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Technique and impulse: A practical approach

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TECHNIQUE AND IMPULSE: A PRACTICAL APPROACH

by

Thomas C. Turner

Bachelor of Fine Arts
Northern Kentucky University
1992

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

**Master of Arts Degree
Department of Theatre
University of Nevada, Las Vegas**

**Graduate College
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
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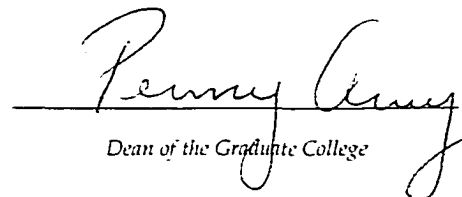
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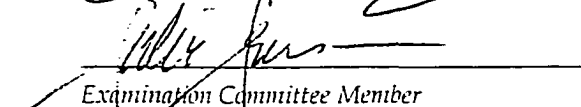
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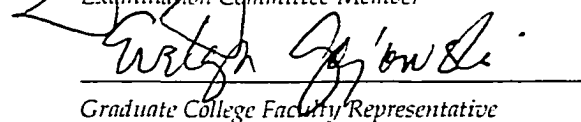
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ABSTRACT

Acting Technique and Impulse: A Practical Approach

by

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Acting technique and impulse must be blended to give a complete performance. In this thesis, I will explore the relationship between acting technique and impulse in vocal work, stage combat, script exploration, and truth. Ultimately, I hope to prove the necessity of both in all of the above areas. Lastly, I will describe a series of exercises that, I believe, can lead to the blending of technique and impulse.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

History of the Art

In the beginning, there was Thespis. And Thespis begot Quintilin of Rome who begot Aaron Hill of England, who begot Delsarte of France and Delsarte was misunderstood and misrepresented. This caused many an actor to gesture and flail. So, the mighty god of theatre, Dionysus, sent his only son to earth. His name was Constantin Stanislavski of Russia. Stanislavski took all that was good in the actor and recorded it in three volumes: An Actor Prepares, Building a Character, and Creating a Role. These books became the bibles of acting and were carried across the great ocean by Stanislavski and his disciples of the Moscow Art Theatre. There, in the new land called the United States of America, Stanislavski converted a new group of followers to his magical “system”. Three of these followers-Lee Strasberg, Cheryl Crawford, and Elia Kazan-founded a new “church” in honor of the teachings of Stanislavski. They called it The Actor’s Studio and, from this church, other great leaders rose to continue the teachings the “method” put forth. Among these new instructors were Stella Adler, Sanford Meisner, and Uta Hagen.

At home, in Moscow, one dared to question the teachings of the profit of Dionysus. He claimed the Stanislavski “method” was not the true path to enlightenment and that there were other ways. This man was Stanislavski’s favorite disciple, Vsevolod Meyerhold. Meyerhold claimed to have a vision given to him by Dionysus and that the

body was the path to enlightenment. He stated that Dionysus gave the purpose of theatre to us: to teach, not to cleanse the soul.

Meyerhold betrayed his master and began a system known as “Biomechanics.” Though later he regretted betraying Stanislavski and would return to the fold, Meyerhold opened a Pandora’s box of training that would influence a generation of anti-Stanislavski disciples. These powerful men had strange, new visions. Bertold Brecht and his “Epic Theatre” taught the “alienation effect”. Antonin Artaud founded the evil “Theatre of Cruelty.” Jerzy Grotowski introduced the “Poor Theatre,” and each of these men came to the new land influencing others such as Joseph Chakin who taught in the great city of New York.

The “church” of The Actor’s Studio began to have problems of its own. “High Priest,” Lee Strasberg approved only of the “Emotional Memory” chapter from one of Stanislavski’s sacred volumes. “High Priestesses,” Stella Adler was not convinced and went to study with the master himself. She returned to “The Actor’s Studio” and told the “High Priest” of the master’s teachings. The master taught her that there are many pathways to artistic truth. Strasberg blasphemed his master and said that Stanislavski was wrong. An artistic Civil War ensued and, when the smoke cleared, two artistic sects remained. One group comprised of Adler, Meisner, and Hagen remained true to the teachings of Stanislavski and kept their connection to The Moscow Art Theatre. Lee Strasberg founded a new artistic sect, which sought separation. Strasberg felt that the Moscow Art Theatre had too much power and influence over the artistic world and even named his own new system, the “method.”

Until this point, young followers of Dionysus were forced to travel to one of the great cities to study with a master teacher. There, they were forced to serve as slaves to a “priest”, learn his way and imitate it precisely. Even when the master’s son, Stanislavski, began his teachings, followers still needed to move to large cities where schools were devoted to teaching one or more chapters of the Stanislavski volumes.

Some of the followers chose to dabble in the dark arts of Brecht and Grotowski. In the early 1960's A.S., (After Stanislavski,) a new path opened to the followers of Dionysus. It was called the university and college system, which, until this point, had rejected study in acting. The sacred schools, which were traditionally devoted to the study of math, science, music, and religion now, included the practices of Dionysus. This was both a blessing and a curse. The blessing was that new exposure to artistic enlightenment was being offered to vast numbers of people, and new "missionaries" were training more and more followers. The curse was that many of the "priests" of Dionysus were unqualified and, as a result, their students were ill equipped and lacking the determination and skill it would take to follow the god Dionysus.

Discoveries of a Disciple

In 1995, I began teaching voice and acting classes to non-major students at the university level. Two years later, I taught my first classes in voice and acting techniques for majors. The change was significant. Although many non-majors had an interest in acting, for most, their only real goal was to get through the class without embarrassment. If the students put work into their monologues and scenes, it was only in a superficial sense, meaning simple blocking patterns and the use of one or two verbs to push the action forward. These students merely skimmed the top of what acting is and lacked depth in their process and understanding. Teaching majors, I was finally working with students who wanted to seriously pursue acting as a career. These students were dedicated to the work and wanted to grow in their performance skills. They were anxious to work deeper and with more technically demanding blocking. Throughout the semester, I noticed there were two distinct types of students: technical and impulsive.

Lisa, a twenty-year-old transfer student, was a terrifically technical actress. She followed technical directions with precision. Lisa could easily break her script down into

the smallest detail using extremely complicated verbs. She also had a wonderful sense of the dramatic arch of a scene as well as an understanding of the play as a whole. The problem with Lisa was that when she performed the scene, there was never any believability behind her verbs. The wonderful sense of dramatic arch was lost. As an audience member, I felt disconnected from the characters she portrayed because, while her technical skills were polished, her characters lacked the emotional depth of a real human being.

Scott was a twenty-year-old student whom I instructed in class and worked with in a number of university productions. He is one of the most impulsive actors I have ever met with the ability to find wonderful moments in even the smallest of roles. As Scott grows as a person and has more life experience behind him, he is able to bring more and more choices to his work. Yet, Scott's wonderfully impulsive technique causes problems when it comes to repeating a moment. Unlike Lisa, he cannot tell you what verb he will play. He simply does it. Scott impulsively feels the arch of the scene, so he doesn't need to intellectually break it down. But impulse filled with emotion and truth is little good if an actor cannot repeat it from night to night. In one production, the director was constantly forced to re-block scenes she had just worked on because Scott would change his choices so dramatically that it would alter the feel of the entire scene.

The challenge for an acting teacher is to combine Lisa's technical talents with Scott's impulsive talents to create a perfectly balanced actor. How is this done? Before I answer this question, I will explain how my own process has developed and what has led me to my conclusions. It is the process that ultimately showed me the importance of technique AND impulse.

Perhaps the best place to start is at the beginning. In 1984, I took my first drama class. I was a junior in high school. The course led to my first role on stage. I was cast in the title role in a very forgettable production called Love Hits Wilbur. It was through this role that I began to learn the essential basics of theatre including simple stage

directions such as stage left, upstage, and blocking. The emphasis of my training in acting was on volume and articulation. As far as an emotional life was concerned, bigger was better. There was never talk of emotional truth, just imitation of generic behavior patterns.

I was always gifted with the ability to change accents and dialects and this led me to the local radio station where I created various characters and voices for the morning show. Once again, I was only imitating, not putting a piece of myself into the role. Everything I was learning was very technically correct but lacked soul. As a young actor in a small high school drama class, real connection wasn't necessary to produce what seemed like good acting. Again, it was the "bigger and better" approach to performance.

During my high school training, I was able to do six shows in two years, a good amount of stage time. The advantage was that I became very practiced in technique and gained some valuable tools about blocking and volume. The disadvantage was that I learned some bad habits that to this day I am still trying to break.

In 1987, after taking a year off of school, I joined the Northern Kentucky University Department of Theatre. My first acting class at the university level was, once again, an introduction to the technical aspects of performance. At NKU, I relearned blocking rules but, this time, I also learned the history of where the rules originated. I received my first basic lessons in theatre history including such interesting facts as the origin of stage directions.

I also began to study an even more technical approach to acting: The Stanislavski method. Through this formula, I learned that a script should be broken down into small parts. In his book, An Actor Prepares, I learned theories such as communion, imagination, objectives, and super-objectives. I discovered how these strange things called "super objectives" are broken down into "objectives," which are further broken down into beats. In later classes, I was exposed to Uta Hagen and exercises such as Endowment, Three Entrances, and The Five Senses.

My vocal training was composed purely on the Edith Skinner approach to voice including proper placement and pronunciation. I also studied private singing voice with several vocal coaches. My movement, with the exception of dance, was non-existent. However, my audition technique training was extensive with classes in auditioning for stage, screen, and musical theatre. I was also fortunate to be cast quite extensively and worked my way up from small ensemble roles to larger supporting roles.

All in all, my five years of training in pursuit of my B.F.A. can be classified as an excellent study in technique. The closest I came to understanding impulse was through a role that I had during an original production titled Pig. In retrospect, I realize that the only reason I was able to use truthful impulse in the role was because my emotional life was so similar to that of the character I portrayed. I understood the character so well that I couldn't miss playing it truthfully. In fact, I even surprised the director who was also my main acting instructor. He wasn't even considering me for the role but asked me to read for it on a whim. Sadly, in the fifteen main-stage and black box productions I was in, I found impulse only once.

During the summers of my junior and senior years, I worked my first real professional jobs. I was an Actor/Tech in the outdoor drama, Unto These Hills. The second year, I was promoted to a role as well as serving as fight director. I also performed in a number of the second stage plays and dance concerts. Though my experiences at "Unto these Hills" did nothing to further me as an actor, I did grow up emotionally those summers and I would later discover what an important role life experience plays in what an actor brings to the stage.

It was also in my later and post NKU years that I began to delve into directing. Still, my directing was a lot like my acting with technical directions such as cross here on this line, project, and what is your objective? My concern wasn't in creating the details of objectives. I only wanted them to exist. I began to feel there was something more. And although I couldn't clearly define it, I knew I had only felt during Pig.

In those years, I also began to have small bouts with stage fright. It is something that still occasionally appears, generally when I am not emotionally connected to the character. After a year of directing and acting in friend's community theatre projects, my wife and I went on tour with the Missoula Children's Theatre.

As a director, producer, and teacher, this job was amazing. Every week, we cast 50-65 students ages 5-18 in a full production. The play had a cookie-cutter format to how the shows were to be directed. However, when Carolan and I got out on the road, it was like having our own personal touring company. We were able to adapt the shows to our unique skills and make them different from the other tour teams.

Each week, 18 to 800 students attended the auditions. During the audition, the students stood in a circle with Carolan and I in the center. Each student would say their name and age with two instructions: "loud and clear" and "big and expressive." Even from this simple task, I could see there were three types of "actors" in the room. First, the ones we couldn't use because they were too quiet or not expressive. Secondly, the ones I liked to call "Orphan Annie's" who were loud, clear, and expressive, but way over the top. These students usually made wonderful dancers and chorus members. And then there were those students who gave us a spark of believability. At the time, I recognized it, but I didn't understand what it was. These were the ones we would use as our leads.

Over the next four nights, for four hours each night, we would teach the music, dances, and blocking. On Friday and Saturday, we would perform the show. On Monday, we would be in the next town. After two and a half years, I became expert at discovering different actor habits, tricks some of which can best be described by Stanislavski in An Actor Prepares:

Eyes starting with horror. The tragic mopping of the brow. Holding the head with both hands. Running all five fingers through the hair. Pressing the hand to the heart. Any one of them is at least three hundred years old. (139)

Of course, now that number is closer to four hundred years. I also began to

realize that an actor could do every single one of those and make you believe that they were genuine. It wasn't until the next major step in my life that I would discover how it could be accomplished.

I would like to stress that there was nothing wrong with me as a purely technical actor. I worked quite a lot. It was invaluable training and where I think every freshman-acting student should start. It was only that with my technical training, I felt empty and was enjoying performing less and less. So much so that I began to seriously consider giving up acting and going into arts administration.

Touring with MCT was extremely rewarding, but after two years, life on the road began to become very tiresome. Carolan decided we should apply to acting schools with an MFA in acting and I reluctantly agreed. Again, I wasn't sure I wanted to continue acting. In 1995, we were both selected for the MFA program at the University of Montana. It was there that both my personal and professional life would literally be turned around.

One week before we were to enter the MFA program, Carolan and I separated and divorced a short time later. I mention this only because it was, ironically, one of two major catalysts that would open me up to the wonderful world of emotions. That, in turn, would be the beginning of my work to discover impulse in acting. The second catalyst would be my training in the Meisner technique.

Before I began the Meisner training, I whole-heartedly believed that acting was *imaginary* living under imaginary circumstances. It was through Meisner's endowment exercise that I had a breakthrough. By breakthrough, I mean that I realized the truth in Meisner's simple statement, "Acting is living truthfully under imaginary circumstances" (Meisner 178). During Meisner's endowment exercise, I had placed myself into an imaginary situation involving my real wife. The results were surprising. Through that imaginary situation, truth in acting opened up to me. Once I discovered what it was, I realized that my perception about of the process of acting was incorrect. The discovery

was that strong. I know that I was able to have that breakthrough because I was in such an emotional and delicate place. But good acting requires vulnerability and the freedom to go to those places.

I also realize that I could have made this discovery with almost any of the major techniques. In fact, when I went back and reread Stanislavski's An Actor Prepares and Uta Hagen's Respect for Acting, as well as a number of other books, it was like I was reading them for the first time.

It was also at the U of M that I organized a project called "Monologues to Music." I took original monologues written by the actors and played different types of music to see what new choices the music would create. "Monologues to Music" was a project that solidified my push toward impulse work. Other than those two projects, my time at the U of M was miserable. The other half of my training (voice and movement) was exactly like my BFA and I realized that I needed to leave.

It was at UNLV that I was introduced to the Linklater and Alexander vocal techniques. Kristin Linklater's work is impulse work. With Linklater, the actor frees tension with the goal to free the voice so that it flows along with the emotion you are feeling in the role.

I began as a very technical actor who knew absolutely nothing about impulse. Once I discovered impulse, I was able to blend it with what I already knew about technique. Now, my work is finding the right mixture for each role to make them work together. This thesis is a major step in finding that combination.

CHAPTER 2

VOICE & SPEECH

Since the beginning of theatre, with the Greeks, vocal training has been dominated by a technical influence. Initially, training the voice was done through a series of exercises designed to teach proper placement and pronunciation. The objective was to have a rich, resonating sound. Actors would study elocution and rhetoric. They would read poetry and recite passages from works of literature. They would learn breathing techniques that were the same as those used by singers. Even in today's university systems, Edith Skinner's very technical book Speak with Distinction, is a virtual bible among voice teachers.

It was not until 1910 when a man named F. M. Alexander published a book titled "Man's Supreme Inheritance" that someone began to question that there may be more to vocal training than just proper pronunciation and pleasing sound. A popular actor and orator, Alexander began to frequently loose his voice. Seeing his career threatened and no success with the conventional training of his time, he set out to discover why he could not keep a healthy sound. Using a mirror, Alexander began to notice patterns of habitual tension in his head and neck that was causing tension in his throat that, in turn, caused him to loose his voice. In the book, Body Learning, An Introduction to the Alexander Technique, author Michael J. Gelb describes the four steps Alexander used to break himself of his habits:

First, he would inhibit his immediate response to speak the sentence, thereby stopping at its source the habitual uncoordinated direction. Second, he would consciously practice projecting the directions necessary for his improved use of himself...Third, he would continue to project these directions until he was

confident that he could maintain them while speaking the sentence. Fourth, at the moment when he decided to speak the sentence he would stop again and consciously reconsider his decision. (15)

Alexander soon became known as an excellent actor and brilliant teacher. Many of London's stars of the stage began to study with Alexander. He died in 1955 and today his discoveries are, along with Skinner's Speak with Distinction, a cornerstone in many acting programs. Though Alexander began searching for a way to strengthen his voice, I believe his technique is much more a movement rather than a vocal technique. I mention Alexander because, as stated earlier, he began to influence others to look at new and unique ways to work on the voice.

One of the next steps in a new direction in vocal training was in early 1950 England with Iris Warren. In her book, Freeing the Natural Voice, Kristen Linklater writes:

It was Iris Warren who moved the science of voice production for British actors into a new phase by adding psychological understanding to the physiological knowledge. In the late 30's Iris Warren began tackling the most common problem among actors, that of straining the voice when expressing strong emotions, not by dealing directly with the suffering voice, but by unlocking the emotions. (5)

Iris Warren brings us up to today through the direct influence of Kristin Linklater. Linklater has been teaching in America since the early sixty's. She found that her vocal training and now teaching "married well with the American methods of acting" (Linklater 3). Though new types of vocal techniques began to appear with the emergence of realism, the old school of elocution still thrived and a bastion of old school technical training was Edith Skinner.

It is through Edith Skinner, (the queen of technique,) and Kristen Linklater, (the queen of impulse,) that I will demonstrate the two types of vocal technique. I will also show how, through both techniques, the actor can have the tools for creating a voice filled with choices that can be used for whatever the role may require.

I believe the best way to describe Edith Skinner's thoughts on the voice and vocal training is the through her own description found in the forward to her book, Speak with Distinction:

Through voice and speech, more than any other qualities, the actor lays bare before an audience the soul of the character impersonated. (Skinner iii)

Edith Skinner explains that the voice is the tool used to communicate an actor's thoughts and feelings. The use of various levels of pitch, tone, and volume accompanied by good pronunciation and informed dialect choices all provide important information. It is from this information that the ideas of the text are communicated to the audience. When using dialects and accents, Skinner cautions the actor to avoid letting the speech become so thick that it prevents the audience from understanding the words. She also challenges the actor to possess all of the skills that lead to perfection in speech. (iii)

In her forward, Skinner describes the process of voice and speech. At no time does Skinner mention the words impulse or truth. The only acting advice she offers is that "The actor lays bare before an audience the soul of the character impersonated" (iii). Her greatest concern is to "foster the finest sound in spoken English" (iii). No other book can come close to doing just that. As further proof of Skinner's love of sound, one need only to read a quote from Jack O'Brien's "Remembering Edith Skinner," in Speak with Distinction:

Of course, her ear was extraordinary, and soon everyone began to "hear themselves" through her tenacious objectivity. The clarity of a remarkable vowel might be praised in the midst of her request for coffee, (29)

Her understanding of sound is what makes Edith Skinner such a powerhouse in vocal training. In Speak with Distinction, Skinner makes use of the International Phonetic Alphabet as a tool for vocal development. The International Phonetic Alphabet

(IPA) is a system of notating the various sounds used in language. Through the IPA, an actor can learn the correct pronunciation of sounds. This allows an actor to discover habits they may have developed. In his book, "Keeping Your Voice Healthy," Dr. Friedrich S. Brodnitz describes vocal habits:

We like to think of ourselves as individuals, unique and different from all others. Actually, we are, to a large extent, the products of our surroundings.

Social level, racial temperaments, professional surroundings, and many other influences leave their mark on speech and voice. What may be the expected pattern of one group would be abnormal in another. (44-45)

The discovery of one's habits is the first step in having choice. It provides the choice to continue speaking the way you would like, the choice of a dialect or accent, or the choice to forever change your speaking habits. The more choices the actor uses, the stronger the actor's performance.

One of the strengths of Edith Skinner's vocal technique is that it is purely intellectual. It takes all impulse and emotion out of the training. Instead Skinner's technique uses clear-cut objectives that the actor must strive toward. A cassette tape accompanies the book featuring an actor and actress demonstrating the correct pronunciations of the exercises within. On one level, the robotic repeating of phrases such as "Here's their poor ore car," (Skinner 168) or "Pay my boy go now," (Skinner 143) may seem extremely stifling to the creative process. Once learned, an actor gains tremendous freedom in the choices they have in substituting sounds for the creation of a character.

Not only do Skinner's techniques help create an actor who is strong in his or her pronunciation skills but she also stresses the importance of an actor who can craft a sentence. In her section, "Strong and Weak Forms of Words"(21), she explains that the use of nouns and verbs are used to stress important ideas in sentences. These are called strong forms. The use of articles, personal pronouns and conjunctions, among others, are

rarely used to stress a point. These, of course, are weak forms. When an actor learns to recognize the difference between the two, they will be able to give each word proper stress. (21)

After a student has mastered pronunciation and phrasing, they are ready to tackle the text. Skinner refers to this as creating a "score." Through the use of tone, pitch, pauses, volume, and strong and weak forms of words, the actor can create various moods in their speech. These moods are very similar to what would be created through music and help demonstrate emotion. Moods can range from joy, to sorrow, or anger. The only limitation is the skill and imagination of the actor. Skinner believes that vocal moods should come from the particular vocal score the playwright has provided. (349)

In her book, Skinner includes a number of sonnets, poems, and sections from novels as examples for student practice. An actor who successfully studies the Skinner technique is an actor who is articulate with wonderful projection. The tools a student will take away from such a study will help them technically conquer any text or dialect they may run up against.

The Skinner technique is not without its drawbacks. The main problem I have found in fellow actors, students, and myself are the stiff and stilted appearance of those wonderful sounds when not working in readers theatre or reciting poetry. Actors who are exclusively trained in the Skinner technique tend to stay in a comfort zone of sounds. This limitation can make them sound robotic or unfeeling in certain styles. The fear of sounding bad can also put limits on what the actor is willing to attempt. Working with a Skinner voiced actor can be like working with an actor who is afraid of looking physically ugly.

Acting is not always pretty. A versatile actor may play a handsome lead for one role and a hunchback for the next. Each role will require different things from an actor. An actor who can create both to their fullest will be the actor that works. I began my training with Edith Skinner's Speak with Distinction and have actually been asked to

lessen my articulation during several auditions and roles. I was told I sounded too good or proper for the role. This concept is never given consideration in Speak with Distinction. On the contrary, the biggest concern is to speak with what is called a "General American" dialect:

General American is that dialect of North American English most frequently found in the ordinary speech of people who live in the western United States. It does not sound like the speech of any particular region, yet it sounds distinctly contemporary and distinctively American. (ix)

At the opposite end of Edith Skinner's philosophy are Kristen Linklater's teachings:

The objective is a voice in direct contact with emotional impulse, shaped by the intellect but not inhibited by it. Such a voice is a built in attribute of the body with an innate potential for a wide pitch range, intricate harmonics, and kaleidoscopic textual qualities, which can be articulated into clear speech in response to clear thinking and desire to communicate. The natural choice is transparent/revealing, not describing inner impulses of emotion and thought, directly and spontaneously. The person is heard, not the person's voice. (1,2)

From the very beginning, you can see how different the teachings of Skinner and Linklater are. While Skinner believes the words are used for expressing meaning, Linklater believes "the person is heard, not the person's words" (2).

The closest they come to agreement is that breath is the key to speech. Linklater describes the process of breath:

Physical awareness and relaxation are the first steps in the work to be done, with a constant emphasis on mind-body unit. Breath and sound must always be connected to thought and feeling so that the two processes work simultaneously to activate and release inner impulses and to dissolve physical blocks. (2)

The Linklater technique is unique in that it approaches vocal work not from a process of vocal exercises but, rather, from what she calls "freeing the voice:"

To free the voice is to free the person, and each person is indivisibly mind and body. Since the sound of the voice is generated by physical process, the inner muscles of the body must be free to receive the sensitive impulses from the brain that create speech. The natural voice is most perceptibly blocked and distorted by physical tension, but also suffers from emotional blocks, intellectual blocks, aural blocks, and spiritual blocks. All such observances are psychophysical in nature,

and once they are removed the voice is able to communicate the full range of human emotion and all the nuances of thought. Its limits lie only in the possible limits of talent, imagination or life experience. (2)

For Linklater, when an actor is in touch with his or her voice, they will be able to respond to the impulses they feel when working on a scene. Without this freedom, the actor will become limited in their range of character and emotion. An actor who cannot free their voice is an actor who will also be trapped emotionally. The reason for this, according to Linklater is that:

The voice is prevented from responding with the spontaneity because that spontaneity depends on reflex action and most people have lost the ability, and perhaps the desire, to behave reflexively. Except in moments "beyond control," such as extreme pain, extreme fear, extreme ecstasy, nearly all visibly reflex behavior is short-circuited by secondary impulse. (11)

She continues, saying:

As long as we are emotionally protective our breathing cannot be free. As long as the breath is not free the voice will depend on compensating strength in the throat and mouth muscles. When these muscles try to convey strong feelings, a number of possible results can occur: they find a safe, musical way to describe emotion; they drive sound monotonously up into the head; or they tense, contract, push and squeeze with so much effort that the vocal folds rub together. Then the folds become inflamed, lose their resilience, and are unable to produce regular vibrations and finally, grow little lumps on them as they grind against each other without the lubrication of breath. Then all that is heard is a gritty, hoarse sound and, ultimately, nothing. (12-13)

Linklater believes that, "muddy thinking is the fundamental obstacle to clear articulation. Blocked emotions are the fundamental obstacle to a free voice" (16).

Like Alexander, Linklater begins her vocal work with the body, particularly the head, neck, and spine. Linklater uses a series of exercises designed to relax the actor.

She stresses:

There is however, a vital difference between relaxing for the sake of relaxation, which inevitably includes mental collapse, and relaxing in order to do something. The aim is to remove unnecessary tensions so that the muscles are free to respond to impulse, without the short-circuiting created by habit. (24)

Once the student is relaxed and in touch with her body, she is ready to begin

working with breath. The key to working with the Linklater technique is getting in touch with your "natural breathing rhythm." It is the rhythm a child used before stimuli changed it. With stimuli such as, "You better stop crying," a child learns to hold their breath when emotional. A parent says, "Don't talk so loud," and a child learns to slow the breath down to speak quietly.

Starting on the floor, on her back, the student attempts to find her breath. Once she finds her breath, she can then place it on sound. The first sounds being a series of "f" sounds. Linklater's description is detailed:

If your mouth is relaxed, the breath should automatically arrive in three "fff" somewhere between the top of the teeth and the lower lip. Don't make a "fff" sound; let it be the natural byproduct of the release of breath from inside and the realized position of the mouth." (27)

The next step is to place the breath on a sigh. First with no sound, and then touching sound. It is important that the student notice that the larger the sigh, the larger the necessity for a big breath. This is also the principle that will be used later when applying sound to breath. Linklater states, "That, if you allow the breath to tell you what it wants, you do not have to waste energy controlling or sustaining it consciously. That, the ultimate control for the breath are thoughts and feelings" (34).

After the student has mastered the breath, she is ready to move onto "the touch of sound." Linklater defines it as "the feeling of vibrations in the body" (35). The touch of sound begins with a simple "hu-u-uh". After experimenting with different lengths and patterns of these sounds, the student can begin to put the sounds on pitch and move toward a "huumm" sound. The student can also substitute consonants such as "b" or "v" while always keeping in mind that "the breath serves the thought and each thought has an intrinsic length. Each new thought has a new breath" (Linklater 45).

Slowly, the student works her way toward standing while keeping the same ease

and lack of tension that she had on the floor. When this level of freedom and ease is reached, Linklater pushes the student toward exploring the outer limits of her register. The main registers are the body, chest, nasal, and the top of the head. "Picture your voice as an elevator," she says, "whose electrical mechanism is in the basement, and using a long "he-e-ey" as the sound in which your voice/elevator is manifested, travel from basement to the attic visiting all the resonating floors on the way" (112-113).

Like Skinner, Linklater also makes use of tongue twisters to practice articulation. The main difference in how the two approach the exercises is that Linklater does not teach it using standards of correct speech. In fact, she states:

No standards of correct 'speech' will be given. Such standards last longer between the covers of a book than on the tongues of living people and are a lost cause because live communication will not sit still and behave. Much of what, in the past, was hopefully labeled Standard American, Transatlantic Speech, or Standard English, was a reflection of class-consciousness and as an esthetic rule of thumb is doomed to failure. (144-45)

Linklater believes that poor articulation or severe dialects are habits and can be broken and changed:

All these are habits of mind and muscle developed under the limited conditioning of one environment. Without condemning the initial conditioning, rigid extremes will inevitably be modified as new interior and exterior environments are explored; one the whole potential of a voice with three octaves, endless harmonics, and unlimited textual quality is freed, changing styles are available to changing content. Limits lie only in the possible limitations of talent, imagination or life experience. (145)

She finishes by saying, "with agile lips and tongue, free from the constrictions of habit, the one criterion for clear speaking is clear thinking" (Linklater 146).

In the Linklater technique, when a student finally reaches the point to begin using words for text, the first problem the actor will encounter is:

The words seem attached to ideas and detached from instinct. Feelings, attached to instinct and experienced physically, have to struggle for verbal expression because words seem to belong not in the body but in the head. (172)

She goes on to say:

To release the built in art of eloquence must be to reestablish the visceral connection of words to the body. An awareness of their sensory nature must come before that of their informational purpose. This is not to say that intelligence is to be ignored but that. In order to redress the balance between intelligence and emotion, emotion must be given precedence for a little while. (174)

An actor reestablished this connection by re-experiencing how sound flows through the body.

You will find that as you allow these sounds to play through you, they stimulate energy by the simple impact of their vibrations. If your body is relaxed and your mind open, sound immediately generates energy. It offers at that moment, however, a channel through which you can express pent up feelings..." (179)

Once you've established the sound in the body, you can improvise text using only the sounds. "Once it is made flexible and sensitive in this way, you can return to the job of communicating textual sense with a voice naturally susceptible to para-textual influences." (Linklater 183)

Linklater finishes her chapter on text:

Essentially 'work on the text' means letting the words of the text happen to you; finding ways to let the text impregnate you so that sensory, emotional, imaginative, physical and vocal discoveries are the foundation on which the intellect can build. This, in turn, becomes the foundation on which the speech, the scene, the character and the play are built." (191)

The strength in the Linklater technique is that she is able to successfully combine a vocal technique with American realism acting techniques such as Meisner, Strausberg and Hagen. Training an actor to speak not only legibly but also emotionally can bring a powerful performance to the stage. Linklater's relaxation and vocal exercises can be used as a complete vocal and emotional warm-up prior to a performance.

When I studied the Linklater technique, I found it to be amazing. The first time I connected to a free sound was truly liberating. When I knew what a free sound was, I found power to control my sounds in ways I never could with Skinner's technique.

While my work with Skinner's technique taught me how to intellectually control my instrument, the Linklater technique taught me how to let my instrument work with my impulses. I let the impulses inform the breath, and the breath inform the sound. In this way, Linklater's technique can be compared to Eastern Zen philosophy.

The danger of studying Linklater's technique is that any time an actor places a principle such as vocal control on impulse, it may have an adverse effect. Most young actors are very limited in their range of impulses. Like a Skinner actor who is only comfortable with certain sounds, a Linklater actor tends to be comfortable with certain emotions and those may be the only ones used. Their small range of emotions will prevent them from making strong impulsive choices. Lack of strong impulsive choices will then limit strong actions. There is also a danger when impulses lead to strong emotions and those emotions overwhelm the actor. When this happens, the actor's sound is the first thing lost. The overwhelming emotion may cause poor articulation, tension in the throat or loss of breath.

Linklater and Skinner would claim that these problems can be easily overcome through practice. However, I have found that in a great number of actors-both students as well as professional-lost old habits turn into newfound habits. Once they become comfortable with new habits, growth again becomes stifled. A way of avoiding this is to combine the techniques of both Skinner and Linklater.

When an actor is first beginning their training, they would benefit from studying both techniques at the same time. By using the Linklater work to get in touch with their breathing, body and impulses, the student would have a balance to the intellectual training they would receive through the Skinner teachings. The student would be exercising and exploring both mind and body. Some may feel this could lead to confusion for the student. However, the techniques are so different from one another that it would no different than studying stage combat and dance at the same time. In a voice class, the student could use the Linklater technique as a warm-up for the voice and the

Skinner technique as a way to work on dialects and accents. Both could be used as tools for discovering personal habits and problems.

Lastly, students would have the ever-powerful tool of choice. Only by knowing what over articulation was, was I able to pull it back. It was only when I was able to let the impulse inform the breath and the breath inform the word that I was able to begin to expand my vocal range.

By blending both techniques, an actor can take on whatever vocal challenge they might face. Now that I have studied and continue to practice both methods, I feel that vocally I can undertake any role, whether Eddie in Fool for Love or the clown in Shakespeare's A Winter's Tale, or Mickey the Cop in Neil Simon's The Odd Couple.

CHAPTER 3

STAGE COMBAT

There is no other area of theatre that better demonstrates the need for the blending of technique and impulse than stage combat. It is also one of the most neglected aspects of actor training. At one time, every actor who either studied or apprenticed the art would take fencing to develop balance, skill, and grace. It was also studied because, let's face it, what has greater conflict than swordplay?

In the forward to fight master William Hobbs's book, Stage Combat: The Action to the Word, Laurence Olivier writes:

I have always felt very strongly that a stage fight offered the actor a unique opportunity of winning the audience, as great as almost any scene, speech or action. That Shakespeare put it high in his estimations of stage effects is proclaimed by the amount of times he trustingly leaves it to this element to provide him with his denouements. (54)

At most universities, training in fencing or any other type of stage combat, is non-existent due, in part, to a lack of teachers and weapons. Students are forced to improvise fight scenes based on what they have seen in movies and television or picked up at drama workshops. Worst is the old "Go ahead and hit me," school of stage combat.

It is unfortunate that stage combat is available to so few students. In the book, Swashbuckling by Richard Lone, Mr. Lone lists several advantages to stage combat:

1. A better ability to concentrate
2. Improved coordination, strength, stamina, and appearance
3. An inner calm and confidence (5,6)

Lone also discusses the acting side of combat:

But knowing which weapons to choose and how to wield them-including the

techniques of unarmed combat-is only half the challenge of swashbuckling. The other half is acting while in action, the reason you're on stage. Unless you can convince an audience that the story continues during the fight-that this most dramatic form of conflict can and does reveal still more of your character-you will have failed at your primary task." (4)

There are many types of stage combat. Ranging from small slaps or punches to major battle scenes, most fights combine more than one element. In a knife fight I choreographed for Gris Gris, an original production at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, I used three actors. Each actor, at one time or another, used unarmed combat or knives. Of the three actors, only one has stage combat experience. That experience came from working with me on a green show for Nevada Shakespeare in the Park.

When choreographing a stage fight, particularly with actors who have little or no experience, the only place to begin is with technique. In the knife fight for Gris Gris, I began with simple safety instructions such as eye contact before each move, spacing, telegraphing of movements, and instructions to watch out for elbows, wrists, and knees when falling. When I choreographed three major battle scenes for Shakespeare's Henry VI Part III, I was working with 10 to 16 combatants on stage at one time. The weapons were broadswords, shields, and quarter-staves. I had the good fortune of having two of my actors well trained in combat. Even though I was working with large numbers of combatants and different weapons, I began rehearsals the same way as for Gris Gris: With safety technique.

For both productions, I had to teach a forward fall. To demonstrate how technical a fight-choreographer must be when teaching even a simple fall, I will describe to you, as I described it to the actors for both productions:

1. Actor steps out into a lunge with left or right leg.
2. Actor lowers himself forward and down.
3. When chest is close to knee, actor may then place his hands on the ground.

Note: Actor should make sure his knee is over the ankle and not past it.

4. One hand placed to the outside of the body, the hand on the lunge side is placed inside of the knee.

5. The actor can then lower himself to the ground making sure not to put stress on the wrist or knee.

This was rehearsed at 1/8 the speed that it will be performed at. I then had the actors rehearse it over and over again while making sure that they were not placing their wrist down until their momentum had slowed. This reduces the risk of injuring their wrists. Once they began to get the hang of it, I slowly increased the speed.

Speed is one of the most dangerous elements of a fight and most actors want to rush immediately to performance speed and intensity. When choreographing, I continually have to pull actors back. The slower they go in the beginning the easier they will be able to focus on technique and allow the movements to enter their muscle memory. This makes for a safer fight and also a stronger looking fight. In the book Fight Directing for the Theatre, J. Allen Suddeth says:

Slow and steady is the key to fight-choreography rehearsals. A fight director should continue to keep the pace slow by mutual agreement until quite close to the opening night. The performers will continue to learn details about the fight in slow motion every time they do it--Details that are lost to them when they fly through the choreography. (4, 5)

When dealing with weapons, it is even more imperative the fight remain slow and steady until the actors have complete control of themselves and their weapons. For Henry VI Part III, I had a two-hour rehearsal to assign weapons and choreograph some of the small skirmishes. I then had a four-hour rehearsal to choreograph three group battle scenes, six kills, and one assassination scene. Finally, I attended the wet-tech to finish choreographing one large fight scene between three major characters and two short fights between four minor characters. Overall, I had about twelve hours to choreograph and teach the fights for the show. I would never have been able to do this safely except for the fact that the director decided to do all of the fights in a stylized fashion. Each of the

fights took place in a slow motion style. A drum underscored the fights so that each hit took place on a pulse every four beats. Speed was never a concern since every fight took place to a very slow 4/4 time signature. For Henry VI Part III, I was able to concentrate solely on teaching the fights. Once the actors learned technical moves for the fights, I allowed them to quickly move into acting the fights.

For Gris Gris, I did not have the luxury of a stylized fight. It had to be in full tempo, which is approximately 1/4 to 1/3 less than the speed of a real fight. The knife fight in Gris Gris was only a three-minute fight but I spent about the same 12 hours with the combatants.

The first rehearsal was spent teaching safety and choreographing the unarmed portion of the fight. During the fight, two men fight over a woman. The woman is caught in the middle and tries to break up the fight. She also participates in it. The unarmed sequences used both contact, where the attacker makes contact with the victims body, and non-contact, where no contact is made with the body. Three hours were spent on just the first 30 seconds of the fight. The second rehearsal was spent choreographing the knife fight. Particular care had to be taken when the weapons were introduced for the safety of the actors and the audience. Both Henry VI Part III, and Gris Gris were in a Black Box theatre with the front rows located only a few feet from the actors. After another three hours, the knife fight was choreographed. The rest of the rehearsals were spent cleaning up the spacing and intensity of the fight.

To recap, safety for the actors is always the primary importance. The actors should know when to make eye contact. Moves are be telegraphed so that their partners and the audience will know what is coming. There is nothing worse than for an audience member to watch a fight and say, "What happened? I didn't see it," except maybe a partner with a bloody lip who says the same thing. When working with weapons, actors should know where to thrust and parry safely. Technique will allow them to have polished movements and phrases because both mind and body know what to do.

Taking time to rehearse only the technical moves is invaluable for the actor. However, comes a point when the staged fight must look like a real fight. If it were only the actors exchanging blows with no impulse behind it you would lose the point of the conflict.

Stage combat first needs to be mastered as a skill so that it may be more easily integrated into the acting craft. Having carefully gone through all the fundamental moves and mechanics in a neutral state, we now can explore the character within the conflict. Once the skills are understood and the artist is comfortable with the mechanics of the weapon, then they can start a process of working the acting craft into a stage fight. " (Girard 433)

Both the Gris Gris and Henry VI Part III, fights had to move into impulse. For Gris Gris, it was a natural progression. The story alone, two men fighting for a woman, lends itself to impulse. In fact, I had to pull the actors back several times because they would rush through the fight. Speed not only caused a safety hazard, but it also took away from the orchestration. In Hobb's book Stage Combat, he describes orchestration:

Always been conscious that most well-constructed fights have changes of rhythm and are "orchestrated" in a way not unlike a musical score. For example, the fight may, like a piece of music, start in a low key in a slow tempo and gradually gain in momentum and pitch, arriving eventually at the equivalent of a clash of symbols. (15)

The key to a well-orchestrated fight is that the actor motivate the fight based on factors such as who the aggressor is, who is more skilled, if the characters had any training in fighting, the size of their opponent, fatigue, injuries, or any dialogue in the scene. In Gris Gris, the female character does a lot of talking to both of the combatants. The combatants themselves have a few verbal exchanges. The actors had a tendency to forget everything and just go at each other. Unfortunately, this is not *acting* on impulse, this is living impulse and living impulse is not acting.

There is a school of actor training that espouses 'real emotion' for every moment in the play. Unfortunately, this technique while popular and effective in many

situations is particularly dangerous during a fight scene. The actor playing Edmond cannot really want to kill Edgar, or he might-and the curtain will ring down to the wailing of ambulances.” (Suddeth 175)

I was able to stop the actors from rushing the fight by having them justify the reasons for each move in the fight. Reasons had to be based on the given circumstances of the scene. Once they could justify each move, they were able to work toward impulsive acting choices that were not only safe, but also realistic and clean. An out of control fight scene can look at bad as a purely technical fight scene.

In Henry VI Part III, I had to take particular care to make the stylized fights look realistic. Since the style chosen was a type of slow motion, the actors had to find a way to realistically struggle with each other. Fortunately, they were using heavy weapons and having to slowly wield them was a struggle in itself. If the actors would have fought at top speed, they could let momentum do half the work of wielding a broadsword. The actual strain on the actor’s muscles lent an unexpected appearance of struggle to their performance.

One of the major acting obstacles I had to overcome was that several of the actors were wincing away from the weapons coming toward them. This may seem like a logical impulse except that it didn’t come from an acting choice. Instead, it came from the actor’s fear of the weapons. This problem was solved as the actors become comfortable with the weapons. I also reminded them that they were trained warriors fighting not just for their lives but for a cause they truly believed in. With that little bit of imagination work, they began to look like trained soldiers. Their acting impulses began to show in the way they attacked, retreated, and died. In Swashbuckling, Richard Lane has a wonderful description of what he calls the “roots of combat:”

1. Survival: This is the most primitive combat instinct of all.
2. Need. Someone has threatened to take away the most valuable thing I have, or denies me something I’ll eventually need for survival.
3. Greed. Avarice is an overwhelming desire to possess something regardless of the consequences.

4. Righteousness. Moral imperatives lie at the upper end of the violence motivation scale. In drama, a fight that begins as a matter of principle often dissolves into a fight based on greed, need, or survival. (13)

When an actor is able to tap into one or more of these as a motivation for their character, they can begin to bring a fight to life. To summarize, stage combat is a wonderful tool for an actor to study both impulse and technique. Through the drills required to master different combat styles, an actor can develop a strong and flexible body as well as the actor/combatants powers of concentration. Working in a discipline that can injure and kill you if you are not focused on what you and your partners are doing can truly make one concentrate!

Once the drills are moved into choreography and the actor has safely mastered the fight sequences, they are able to begin to make impulse choices based on character. In most non-combat plays, the conflict can be very difficult for an actor to find. It may be hidden in subtext or lost in dialogue. The conflict might be spread over several scenes. When it comes to stage combat, the conflict is right there in the struggle for life and death. Very rarely, except through stage combat, does the actor get the wonderful opportunity to play straight out, no holds barred, conflict. Even a scene that only contains a slap is powerful. In our society, physical violence is extremely forbidden. For a character to be moved enough to break such a cannon there can be no doubt as to the reasons for their impulses. With that much power, even the most inexperienced actor can find a way to experience truthful impulse on stage.

As a final note, I believe stage combat is the only area in performance where there should be a slight tilt toward technique. If an actor makes an impulsive vocal choice that is too strong, their dialogue may be lost or they may strain the throat muscles. An overly

impulsive acting choice may come across as over the top. An overly impulsive actor/combatant could cause serious injury or death to someone. The ultimate goal, of course, is the balance between both.

CHAPTER 4

GIVEN CIRCUMSTANCES & TRUTH

What is acting? "Acting is living under imaginary circumstances" (Meisner 178). "Acting means the elimination of human barriers. You must knock down the walls between yourself and the other actors" (Adler 7). "Acting is a person behaving honestly, truthfully, economically, and comfortably in front of other people in a place used for theatrical presentation" (Crawford 2).

There are hundreds of books on acting techniques, written by master teachers. These books run the gamete from Stanislavski and his three books to those by Meisner, Adler, Chaikin, and many others. There are thousands of books written by descendants and practitioners of master teachers such as Ramonde Temkine's book Grotowski and his Poor Theatre and Edward Dwight Estey's book On Method Acting about Lee Strausberg's "method" technique. One can also find books written by master teachers who dedicated much of their lives to teaching in Universities. Jerry Crawford's book, Acting in Person in Style is a wonderful example. Books that specialize in Shakespearean performance, Brechtian techniques such as Margaret Eddershaw's book Performing Brecht, or even an excellent book written by the modern dance master Ted Shawn are easily accessible. Shawn's book, Every Little Movement is dedicated to teaching the truth about Francois Delsarte and his "laws of expression."

At some point in my career, I have read these books, along with many others. How did I find the ones that I believe best support my theory that an actor must have both technique and impulse to have a complete and organic performance? Is there a need for my thesis? What do I have to offer that the others do not?

Perhaps it is the experiences unique to my life that may offer insight to someone who was not able to find it before. In my life, I was most influenced by five texts.

Stanislavski's An Actor Prepares and Building a Character; Sanford Meisner's Sanford Meisner on Acting, Uta Hagen's Respect for Acting, and Stella Adler's The Technique of Acting. This is not to say that I have not found inspiration and use from other theorists and teachers. I could write a doctoral dissertation on that subject alone.

For the purpose of this chapter, I will limit it to four of the above texts. Due to the limited number of topics I can cover in one chapter, I have chosen to outline several chapters of Stanislavski's An Actor Prepares. These chapters support both technique and impulse. I will also point out how Meisner, Adler, and Hagen have used some of Stanislavski's ideas to build their own techniques. I chose Stanislavski's An Actor Prepares because it contains a complete technical and impulse-based foundation. Once the foundation is laid, a student can build any house whether it's Brecht's "epic theatre" or Esslin's "absurdism." Some may ask how a study in Stanislavski could work so well for such anti-Stanislavski methods. Recall that a common inspiration for leaders in theatre such as Meyerhold and Grotowski was a desire to break away from Stanislavski's methods of performance. What better way to move through the differing styles of these individuals than to be trained in the one style they opposed?

Throughout his life, Stanislavski claimed that he was not the father of acting. Instead, he humbly claimed that he had only taken what he saw other actors do successfully and write it down. Herein lies his genius. It was not Michelangelo Buonarroti that invented perspective painting during the Italian Renaissance; it had been toyed with for centuries. But it was Michelangelo who was responsible for pulling those influences together and perfecting them.

What was also brilliant about Stanislavski is the way he organized the information he obtained. The meat of his book begins in Chapter 3 with the very intellectual idea of action. "Whatever happens on the stage must be for a purpose," he writes (35). "On the

stage, you must always be enacting something; action, motion is the basis of the art followed by the actor” (36). “On the stage, it is necessary to act, either outwardly or inwardly” (37).

Stanislavski’s next chapter moves into the very impulsive imagination. “Imagination creates things that can be or can happen, where-as fantasy invents things that are not in existence,” he says (55). “Every movement you make on the stage, every word you speak, is a result of the right life of your imagination” (71).

He then moves to the topics of “Concentration of Attention” and “Relaxing the Muscles.” Finally, in Chapter 7, we reach “Units and Objectives.” He then leaves the subject for eight chapters to pick up with the “Super Objective.”

In between chapter 7 and 15, he covers topics such as “Emotional Memory,” “Adaptation,” and “Communion,” among others (163, 223). The final chapter in An Actor Prepares is Chapter 16, “On the Threshold of the Subconscious” (281). An extremely impulsive chapter dealing with the subconscious follows a very technical chapter on Super Objective.

In An Actor Prepares, Stanislavski alternates his chapters between what I consider two styles. First, are the technical chapters, which focus on the study of actions, objectives, and super objectives. Secondly, the impulse chapters, which concentrate on imagination, relaxation, emotion and memory. Even in the layout of his chapters, Stanislavski is demonstrating the importance of training an actor in both technique and impulse.

In his chapter on units and objectives, Stanislavski gives the beginnings of the intellectual process of script analysis. Though the process is very technical, it is also grounded in impulse. Stanislavski explains that units are a series of actions that are linked together to obtain an objective. For example, if I were sitting in my apartment and realized I want some water, I would need several “units of action” to reach my objective of getting a drink of water. I would have to stand, walk to the cabinet, open the cabinet,

select a glass, close the cabinet, turn on the faucet, place my glass under the water, and so on until I satisfied my objective.

However, not all objectives can be obtained. If I was to turn on the faucet and no water came out, my objective would change. I may give up, get a glass of juice, and return to my chair. Stanislavski gives nine rules for objectives:

1. They must be on our side of the footlights. They must be directed toward the other actors and not toward the spectators.
 2. They should be personal yet analogous to those of the character you are portraying.
 3. They must be creative and artistic because their function should be to fulfill the main purpose of our art: To create the life of a human soul and render it in artistic form.
 4. They should be real, live, and human, not dead, conventional, or theatrical.
 5. They should be truthful so that you yourself, the actors playing with you and the audience can believe in them.
 6. They should have the quality of attracting and moving you.
 7. They must be clear-cut and typical of the role you are playing. They must tolerate no vagueness. They must be distinctly woven into the fabric of your part.
 8. They should have value and content, to correspond to the inner body of your part. They must not be shallow, or skim along the surface.
 9. They should be active; to push your role ahead and not let it stagnate.
- (118-119)

Stanislavski also states, "The objective must always be a verb" (123). This is because verbs are actions and intellectually selecting an active verb will push the actor toward actively impulsive choices. If I intellectually choose the verb "to seduce" it gives me several impulsive ways to act the verb. Seducing my boss for a raise would be very different from seducing a woman for sex. The intellectual verb can be played on many impulsive levels.

There are other reasons why it must be a verb. "An noun calls forth an intellectual concept of a state of mind, a form, a phenomenon, but can only define what is presented by an image, without indicating motion or action" (123).

According to Stanislavski, "We admit three types of objectives: The external or physical, the inner or psychological, and the rudimentary psychological type" (119). This means that in the external, you would simply perform the act of "shaking hands." In the internal, the "hand shake" would convey some type of emotion. In the rudimentary, the "hand shake" would stem from a need to apologize or accept an offer. Even the simple act of shaking hands has to be based in the technical. Factors such as customs for shaking hands and the mechanics of the actual act must be considered. Then, the process moves to impulsive and intention: "I am shaking his hand to gain his trust."

Actions, units, and objectives are wrapped up in the world of "given circumstances" The given circumstance is the world that the playwright has set up. In Romeo and Juliet, the given circumstances are two young lovers who cannot be together because they come from two warring families. This of course, is simplified. Each section and character in a play has its own set of given circumstances. The actor's investment to given circumstances creates an endless debate among actors. Some, like Stella Adler believe:

You must not take yourself and put that into Hamlet. Hamlet is a royal prince of Denmark. Therefore, the truth of the character is not found in you, but in the circumstances of the royal position of Hamlet, the character you are playing. The action of Hamlet-to decide whether to live or die-has to be put in his circumstances, not in yours. The truth is always the truth in the circumstances of the character. (32)

A different viewpoint can be found in Sanford Meisner's Sanford Meisner on

Acting:

The first thing you have to do when you read a text is to find yourself-really find yourself. First you find yourself, and then you find a way of doing the part, which strikes you as being in character. Then, based on that reality, you have the nucleus of the role. Otherwise every schmuck from Erasmus Hall High School is an actor because everyone there knows how to read. (178)

Uta Hagen presents both sides in Respect for Acting:

Two approaches to acting that have been debated in the theatre through the centuries...One is the representational (Bernherdt), the other is presentational (Duse). The representational actor deliberately chooses to imitate or illustrate the character's behavior. The presentational actor attempts to reveal human behavior through the use of himself, through an understanding of himself, and consequently an understanding of the character he is portraying. Formalized, external acting (Representational) has a strong tendency to follow fashion. Internal acting (Presentational) rejects fashion and consequently can become as timeless as human experience itself. (11-13)

Stanislavski says, "Properly envisaged 'given circumstances' will help you to feel and create a scenic truth in which you can believe while you're on stage" (128). He goes on to say, "Consequently, in ordinary life, truth is what really exists, what a person really knows. Whereas on the stage it consists of something that is not actually in existence but which could happen"(128). He later says, "What is important is how the actor, a human being, 'would have acted'" (129).

Stanislavski also lends insight into how to create given circumstances in different styles of acting:

The approach to drama or tragedy, or to comedy and Vaudeville, differs only in the given circumstances which surround the actions of the person you are portraying. In the circumstances lie the main power and meaning of these actions. Consequently, when you are called upon to experience a tragedy, do not think about your emotions at all. Think about what you have to do. (151)

The concept of thinking, "about what you have to do" brings us back to Stella Alder. She says:

When your attention is on the words, you worry mostly about yourself. Tension prevents you from being truthful on the stage, as you must be in speech and action or else you will lose the audience. But tension is reduced when your attention is given to the actions. (11)

Here you have four separate teachers all discussing how an actor is to invest in his given circumstances. Adler disagrees with Meisner, whose thoughts are slightly different from Hagen's, whose thoughts are similar to Stanislavski's. Yet both Adler and

Stanislavski agree that putting your focus on the circumstances is a key to tension free, truthful behavior.

In a room filled with actors, the use of the words “truth” and “truthful” can open up debate, discussions, and fist fights. Some refuse to even use the word. One professor I had referred to truth as “first function.” He would mock the concept of truth as defined by Stanislavski, yet in describing “first function,” his definition sounded remarkably similar to some of Stanislavski’s definitions of truth:

What we mean by truth in the theatre is the scenic truth which an actor must make use of in his moment of creativeness... Truth on stage is whatever we can believe in with sincerity, whether in ourselves or in our colleagues... Truth cannot be separated from belief, nor belief from truth. They cannot exist without each other and without both of them it is impossible to live your part, or to create anything. (129)

Uta Hagen gives an example of tricks used by an untruthful actor: “They rely on a quality which they feel has worked with an audience, and end up playing ‘the manner of’ themselves in as tiresome a way as another actor playing the ‘quality of’ a character” (28).

Stella Adler stresses, “There is a difference between the truth of life and the truth of the theatre and you must learn not to mix them up” (7).

I believe that truth is based on commitment. Committing to the given circumstances, an image, or even committing to thinking about what you had for lunch can lead to the appearance of truth to the audience. Ultimately, the audience is the only place that it matters: if truth is perceived or not. The work of actor Jim Carey is a perfect example. The reason he can command 20 million dollars per film is because he doesn’t apologize for what he is doing. Because he commits to it, he can bend over, and make his rear end talk and audience will laugh uproariously. I believe it was Robert DiNero

who was once asked by a young actor, “In that scene you were so focused, committed, and truthful. What were you thinking?” DiNero’s response was, “I was probably thinking of the ham sandwich I had for lunch.”

The playwright gives the audience the given circumstances of the play. It is the actor’s job to breathe life into the given circumstances and words. The great film-director, Kuleshove, once experimented with editing by taking one long shot of an actor staring forward into the camera. He then cut up the long shot by splicing in different scenes such as people eating, riots, parties, etc. Kuleshove then showed his film and asked the audience to notice subtle changes in the actor’s expressions in the various scenes. Even though each shot of the actor was the same, the audience perceived the actor to be hungry, scared, or happy depending on what scene was placed around him. The audience will be looking for what the playwright leads them to look for.

Commitment to the given circumstances should support the given circumstances of the play. A disservice to most plays and playwrights is that many actors will get up on the stage and recite lines with a commitment to nothing whatsoever. When this happens, the audience is better off staying at home and reading the play. At least they would have saved time and money.

In this chapter, I have only focused on a few aspects of acting. Units and objectives and, yes, even truth and truthful emotions require technique and impulse. Technique is used to find a way to break down and analyze the whole so that you can allow impulse to take over and commit to your actions, whether physical or psychological. Sanford Meisner beautifully describes the blending of text and emotion. It’s an analogy that describes the concept of impulse and emotion too:

The text is like a canoe, and the river on which it sits is the emotion. The text floats on the river. If the water of the river is turbulent, the words will come out like a canoe on a rough river. It all depends on the flow of the river, which is your emotion. The text takes on the character of your emotion. That's what this exercise is for: How to let the river of your emotion flow untrammelled, with the words floating on top of it. (115)

CHAPTER 5

GIVEN CIRCUMSTANCES & TRUTH

Since my first teaching position with the Troubadours back in 1992, along with basic acting training such as action/ objective and Meisner technique work, I have started utilizing a series of beginning exercises that I believe will lead to a technically and impulsively skilled actor. As my experience as a teacher, director, and actor has grown, so have my exercises. Others have developed some of the earlier exercises. However, I expanded and developed many of the later exercises, myself.

In this chapter, I will give a brief history of my influences and/or ideas for the exercises that I use. In each case, I will attempt to give as much detail as I can recall to all of the origins of these exercises. Some of the exercises came directly from discoveries I have made. However, since the beginning exercises were developed over seven years ago, I have forgotten the direct origins for some of the exercises.

During the 1997-1998 school year, I taught majors in acting at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. The following exercises were some that I used. I have listed them in the order I used them as a progression for the actors to follow in their development.

The Toilet Paper Game

In the toilet paper game, the instructor takes a role of perforated toilet paper and instructs each student to take "as much as they need." The only restriction is that they must take at least four squares and there must be enough for everyone in the group.

Once everyone has their share of toilet paper, they must tell the group something about themselves for each square they have taken. When everyone has finished, the

instructor has him or her write his or her name on a square and put it in a hat. Everyone then draws a square. After everyone has a square they must then tell the class as much as they can remember about the person whose square they have drawn.

This is a very common exercise and is used in a lot of areas other than theatre. Though I have no influence in the development, I list it in this thesis and use it because I think it is a wonderful tool for building trust within a class. Truth is the cornerstone to building an atmosphere conducive to growth.

This exercise is also a way to introduce concentration and focus. The instructor can point out that the students who were paying the most attention were also the ones who remembered the most. At the end of the exercise, the instructor should point out that in order for work in theatre to grow, they must allow the freedom to take risks. That freedom involves trust. To maintain that trust nothing that takes place in class of a personal nature is to be repeated outside of class unless strict approval from both the instructor and participants is received.

The Machine Game

The instructor explains the three rules. First, you must have a physical movement. Second, you must have a vocal sound. Lastly, you must make appropriate physical contact with at least one other person.

One student begins making a movement and sound. The instructor then points to another student and they must join on to the first student also making a movement and a sound. The third student picked can join either the first or second student and so on until everyone is joined together making movements and sounds.

The instructor should explain that the exercise is about making interesting choices and the choices can be made through the use of different levels, positions of the body, and sounds. The instructor should encourage the students to refrain from straight lines or

large clumps of bodies. The students should work toward a large, moving, interesting sounding machine.

The instructor can also add a machine meltdown. When the instructor claps their hands together, the students slowly melt down with movement until everyone is still and silent.

Machine Game II

When the students have begun making interesting choices in their movements and sound and are also comfortable with each other, you can move into the second part of the machine game.

The instructor begins by dividing the students into two or more groups. The groups should be no less than six to a group. The instructor explains that machines have to make a product. We must see the product in raw materials going in and the finished product coming out of the machine. This must be done using movement and sound.

If the instructor is working with two groups, go to group A and ask them for a product. Let's say group A chooses a blender. Then go to group B and ask them for a product. Let's say group B chooses a chair. You then have group A build group B's chair and group B builds group A's blender.

The instructor then informs both groups they have five minutes. When the machines are demonstrated, the instructor should look for and encourage interesting choices. Interesting choices may include large physical movements, wild vocal sounds, varied group movements, or even precise combined group movements. The instructor can repeat the exercise but each time decrease the amount of time they have to develop their choices. Go from five minutes to three minutes, to two minutes, and so on.

Machine Game III

Once you have the groups down to approximately one-minute, combine everyone and tell him or her they have one minute to become something as a group. I like to start out by pointing in front of me and saying, "Here is the front. You have one minute to become a motorcycle." Then, "Now you have 45 seconds to become a tank." I keep changing the items and decreasing the time until I reach five seconds.

All of these machine games are commonly used in improvisation troupes and improvisation classes around the world. Viola Spolin developed games such as these as well as many others for her "theatre of games" technique which led to such improvisational companies such as Chicago's Second City. If you'd like more information about Spolin as well as other games she uses, try her book, Theatre Games for the Classroom: A Teacher's Handbook.

I do not remember where I learned the Machine Game exercises; but I have used them for a long time. The power in these exercises is first, that once people touch each other, they automatically begin to become comfortable with each other. This happens faster than if they just sat around and talked. There is power in touch that also brings out trust.

On an acting technique level, the students begin to make choices. Choices on how to move, what sounds to make, where to touch someone, and who to touch. Then, by decreasing the time limit, students have to let impulse take over. With only three seconds, you cannot over-analyze what part of a computer you're going to become. You just lie on the floor and become the mouse and the person next to you drops to the floor to become the cord.

Through these three simple exercises, the instructor has moved the students through technique to impulse. At the end, the instructor breaks down the more interesting and less interesting choices they have made, bringing the class back to the very technical process of analyzation.

Fractured Fairy Tales

The instructor breaks the class down into no more than four groups. The instructor then assigns each group a portion of a fairy tale. For example, let's assume that there are three groups and each group has been assigned a section of "Goldilocks and the Three Bears." Group one is assigned the section where foolish Goldilocks enters the cabin and eats the bowl of porridge. Group two is assigned the three chairs section. Group three is assigned the scene with the three beds.

The instructor then informs the group that each member has to be something in the story. Since Goldilocks is the only living person in the story, everyone else has to become set and props. For an advanced group, the instructor requires everyone to become two things. Even though the students are set and props, the instructor should encourage them to make interesting choices about what they become. The instructor should also encourage them to make use of sound effects, whether real or fanciful. I have had students be talking rugs, chairs and doors. Each time I do this exercise, someone surprises me with how imaginative they can be.

The purpose of the exercise is to move the students from improvisation exercise to the introduction of context. By using a well-known fairy tale, the students can begin exploring minor conflict. They will also begin to make simple choices of character such as who or what am I? What is my purpose? What does my character do or represent? The use of the simple fairy tale allows the student to do this without the pressure they would have by exploring an actual monologue or scene.

The students usually view it as a game, which I believe, is a good way to introduce a lot of acting techniques. Games are also a good way for students to learn impulse without knowing it until the instructor points it out. Through games like Fractured Fairy-tales, an instructor can trick students into learning.

This is an exercise that I learned when I was with the Missoula Children's Theatre. My changes to the exercise are the use of sound effects and the doubling up of parts for advanced groups.

Duck Duck Goose, Mother May I, Red Light-Green Light

The instructor should begin by playing the childhood game, Duck Duck Goose. In it, everyone sits in a circle with one person walking around the edge of the circle tapping everyone on the head saying, "duck." At some point, the outside person taps someone on the head and says, "goose." The person called the goose then has to try and catch the tapper before he gets back to the goose's former seat. If the goose catches the tapper, the tapper remains the tapper. If the tapper makes it to the goose's seat, then the goose becomes the new tapper.

After a few rounds, the instructor should begin to add new rules like everyone must move in slow motion or the chase should begin on hands and knees or running backward.

In Red Light-Green Light, the instructor appoints one person to serve as the traffic light. This person turns their back and says "green light." Everyone else tries to reach the traffic light before he turns around and says "red light." When the traffic light turns around, everyone must freeze. Anyone the traffic light catches moving must move back to the beginning. The game is over when someone touches the traffic light. That person becomes the new traffic light.

After the first round, the instructor should have the students react when they are caught. Reactions may be to violently complain, to laugh, to cry, to insult, etc.

With Mother May I, someone is picked to be the mother or father. The rest of the students stand 15 or more feet away. In this game, the students must ask the mother or father for permission to move. "Mother, may I take three steps? Mother, may I do a somersault?" If the mother or father agrees, the student may then move. The game is

finished when someone tags the mother or father. For this exercise, the instructor should encourage the students to try different tactics on the mother or father such as to plead, to tease, to seduce, or to threaten. The student who uses the best tactics is the winner.

The purpose of these games is to introduce the simple concept of action and objective. In Duck Duck Goose, the objective for the tapper is to get the goose's seat before being tagged. For the goose, the objective is to tag the tapper. The actions will change depending on what instructions the instructor gives. For example, to chase, to crawl or to dive.

In Red Light-Green Light, the objective is to reach the stoplight. This can be achieved through actions such as to sneak, to crawl, to run, to hide, to dive, etc. As you can see, there become more action for objectives as the games change.

In Mother May I, the objective is to tag the mother or father. The actions can be even more sophisticated. Some of them I stated earlier as to plead, to seduce, etc. Since the students are dealing with the reactions of the mother or father, the instructor can point out that the students who are committed to their actions are the ones who move the farthest.

This series of exercises is a wonderful way to introduce a very technical process of action and objective. This concept can be very confusing for a student who, up until the beginning of their training, relied on instinct and, most of the time, limited instinct at that. By progressing through these seemingly simple games, the students are able to use the instincts they have and those instincts can demonstrate the concepts of larger and more complex actions and objectives.

The origins of these exercises came from my desire to give the students a fun day. A day to do nothing but play. I began to notice that when I played these games around the time I was teaching action/objective, some of the students were able to have a breakthrough in verb work. From this discovery, I made it part of my Stanislavski action/objective section of teaching.

Monologues & Music

The instructor begins by requiring the students to bring in one or two songs they have an emotional connection to. The instructor also brings in several selections. CD's that are movie soundtracks, or contain selections by a variety of artists work well because they contain such a variety in the type of music.

Second, the instructor has the students' lie on their flat backs on the floor. The instructor explains to them that they will be listening to all types of music and asks the students to be open to what the music makes them feel. After playing portions of various songs, students talk about their experiences. If they hate the songs, they don't need to try to like it but, rather, experience the hate. See if they connect with the lyrics or melodies. What music surprised them? Which songs did they thought they wouldn't like? Which did they like best?

Next, the instructor has them perform a monologue that they have used for a long time. Then, the instructor asks them to repeat the monologue but this time with music in the background. The instructor should play a song that fits the textual idea of the monologue, a song that goes against the text, songs of different speeds, a song that the student brought in, and song they noticed the student connecting to on the floor.

Now the instructor should ask the student about the experience. Questions such as, How did different songs affect your monologue? Were you able to let the music affect you? Were you locked into one way of performing the monologue? Did any of the music bring out strong emotion and if so, how? Purely from the music, did it remind you of a past event, stir their imagination? If a student was able to connect with emotion through to the music, are they able to repeat the experience first with the music and secondly by simply remembering how the music made them feel?

This exercise came from my work on memorization of a monologue while listening to the radio. I suddenly realized that the song that was playing affected the way

I memorized my monologue. A fast song caused me to speak faster and more intently and a slower song created a more mellow or somber feel to my piece. My interest in this exercise led me to discover that others also use music to open up sides of the performer, be it emotion, movement, or sound.

The exercise can demonstrate how music can free an individual of the responsibility of emotion. If you focus on the music it will cause students to feel something. By experimenting with different kinds of music, the performer may find new avenues to approach old material. They may also find a key to unlocking emotion in themselves.

The 5-Minute Acting Lesson

The instructor has the student recite the poem, “Jack and Jill.” Then has the student create a life around the text by asking a series of questions: Who is Jack? How do you feel about Jack? Who is Jill? How do you feel about Jill?

For the purpose of demonstration, we suggest that Jill is someone you love. Jack is your worst enemy. The story line is that Jill has left you for Jack. They went up the hill not for water but for sex or to make-out. The instructor can adjust their level of intensity to suit the audience and their age and/or beliefs. The story is detailed. Jack fell down and broke his crown, (injured himself,) and Jill came tumbling after, (she was hurt too.)

Now that the instructor has outlined and personalized the story, they can ask more specific questions: Whom are you talking to? What do you want from them? I believe that these two questions drive acting because they also drive life. Nothing in life is done without a reason and the person or people you are with shape how you express your wants.

As the instructor, I like to begin by telling the student to picture or imagine me as their best friend. I have them tell me the story of how Jack and Jill embarrassed

themselves by falling down the hill half-naked. Encourage the student to picture the location of the picnic in detail, to see the hill and how the people reacted to Jack and Jill. I encourage them to talk to me and to create the images for me. They should not act it out. Rather, they should keep it simple remembering to pause, breath, and break up the rhythm of the poem, but do not change the text.

Next, the instructor should change the person who the student is talking to. For example, make it a police officer who has threatened to take the student to jail if they cannot prove they didn't push Jack and Jill down the hill. Imagine they are speaking to Jill's Mom who never liked the student and even encouraged Jill to leave him for Jack. Or it could be Jill's father who always liked the student and thought Jill was a fool to leave him for Jack.

Once again, the instructor should ask the student how who they are talking to affects the way the poem is expressed without changing any of the details of the original story.

This exercise is a variation of an exercise I was introduced to during my Meisner training. That exercise used excerpts from the Spoon River Anthology, posing the similar questions. The main difference between the two is the use of simple fairy tales and the strong emphasis on who the actor is talking to. If the exercise is kept simple, the instructor can use it to demonstrate how to play an action, have an objective, and the important fact that who you are talking to can and should inform the text.

Further Applications

I have given numerous examples of how technique and impulse can be blended to further an actor's performance. How can these examples can be utilized in actor *training*? In most universities, students perform a monologue for the faculty in a sort of audition for placement. They are divided into classes based on the success of their auditions. Those students who seem to possess the best skills are placed in a class together and those

considered weaker by the faculty are placed in a separate class. At some universities, the professors only work with the groups that they feel are acceptable and leave the others to be relegated to graduate students for study. This system is extremely unfair and unnecessary. Under this system, there is an entire group of students silently labeled second-class without the benefit of training. Because the faculty never works with these students, they are unaware of the student's growth and neglect to take progress into consideration when placing students in the next level of acting classes. Lastly, due to the close teacher/student relationships formed in acting classes, those taught by the faculty have a tremendous edge when considered for further training. Many times, students in the faculty taught classes are passed on further even if their growth is not as strong as a student from a graduate taught section.

Generally, students perceived as exceptional have a strong sense of impulse in their performance. The technically strong students are usually labeled as the weaker group. It is strange to me that all of the students are taught the same curriculum regardless of their inherent skills. Usually, the curriculum only highlights the skills of already gifted students. However, that does not foster full growth. The growth seen in these students is the result of the on-stage performance experience they receive. Technical students are left to struggle and learn techniques that are either not clearly taught to them or do not address their particular weaknesses.

What is the point of attending a university if a student is not being educated? Most theatre programs excuse the lack of equality in teaching by saying that theatre is subjective and if the student is not getting the education that he or she needs, they should go elsewhere. In some cases, this is true, but many theatre programs use this as a way to cover up the problems within their curriculum.

In a strong program based on technique and impulse, the students would still audition for placement into classes. But they would then be placed into classes based on their individual needs. For example, technical actors would begin their training with

strong emphasis in improvisation, movement, and imagination work. This would begin to expose them to the basics of impulse work. Students who already have a strong grasp on impulse would begin studying the more intellectual side of verb work, units, and given circumstances. This would enable them to recognize their impulses are and how to control them. The goal is to mold both groups into balanced actors, proficient in both impulse and technique. Once the balance is reached, actors could be combined to move on to stylized training. The more a student is exposed to the greater the chance that they will discover an approach that will open them up to a whole new world of artistic expression. The faculty and graduate students would rotate within each group, exposing the students to several approaches.

Ultimately, responsibility for growth in acting rests with the actor. Actors must be willing to share everything about themselves with an audience. They must also seek out their individual needs in training. This requires an incredible amount of honesty with one's self. An actor must be able to admit his or her weaknesses and recognize strengths. If an actor can not do this with themselves, how can they do this before an audience?

My theories stem from fourteen years of training, which exposed me to hundreds of techniques and exercises. Through them, I have discovered that the wider the variety in student training, and this includes both technique and impulse, the greater the chance that students will develop to experience a whole new world of artistic freedom.

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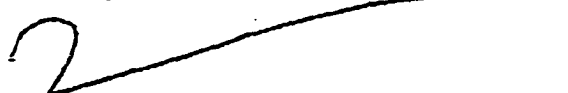
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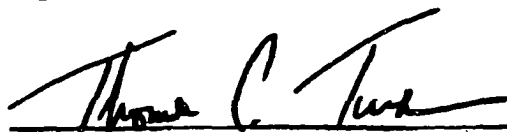
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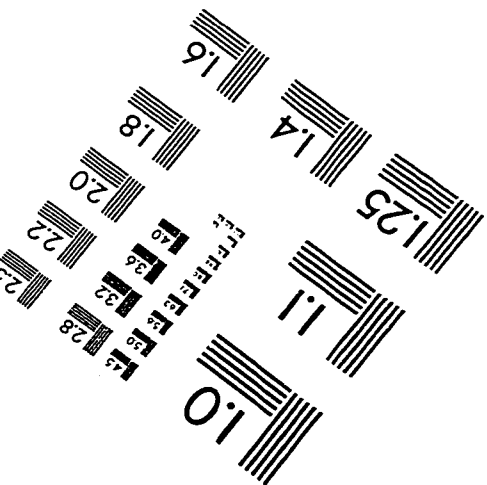
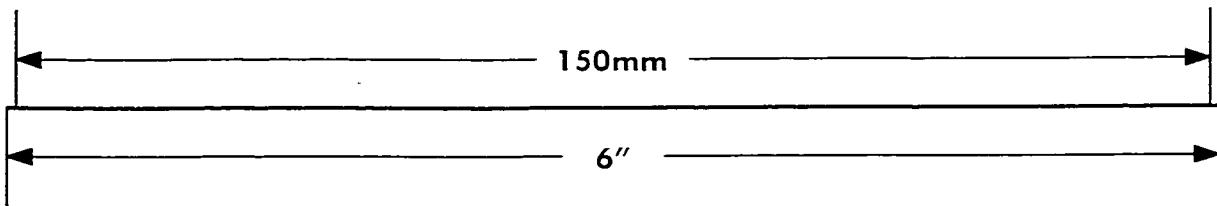
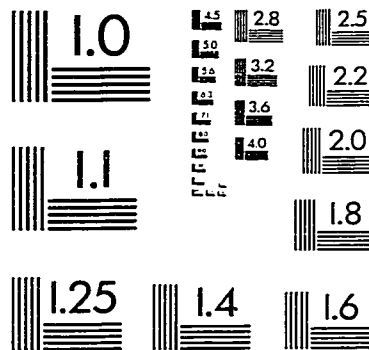
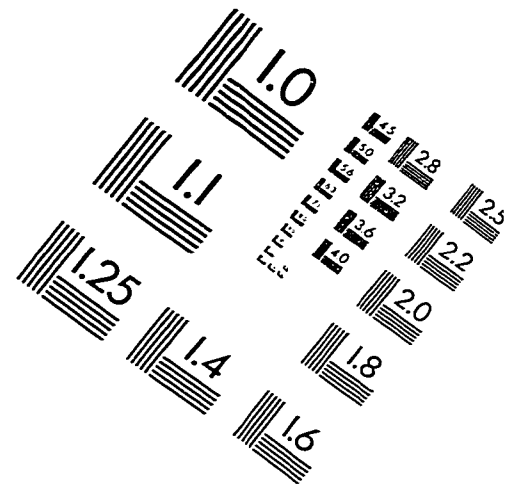
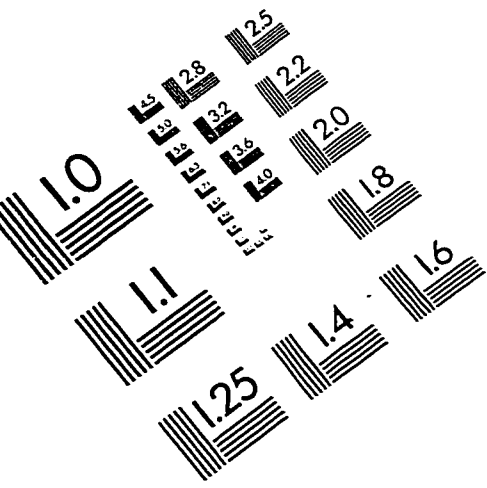
Meritorious Achievement Award for Fight Choreography. The Kennedy
Center/American College Theater Festival XXXII.

Thesis Title: Technique and Impulse: A Practical Approach.

Thesis Examination Committee:

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Graduate Faculty Representative, Dr. Evelyn Gajowski, Ph.D.

IMAGE EVALUATION TEST TARGET (QA-3)



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