away from the new information (for example, you’re terrified of dogs, and you see a Doberman walking toward you on the sidewalk).

New information becomes the object of Adjustment

Perhaps the easiest way to think of Adjustments is to say that, after our minds have decided what the new information is, our bodies then "adjust" to that new information by changing weight and by moving in relation to the new information *in a specific way*. What was originally new information to us during the Reaction next becomes the *object* that our bodies adjust to after we finally realize what's going on.

One of the most famous bodies in Adjustment is probably Jackie Gleason's as Ralph Cramden in the television show, *The Honeymooners*. A typical exchange between him and his wife, Alice, could be:

RALPH
Alice! I'm warning you. Your mother steps one foot in this apartment, I'm out that door!

ALICE
Ralph, you're so fat, you couldn't fit through the door!

Ralph gives her a frozen stare – if looks could kill! – then begins swaggering toward her.

What's the new information in this exchange? Is it new to Ralph Cramden that he's fat? No. Or is this the first time his wife has ever told him he's fat? Of course not.

According to Adjustments, the new information will be whatever Ralph moves *in relation to* next. After we see Ralph react (freeze) to what his wife has said, we see him move toward. . . his wife! How could his wife be the new information?

The new information, in Ralph's mind, is the "sudden" appearance of his wife's rebellious and insubordinate nature. It's the appearance of this side of his wife's personality that's new to the situation, and this is what he adjusts to. However, it's HOW Gleason moves toward his wife that's so memorable: his Weight gets heavier, his shoulders rise up, his whole body seems to quiver and lean menacingly toward his wife like a swaggering bully.

The Adjustment only applies to movement in relation to the new information, not movement that touches the new information. According to the model, then, Gleason's character is in Adjustment as long as he's moving toward his wife (the new information) without touching her or talking to her (hold on for the third part of the model! – the Influence – for the role that talking will play).

Often, Gleason remained in the Adjustment portion of actions for relatively long periods of time, drawing them out and playing them for comedic effect.

DEMONSTRATION 8B.1 The sunburn

Look at Figure8b.2. Imagine that you're asleep (indicated by the evenly waved line at the far left side of the drawing) when suddenly you wake up because your face feels strangely hot and uncomfortable.

What's the new information? Your FACE feeling HOT (new information/Reaction [2]). It didn't feel that way when you went to sleep, right?

So, how do you move in relation to a hot face? (Remember, an Adjustment is movement in relation to the new information.)

This new information of your face feeling hot makes you move UNSURELY and QUESTIONINGLY out of bed to turn on the light so you can look at your face in the bedroom mirror to try to figure out what's going on with it (movement/Adjustment [3]). The WAY you move toward your hot face is the Adjustment. (You move toward the mirror as a way of moving toward your face.) You can imagine right away how you would move toward your face if your face were hot.

Now, in the mirror, you see that your face is bright red with sunburn!

What's the new information? SUNBURN! You spent too much time in the sun without a hat and sunscreen, and now you've got a sunburn (new information/Reaction [4]).

So, how do you move in relation to a sunburn?

This new information that you have a sunburn makes you go DIRECTLY to getting something to put on the sunburn to make it feel better. Without hesitation, you go STRAIGHT into the bathroom and open the bathroom medicine cabinet. You see a bottle of pink lotion. You grab the bottle, take off the lid, pour some of the pink lotion in your hands, and then apply the pink lotion IMMEDIATELY to your face (movement/Adjustment [5]).

(The moment where the pink lotion comes in contact with your hot, burned skin is the end of the Adjustment and technically begins the third component of the Three-Part Model of an Action: the Influence. We'll skip this discussion for now and continue identifying the Reactions and Adjustments.)

What's the new information when the lotion touches your sunburn? The PAIN is GONE (new information/Reaction [6]).

So, how do you move "toward" the ending of pain?

The new information that the pain is gone makes your muscles RELAX, your attention goes away from your body, the bottle of lotion slides from your hand down to the counter, and you SLOWLY walk back and MELT down onto your bed (movement/Adjustment [7]).

Of course, the next morning, as you struggle to wash the dried and flaking pink lotion off your face, you'll be adjusting to the new information that you mistakenly put Pepto-Bismol on your face to relieve your sunburn! See what pain does to our thinking? This is the message of the scene.

Adjustments add expression to actions

Look at the four different movements in Figure 8B.2 as they're described by the lines. See how clearly and specifically the movements are described? See how easy it is to distinguish each movement from the others? Because each movement is different from the movements on either side of it, all of the movements become EXPRESSIVE; they mean something to us. If all of the lines looked the same, only one movement would be expressed.

Exactly the same is true with human movement. If there is no change in the *quality* of movement people do, then there is no change of action. And without a change of action, we know that there is no new information (and this becomes a big problem for an actor who is performing a scene with a plot that has clear and obvious points of new information).

What kind of life would it be where there was never any new information? What would a play or a movie be like where nothing new ever happened so that the actors always did the same movements over and over?

You can see now how important it is to always know exactly what the new information is when you're acting since both Reactions and Adjustments depend on new information for their movements. For this reason, clear dramatic writing most often contains plots where pieces of new information are presented sequentially, one at a time.

Other important points to keep in mind about Adjustments are:

1. Since people do Adjustments in life, Adjustments are used in non-presentational acting for helping actors go through the proper time and weight of their actions.

2. Like Reactions, Adjustments are a tool actors can use for "tipping off" the audience to what's happening in the plot of a scene. An audience sees the problem because they see an actor's Adjustment to it. If audiences don't know what the actor is adjusting to in a scene (what the new information is), then they spend their time looking for new information

instead of watching and learning HOW the actor is reacting and adjusting to the new information.

3. Just as Reactions are one-third of an action, Adjustments also are fully ONE-THIRD of the ways of revealing information about characters' relationships to new information on stage. (Influences make up the final third. SEE Chapter 8C.)

Seasoned actors learn to be as expressive with their Adjustments as they are with their Reactions. How a character adjusts to new information is yet another chance for an actor to give an audience a great deal of visual information about who that character is.

How to observe Adjustments

In life, very few actions appear as obvious to us as they do in Figure 8B.2. Often when we observe people's actions in life, we concentrate on what they appear to be doing at that moment (for example, going to bed) instead of asking ourselves what the new information is that caused them to begin their actions in the first place. In other words, we forget that new information has often already occurred (off-stage, as it were) before we come into contact with people and their movements.

DEMONSTRATION 8B.2 Observing adjustments

For example, what if we were to observe people shopping in an American suburban supermarket? The relaxed movement of people shopping in supermarkets probably doesn’t communicate to us that the shoppers intend to rush directly home and eat everything that they’re buying right away.1 If this is true, then what's the new information that causes many American suburbanites to go to a supermarket?

Very likely, the new information to which suburbanites are adjusting when they go shopping is that they've run out of something in their home which they're used to having. For example, many of them use shopping lists. Or, many of them stroll up and down all of the aisles in the store allowing the merchandise they see on the shelves to remind them what they've run out of. Adjusting to the new information that they're out of something gives quite a different quality to people's movements than adjusting to a feeling of hunger would give.

SITUATION 1 In the produce section

You see a middle-aged woman carefully eyeing tomatoes in the produce section of a supermarket. Based on what you SEE in her movements, what is the new information to which she could be adjusting?

1. What if she were looking down at each tomato as if she were looking at it under a magnifying glass, not touching it, but painstakingly going over every inch of the outside of it?

Could the new information to which she's adjusting be that she found tiny, black bugs on the last tomatoes she bought here which she thought were only black specks of dirt but which got into her salad and ruined an entire meal?

2. What if the woman stands for a very long time in front of the tomatoes (her attention is in Third Circle)2 before gracefully reaching her hand out and picking up a tomato and holding it in her hands tenderly as if it were a little baby?

Could the new information to which she's adjusting be that she's preparing her daughter's favorite meal for the last time before her daughter goes away into the army?

SITUATION 2 In line

You're done selecting your own groceries, and you're waiting in a very long line to be checked out. You turn around and watch the people waiting in line behind you. Again, based on what you SEE in their movements, what is the new information to which they're adjusting?

1. What if you see a man craning his neck to look at the front page photographs of a supermarket tabloid which declares that "Dead Mom Gives Birth in Coffin?"

Could the new information to which he's adjusting be that, in all of his experience, he's never heard of a dead woman giving birth before, and he wants to know more? (New information is surprising and shocking, right? Just remember, "They couldn't print it if it wasn't true!")

2. What if you see another man staring vacantly down at a gallon of ice cream in his shopping cart? Eventually, he begins doodling with his fingernail in the thin layer of ice on the outside of the ice cream carton.

Could the new information to which he's adjusting be that he suddenly has no "structure" while he's waiting to have his groceries checked out? Normally he has things to do, but now they're all put on hold until he can get through the line, so, in the meantime, he gives himself something to do on a blank canvas of ice – draw designs in order to create a temporary structure to look at.

The key is to observe carefully HOW people move – the quality of their movements. You may not be able to always identify the new information by what you see people moving *in relation to* since the new information could have occurred before you got there (for example, there aren't any bugs on the tomatoes by the time you see the woman looking at them, but they were there for her to see originally). However, you can train yourself to always ask yourself what the new information could have been that makes people move the way they're moving and then observe more to confirm or change your hypotheses.

Adjustments checklist

Try using the following checklist for observing Adjustments in life and in performance:

1. What was the *plot* (what happened)?
2. Where did the *new information* occur?
3. How did the body change *Weight*?
4. What was the movement *in relation to* the new information?
5. Can you physically draw the movement?

EXERCISE 8B.1 Three ways moving to kill a bug

For the exercise, plan and perform at least three different Reactions and Adjustments to seeing a bug and then killing it. By controlling the *quality* of your character's movement during each Reaction to seeing the bug and each Adjustment to killing the bug, you can reveal descriptive information about your character.

To do this exercise you'll need:

1. A life-like plastic or rubber toy bug, the uglier (and more life-like) the better.
2. A long scarf that people wear in cold weather.
3. A chair.

Go get these now, then continue reading.

Place the bug on the seat of the chair and hang the scarf over the back of the chair so that one end of the scarf covers the bug on the seat of the chair.

The plot is this:

1. Your character comes to the chair to put on the scarf;

2. Your character takes the scarf from the back of the chair;

3. Your character sees the bug (new information) on the chair and has a Reaction;

4. Your character *adjusts* toward the bug by going to kill it (Adjustment).

Catching actions

You can "catch" actions for each of your three characters any of the ways already described toward the end of Chapter Five:

1. moving IN ORDER TO accomplish something,
2. moving AS IF something were occurring,
3. moving LIKE something.

The goal is for each of your three characters' Reactions and Adjustments to be clear and identifiable – so clear, in fact, that you can draw lines that describe each movement.

For example:

CHARACTER #1: Killing a bug LIKE a ballet dancer

Look at Figure 8B.3. Imagine that you are a famous ballet dancer.

How could ballet dancers REACT to seeing a bug?

Reaction: Ballet dancers have strong legs and are trained to leap and jump. Ballet dancers could LEAP backwards when they see a bug; therefore, the movement of their Reactions would look like a large curved line (Reaction to bug [2]).

Think back to the Reaction part of this model (Chapter 8A). Jumping back would be part of the body opening up and its change to Light Weight. When you react like a ballet dancer to seeing the bug, perform a curved leap backwards like the Reaction line in Figure 8B.3 before you freeze.

How could ballet dancers move their bodies in ADJUSTMENT toward killing a bug?

Adjustment: Ballet dancers are disciplined and precise in their movements. Going toward the bug, they could take measured, sliding steps, probably moving sideways, until they got close enough to the bug to finally kill it; therefore, the movement of their Adjustments to killing a bug would look something like a scalloped line (Adjustment toward bug [4]).

When you adjust like a ballet dancer to killing the bug, perform a controlled, balanced, rocking, hopping sideways step like the Adjustment line in Figure 8B.3 to get you back close enough to the bug to actually kill it.

Perform these two movements with these qualities in reacting and adjusting to killing a bug, and you will communicate information not only about how your character moves, but information about how your character thinks as well.

Other descriptions for actions that would give these same qualities of movement could be:

● Moving to kill a bug AS IF you were chest-deep in water;

● Moving to kill a bug IN ORDER TO maintain a pure environment around you of graceful, flowing movement.

Here are samples of other characters you can practice "catching" actions for:

a housewife;
a computer programmer;
a mathematician;
a research scientist;
a prosecuting attorney;
a football player.

Make the three characters' movements as distinctive and different from each other as possible. If it helps, start out by drawing their movements first on paper.

8C The Three-Part Model of an Action: *Influences*

"One of these days. . . Pow! Zoom! Right in the kisser!"

Jackie Gleason as Ralph Cramden

The third and last component of the Three-Part Model of an Action is the Influence. The Influence begins at the point a person comes into physical contact with the new information. In other words, the Influence determines how the object of Adjustment is finally touched.

PART THREE *INFLUENCES*

Actions can be complete or incomplete. All actions start with new information which creates a Reaction, at the least, but not every action necessarily plays out to the point where we actually end up touching the new information that started each action in the first place. For example, we aren't able to touch a bomb that explodes, although we may adjust our bodies toward it and go and look to see where it happened.

In the instances where we do complete our actions by finally touching the new information, HOW we touch the new information is yet another chance for actors to communicate visual information about their characters and how their characters think.

For example, as a continuation of Exercise 8B.1 where you only approached a bug, now imagine the unlimited different ways there are of actually squashing a bug – how you might actually make physical contact with it. There's the "grind it into oblivion" movement of squashing the bug or the "dab it with a tissue" movement or even the "flick it with a finger and hope that it dies from the impact" movement.

The movement of finally touching the new information is not just a continuation of the movement that went before it. Influences are different than Reactions and Adjustments (Figure 8C.1).

The psychical (mind) nature of Influences

Influences are deliberate.

In life, when we move, we move for change. And once we've actually touched the thing we want to change, we've reached our goal. Once we've finally touched the object of Adjustment, we're committed – there's no going back. Once we've made contact with

the new information, we're "in action" according to our everyday understanding of what "action" is. For this reason, during the Influence stage of an action, the mind is the least open to taking in information. During the Influence, the mind is the most directed and concentrated.

In fact, it's precisely this directed and irreversible nature of Influences that often generates the next new information that we react to in this never-ending chain of actions we call life.

For example, say that:

You hear the teakettle whistling on the stove (Action 1 – new information/Reaction), so you rush to make it stop before it wakes up your sleeping baby (Action 1 – Adjustment), so you lift the teakettle from the stove at too low of an angle (Action 1 – Influence);

however, this knocks over a bottle of baby's formula which begins spilling formula onto the floor (Action 2 – new information/Reaction). You move to pick up the formula bottle before it totally empties its formula out (Action 2 – Adjustment), but as you grab it firmly to right it (Action 2 – Influence);

the heat from the bottle burns your hand (Action 3 – new information/Reaction), and you drop the bottle and look at how badly your hand is burned (Action 3 – Adjustment).

Of course, not every Influence results in an accident or a mistake. The successful accomplishment of an Influence simply means that the mind becomes unoccupied and available for something else to happen (as if to say, "Okay, I finished that, now what can I do?").

The physical (body) nature of Influences

As we're observing from the Three-Part Model of an Action, our bodies – without fail – pass through a Reaction and an Adjustment BEFORE getting to the Influence. This means that our bodies experience two weight changes before we finally touch the object of Adjustment.

Once we touch the object of Adjustment, our bodies' weights may shift yet again, very often into Equal Weight (Chapter Seven). Equal Weight is the weight of working and the weight our bodies are in when we know what we're doing. Remember that the mind is the most directed and concentrated during the Influence, and this is reflected in our bodies.

Secondly, when we think of influencing an object, we often think of touching it with our hands. For example, we see a child fall off of a bike, and we reach down with our hands and help the child up. We hear an alarm clock go off, and we reach over with our hand and turn it off.

However, what are instances when we use other parts of our bodies to influence objects? I often have to unlatch the front gate to my apartment building with my foot because my hands are full, and I can't use my hands. I've also seen people blow air on a cut or a burn to reduce pain. This is influencing by blowing! Even waving a burned finger rapidly in the air to cool it is influencing without using your hands (you're using air).

There are many ways to touch an object other than just with our hands. Start observing the different ways people touch objects in life and begin noticing particularly when and how they use means other than their hands to do it.

Words are Influences

Far more often than using our hands, we touch new information by speaking to it. Sound waves travel from us in the pattern of words and touch the ears of whomever or whatever caused us to speak in the first place. For example, we hear someone knock at the door (new information), we look up from what we're doing (Adjustment) and ask, "Who's there?" (Influence). Or, a friend asks you, "What time shall I pick you up?" (new information), and you consider what a good time would be (Adjustment) and reply, "Eight o'clock" (Influence).

Words are Influences, and as with any other Influence, WORDS COME AFTER A REACTION AND AN ADJUSTMENT. Words never happen just "by themselves." An Adjustment to new information must be physically reflected in our bodies before we begin to Influence with words.

Unfortunately, in today's "acting-as-selling" environment, this is easier said than done (no pun intended). For example, what happens when actors audition for a play or for a movie? What are the very first thing actors are given? A script with words! Producers and directors, in effect, are saying to the actor, "We want you to take these words, and we want to hear you speak them."

Not surprisingly, even the way actors are paid reflects the emphasis Hollywood places on words: Union pay scales are based on how many lines an actor speaks in a show. Speaking more than a certain number of lines (five, for instance) greatly increases an actor's pay.

But actors are thinking to themselves, "Wait a minute. My material – what I've been training myself to do – is actions, not words! What about actions?"

This is a very important concept for actors to understand because if they don't realize that words are only the last third of an action, their performances will be almost unavoidably PRESENTATIONAL. The quality of speaking memorized words comes from actors not allowing their bodies to live through the Reactions and Adjustments people naturally live through in life before they speak.

All of this may be very different from what you were thinking acting is. For many of us, acting has always meant memorizing words and counting the number of lines our characters get to speak. This approach may work for presentational acting, but it makes non-presentational acting almost impossible.

In the end was the word

To show you how crazy and difficult it is to attempt to act non-presentationally by putting words first, imagine that tonight you sit down and write a script out for everything you're going to say tomorrow.

For example, you think, "The first thing I'm going to do is get up and make a telephone call to my brother, and this is what I'll say to him," and you write that down. Then you think, "Well, I have to have my car fixed," so you write down what you'll say to the auto mechanic. By the time you're done, you have everything you'll need to say the next day in your script. Before you go to bed, you memorize your script.

The next morning, you call your brother and say your lines. You go to the auto mechanic and say your lines to get your car fixed. Your day certainly runs smoothly even if it is a little predictable.

Do you see how backwards it all is? Scripts ask you to work from the words first. Instead, what actors know from life is that the words are LAST. Words are the RESULTS of the purposes and desires people have during a day. For example, if I decide I want to talk to my brother, I pick up the phone, I dial his number, I hear him say, "Hello." From this, I try to figure out what kind of mood he's in, if he has time to talk to me and if he'll listen to what I want to say. And after figuring this out, I then use words and certain tones and qualities of my voice to get across to him what I want him to know – but I don't know ahead of time exactly what the words are I'm going to use to do this.

If we want to act non-presentationally, we need to be aware that working from a script forces us to work backwards from what we know from life. In life, words come last.

"No, it's not my job to work from a script"

Of course, I'm not saying that actors can't ever work from scripts – in fact, they must work from them. But scripts are not the problem. The problem is ignoring the limitations of scripts when scripts are used for non-presentational acting and assuming that working from a script is a natural process for actors.

Think back to Chapter Four when we discussed different professions' materials. You'll remember that the actor's material is *actions*, not words. But if words aren't the actor's material, then which profession does use WORDS as its material?

A writer, yes, but specifically, which kind of writer? There's one particular profession of writing that uses only words for its material: words' meanings, their sounds, their rhymes, their rhythms. I'm not saying that playwrights, screenwriters, and actors don't use words; they do. But words are not their materials.

The answer is that only the profession of poet uses words as its primary material to shape. Words are the poet's material, and as such, they're not the actor's material. Words are simply tools when used by all professionals other than poets for shaping their own respective materials.1

To be sure, actors can speak words to achieve their actions, but words are only INFLUENCES and not complete actions. Words are different than actions.

Words can lie

No one believes that in life we mean exactly everything we say, or that everything we say in life is truthful. Then why should we believe that words in a script are truthful? Why should we believe that printed words in a script truthfully describe what every character means to say? The answer is, "we shouldn't."

"Opposite information" shows us how futile it is to look at the words in a script as anything other than simply results of new information which drives us to respond. For example, without an action behind them, the words, "I want to go to sleep," are meaningless. Depending on the action chosen, the words, "I want to go to sleep," can mean, "Leave me alone," or "Give me attention," or "Let's make love," or "You don't love me anymore"; the choices are infinite. With words, you can tell someone they're beautiful and still not mean a word of it.

Furthermore, printed words by themselves say nothing about characters' Weights, or where their attentions are placed, or what one person wants from someone else, for

example. All of this is determined by actions, and actions are communicated visually by actors. This is what we need actors for. For visual communication. Otherwise, we might just as well listen to plays being read on the radio or watch plays only with our eyes closed.

The actor's responsibility

The process of working from a script isn't going to change. Virtually all professional productions are financed, developed, and produced based on the words in a script. This only means that actors need a technique for turning the odds back around to their favor when they work from scripts and for putting words back in their proper places as Influences.

What the Three-Part Model of an Action shows us is that it's up to actors to identify the *qualities* of the movements that are right for their characters at each stage of an action – Reaction, Adjustment, and Influence – and then to execute these movements clearly in a performance. If an audience sees no change in the quality of an actor's movement – no freezes, no Adjustments, no Influences – then they see only one generalized type of presentational behavior.

DEMONSTRATION 8C.1 Applying actions to a script

The Three-Part Model of an Action can be used for breaking down scripts and for identifying dialogue as Influences. One approach is as follows: 1) identify the points of new information for each character, and 2) identify the resulting Adjustments and Influences which result from each point of new information.

1. Read through the script and identify the points of new information for each character.

    a. Understand the story (plot) first. Don't rely on only the words in the script to give you the plot of the story. If you understand the story, you'll understand the actions. The movement of the story will be toward the points of new information.

    b. Remember that the words in a script are only a blueprint. Writers don't always indicate in words what the actions (Reactions, Adjustments, and Influences) are, nor do they always describe the actions in a script completely. You may have to fill in some parts of the actions yourself. That's the actor's job.

    c. When you're first beginning, I recommend looking for new information that occurs because of EXTERNAL events and not from events occurring only inside of a character's head. Of course, it can be proven that new information happens in our

minds, but this isn't visual. Actors and audiences need visual information. As you become more advanced in working with actions, you can work on ways of externalizing internal actions as well.

d. Finally, remember that what may be new information for one character is not necessarily new information for another. Make each event of new information you identify "character specific" and identify which event applies to which character.

Go ahead and read the following script. Each line is numbered for easy reference later on. After you're sure you understand the story, mark in the script where the events of new information most likely occur and for which character each event is new information:

"EXCUSE ME!"

FADE IN:

EXT. SEACOAST BLUFF – DAY

The sound of pounding waves can be HEARD coming from below the bluff.

FRANK is seated on a large rock very close to the edge of the cliff and writing on a pad of paper.

JULIA enters carrying a pad of paper and vigorously searching through her handbag. She looks up and notices Frank.

She walks to him and touches his shoulder.

JULIA
Excuse me!

Startled, Frank jumps up.

FRANK
Ahh! . .

He looks from Julia to back down over the cliff.

FRANK
(continuing)
Why did you do that? You almost made me fall off. Have you looked down there? It must be at least two-hundred feet. Jagged rocks, pounding waves. . .

JULIA
I'm sorry. I just wondered if I could borrow your pen.

FRANK
Well, I'll be done with it shortly. Can you wait?

JULIA
Okay. I'll wait.

Frank sits back down on his rock and returns to writing.

Julia finds another rock next to Frank and sits down.

Julia begins singing to herself and then crying.

JULIA
(continuing)
What kind of fool am I. . .
who never fell in love?
Was I the only one. . . who
never knew. . . the joy of
love –

Annoyed, Frank looks up from his writing.

FRANK
Excuse me. Would you mind
not singing? I'm writing
something very serious
here. I'm trying to
concentrate.

JULIA
Oh, I'm sorry. I won't
sing.

Frank returns to his writing.

Julia begins whistling the same tune and crying.

Ready to kill now, Frank looks up at her again.

FRANK
Okay, okay! I think I've
got another pen. . .
somewhere.

FADE OUT.

The plot

Plot is a physical language: it describes, in order, WHAT happened without telling why.

So, what's the plot (the story) of the script above, "Excuse Me!"?

A man is writing on a piece of paper. A woman approaches him and asks to use his pen. He asks her to wait until he's done using it himself. The woman begins singing. The man asks her to stop. The woman begins whistling instead. The man agrees to find her another pen.

Answer key: the events of new information

Compare the following events of new information and where they occur in the script with the events you identified yourself. (If you haven't already, go back and mark in the script where each event of new information occurs.)

Julia new info #1: Frank has a pen (line 14; notice that the writer doesn't tell us that it's Frank's pen that Julia is reacting and adjusting to until line 40).

Frank new info #1: Julia breaks Frank's concentration and makes him lose control (line 20; Julia touches Frank both with her hand and with her voice).

Julia new info #2: Frank loses control (line 22; Julia sees him startled even before he starts talking).

Frank new info #2: Julia wants Frank's pen (line 40; Julia tells him).

Julia new info #3: Frank wants Julia to wait for the pen (line 44; Frank tells her).

Frank new info #3: Julia agrees to wait (line 47; Julia tells him).

Julia new info #4: Julia remembers her boyfriend breaking up with her (line 53).

Frank new info #4: Julia begins singing (line 57).

Julia new info #5: Frank is bothered by Julia's singing (line 67; Frank tells her).

Frank new info #5: Julia stops singing (line 74).

Julia new info #6: Julia remembers her boyfriend breaking up with her (line 78).

Frank new info #6: Julia begins whistling (line 78).

From these events of new information, we can easily notice the back-and-forth quality of actions: one person does something new causing the other person to do something new which, in turn, causes the first person to do something new – and on and on.

Adjustments and Influences

2. Starting with each event of new information you identified, go on to identify the resulting Adjustments and Influences for each respective character reacting to that event.

a. After reacting to new information, characters usually continue adjusting to and influencing the SAME new information until they've reached their goals. For this reason, consistently phrase your descriptions of Adjustments and Influences in terms of the new information. (For example, if the new information is a barking dog blocking your way to a party, the Adjustment is also to the barking dog, and the Influence is talking to or petting the barking dog.)

b. Variations occur. Be aware that Influences of a particular event of new information can be delayed and can occur even after other events of new information have already happened (see, for example, line 53 and line 78 where Julia begins crying and later whistling which is trying to influence her boyfriend leaving her – an event which happened before this scene even began).

c. Words are Influences; however, words often become events of new information for the person the words are being spoken to.

Remember that one purpose of acting models is to make life bigger in order to observe life. This means that real life is more complicated and mixed than any one single acting model.

For this reason, because scripts are often attempting to approximate real life, the identification of Reactions, Adjustments, or Influences based upon the words in a script can appear to be quite fluid. However, the pattern of going from Reaction to Adjustment to Influence remains constant, and the choice of where a Reaction occurs in a script will always affect where the resulting Adjustment and Influence occur.

The final choices are creative ones actors and directors use to communicate the message of the scene. By changing the points of new information in a scene, it's possible to change the entire meaning of the scene (remember that we know people by what they react to).

Go back to the script above and identify the Adjustments and Influences that go with each Reaction. When you've finished, return here and compare your choices to the answer key.

Answer key: Adjustments and Influences

Following is the same script with descriptions in brackets ([ ]) of the Reactions (new information), Adjustments, and Influences and where they occur:

"EXCUSE ME!"

FADE IN:

EXT. SEACOAST BLUFF – DAY

The sound of pounding waves can be HEARD coming from below the bluff.

FRANK is seated on a large rock very close to the edge of the cliff writing on a pad of paper.

JULIA enters carrying a pad of paper and vigorously searching in her handbag. She looks up and notices Frank. **[Julia: NEW INFORMATION is that Frank has a pen]**

She walks to him **[Julia: ADJUSTMENT to getting the pen]** and touches his shoulder. **[Julia: INFLUENCE (she touches the pen by touching Frank)]**

JULIA

Excuse me! **[Julia: INFLUENCE Frank and the pen with words] [Frank: NEW INFORMATION is that someone broke his concentration and made him lose control]**

Startled, Frank jumps up. **[Julia: NEW INFORMATION is that Frank lost control; ADJUSTMENT to his loss of control]**

FRANK

Ahh!

He looks from Julia to back down over the cliff. **[Frank: ADJUSTMENT to his broken concentration and loss of control]**

FRANK
(continuing)
Why did you do that? You
almost made me fall off.
Have you looked down there?
It must be at least
two-hundred feet. Jagged
rocks, pounding waves. . . **[Frank: INFLUENCE his loss of control with words]**

JULIA
I'm sorry. I just wondered
if I could borrow your pen. **[Julia: INFLUENCE his loss of control with words]**
[Frank: NEW INFORMATION is that she wants his pen; ADJUSTMENT to her request for his pen]

FRANK
Well, I'll be done with it
shortly. Can you wait? **[Frank: INFLUENCE her need for his pen with words]**
[Julia: NEW INFORMATION is that she has to wait for the pen]

JULIA
Okay. I'll wait. **[Julia: ADJUSTMENT to waiting for the pen)]**

Frank sits back down on his rock and returns to writing. **[Frank: NEW INFORMATION is that she will wait; ADJUSTMENT and INFLUENCE to writing his thoughts with her waiting for his pen]**

Julia finds another rock next to Frank and sits down. **[Julia: still ADJUSTMENT to waiting for the pen]**

Julia begins singing to herself and then crying. **[Julia: REACTION to her boyfriend leaving her; ADJUSTMENT ending in INFLUENCE of his leaving her by singing and crying]**

JULIA
(continuing)
What kind of fool am I. . .
who never fell in love?
Was I the only one. . . who
never knew. . . the joy of
love –

Annoyed, Frank looks up from his writing. **[Frank: NEW INFORMATION is her singing interrupting his attention on his writing; ADJUSTMENT to her singing]**

FRANK
Excuse me. Would you mind
not singing? I'm writing
something very serious
here. I'm trying to
concentrate. **[Frank: INFLUENCE her singing with words]**
[Julia: NEW INFORMATION is that her singing bothers him; ADJUSTMENT to his bother at her]

JULIA
Oh, I'm sorry. I won't
sing. **[Julia: INFLUENCE his bother toward her with words]**

Frank returns to his writing. **[Frank: returns to adjusting to and influencing the writing of his thoughts with her waiting for his pen]**

Julia begins whistling the same tune and crying. **[Julia: returns to her INFLUENCE of her boyfriend leaving her, this time by using pure sound instead of words]**

Ready to kill now, Frank looks up at her again. **[Frank: NEW INFORMATION is her whistling interrupting his attention on his writing; ADJUSTMENT to her whistling]**

FRANK
Okay, okay! I think I've
got another pen. . .
somewhere. **[Frank: INFLUENCE her whistling with words]**

FADE OUT.

EXERCISE 8C.1 Three ways to squash a bug

To do this exercise you'll need:

1. A life-like plastic or rubber toy bug, the uglier (and more life-like) the better.
2. A long scarf that people wear in cold weather.
3. A chair.

Go get these now, then continue reading.

This is the same plot as in Exercise 8B.1 but this time we're going to finish the job.

Place the bug on the seat of the chair and hang the scarf over the back of the chair so that one end of the scarf covers the bug on the seat of the chair.

The plot is this:

1. Your character comes to the chair to put on the scarf;

2. Your character takes the scarf from the back of the chair;

3. Your character sees the bug (new information) on the chair and has a Reaction;

4. Your character *adjusts* toward the bug by going to kill it (Adjustment).

5. Your character touches the bug in order to kill it (Influence).

As before, plan and perform at least three different Reactions and Adjustments to seeing a bug and then killing it but this time continue through the Influence and actually kill the bug.

By controlling the *quality* of your character's movement during each Influence of killing the bug, you can reveal descriptive information about your character.

Review: catching actions

You can "catch" actions for each of your three characters any of the ways already described in Chapter Five:

1. moving IN ORDER TO accomplish something,
2. moving AS IF something were occurring,
3. moving LIKE something.

The goal is for each of your three characters' Reactions, Adjustments and Influences to

be clear and identifiable – so clear, in fact, that you can draw lines that describe each movement.

For example:

CHARACTER #1: Squashing a bug LIKE a professional wrestler.

Imagine that you are a professional wrestler named The Exterminator.

How might you move when you're squashing a bug?

Influence: Professional wrestlers aren't known for being subtle in their movements. They don't sneak up on their prey – they attack them straight on. They might move directly, firmly, solidly, without flourish when they're squashing a bug.

Therefore, the movement of their Influence would look like a straight line pointed straight down from directly above the bug.

Perform this movement with these qualities in squashing a bug, and you will communicate information not only about how your character moves, but information about how your character thinks as well.

Other descriptions for actions that would give these same qualities of movement could be:

● moving to squash a bug AS IF your hand were a sledge hammer;

● moving to squash a bug IN ORDER TO pin it (wrestlers "pin" their opponents to the mat of the wrestling ring).

If it helps, start out by drawing the movements first on paper. Make the three characters' movements as distinctive and different from each other as possible.

EXERCISE 8C.2 Three ways to squash a bug without using hands or feet

Create three different characters, circumstances or movements that would justify using three different parts of your body – other than your hands or your feet – or different tools or implements to squash a bug.

For example:

● How could a mathematician use a pencil to squash a bug?

● A waitress discovers a cockroach on a table as she's serving a meal with her hands completely loaded with plates so she uses her elbow to smash the cockroach.

● A woman has just finished painting her nails when she sees a spider on the makeup table in front of her. She doesn't want to ruin her nails so she uses the back of one of her wrists to smash the spider.

9 Feelings and emotions

"Hey fella, what's with the long face?"
(What did the bartender say to the horse that came into his bar?")

The importance of feelings and emotions as a goal of acting for many people is undeniable.1 It answers the question some teachers have asked, "Why, in the visual arts, all of them, have we fallen heir to an unspoken devotion to nonintellectualism?" (Dondis 1973:11). Nevertheless, a model of acting as the communication of feelings – from a purely biological point of view – is simply at odds with everything we know about the physiology of the human nervous system.

A heritage of feeling

In American society, children who display emotion frequently or who entertain their family and friends by being the center of attention or who are perceived as often overreacting to everyday situations are labeled as "dramatic." They're told that they're more "sensitive" or "artistic" than other children. The next logical step is that they're encouraged and counseled to perform in school plays or to take acting, singing, and dance classes.

In acting classes, however, in public schools and even at the college level, nothing may be done to change the (erroneous) beliefs we learned as children that acting is synonymous with displays of emotion and "sensitivity." Without any coherent system of teaching and training designed to free the student actor from these ideas, acting classes (and Method Acting!) can unwittingly perpetuate and reinforce our cultural conditioning and stereotyping of acting as displays of feelings.

The result is that, without learning a technique for acting BEFORE performing in plays or in movies or on television, students can only fall back on the pre-conditioned rules for "play-acting" they learned as children growing up. They would have to; there is nothing else for them to know.

It's no wonder then that the most pervasive idea in American culture about acting is that it is the ability to "feel" what a character is feeling and then to communicate these feelings back to an audience. Accordingly, most acting techniques end up concentrating first and foremost on how to get actors "to feel."

Feelings come from perceptions

But as we've seen, non-presentational acting is not at all synonymous with displays of feeling and sensitivity. Furthermore, for acting techniques to concentrate on feeling is confusing and misleading to actors because, strictly speaking, "feelings" are something that can't be communicated directly from one person to another. Feelings are chemical reactions – adrenalin, for example – occurring separately inside each person's own body, and the results of these chemical reactions are often more complicated than we have words with which to describe them. Technically speaking, feelings don't travel like words or touching do.

For example, say you were in a private room at a hotel on the beach. It's sunset, and you're standing looking out at the ocean. You close your eyes and listen to the sea gulls calling. You hear the rhythmic crashing of the surf on the sand. You perceive a nudge against your leg. You turn, and you see a gigantic leopard baring its fangs at you. Suddenly, your body goes into action: your skin goes pale, your breathing becomes shallow, and your body freezes in place.

Now, as long as you didn't know the leopard was behind you, you felt one way, i.e., calm, relaxed, and peaceful. It wasn't until you turned and saw the leopard that you began to feel quite differently, i.e., excited, tense, and fearful. In fact, if you had never even seen the leopard – say it came into the room, and then left again behind your back – your body would never even have reacted to it. Your "feelings" were caused by what you were perceiving at the moment; that is to say, your feelings are the results of what you perceive.

Now, say that somehow I had been tied to a chair in the next room and was being forced to watch, unbeknownst to you, what was happening to you in your room through a one-way glass. It's possible that I would begin experiencing some of the same chemical reactions within my body that you might begin experiencing after you finally turned around to see the leopard. I might begin feeling excited, tense, and fearful as I saw the leopard approaching you.

But it would not be you (or your acting) who directly gave these feelings to me.

I begin feeling my feelings – the results of my own chemical reactions within my own body – just as you will: by perceiving the presence of the leopard. The leopard coming toward you would be what causes the feelings inside of me.

In fact, my perception that you were feeling calm and relaxed as a leopard was sneaking up behind you probably intensifies my feelings of fear and anxiety more than if you were feeling the same feelings of anxiety as I was.

Furthermore, as a spectator, I would be perceiving a different scenario than you would be

perceiving. I would be seeing a person being attacked by a leopard. You would be seeing only yourself being attacked by a leopard. What we would be reacting to, therefore, would be two very different events.

Or what if I was your sworn enemy and had been trying to have you killed for years? The feelings that I would be experiencing as I'm watching the leopard attacking you would, again, be quite different from the feelings you might be experiencing. In fact, as we saw in the Reaction Model, how people react to different events is how we begin understanding their characters.

Can it still be said, then, that actors feel the same feelings as the audience?

Emotions are displayed feelings

Let's be more precise when we talk about "feelings." Things begin to happen in our bodies when chemical reactions occur from our perceptions. Some of the effects of these chemicals might be internal, e.g., a knot forms in our stomachs or our breathing gets quicker and shallower. And some of these effects might be external, e.g., we run away or tears well up and flow from our eyes.

Let's say, then, that the behavior we display that is the visible or audible result of our feelings can be referred to as *Emotions*. Emotions are external feelings an audience SEES people do and intellectually labels as anger, love, hate, fear, happiness, sadness, etc.

But which of these effects – internal or external – is more useful to us as actors? For example, is it important for us as actors to be able to experience a knot in our stomachs when we perceive our boyfriend or girlfriend romantically kissing someone other than ourselves? Must our characters always have tears flowing from their eyes when we're at a funeral for our infant daughter?

The test is not what we, as actors, want to experience but instead what we want the audience to experience.

For example, say you were a lion tamer with twenty years of experience with a major circus. You are in that same ocean-front hotel room looking out the window. You perceive a nudge against your leg. You turn and see a gigantic leopard baring its fangs. You feel the same chemical changes taking place in your body that anyone else might feel in this situation. Most likely, however, as an experienced lion tamer, you display the feelings you feel in this incident differently than other people would. For example, you probably don't feel fear or display panic.

The confusion for us as actors may lie in the fact that 1) not everyone *displays* feelings in the same way and 2) that human vocabularies (verbal, remember, not emotional) are too

limited to accurately define feelings in words; there are a million different kinds of pleasures and displeasures, attractions and avoidances.

Furthermore, displays of emotion to a particular event may often be delayed by hours, weeks, or even years. For example, many people don't cry immediately when they first learn of the death of a family member. The notion that all people cry immediately when they hear of the death of someone they love has become a cliché for a way of externalizing and showing people's inner feelings at such a time.

Feelings are for the audience

As we saw from the Materials Model, *actions* are the actor's Material – not feelings or emotions. This means that, as actors, we're only concerned with performing actions that create *perceptions* for an audience which, in turn, will create feelings within them. And since, as actors, we can't share our feelings (our chemicals) directly with the audience to begin with, this means that it isn't necessary (or even desirable) for actors to feel what the audience is feeling.

For these reasons, actors are mistaken when they think that they're responsible for what audience members feel and that by their own displays of emotion, audience members will feel the same feelings they're feeling. Perceptually, this is just not physically what occurs.

For example, sucking on a lemon or scraping fingernails on a chalkboard will create feelings in an audience without actors themselves feeling anything whatsoever.

Animals can create feelings within an audience without themselves feeling those feelings. Think of a few of the television series alone that prove this: *Lassie, Flipper, Mr. Ed*.

Likewise, directors and writers are mistaken when they ask actors to display emotions for the communication of the identical emotions to an audience. Just because an actor is crying doesn't necessarily mean that the audience will be crying. For example, the audience might be laughing because an actor is crying.

This is not to say that Emotions (external displays of feeling) can't be used for creating perceptions in the audience. In fact, actors often move AS IF they're experiencing certain feelings without actually having those feelings while they are performing them.

The important element is WHAT the audience perceives from the actions being performed within the plot of the story.

So what do actors feel?

There is no doubt that since actors are watching themselves do actions, their own perceptions of these actions might create feelings in them similar to the feelings an observer might have. But the point to remember is that, for the actor, the feelings and any resulting emotions ARE NOT THE GOAL.

The correct sequence of actions will always be the "bait" for a perception which leads to a feeling that might result in an emotion. But if actors experience feelings, it is the actors' own perceptions of actions that create these feelings inside of them.

In the strictest, theoretical sense, in performance, the actor necessarily feels no more than two feelings: pleasure when things are right and displeasure when things are wrong. Or to put it another way: Ideally, actors feel good when they're doing an action, and they feel badly when they're not doing an action.

DEMONSTRATION 9.1 Experiencing feelings

To do this demonstration you'll need:

1. A sturdy, hard surface.

2. A long piece of soft, silky material or plush fur.

Go get these now, then continue reading.

You may have noticed already that particular movements may evoke particular feelings inside of you. It follows then that to experience a particular feeling inside of you, move like people move when they have that feeling.

1. Experiencing anger.

Stand or sit in front of the sturdy, hard surface. Without thinking of anything in particular, begin pounding your fist hard onto the surface. If you continue pounding long and hard enough, you will begin feeling anger.

2. Experiencing tenderness.

Sit with the piece of soft material or fur in your lap. Again, without thinking of anything in particular, begin softly stroking – petting, really – the material. Continue stroking and petting and you will begin feeling tenderness.

Of course, since actors are concerned with creating movements (actions) from which

others will experience feelings, actors aren't necessarily concerned about doing a movement long enough for them to experience a particular feeling. This demonstration simply shows how movements can create feelings inside us without those feelings being the reason for our movements in the first place.

Feelings are results of actions

If actors are forced to work from feelings first (and they almost always are), then they again need a technique for turning the odds back around to their favor when they're asked to perform feelings. The questions posed by the following model will help actors in working backwards and matching up a director or writer's (misleading) request for a particular emotion with the movement that will create that emotion within an audience.

Feelings/Emotions Model

Since it is perceptions of actions that create feelings, actors need to question and explore at least two aspects of feelings and emotions in life:

1. Which perceptions cause people (and audiences) to experience feelings?

This is the mother of all questions in the Arts. This is the question all elements of a production – the writing, the directing, the acting, the lighting design, the set design, the music – work together to manipulate and solve. Each profession adds something different to create a whole production of perceptions with a pre-determined effect on an audience.

In non-presentational productions, actors aren't used merely as puppets of the director or writer, but add their own visual information as cues for an audience. For this reason, actors need to know what they contribute that's different from what the other professions contribute to a production. It has been said that the famous Russian actor, Michael Chekhov, could adjust his body in such a way that an audience looking at him knew that he was feeling hunger. This is the ultimate expression of the actor's material.

2. What do people do when they experience feelings?

When people display emotions, what do we see them do that goes beyond yelling or crying or laughing?

a. Applying the Weight Model, we can certainly see that the weights of people's bodies change when they display emotions. Because weight is visual, it is an excellent tool for actors to use for communicating the internal emotional states of the characters they play. (SEE Chapter Seven.)

b. If we observe people's movements when they're experiencing feelings, we can define actions (movements with purposes) for those feelings. For example, when we're angry, we can move IN ORDER TO get our minds off our anger. If we're feeling bored, we can move IN ORDER TO find purpose (boredom is caused by lack of structure; the conflict is that whatever we try to occupy ourselves with doesn't pan out).

c. We can observe consistent and recognizable patterns of movement when people experience certain feelings. For example, people who are nervous often do things in the wrong order. People who are feeling tired will ignore their circumstances and sit down anywhere no matter how inappropriate it may be: any place will do. People who are sad often hold onto objects that remind them of something from the past. (Be particularly careful of cliché here, however.)

EXERCISE 9.1 Observing emotions

To do this exercise you'll need:

1. A loose-leaf notebook.

2. Paper and pen.

Begin observing the movements of people who are experiencing feelings and displaying emotions.

As you're watching their movements, first identify the emotion, and then write down your observations of their weight, how they move, and what they do.

I suggest keeping a notebook of your observations with a heading for each feeling/emotion.

For example:

1. Nervous

a. What WEIGHT is the body in?

b. HOW do people do the movement?

c. WHAT do people do?

2. Confident

a. What WEIGHT is the body in?

b. HOW do people do the movement?

c. WHAT do people do?

Other examples of emotions to observe could be: sad, happy, bored, afraid, powerful.

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Notes

Introduction

1 Told to me in the early 1980s by Evgeny Lanskoy during his "Acting Structures" classes at the Stella Adler Conservatory of Acting in New York City.

Chapter 1 A tradition of acting

1 Many of the dramatic plays produced before the 1930s were written in poetic verse. For example, Shakespeare is written primarily in iambic pentameter, i.e., ten syllables per line. Shakespeare comes from England, so the acting style used to act Shakespeare is traditionally British. Because of this, Americans who wanted to become stage actors before or during the 1930s had to work on their speech and to learn to speak in a style called Mid-Atlantic Standard English – so-called because the accent is half-way between American and British – which is how someone who lives in the middle of the Atlantic ocean supposedly would talk. (Most of us today can remember Katharine Hepburn's voice and accent, and her voice is reminiscent of this older style of stage speech.)

2 The idea that Stanislavsky's acting research was only concerned with "Realism," however, ignores Stanislavsky's less-known and highly censored research into and the use of techniques that are decidedly not realistic, e.g., Yoga and improvisation which occurred after his earlier exploration of realistic approaches. SEE Carnicke 2009:2–3.

Chapter 2 The third way: take it from life

1 This is a goal of miming or pantomime – portraying actions or a story by gestures and body movement without the use of words – not the goal of acting.

Chapter 3 A basic shift occurs: Soviet acting models

1 Technically, every action can be proven; however, not every actor is necessarily physically or psychically capable of proving every action at all times. Some actors may practice for years to perfect particular actions.

Chapter 4 The Materials Model

1 For further explanation of The Materials Model and Figure 4.1, SEE The Materials Model DVD video.

Chapter 5 The Two-Part Model of an Action

1 This has absolutely nothing to do with mind control or power over someone else. The actor's material is *actions* and the actor needs a method for observing actions in life, defining them and then recreating them in performances. This is one way of doing just that.

2 Rent or download and watch Charlie Chaplin movies, e.g., *Gold Rush* or especially the final scene in *Modern Times*.

Chapter 6 The Four Circles of Attention Model

1 The Second Circle of Attention.

2 The Second Circle of Attention.

3 The First Circle of Attention – the pain you're feeling is in your own body.

4 Our attention shifts from Fourth Circle (no conflict) into Third Circle (conflict).

5 Dreaming.

6 Most commonly in life, our attentions will go into Third Circle first. However, this doesn't mean that it's impossible for our attention to go directly into Second Circle or even First Circle when we're waking up.

7 When you first open your eyes after hearing the alarm, what are your eyes looking at? If your eyes aren't immediately looking at the source of the sound that woke you up, your attention is in Third Circle. The quality of how the eyes look at this moment is often described as a "short stare," unfocused or wandering. Your attention isn't in Second Circle until you finally move your head and physically see the alarm.

8 A nightmare.

Chapter 7 The Weight Model

1 It's interesting to note that, in this situation, there are cameras everywhere recording the transaction. This reveals that the more public a situation is, the more likely the weight of the purposes will be equal.

Chapter 8A The Three-Part Model of an Action: *Reactions*

1 The new information is the car coming at you.

2 Can you imagine what driving would be like if we had a reaction – a freeze – this big every time we saw something new?

3 It's possible too that we can get new information that doesn't change our current movement. We call this kind of new information a "link." For example, we can get new ideas (thoughts) in our minds because we're thinking about how to achieve a particular action we're already doing. Even though these new thoughts result in small freezes, the thoughts aren't important enough to change our actions into totally different movements.

Chapter 8B The Three-Part Model of an Action: *Adjustments*

1 This distinction is becoming blurred now with so many supermarkets that have “deli” sections and coffee and pastry vendors with tables and chairs inside the actual store.

2 SEE the Four Circles of Attention Model.

Chapter 8C The Three-Part Model of an Action: *Influences*

1 The playwright's material, for example, is *sequences* of actions. Playwrights work with the order in which actions occur. The director's material is *relationships* of actions. Directors work with how actions relate to one another in both conflict and harmony.

Chapter 9 Feelings and emotions

1 I have seen students become very agitated when I have proposed (too early in the semester?) that acting is based on perceptions of external events and not on internal feelings.

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