

1983

The Principles of Acting According to Stella Adler

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THE PRINCIPLES OF ACTING ACCORDING TO STELLA ADLER

by

JOANNA ROTTE

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in
Theatre in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City
University of New York.

1983

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PREFACE

"You must travel ten-thousand miles to find the person who can give you a technique that makes you secure."

Since 1949, when the Stella Adler Theatre Studio opened in New York City, new students have come each fall to test their histrionic talent and commitment to the way of life of an actor. Their teacher, Stella Adler, introduces them to the historical fact that they have selected a profession steeped in myriad methods of education. In her approach to actor-training, she might recall the initiation rites common in the early days of this century, when she earned her own passage onto the stage:

In those days they called it the business of acting. They never called it an art. Persons who wanted to act walked around and went to matinees, and from that they went and knocked on the back-doors of stock companies, asking, "Is there any room for me?"

The young actors hung around and listened. They carried a spear, a sword, and they played a monk, a young man, an old man, a little comedy. They learned a scale, a range. They watched other actors at work.

But these approaches are no longer available, and this kind of "hit-or-miss" method is inadequate to meet today's theatrical demands.

¹All of Stella Adler's theory and direct quotations contained in this "Preface" derives from notes and tapes of Studio classes in Technique I taught by her in 1966, and from Stella Adler, "The Art of Acting (The Actor's Needs)," The Theatre II (April 1960):16-17.

To replace adequately the old way of learning in the field, Stella Adler suggests studying a technique of acting in a studio before entering the theatrical market-place.

As Stella Adler has conceived it, the studio is the place in which the student commences to become a person equal to the times in which he lives, and an actor equal to the demands of the theatre of his time. He is given the opportunity to cultivate the habit of looking at himself, not as a person scooped along by the manners of conventional life, but as one who actively wants and pursues a creative life. It is the place in which he is allowed, even encouraged, to fail, so that he need not be pressured, nor his work crippled, by a requirement to succeed. It is the place in which he receives the guidance and support of a teacher who cares less for the result of his work than for the effort put into it, and who cares about him. It is the place to become secure in a technique that will give him the craftsmanship to solve any artistic problem that might confront him in his profession. The studio training is, in Stella Adler's opinion, the preparation most likely to insure his artistic survival.

The technique that Stella Adler teaches is based upon her own life-experiences and observations, her work as an actress and director, the influences of her parents, and the teachings of Konstantin Stanislavsky, which in this

country have come to be known as The Method or the Stanislavsky System. She may begin revealing the System to her students by outlining what it is; whence it came; how it might properly be used, and how it has been misused.

Such a summary from Stella Adler would explain that the teachings of Stanislavsky derived from his need to enable himself and the actors under his direction to become articulate, independent artists, capable of producing, without merely reproducing, an inspired performance night after night. Systematically culled from his research into the personal approaches to acting by fine actors, both dead and living, and from his study of various foreign acting styles that have served the dramaturgy of several nations, a description of a technique of acting was finally realized.

Because he recognized the danger of someone's expropriating without first experiencing any aspect of an artistic theory, Stanislavsky hesitated to write down the principles he had discovered. However reluctantly he did so, it was with an insistence that the application of the principles necessarily remain fluid.

Any misunderstanding of the System, confusion over its interpretation, or even hostility toward it, as has existed in this country, is traced by Stella Adler to the same pitfalls inherent in "religiously co-opting religion." That is, the proponents of one segment might be willing to

kill -- "You are not a Christian. Bang! Dead!" -- in order to purge the land of those who neither believe nor practice in the same way.

In Stella Adler's view, the System is not a fixed set of rules nor a codified way of performing. It is not something invented by a man and therefore culturally, even philosophically, limited. It is rather a man's understanding of the principles or logic of Nature applied to an art form, and therefore unlimited and available to the senses, minds, and hearts of everyone, as is all of Nature. It is infinitely flexible, applicable, and capable of embracing all actors and all their acting tasks.

Just as it is harmful to apply rigidly the principles of the System, so is it foolish to apply them carelessly. The result, which Stella Adler says she has witnessed in our theatres, can be the emergence of "the mumbling, stumbling young actor without vocal, physical, or emotional discipline." She explains that Stanislavsky insisted upon a respect for the training of the actor along traditional histrionic lines, including voice production, impeccable speech, and physical agility. He knew the actor's instruments must be made and kept clean, clear, and facile in depth through practice. Nevertheless, in Stella Adler's opinion, the instrumental aspect of the actor -- his vocal, physical, imaginative, and mental tuning -- has tended to be neglected by most Method education in this country. One

of her tutorial aims has thus been to prevent a misuse of the System by initially stressing a careful practice of the rudimentary techniques supporting its principles.

Stella Adler's ultimate instructional aim is for the young actor to become independent of the System. If he has understood its principles, he may well recognize that all his creative powers lie within himself. Even while the student is mastering the techniques, or at least acquiring good working habits, Stella Adler behaves as a guide to his independence, releasing him from the System, from herself, and from his need to rely upon anyone else. She urges him to develop the strength to re-formulate the techniques for himself and go on his way. Withal, she tries to fulfill her own image of a teacher's role, which is "not to teach, but to lessen the anguish."

What, then, are the techniques of acting taught by Stella Adler in her studio, which convey, in turn, her own representation of principles of acting fostered by the Stanislavsky System? Through a step-by-step presentation of these techniques, including some illustration of them in operation, Stella Adler's version of the art and craft of acting may be cumulatively revealed in theory and somewhat in practice.

It needs to be noted that in the course of Stella Adler's teaching, the revelation of her principles of acting, and of the techniques to fulfill them, emerges from

.

her critical guidance of the classroom experience. The principles selected for this dissertation are not necessarily presented in the same sequence, or even logically, by Stella Adler. Nor does she delineate each and its appendant techniques in isolation, one from the other, as does the following text; her teaching is mixed, interconnected, and interdependent. The text of this dissertation is derived from over five thousand pages of previously unedited papers and transcriptions of tapes covering fifteen years of her classes. That material has demanded systematization and the imposition of a developmental form for the sake of comprehension.

This dissertation is the writer's structural analysis and interpretation of Stella Adler's teachings. Its terminology is primarily that of the writer. Stella Adler is an inspirational presence, both demonstrative and passionate in her teaching; she is not a lecturer. The writer has attempted to project Stella Adler's spirit through the language.

The Introduction to this dissertation recounts the influences upon Stella Adler that enabled her to arrive at her own interpretation of the Stanislavsky System as well as to formulate principles of acting and apply techniques that illustrate them. In the Conclusion, the principles are reviewed, and the value of her teachings is discussed.

The dissertation does not include the subject matter of Stella Adler's courses in Play Analysis I and II.

Those, the interpretation of modern European and American plays respectively, apply the techniques while concentrating on a comprehensive approach to reading and analyzing plays. The Appendix to this dissertation does present excerpts from classes in Technique III (Script Breakdown). These serve to: 1) provide an introduction to Stella Adler's method of line-by-line scene study from the actor's point of view; 2) demonstrate an application of the techniques to a text; and 3) offer insight into her ability to impel the actor toward the "creative state."

The primary purpose of this dissertation is to describe Stella Adler's teachings on acting technique, and a philosophy for the actor-artist, since only fragments of her ideas currently exist in writing.

The dissertation does not intend to compare or contrast her teachings or method of teaching with that of any other teacher of acting, as that has been the subject of another dissertation.² It also does not propose to locate the source of every technique. Stella Adler's meetings with Stanislavsky took place nearly fifty years ago. Although his influence can be deeply felt, his concepts have been absorbed by her and imaginatively re-worked to the point where she herself could not say precisely what is his and what is hers. Nevertheless, the text, at appropriate

²See James Monos, "The Use of Stanislavsky Principles and Techniques in Professional Actor Training in New York City," (Ph.D. dissertation, City Univ. of New York, 1981).

times, and the Conclusion more frequently, do credit Stanislavsky and others. For a thorough recognition of how Stella Adler has creatively applied Stanislavsky's theories on acting, the reader might familiarize himself with Stanislavsky's books.

Finally, the dissertation does not attempt to evaluate Stella Adler's effect upon professional acting. As she has not published, nor have her techniques been published, and since she has authorized no other teaching in her name, her actor-training has not been available except through direct contact with her.³ One might, however, take into account her work with the Group Theatre and hence her effect upon the teachings and students of Harold Clurman, Robert Lewis, Sanford Meisner, Lee Strasberg, and all the other teachers and actors taught by them. Certainly, the work of her own graduates, including Warren Beatty, the late Larry Blyden, Marlon Brando, James Coburn, Robert DeNiro, Nina Foch, Jayne Meadows, Pamela Tiffin, Louis Stadlin, Elaine Stritch, Peter Bogdanovich, and Jerome Robbins, has demonstrated a thoroughness worth emulating and techniques warranting incorporation into the craft of any actor or director.

As can be seen by the content of the numerous

³Besides teaching at her studio, where New York Univ. students attend classes for college credit, and besides teaching Play Analysis outside her studio to New York theatre professionals, Stella Adler has taught at The New School for Social Research, at Yale University, and summer sessions in Los Angeles.

letters from graduates accumulating in her studio files, perhaps the most tangible result, up to now, of her teaching has been her students' continued personal development. Whether or not the graduate pursues an acting or theatre-related career, he carries with him from her studio a profound appreciation for the work of any artist, and the tools with which to build his own creative life. Accordingly, this writer, with thanks to the late Harold Clurman, who introduced her to Stella Adler, wishes to acknowledge the propitious changes in her own perception, thought, and life-style initiated by her study with Stella Adler. She also wishes to express sincere appreciation to committee members Provost Stanley A. Warren and Professor Benito Ortolani for their critical advice, and to committee chairman Professor Glenn M. Loney for his unerring guidance and humor throughout the writing of this dissertation.

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INTRODUCTION

THE DEVELOPMENT OF STELLA ADLER

"My family has always believed in the majesty of acting."

Stella Adler, born in 1902 the youngest daughter of Jacob P. Adler (1855-1926) and Sarah Lewis Adler (1858-1953), has achieved eminence within the Adler clan -- that family of theatre professionals who delivered more actors to the American stage than any other. In accordance with her father's patriarchal custom that whenever each of his several children born in or out of wedlock could walk or talk he or she entered theatrical life, Stella Adler's career commenced at the age of two. She was carried on stage by her father to serve as a compelling appeal for his theatre's economic support. Since the audience response was to throw money all over the stage, it may be suggested that Stella Adler's role in sustaining the American theatre was given her in infancy.¹

The Adlers, in the eyes of Stella Adler's second husband, stage-director and critic Harold Clurman (1901-1980), were as a litter of cats, an inseparable race unto themselves. "They all loved the theatre passionately, down

¹Personal interview with Lulla Rosenfeld, New York, New York, 10 June 1975.

to its minutest details, and were 'idealistic' about it withal. They would talk all through the night, reminiscing, telling tall tales, and, above all, laughing."² The idealism was based on a propensity for good acting in good plays. They knew the classics, particularly Shakespeare, as well as contemporary European drama. They believed an actor must make of himself an articulate, large-spirited human being, as well as a creative craftsman responsible to a sense of truth. The inspiration for these ideals and the focal point of their lives was their father, who asserted, according to Stella Adler, that art is better than anything else.

Jacob Adler, a matinee and evening idol in the theatre concentrated on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, devoted his professional efforts in the 1900's through the early 1920's to revolutionizing Yiddish productions. Condemning the common taste for silly buffoonery and lurid melodrama, as theatre-manager, stage-director, and leading actor, he sought to replace banality and convention with scripts and acting that bore some resemblance to human nature.

Adler's own idealism began in his youth in Odessa, Russia, where he first insisted that the actor ought to know everything in order to interpret humanity. After dubious beginnings with a company of Yiddish players, he gained

²Harold Clurman, All People Are Famous (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1974), p.110.

public acknowledgment, due to his captivatingly good looks, and achieved managerial status, due to hard work. He then scored unprecedented success in Jewish America, due first to connecting with the original Yiddish playwrighting of Jacob Gordin and subsequently to his own magnetic acting and directorial aptitude. Yet, from beginning to end, Jacob Adler relentlessly decried his own lack of education, and hence unworthiness for the profession and art of acting.³

His work was in conflict. Though wanting in performance and production "to be natural, to be real, to express the actual life of the people with serious intent,"⁴ Jacob Adler's personal nature -- passionate, mesmeric, and theatrical -- made his playing more romantic and his staging more doctrinaire than natural or real. His acting style, though sometimes criticized as stagey because of its artifice and recitative tendencies, was not so much bombastic as classical, in the manner of French acting. Though the public held him most remarkable when displaying "heroic power," his family judged his talent to be at its height in moments of simple truth.⁵

His life was also paradoxical. By means of the same enormous tenderness with which he aroused his family to place

³Hutchins Hapgood, The Spirit of the Ghetto (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap of Harvard University, 1967), pp.156-176.

⁴Ibid., p.156.

⁵Interview with Rosenfeld.

artistic ideals before popularity, he seduced his audiences into heralding him as the undisputed monarch of the Yiddish stage. Though more than fifty thousand people followed the funeral procession of this man who looked like an emperor, Jacob Adler confessed to the day he died that if he had been educated, he might have been a good actor and well-liked.⁶

Sarah Adler, more so than her amply gifted but profligate husband, exemplified the uncompromising true-to-nature actor. Also born in Odessa, where she studied at the Conservatory, Sarah Adler was reputed to possess a voice of beauty and feelings profound. Within the Adler clan, she was considered a genius of the school of romantic realism, based upon an in-depth portrayal of emotions, supported by confidence and technique.⁷ Her evocative yet simple variety of realism -- "meticulous, subdued, though still intense, never failing to convey a largeness of feeling"⁸ -- caused audiences to comment respectfully that she acted as people do in real life. They did not, however, shower her with the adulation enjoyed by Jacob Adler.

Remembered by her family as having the endurance of a Russian peasant, Sarah Adler was a woman of hearty constitution, energy, will, and sense. When Jacob Adler once left her to take a servant as his mistress, she formed her

⁶Clurman, Famous, pp.110-111.

⁷Interview with Rosenfeld.

⁸Clurman, Famous, p.112.

own company, chose and directed the plays, designed and sewed her own costumes, polished and arranged the fruit sold during intermissions, and acted the main female parts.⁹

Fed by these two powerful personalities, Stella Adler, in pursuing her own life and work, has not denied herself the nourishment of her roots. That she has absorbed an intermingling of her parents' resources can be seen in Clurman's description:

Stella is an extraordinary human being. She spreads the air of real theatrical glamour. I sometimes feel that the glamour part has obscured to many people the degree of knowledge and work that goes with it. The actress in her is so colorful, people don't realize the real substance and idealism that lies behind it,¹⁰ all. She has grandeur in a society that lacks it.

Having inherited her father's noble mien (she was considered the beauty of the family), and having been influenced by her mother's spirit (she was said to be the most deeply feeling of all the Adler children), Stella Adler's career-direction was determinedly stage-bound.¹¹

She did not of course instantly spring into full theatrical bloom, as if from the mind of Dionysius. Remembering her beginnings as a Yiddish actress, she has said that she worked with her parents' influences:

I was exposed enormously to acting and to the craft and art of acting by my father; also, by my mother, who was the greatest actress I have ever seen. Since

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰John Gruen, "Stella at Yale," New York/World Journal Tribune, 8 Jan. 1967, sec. The Lively Arts, p.15.

¹¹Interview with Rosenfeld.

their styles were so varied -- as somebody said, "All the styles came from them!" -- and since they played in so many kinds of plays, they influenced me most.

She also worked with her own observations: "I started taking notes very early in life on people who impressed me."¹² She has pictured her young self as a girl socially ill at ease and emotionally undisciplined. Her first husband, Horace Eliascheff, an aristocratic Englishman of Russian lineage, whom she married in her early twenties, has concurred:

She was a retiring, hyper-sensitive girl. Wall-flowerish, shy, closed inside her shell. And beautiful, very beautiful. . . . Performing on the London stage with her parents, . . . she was in the first stages of her development -- a young girl full of energy and curiosity -- still unformed. Too sensitive to know how to channel her sensitivity.¹³

Aware of the need to discipline her talent, Stella Adler, looking for what she has called a "more grabbable technique," joined, in 1924, the American Laboratory Theatre, a Moscow Art Studio Theatre off-shoot. It was a significant step. As well as being her introduction to the early principles of Stanislavsky, it marked her as unique in the Adler group of actors, who had learned their craft entirely from experience on stage. With the exception of her father, the family made fun of Stella Adler for going to acting school. She had already been on the stage for years -- with her parents, in vaudeville, in London with Holbrook Blinn, and on

¹²Personal interview with Stella Adler, New York, New York, 23 May 1974.

¹³Gruen, "Stella at Yale," p.15.

Broadway -- but, according to Harold Clurman, she joined the Laboratory, as both a member of the company and a student, to make fresh inquiries.

Most memorable to Stella Adler about the Laboratory was the answer given by Richard Boleslavsky, its founding director, to the accusation that his method was Russian. He said, "It may be Russian, but I have never met a drunk anywhere that was not a drunk whether he was in America or Russia. He was drunk the same way."¹⁴ Boleslavsky's comprehensive point of view was for Stella Adler the revelation of a universal humanity within every human being.

The Laboratory experience was for her the "big opening up" through technique, by means of which she was eventually able to apprehend Stanislavsky's advanced theories and thus work on a role in its totality. She has said that, with her temperament, she would not have survived in the world of theatre without the re-inforcement of 1), the technique from Stanislavsky:

From the Lab's point of view, I had come with the complete instrument, but did not know how to control it;

and 2), a fortitude from her mother:

She was not a strong woman in the conventional sense, but she was a brave woman. She did not so much say anything -- she never "talked" -- but her behavior influenced me. Whatever courage made me go on in a very hectic, desperate career -- some of it very good and some of it very bad -- came from this sort of optimism and courage I got from her.¹⁵

¹⁴Interview with Adler.

¹⁵Ibid.

After the Laboratory training, for the season of 1926-27, Stella Adler was engaged by the Irving Place Theatre. Under the direction of Max Wilner (step-son to actor-manager David Kessler, colleague of Jacob Adler), the Irving Place company strove to heighten the artistic value of Yiddish theatre. During 1929 and 1930, she played on tour and in New York with Maurice Schwartz's Yiddish Art Theatre, the vanguard of the Yiddish art movement. Schwartz's professed purpose, a further advancement of Jacob Adler's preliminary endeavors, was to produce plays of literary merit, using an ensemble system of acting.¹⁶ Several members of the company, which from time to time included Rudolf Schildkraut, Ludwig Satz, Jacob Ben-Ami, Paul Muni, and Celia Adler (elder step-sister to Stella Adler), though grounded in the old Yiddish theatre, had variously been exposed to the innovative staging and ensemble approaches of such directors as Jacques Copeau, Max Reinhardt, Harley Granville Barker, and, most significantly, those of the Moscow Art Theatre. On the whole, the members, excepting Schwartz, were wont to break with the grandiloquent tradition of declamatory acting and the star-system.¹⁷ In

¹⁶Judd L. Teller, Stangers and Natives (New York: Delacorte, 1968), p.22. He says of Schwartz: "He would assure his actors that he believed in the ensemble system. He would engage experienced European directors and give them similar assurances. However, once rehearsals began, he pre-empted everything, and ended up starring in most of the plays and directing them himself."

¹⁷David S. Lifson, The Yiddish Theatre in America (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1965), pp.284-289.

Stella Adler's recollection, the Yiddish Art Theatre was a "theatre of love," and her two years with it were the most enjoyable of all her years on stage. Of all Stella Adler's performances, most fond in the memory of her niece, Lulla Rosenfeld, were those at the Yiddish Art Theatre where she played Nerissa with Frances Adler's Portia (The Merchant of Venice) "as if they were two flowers laughing," and appeared in Sholem Aleichem's dramatization of Wandering Stars "as if she were a kind of Lillian Gish perfume."¹⁸

The next year, 1931, under the leadership of Harold Clurman, the Group Theatre, with Stella Adler¹⁹ and Franchot Tone prominent among its members, was founded. Up to that time, Harold Clurman's theatre background had included classes with Copeau in Paris, membership in the American Laboratory and the Theatre Guild, as well as a steeping in Yiddish theatre and the changes toward artistic realism brought by the Yiddish art movement. In his biography, All People Are Famous, Clurman has, in fact, traced his fascination with the art form to the impact upon him of Jacob Adler's acting:

When I was six my father took me to see Jacob Adler, the greatest Yiddish-speaking actor of the day, in a translation from German called Uriel Acosta, and a while later to see Adler play Shylock. . . .

¹⁸Interview with Rosenfeld.

¹⁹By 1931, Harold Clurman was well acquainted with Stella Adler. In Gruen, "Stella at Yale," p.15, he is quoted as having said: "I first beheld her on the New York stage. It was in Goat Song by Werfel. I looked at Stella up there and knew that that was a woman I could fall in love with. I soon began courting her." The year was 1929.

That visit to Uriel Acosta had "taken," and I never ceased imploring, insisting, crying out to be taken again and again to the theatre.²⁰

According to Clurman, the Group's functional premise was to combine a study of theatre craft with a creative content which that craft was to express. Its membership's mutual interest in the life of their times was to serve as a catalyst leading them to the discovery of those methods that would most truly convey that life through the theatre.²¹ Hence, they were socially, topically, and politically oriented, dedicated to craftsmanship, and oftentimes poor.

The Group was supplied with some solidly professional actors, many of whom were acquainted with the rudiments of Stanislavsky's system. After each season of performance in the early 1930's, all spent their summers together experimenting with aspects of the techniques and emotion exercise, mainly under the supervision of Lee Strasberg, co-director with Clurman. All studied voice and movement. In short, they did their homework and grew -- to a point. It was not until 1934, when Stella Adler delivered to them the results of five weeks of private classes with Stanislavsky at his flat in Paris, that the Group actors really began to fathom the breadth, width, and depth of humanity in the Stanislavsky System that had previously been missing in its

²⁰ Clurman, Famous, pp.5, 7.

²¹ Harold Clurman, The Fervent Years, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945), p.31.

American application.

Stella Adler's meeting with Stanislavsky was fortuitous for the future of American acting, as well as professionally and personally gratifying to her as an actress and an Adler. All together, according to Harold Clurman, who introduced them, it was an encounter:

He [Stanislavsky] was regally handsome, with beautiful white hair and must have had a decided appeal for Stella: her father had also been majestically tall, with snow white hair. But Stanislavski, despite his imposing figure held erect in perfect relaxation, was somehow reticent, whereas Jacob Adler had never been at all shy with women. . . .

When he looked up and saw Stella with me, he rose to his great height -- he must have been six foot four -- and addressed himself first to her, saying that he²² had heard that her father had been a wonderful actor.

The story, taken up by Stella Adler, continued as follows:

I sat quietly in my chair, too awed to utter a word. But I observed him. I looked at this gracious man -- full of wit, full of warmth -- totally unaffected. He chatted with Madame Chekhova, joked with her, talked of her husband's plays, and, at one point, laughed and called her a ham.

After a while, he turned to me and said, "Why don't you talk to me?" and I answered, "Because you have ruined the theatre for me!" It was true. In America, at the time, Stanislavsky's writings just didn't seem to penetrate. The school of Russian acting was taken to be a grim, breast-beating, morbid form of expression. There was no joy to be found in it anywhere. I could not believe that Stanislavsky really meant the actors to wail so, and sigh, and cry, and carry on.

When I told him all this, Stanislavsky stood up and asked if I would like to take a little walk with him in his garden. We did, and as we walked and talked, he began to²³ clarify all that had confused and distressed me.

²²Clurman, Famous, p.82.

²³Gruen, "Stella at Yale," p.14.

Stella Adler had never seen the Moscow Art Theatre's performances in America or anywhere. Her disparaging references were presumably based upon her experience with the Americanized versions, Strasberg's in particular, of Stanislavsky's teachings. As a Group instructor, Strasberg had concentrated upon pulling out the actor's personal psychology; and as a Group director his ideology had fixed upon the actor's building a character out of "affective memory."²⁴ That he placed more emphasis upon the actor's using his own personal life than on his imaginatively creating a life for the character according to the play had been a point of antagonism between him and Stella Adler. Thus she had felt, both as a student and as an actress, that the American emphasis had been distorted.

Stella Adler brought back to the Group what she said Stanislavsky wanted the Americans to know. It was in effect a clarification of his system, some theories of which were demonstrated to her by their working through scenes from John Howard Lawson's The Gentlewoman, a play with which she had had difficulties in performance. Speaking as an actor to an actress, Stanislavsky told her that acting

was not merely a question of technique -- technique was essential, yes -- but more importantly it was a matter of truth, and how this truth could be found

²⁴"Affective memory" or "emotion memory" was defined by Stanislavsky as "That type of memory which makes you relive the sensations you once felt." (See Constantin Stanislavski, An Actor's Handbook [New York: Theatre Arts, 1963], p.55.)

within the circumstances of the play. He would say, "The truth in art is always centered in the circumstances [the situation of the play], but it must first be found in life [from which its nature derives]." ²⁵

Also, he explicitly and concretely explained to emissary Adler just what he had done in each sequence when playing Dr. Stockmann in Henrik Ibsen's An Enemy of the People. To focus upon doing an action within a specific situation (the situation of the play, not one's own situation) was, in Stella Adler's appraisal, what had been lacking in the American classes all along. To cap her experience with Stanislavsky, she has recalled two of his off-the-cuff statements important in affirming her concept of acting as both a matter of craft (technique) and art (creation):

1. Get very friendly with that stage before you act on it. Let the set, the circumstances, and every object help you. Don't squeeze it so from inside.
2. The imagination contains everything you need. If you use only your own conscious life, the work is limited. ²⁶

Thus, Stanislavsky's instruction to the Americans via his delegate was to emphasize neither emotion nor oneself, but doing the nature of an action, using material resources to assist the doing, and doing it within the circumstances of the play brought to life through the imagination.

Stella Adler's account of her definitive sessions with Stanislavsky caused the Group to alter its rehearsal

²⁵Gruen, "Stella at Yale," p.14.

²⁶Interview with Adler.

methods, which in turn led to the Group's achieving, in the judgment of critic John Gassner, the best ensemble acting Broadway had ever known.²⁷ Also, the Group, with Stella Adler as a prime-mover, influenced American acting in general. The members, during the Group's lifetime and after the fall of its final curtain in 1941, by lecturing, writing, teaching and practicing their craft as directors and actors, on stage and screen, helped to make the Stanislavsky System the dominant technique studied in New York and elsewhere. Directly or indirectly, many American actors have been Group trained.²⁸

With the Group disbanded, Stella Adler spent the next few years first performing and producing in the Hollywood film industry, and then acting on the New York stage and abroad. In 1946, three years after her marriage to Harold Clurman, she declared the end of her acting career, closing in Leonid Andreyev's He Who Gets Slapped, under the direction of Tyrone Guthrie. Her break with the stage was, however, a long time brewing.

Though optimistic after her 1934 meetings with Stanislavsky, Stella Adler gradually began to register dissatisfaction with what she felt to be a lack of joyfulness within the Group. According to Lulla Rosenfeld, in the second half

²⁷John Gassner, The Theatre in Our Time (New York: Crown, 1954), p.300.

²⁸Louis Hetler, "The Influence of the Stanislavsky Theories of Acting on the Teaching of Acting in the United States," (Ph.D. dissertation, Univ. of Denver, 1957), p.130.

of the Group's decade of existence, its atmosphere, permeated with the spirit of Elia Kazan, grew loveless, ruthless, smug, arrogant, and cold. It was a space in which one could not be happy. Because Stella Adler reportedly saw through the atmosphere that irreparably harmed the other actresses (Margaret Barker, Dorothy Patten, and Frances Farmer were "driven crazy!"), she was not personally unhinged; but her career was damaged. "She," Rosenfeld has said, "the most beautiful woman in New York, was made to play aging mothers (Bessie Berger in Clifford Odets' Awake and Sing and Clara in his Paradise Lost). People thought her old. She never forgave Harold Clurman for that."²⁹

Her career ruined or not, three years before the dissolution of the Group, Stella Adler had already begun to expand her professional life beyond performance into directing. By the time she took her "last"³⁰ stage assignment, it was, she has said, ostensibly not to perform but because she admired Tyrone Guthrie as a director. Having seen his productions, which she has admiringly called "theatrical in the extreme," she worked with him out of a deep curiosity. In her estimation, Guthrie's attitude toward actors was thankfully more akin to that found in the Yiddish art theatre in which she had begun, than to that of the Broadway theatre in which

²⁹Interview with Rosenfeld.

³⁰Stella Adler did have a stage come-back in 1961, playing Madame Rosepettel in Arthur Kopit's Oh Dad, Poor Dad at the Lyric Theatre in London.

she had matured.

He came from an old theatre where there were weak performances and strong performances. Not everything had to be "death quality." If you were good, that was fine. If you were not good, he left you alone.³¹ He said that it was not his job to improve you.

All told, finishing with Guthrie, Stella Adler returned full circle to a climate in which actors were considered craftsmen responsible for their products -- allowed to fail, allowed to succeed, allowed to try to create a role and enjoy it.

Given her Adler blood, though no longer on the stage, Stella Adler did not of course extract herself from the theatre. From 1949 on, she took up the teaching of acting as her profession. In addition, during the 1950's, as the American representative of the Moscow Art Theatre, she officiated at the symposia of visiting Soviet artists, and participated in Michael Chekhov's lecture series on character-acting presented in Hollywood in 1955.

In the early 1960's, during two separate tours of Moscow, she attended plays and seminars to assess changes in Soviet theatre since Stanislavsky's death. She was especially interested in Eugene Vakhtangov's adaptations of Stanislavsky's techniques, as carried on by Stanislavsky-Vakhtangov disciples. After attending study sessions and the Vakhtangov-conceived productions at the Soviet theatre which had preserved his concepts, her assessment was:

³¹ Interview with Adler.

Vakhtangov's contribution was stylization, so individual you could not put your hand on it. He knew the style necessary for every leaf. It was entirely a great experience seeing all the levels -- Chinese, Russian, Jewish, Catholic, religious ceremony -- on which his genius worked.

However, the fact of the Stanislavsky theatre that he was trying to make clear, but that is little understood, is that he [Stanislavsky] was not a naturalist or a realist, but worked in very many styles. When Stanislavsky did Moliere, or any play, he was much more varied than people understand. If you just take an album of the different characters he played and look at them -- his Gogol, or Woe from Wit -- you realize he played in verse, and his externalization was enormous. He was not only in An Enemy of the People. He began everything Vakhtangov did. I would say that he had it all.³²

It has obviously been her culturally unbiased pursuits of excellence and new directions in world theatre that have given Stella Adler a special position among American actors. She is the only one to have been in direct contact with the methods of Stanislavsky -- whom Harold Clurman has named the one great contributor to the technique of acting of our time, as well as those of Vakhtangov, Brecht, and Reinhardt -- whom Clurman has called three of the four great directors of our time, Meyerhold being the fourth.

Having met Bertolt Brecht in 1935, the year after studying with Stanislavsky, Stella Adler trained with him for clarity, and later analyzed his plays in order to understand them from the actor's point of view. Their work method was similar to that used by herself and Stanislavsky: they rehearsed scenes together, in this case from Brecht's

³²Ibid.

Saint Joan of the Stockyards. According to Harold Clurman, their meetings were mutually salutary:

Stella, always curious about new modes in theatre practice, asked Brecht . . . to expound his theories of acting to her. . . .

Brecht was eager to have this opportunity to work with an American actress and all the more eager to work with Stella, since he had given her half-sister Celia Adler a difficult time when the Theatre Union had produced his version of Gorki's Mother.³³

Stella Adler's experience with Max Reinhardt was as an actress in his short-run 1943 production of Irwin Shaw's Sons and Soldiers. Prior to rehearsals, after their first acquaintance with each other, Reinhardt, in a letter to his son and biographer Gottfried Reinhardt, wrote:

I find . . . Miss Adler . . . most sympathetic. . . an intelligent Jew . . . with an inner drive toward better things, toward art. . . .

I have never seen her act. Though that never made much difference to me when casting. What is important is that she looks good, is of theatre blood, has a strong temperament, pronounced humor, and a sharply critical brain; above all, she is a personality, which, in the theatre, is always the most important thing.³⁴

Stella Adler likewise respected Max Reinhardt. In spite of his voluminous production notebooks, designed even before commencing rehearsals, Stella Adler has said that Reinhardt depended a lot upon the actors. "He expected a full performance from you. It did not matter if you were Turkish or British, he expected the performance."³⁵ Acknowledging

³³Clurman, Famous, pp.134-135.

³⁴Gottfried Reinhardt, The Genius (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), p.115.

³⁵Interview with Adler.

but not deferring to Reinhardt's talent and status, Stella Adler unhesitatingly delivered a performance, as seen in the following account:

At one of the rehearsals, Stella took Reinhardt aside and said, "Professor, . . . the characterization you have suggested to me is first-rate. I shall be glad to fulfill it. But I have something else in mind." Reinhardt said, "Show me!" When she had done the scene her way, he said, "Much better. You should play the part your way."³⁶

Bolstered by nearly fifty years of experience in working with the finest acting theories and practices of the twentieth century, for the three decades since 1949, Stella Adler has been putting her ability, intuition, and energy into teaching -- and refining her teaching of -- the craft and art of acting. Because she had given lessons to the Group, and had started a simple acting school when an ingenue in the Yiddish theatre, teaching was not something alien. She has said, however, that making it her profession was a development, a progression.

Over the years, through working with students on the techniques and through seeing the universality of themes in dramatic literature and of tendencies in human nature, she has arrived at a philosophic view of teaching and unfolded a philosophy for the actor, somewhat as follows:

I'm not really interested in helping an actor become a good actor unless he becomes the best self he can. There has to be a level of grandeur -- grandeur is the wrong word -- of size in him: in the instrument and in the soul of the actor. Size forces open all

³⁶ Clurman, Famous, p.144.

the channels which life closes off. It opens them up and allows the actor to achieve himself.

The actor must not remain small, but must take his place as an artist who can collaborate with any artist. That is the most important thing for me, and is what acting is all about. And that is what³⁷ is missing for me in the actor in performance today.

The time between her divorce from Harold Clurman in 1960 and her marriage to physicist and writer Mitchell Wilson in 1965 was most telling in Stella Adler's own self-development.³⁸ After separating from Clurman, she has said that she gave all her love to the work of teaching, to the students, and to the literature. The response to her involvement was more than compensatory, as indicated by that of her most famous student, Marlon Brando:

Stella has had the deepest influence on me. . . . She has influenced my personal life and my professional life. I am devoted to her. As a teacher, she has an infallible instinct for character, and for knowing who people are. The spectrum of her talent is reflected in all that she does. She has that rare gift: producing lightning states. My debt and gratitude to her are enormous. As a teacher of acting,³⁹ she has few peers. As a human being, few equals.

Throughout her marriage to Wilson, an inspired person himself, Stella Adler persisted in her own evolution. Until his untimely death in 1973, Wilson's expressed impression of her life as shared with him was that of an exciting, volatile, imaginative scholar with integrity, who reads, who

³⁷Interview with Adler.

³⁸In interview, Lulla Rosenfeld revealed, "Harold Clurman said that Stella developed late intellectually."

³⁹Gruen, "Stella at Yale," p.17.

studies, whose life is rooted in work.⁴⁰

Since the death of Wilson, a loss she deeply lamented, Stella Adler has remained alone. She has continued to teach, and to be grateful for the origins, and mindful of the passage, of her theatrical life as an Adler:

We are truly a family of the theatre -- we're all tied by the now invisible iron of Sarah and Jacob Adler. We have all come to understand that the theatre -- acting, creating, interpreting -- means total involvement. The totality of heart, mind, and spirit. The craft of involvement restores you, makes you never lose interest. The life inside you reflects the life around you. And the world is your home. You don't feel a stranger. . . .

The actor has the platform and through himself can express a whole world of ideas, of experiences. If I am able to instill this [what she calls the majesty⁴¹ of acting] in my students, I consider it a victory.

Having lived through all the years and changes in this century of American theatre, Stella Adler has gained a perspective. She has acknowledged that there is only one Stanislavsky and that no actor can copy his work. However, at the same time, she has asserted that the actor, to be a good actor, must have the techniques that Stanislavsky developed. She says:

These techniques were the outcome of playwrighting which required a new kind of actor; . . . are the means with which to interpret these plays; . . . are not an end in themselves; . . . and make great demands on the actor. The ignorant actor, the half-baked actor, the exploiter have no place in the theatre of today.⁴²

⁴⁰Ibid., pp.16-17. ⁴¹Ibid., p.17.

⁴²Stella Adler, "The Art of Acting (The Actor's Needs)," The Theatre II (April, 1960):17.

Her current feeling is that America, admittedly a young country but still a part of Western culture, has not yet engendered a theatrical tradition of its own; and hence has not yet enjoyed great ensemble acting. Still, she thinks the Group Theatre came closest to generating a tradition of acting, but that development ceased with the dissolving of the Group. Evermore rapidly since then, because of theatre as commerce, and more so because of the mechanical and uncaring attitude toward acting and actors assumed by the film and television industries, she believes there has been a resignation in the actor's nature. He has been either instructed or compelled to aim at only the show, to the exclusion of the large meaning of the script, and ultimately the meaning of himself as a creative human being.

As an alternative to the humanly demeaned position of the actor in contemporary American theatre, she has offered her conception of the actor in a humanly elevated position, in the position of a person capable of participating in the birth and growth of a tradition of good acting:

The artist and the man must meet somewhere. If the aim of the production -- what the play is saying -- is made clear to the whole body of actors, they can rise above their normal level.

That growth comes out of doing the performance. The inspiration for it can come from the director, or from the actors working together with each other; it can also come from the guidance of a teacher.

There used to be a lot of that growth in the theatre. You see the actors of old -- you saw them as young people, and you see them twenty-five years later -- their heads have changed. Everything about them has changed, and you can see those changes in their work.

You can also see that in the artist, in the novelist. He does not remain the same. He becomes bigger through working. The actor must not remain the same.⁴³

Stella Adler has not remained the same.

⁴³Interview with Adler.

CHAPTER I

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ACTOR

Throughout the first term of study at the Stella Adler Theatre Studio, the student is engaged in following a process of self-development. He is instructed to define and describe for himself, not for Stella Adler or the class, the standards by which he has so far measured himself, and to assess the results of having accepted those standards. With these, he is asked to compare the standards necessary for an actor, a picture of which is gradually unfolded for him. Armed with Stella Adler's cumulative projections of the means with which to climb the actor's life-long path toward artistic, spiritual, and physical fulfillment, the student, by the completion of the first term, has found a direction and begun the ascent.

Artistic Standards

"The actor must be in complete control of his artistic development for as long as he lives."

In the first few days of exposure to Stella Adler, the student is challenged to question the validity of his values, beliefs, and lifestyle for the profession of acting. He is charged to get rid of institutionalized

opinions and stop being a victim of the rumors and gossip purveyed by ignorant people. With the intention of having him elevate his standards, Stella Adler requests he abandon conventional ones, which, she insists, are those of advertisements. In accordance with what her own teachers, particularly her parents, expected of her, he is to create his own.

Pointing out to the student that he will need to make choices in order to pursue a theatre career, she poses questions -- Craft or comfort? Content or glamour? Spirit or material? -- the answers to which, in acting, exhibit themselves as the difference between an artist and a merchant. In these early classes, she is attempting to distill the ethics of the profession, that the student might be inspired to order his life in a way that all integrity, confidence, and activity are put into the training, and whatever detracts from it is put aside.

Her other intention is to warn the student that he has not selected an easy or ordinary profession. He should not expect approval or understanding, either from his family or the society; nor, when he is ready to work in the theatre, should he look to the producer or the director for assistance. He is urged to become realistic about the hard edges meshing within the world of theatre:

Know that the director may want to exploit you. Whatever his attitude, understand that he may have chosen not to care. But always give your best by offering your creative self. Take the

position of a servant, in service to the production, but do not forget that even the servant estimates the master [the director and/or producer]. Know with whom you are dealing.¹

It is not entirely an image of servile struggle that is presented to the student. Stella Adler takes care to balance the severities with rewards, explaining that an actor's life, however misunderstood or socially ridiculed, is not necessarily lonely. "Artists are together, helping each other's soulfulness to emerge," she says. With this kind of encouragement, she hopes to help the student arrange his priorities, that he may seek positive artistic standards.

The professional standards which she proposes to instill are concerned with confidence, tradition, and growth. The obstacles that can deter the actor from attaining these are characterized as misunderstood concepts of salary and success. Although Stella Adler admits that everyone must earn a living, her primary concern is with the student's becoming an actor who is more anxious to grow than to sell something. She also realizes that success might mean to the student being hired all the time, or being applauded, or being mentioned in the newspapers. But to Stella Adler, it is incorrect for an actor to

¹ All of Stella Adler's theory and direct quotations contained in this section, "Artistic Standards," derives from notes and tapes of Studio classes in Technique I taught by her from 1968 through 1972.

consider himself a success when he is acclaimed, or a failure when he is not. Rather, he needs to define success in terms of his entire effort toward accomplishing control of his own destiny. The only creditable verity the actor can finally depend upon, in her opinion, is feeling, for as long as he lives, that his work is good.

If he does not feel it, no money, applause, or symbol of success can give it to him. That feeling, which is confidence, must be established in him. When he has it, he will not need anybody else. He will collaborate with the director, but will never say, "Help me!"

Confidence, this fundamental professional requisite, is born of knowing and using a technique of acting. Then, to the extent that the actor's range of capabilities is widened and deepened by immersion in the theatrical tradition, from confidence comes growth.

It is Stella Adler's belief that there is a universal reason, overriding any lure of fame or money, why anyone, regardless of background or temperament, chooses to become an actor. Before describing the motivation, she might relate what one well-heeled actor had to say on the subject: "My father said, 'To become an actor you have to have three reasons. Usually, the three reasons are: You don't want to get up early. You don't want to work. You're afraid to steal.'" Although her father's joke might more often than not appear applicable, Stella Adler believes that the deepest reason why the actor wishes to act is because everyday reality is not enough for him.

Through the theatre, which is not a job but a way of life, he may transcend society's mundane limitations. He may achieve the freedom of self-expression and secure the continuation of his own growth for as long as he lives. Asserting that the actor will go on developing, even if the stage is taken away from him, since he has the tools, the training, and the discipline to do so, Stella Adler contends: "To grow: that is his deepest and truest need when he says, 'I want to be an actor.'"

She insists that for the student even to begin making a commitment to this growth process, a struggle must be set off within him, inciting him to fight for his own human development. The result is his trusting that the work of creation itself, with or without material indemnity, is enough to make him feel good as a human being.

That he can get a perspective on the nature of the struggle he must undergo, the student is back-handedly congratulated for being a creature full of animal vitality. At the same time, he is warned not to offer his energy to theatrical agents, not to do commercials, not to locate where the money can be found. He is psychically nudged away from the easy path, the lazy means, since, in Stella Adler's vocabulary, lazy is just another word for stupid. She tells him that it is his inner nature, more than his body, which warrants his protection, and which needs to be put in touch with what a supposedly civilized person

must do for himself in order to be civilized.

Stella Adler's suggested means of inner cultivation is to expose oneself to those traditions which have passed on the world's five thousand years of culture, making the animal into a man. These she describes:

The stream of dramatic literature that runs from Ancient Greece to the gulf of the twentieth century; all the regional and national characteristics; all the languages; the shifting and changing styles; the different periods of time; the levels of society; the mores and morals of passing years; the cut of clothing from generation to generation; the different furniture; the very sound of the music in the air; the evolution that has changed the earthenware mug into a paper drinking-cup -- these are the inheritance of the theatre student today.

By rooting himself in tradition, the actor might grow to the psychic size necessary for self-civilization. Furthermore, it is his obligation toward the profession to resist the tendency, however fashionable, to be "little," which means, Stella Adler explains, "resisting the urge to protect his little emotion as he comfortably sits in his little chair, in his little blue-jeans, and stares at his little world that extends from right to left." That is because, she goes on to say,

If the actor confines himself to the beat of his generation only; if he is bound within the limits of his street-corner, alienated from every object or period that does not contain his own pulse, then the result is a disrespect for the world in general, and a foreignness to anything around that is not immediately recognizable as part of his everyday habits.

The student is assigned the responsibility of

filling in the two thousand years of theatre and culture that have gone before, upon which his professional health depends. He must study, in order to see imaginatively, the differences between then and there and here and now; for example, the differences between himself and eighteenth century man in manners, education, and leisure activity. By experiencing tradition, that is, by imaginatively living his knowledge of it, the student can not only ascertain the value of other civilizations and customs, but can also have an historical standard of judgment against which to measure his own artistic merits and demerits.

Stella Adler concedes that it is difficult for the young actor in an industrialized country, where identical things are manufactured in the thousands, to appreciate the intrinsic value of cultures, of objects, and even of human beings. For example, at this time in this country, it might not be readily acknowledged that a hand-stitched lace handkerchief passed down from one's great grandmother, which perhaps took an old Venetian peasant woman some time to make, is entirely different in value from a piece of Kleenex. Nevertheless, regardless of the confusion existing in the society around him, the student is expected to ascertain that his work is not temporal but connected to a tradition, and that he himself is not disposable but valuable.

Trying to make the student cognizant of his unique

worth, Stella Adler turns to Stanislavsky, who, she says, having understood the value and glory of the individual actor, replaced the convention of man on stage with the actor's infinite capacity for understanding: "Nobody is me, so I am great." In other words, it is simply the individuality of any given actor that marks him incomparable to all others. Through Stanislavsky's vision and system, it became possible for people, who never thought they could, to become real actors. Stella Adler thus says, "Although Lawrence Olivier might stand on his head, he cannot be you. Only you have the privilege to be you." With this earthy encouragement, the student is set to dispense with fantastical thoughts of becoming the best actor there is, and can realistically concentrate on becoming the best actor he can be; wherein, she holds, lies his triumph.

Teaching the student how to reach his best level, Stella Adler once again refers to tradition. She might recall her reply to Time magazine's query as to whether or not her former student Marlon Brando is a great actor: "We will never know. He has greatness in him, but there is not an actor in the world who knows whether he is great or not unless he plays the great parts." Extending back into the life of the theatrical tradition is the actor's lifeline; and to find one's own best, the range must be as wide as the extension is long, as she notes:

You are never a great conductor unless you conduct the Bs -- Bach, Beethoven, Brahms. You are never a great composer unless you write in the symphonic form. You are never a great writer unless you write in the poetic form. As an actor, your aim must be equally as great.

You have to stretch. You have to know the differences between Roman, Romanesque, and Romantic; and between Odets, Strindberg, Shaw, and O'Neill. You have to learn to deal with all the things that are comedy, that are fast, that require your entire equipment. You must try for musicals, for classical and psychological drama. You need not fear experimenting or enlarging your equipment, in order to be ready to fit into a variety of plays and styles.

It is by dedicating himself to a deep and wide study of the art, encompassed by history, and by testing the strength of his talent, temperament, and technique in all variety of works, that the actor can emerge as an artist with an optimum challenge, style, and form uniquely his own.

Stella Adler concludes that the confidence derived from knowing the technique, and the growth derived from knowing his tradition are fundamental to the student's fulfilling the actor's standards of artistry. Once fortified by the fact of his own individuality, he is told not to neglect his professional duty. He is to tread the collective path of actors by reaching for a psychic size worthy of the stage. He is not to discuss, argue, or philosophize about life, but is to experience it. The difference, she contends, between the actor and the other members of the large cultural group is that history is in him.

While the intellectual says how it is, the actor does it, living it. "Only if you 'own' Denmark [by living there imaginatively] can you be Hamlet," she says. Only by experientially inheriting the size of modern man, man who embraces at least two thousand and five hundred years of dramatic tradition, can the student, realizing the actor's true artistic aim, grow into that which his contemporaries might regard as ideal.

In essence, the Principle is: "AIM HIGH."

Spiritual Standards

"The beginning of being in the theatre is not to have a wall between yourself and another human being."

During the course of the student's first term, he is reminded that few professions in the society provide the privilege of taking the platform and having an audience. But the actor, along with the priest, the politician, and the instructor, has that advantage and with it has the responsibility to deserve it.

Stella Adler exhorts the student to make of himself good "material" for acting; that is, a stage-worthy person, capable of encompassing the depth and breadth of modern drama. Contending that the theatre today is concerned with the drama of epic ideas, she sees modern themes as centered around the search for identity of people having no God, no king, no Communist Party to tell

them who they are and what to do. It is through thinking about, understanding, and both physically and spiritually experiencing the eternal questions of life, to which there are no easy answers nowadays, that the modern actor becomes articulate on stage. It is by enacting the magnitude of these ideas, meant to affect the audience and their own ways of thinking, that he becomes a medium of influence, bearing not only the privilege but also the duty "to give people something that will change them."² To fulfill the actor's obligation, the student is asked to build himself into "a giant for expressing large ideas."

In order for the student to enlarge his spiritual stature, Stella Adler suggests he detach himself from whatever could be considered commonplace. She says that within his soul, which may be understood to include the interfunctioning of his aspiration and his will, he cannot afford to be ordinary. He needs courage to relinquish the desire for popularity, self-knowledge to be unconcerned with material rewards, and faith to live without fear. At the same time, he needs to overcome those deleterious aspects of his character inappropriate to his potentially influential position in the society. Timidity, she says, pulls the actor down and makes him petty; embarrassment is

²All of Stella Adler's theory and direct quotations contained in this section, "Spiritual Standards," derives from notes and tapes of Studio classes in Technique I taught by her in 1961 and from 1968 through 1972. .

a cultural habit; shyness is vulgar. None of these, she concludes, is good for the profession of acting, since all preclude the actor from being the "boss" over himself and his spiritual destiny.

With almost religious implications, Stella Adler describes the actor's preparatory work as done in quietude and privacy, with care and concentration. His daily ritual is observance of the world; his discoveries are his secrets. They are not to be divulged as a kind of gossip, are not to be used as topics for discussion, but are to serve as material for creation.

This singularly contained attitude demands self-discipline, and discipline wants sacrifice. Actually, in Stella Adler's mind, the discipline itself is the sacrifice, so inextricably is it tied to the concept of detachment from personal desire or ego-gratification. To support her contention, she might quote the lesson of John Gielgud, who revealed, "First I was conceited, then I was emotional, now I work;" or that of her former student, the late Broadway actor Larry Blyden, who, chagrined, returned to tell her that he went out from the studio quite cocky, got a part, got fired, and then said to himself, "I'm going to work now, and in future I'll never not know why I'm fired."

The basic tenet ultimately emerging from Stella Adler's teaching of the spiritual standards necessary for

the actor is that he must be a person who extends himself "outward" to the maximum degree of his ability. Although she admits that no one is asking the student to give up everything in his life, she does advise him to avail himself of the possibility of universal love by going out of his way to do at least little things for others. In addition to its obvious intrinsic goodness, the practice of generosity, she notes, is of practical benefit to the actor; that is, it enables him verbally, physically, and intellectually to reach his audience; hence, he might enjoy a kind of love-affair with them. Thus it is through an ease in giving that the magnanimous stage personality can emerge.

As a model of the gracious human being worth emulating, Stella Adler cites the life and work of Michael Chekhov, whom she terms the greatest actor to have come out of the twentieth century. Remembering him as an uncritical, accepting, and giving person, who had the genius to find some goodness in every fault, she recommends that the student cultivate similar qualities: 1) a positive manner of expression, whereby a piece of fruit would be described as a pear once good gone rotten, not as a rotten pear, so that life will be with him; and 2) a mindfulness to give himself to others, so that others will respond to him.

Another facet of the actor's discipline, special

to him among all artists, is putting the doing of work before the feeling of wanting to work. No matter how well- or ill-disposed he personally feels at the moment toward working, the actor, of course, must ever be ready to act. Reminding the student that Keats died at twenty-eight, Stella Adler urges him to dispense with hesitation. He is, however, to refrain from putting himself up for judgment at auditions. But he is not to restrain himself from performing in the studio or any other sympathetic environment, until he feels inspired or ready or good about his performance; that is because, she says,

No actor ever feels he is forever good. Even when he works well and knows it is good, he feels that tomorrow it will not be good.

The actor has a built-in broken heart, which helps him to understand, but does not help him to win. There is no actor who looks like a banker at the end of his life. He looks distinguished, but he does not look as if he has won. The actor pays a price, and the price is his heart.

Given this erudition, the student of Stella Adler soon comes to realize that he is expected to offer his heart to the work: that is, to his interpretation of the role by means of technique; to the theme of the play by means of understanding; to the audience by means of magnanimity; to life itself by means of love. His discipline is to give his love and keep his humanity. Thus Stella Adler confides:

Before all else, I am somebody who is trying to awaken in you what you have to a small proportion -- your soul. I can only touch it.

You must make it aspire to something big.

Don't expect too much help for that. I can only guide you a little bit. You have to struggle with making something out of this little thing in you. That is the historically basic work of man.

That soul-awakening is the very essence of what she calls the actor's fight for human development. If he can manage it, he may more than deserve the platform. He may symbolize its dignity.

In essence, the Principle is: "DO NOT WITHDRAW FROM LIFE."

Physical Standards

"I am not the boss. I am here to help you be the boss over your muscles and everything."

Included in Stella Adler's mission for the first term is awakening the student's awareness of the need to hone his tools to the standard correct for the actor. Calling the actor's body and voice his "signature," she proposes that if they are normal, the penmanship is good. By normal she means healthy, which implies being in good shape and under control, while having fluency.

The raising of the student's physical and vocal standards involves a growth process concurrent with his artistic and spiritual progression. It is his responsibility to attain a facility of movement and voice fit to express the epic ideology attributed by Stella Adler to modern drama. The actor's normal standard in speech and movement, then, should be not just that which feels real

or natural, because it is his habit, but that which is natural, because it meets the integrity of the platform. What Stella Adler is ultimately advocating is an "aristocracy" of the voice and body.

Body

When Stella Adler evaluates the physical condition of the new student facing her each fall, her customary reaction is that she has to deal with the "last remnants of mankind;"³ whereas, what she requires to do her job effectively is people with tuned equipment.

Indicating the existence in America of a pervasive inconsideration for good habits in posture and appearance, she reproves the student for chasing the trend toward carelessness, even sloppiness. Exhorting him not to be casual but severe with himself, since he is "material" for acting, she advises him to study with a movement teacher,⁴ or somehow find the means to co-ordinate himself physically. She wants him to get his spine aligned and head held up, that he can stand, sit, and move normally. If he does not, she says, there is little sense in studying with her; that is because, she exclaims,

³All of Stella Adler's theory and direct quotations contained in this section, "Physical Standards," derives from notes and tapes of Studio classes in Technique I taught by her in 1960, 1961, and 1972.

⁴Classes in both Voice and Movement are offered at the Stella Adler Theatre Studio, though not taught by her.

I cannot deal with broken material. Your homes have broken you. If I had walked or stood as you do, I would have gotten a black eye from my mother or father. But your way is apparently how you are allowed to stand at home. You had better fix it up for yourself. Fix your stance and your ability to be normal. I cannot start you unless you are material. I cannot build you if you have broken yourself, inside and out.

On the other hand, Stella Adler sympathizes with the student's confusion as to just what constitutes a normal body. She says that if he were in Britain, for example, he could reflect the standard of deportment set by the figures of royalty, as, she says, oftentimes do the British preacher, parliamentarian, and actor. But here in America, she regrets, "We have temporarily lost this kind of social symbol. Ours is too broken, too individualistic. Any way you want to walk or talk is the norm." Without a picture of physical excellence presented by the leadership, or at best with only a vague and useless image of "anything goes," the American actor is abandoned to find his own normal body.

To guide the student in his search, Stella Adler suggests he look to certain cultures of the past to discover an aesthetic of plasticity. She recommends the Ancient Greeks, culturally unified through the disciplines of religion, theatre, and athletics, as a people who manifested in their sculptural art the concept that a natural, healthy body-and-mind is one which stretches to elevate itself while seeming to vibrate, if Emerson's phrase may

be used, with "energy in repose."

Stella Adler of course realizes that the actor might be asked to play a character afflicted with some bodily distortion. He will then physicalize the aberration. But no such variation from the norm can be manipulated by a body that has not first found its own norm. For his profession, for characterization, the actor simply cannot afford to bear an abnormal body; that is, a bent, cramped, unelevated, de-humanized one.

Another liability to the student-actor brought up in America is the inhibiting effect upon the body inherited from Puritanism. Blaming the Puritan ethic of restraint for a kind of minimal physical expression, Stella Adler encourages the student to rid himself of parochialism, lest his internal sensibility be trapped by external rigidity. An inherent problem of the American actor she thus characterizes as not an inability to act, but an inability to free his acting from the confines of a Puritanized body. This condition she describes:

You find yourself either ashamed of your body or defensive. It is not the case in Europe, where there is Lollobrigida. But here, there is a lot of contraction, shame, pulling in, and making everything less than it is. It is a tradition of restriction from which you need to free yourself.

Her aim is for the American student-actor not to disrobe, but to dispense with smallness and inhibition. He is to do fully whatever he must do, presenting himself

unconstrained in life and on stage to his maximum capacity in gesture and movement in order that, along with his body, his spirit and feelings might energetically flow outward. This aim is based upon her contention that, insofar as the actor's material tools are primed for full expression, his spiritual resources may thrive.

The student is requested to broaden his personal perspective. He is to appreciate himself as a subject aligned with Nature, rather than depreciate himself by being an object dictated to by society. It means exercising his inherent right to validate what Stella Adler says her mother told her: "There is room for everybody on this earth. No one is taking up anybody else's place." If he will recognize not only his right to be upon the earth, but will also experience its supportive power, the student might move with confidence, as she explains:

No matter what else erodes, goes, or vanishes, excepting when you are buried beneath it, the earth stays to hold you up. It is the same on stage; the platform will hold you up. No matter where you are -- in the street, the garden, on stage -- the earth, because its nature is basic, will support you.

Once the student experiences the nature of the earth as solid, he may likewise grasp that the natures of standing, sitting, and walking upon it are also solid, thereby allowing himself the liberty of extending any physical inclination to its maximum theatrical expression without fear of faltering. He may be convinced that his base will neither

collapse nor fail him.

These tenets of Nature are given to the student that he might embody the physical norm native to the platform. He is asked to check himself habitually against a sense of "I am the most perfect I can be." That is so the actor's norm might become his habit.

The next stage of the student's physical development is learning to apply control, which is to use the minimum specific effort to produce and maintain the maximum physical effect. Stella Adler explains that control depends upon orderliness and clarity but not necessarily comfort; because, as she says, "It is more important to be right than comfortable." Also, in her definition, comfort does not imply relaxation, but rather a kind of laxity or limpness; whereas control does imply relaxation, or a body not overcome by tension. General tension, stemming from ignorance of one's body or of what one ought to be doing in any given situation on or off stage, indicates an overexpenditure of effort; hence, a lack of control.

Even though it may be argued that every actor shakes somewhere, Stella Adler, in concurrence with Stanislavsky, avers that a good actor does not let tension spill over; rather, he places it. Otherwise, in a state of general tension, which does not permit him to feel anything, his talent is withheld and his acting becomes mechanical.

Stella Adler instructs the student that in order to use his energy properly, he must first relax generally and then concentrate all his being on accomplishing whatever action he needs to accomplish. It is not his job to worry about how much energy or muscle is required to do the action, but rather simply to do it, discovering and experiencing the amount of energy or muscle it takes. And, she emphasizes, that much -- no more, no less -- is all it takes.

This same principle of doing only as much as is needed may be applied to another function of control, which is to make an adjustment. An adjustment, which is some change, some imperfection put into the body, de-mechanizes the acting and helps the actor relax. Having observed that "most acting is too ironed-out, too alike," Stella Adler considers it more artistically interesting for the student to create physically something unusual than stick to something average.

As an example of an adjustment, she might offer the case of having two stiff fingers. To gain control of this selection, the student is instructed to live with the two stiff fingers in daily life, testing to see if he can play cards, dress, shop, eat, wash with them, determining the muscular expenditure necessary to maintain them. The two stiff fingers will affect to some degree everything he does; however, they must never consume him, or the

adjustment becomes dysfunctional. Also, Stella Adler cautions, the beginning student especially ought not fictionalize an adjustment by pretending, for example, that the two stiff fingers are the result of arthritis. The adjustment is to be assimilated, made second-nature, and kept under control with minimum effort; it is not to be acted, featured, or displayed. The only thing to be acted is the action, which might happen to be acted by a person with two stiff fingers.

The student may use an aid to help himself discover the minimal level of energy needed to secure an adjustment; if he wants to have heavy legs, for example, he may put iron into his shoes. When the sense of heaviness becomes his own, the device is removed. Once he can live with the adjustment in life, that is, if the stiffness does not spill out of the two fingers nor the heaviness out of the legs, he may transfer it to the stage, letting it be.

Stella Adler's technique, then, for making an adjustment is:

1. Locate the area you want to control.
2. Decide how little effort or muscle is needed to make and keep the control.
3. Practice the control.
4. Forget it.

Mastering the final step of forgetting it appreciably depends upon the tenacity of the next-to-final step of practicing it. Being able to "forget it" not only

indicates that the adjustment has been conquered, but is also the key to the adjustment's producing spontaneity, individuality, and creativity in the acting. If the actor with two stiff fingers mixes himself a drink on stage, it is likely that some surprise -- life! -- will come into the mixing; or if he goes to shake hands with his partner on stage, it is likely that their relationship will be enlivened. To the extent that an adjustment is incorporated and forgotten, the acting, affected by physical idiosyncrasy, is rendered more real.

Stella Adler suggests that the validity of this principle may be evidenced by observing people on the street. Each may be seen as unique by virtue of some physical peculiarity, but none pays or calls attention to his difference. Challenging the student to recognize variety among human beings, she inquires,

Do you think people are all the same? They live with who they are. I know a man who has one good leg and a stump. Still, he walks to the bathroom and doesn't look at his limp. Another person is a hunchback. Another is a cripple; he has things on his mind other than his leg.

As learned from life, a physical idiosyncrasy helps reveal the humanity of a person; and so, when brought to the stage, it can assist the actor in giving his acting a sense of reality.

Voice

The other half of the student's physical development approached during the first term is the training of his voice. This involves defining and practicing the kind of speech that effectively meets the demands of the stage. Regarding this, Stella Adler makes at least two comments:

1. However the actor speaks to his grocer, it is not how he speaks on the platform.
2. Any actor can talk and be heard on television, but a television actor cannot bring that voice to the stage.

What, then, are the vocal points needed for the student to establish his own best voice, as tested with the standards of the platform?

The first requirement in training one's speech is to ensure that it have sufficient volume. Stella Adler is not so concerned with the particular quality of a student's voice, whether it be handsome, mellifluous, lilting, or not, but is adamant about its capacity to be heard from the front, back, sides, every area of the room. It is, in fact, she says, abnormal to use the voice without projection, because the nature of life is to stretch outward. A tree grows out; a bird calls out; a cow moos out; a hand is thrust out to say hello, and a person speaks out to reach another. "It is insanity, madness; it makes no sense at all to talk in," she exclaims.

The second requirement for stage speech is that sounds be properly enunciated and effectively employed.

Acknowledging that human speech has many aspects more troublesome than the call of a bird or the moo of a cow, Stella Adler invites the student to stimulate his voice by becoming familiar with the complications and nuances of language. Chiding the student that Standard American Speech might be something alien to him, she notes that, without it, his range is severely limited and expression hampered; in other words, she says, "It is not good for the actor to do Shakespeare through clenched teeth." To convey articulately the scope of classical and modern drama, the student needs to grow friendly with words. He is to learn to respect their specific natures that he might communicate the meanings behind them, thereby enlarging his understanding of language and use of sound. If he does not, she contends, "He is unfit to talk, much less to act."

Once the student has stretched and trained his vocal instrument to meet the platform standard, he may, as Stella Adler says, "monkey with it in a thousand ways." But he must master the stage norm before he can break it.

As with the body, any number of adjustments can be made in the speech. Stella Adler has the student try various speech impediments. He applies control to the articulatory muscles; he checks to see if he can remain himself, simply and unaffectedly, without exhibiting or performing, without falling into a characterization, while speaking, for example, with a lisp. All he needs for a lisp is to

adjust the placement of his tongue, against the upper teeth instead of the lower, when sounding an "s". He need not adjust any other muscles, nor push out the words, nor raise the pitch of his voice, nor act cute, nor behave like a child or an idiot, nor be concerned with anything, least of all with the lisp, other than that which he is communicating. Stella Adler explains that, like everyone else, "the person who lisps also gets sick, is in great pain, and goes to the doctor, too; except that he says, "I can't thtand it!" In other words, she initially makes it clear once and for all that even though someone speaks with an impediment, he knows what he is talking about.

Accents and dialects are also governed by the technique of making an adjustment. Stella Adler again opts for simplicity. The student is to change just enough of the pronunciation to produce the accent, but is never to divert his entire speech pattern away from Standard American English.

For example, if he places the "r" sound far back in his throat, rolling it as if gargling, he can produce one aspect of a simple French accent. As he is not French and cannot control a whole foreign pronunciation and culture, he assumes nothing else belonging to the French except the "r" and, at most, two other French sounds. He thus has himself in control of a selectively defined accent.

The student is sent out to listen to impediments,

accents, and dialects in life, but with some reservation on Stella Adler's part:

Find a Southerner with whom you can sit and talk. You can steal something from his speech, but don't take the whole South. If you do, "yah'll gohonna dreeep sooo maaynee magnoolleeah blohssuuums, yah'll jes gohonna kiyull evereebohdee."

She also suggest he consult phonetically transcribed books on accents and dialects in order to write out his part phonetically and study from that.

Whatever speech adjustment the student "steals," it must be made his own -- not imitated, not improvised, not a ready-made cliché. As long as his sole muscular involvement is with the control of a selected vowel, consonant, or syllabic sound, there is no danger of his speech slipping into a stage convention, or being pulled into the pattern of a speech rhythm. An honest speech adjustment requires neither fast nor slow cadence, but simply the norm of the student's own rhythm.

The hallmark, then, of any vocal adjustment is sparsity. This is to evoke a sense of authenticity and not artificiality. To substantiate this conclusion, Stella Adler may remark upon the seasoned experience of John Gielgud:

In a magazine article, Gielgud said not to embroider but cut down. Also, he said that the acting becomes better after you've played for six weeks and done the cutting. He's right, except that you must cut down now, even if he does it after six weeks.

The English embroider everything. "What a lovvelly dhaay!" You must first look at the

day before speaking about it. But over there, it's all ready-made. They've forgotten the contact with the day, "reahhly."

Mastering a simple speech adjustment, which can put the student in control, not in fear, of the material he is required to speak, affords him confidence. Stella Adler says that finally the only justifiable fear is that of a child, because he has no control over himself. One of the student's foremost steps toward professional maturity, then, is helping himself banish fear of the stage by assuming control over his body and voice.

In essence, the Principle is: "DO NOT DO MORE OR LESS THAN THE ACTOR'S NORM."

CHAPTER II

THE RESOURCES OF THE ACTOR

The other segment of the Stella Adler Theatre Studio student's first-term development, concurrent with cultivating himself, is the cultivation of an actor's approach to life. This mainly entails improving his appreciation and use of the life that is around him, in order to build upon the improvement of his own life as described in the preceding chapter. He is expected to apprehend everything in a new way; to open up his imagination to its limitless possibilities; to acquire a taste for universal ideas; and to handle materials properly. The path to these objectives is traversed by delving into particular natures in order to build up cumulatively a wealth of understanding upon which to draw for creation. Stella Adler considers it a mistake for the student to think he can rely simply on speaking the words of a playwright; rather, he must fill himself as full of life and ideas as was the playwright when writing those words he is to speak. The student's enrichment partakes of actually and imaginatively seeing, gathering, and assimilating the nature of life, ideas, and materials from the world, in order that these may be given back to the world from the stage.

The Life of the World

"Nature is most of all to be studied."

Inspired by Stella Adler's frequent practice of starting class with a narrative about or a description of some person, place, thing, or incident she witnessed on her way to the studio, the student may begin to see and watch what is in the world around him, and remember it. Observation, considered a virtuous activity, both feeds his imagination and fires his mind. Seeing is, in fact, in Stella Adler's opinion, the key to acting.

Acting is concerned with the natures of objects, people, and especially of actions. Since the nature, that is, the essence and its logical application, of anything never varies but remains constant, it can be known by seeing it. The student is instructed to look for the nature within whatever he sees.

Stella Adler explains that the nature of anything taken from life is not adulterated by being put on stage. Even though the stage (fictitious) is different from life (real), the actor is respectful of and faithful to the fundamental nature of anything brought to the stage.

In life, of course, all is taken for granted as having a life and nature of its own. On stage, however, to each thing a life cognizant of its nature must be imparted by means of the actor's imagination. This creation of life, rooted in the actor's dedicated practice of seeing, is apparently a religious process to Stella Adler, who holds, "In a

godless culture, an art form can save you. You can believe in what you create."¹

Believing that an artistic life is sustained largely by observation, Stella Adler cites the habits of creative people:

In his letters, Thomas Wolfe wrote, "This week I'm looking at noses." That's good, good to see that some noses droop down like waterfalls.

There are writers and artists from all over the world who go to see the trees in season in the south of France.

The student must look and see. He may, for example, discern different ways of walking: the parading on Fifth Avenue, the hanging-out on Ninth, the small, serene walk in Chinatown, or the shuffle in Harlem. From observing, he may be led to locate physically a particular way of walking, different from his own. Also, by looking into various environments, he may see that each place commands a certain kind of behavior. In this way, he can discover that one acting resource is the life around him, or, as Stella Adler states it, "The role exists in the world, not in the actor."

Researching historical life, especially for classical roles, is as relevant to the actor's work as observing contemporary life. Although Americans may be denied a first-hand view of the manners of emperors, queens, and statespeople, or the sight of castles, temples, and battle-fields,

¹All of Stella Adler's theory and direct quotations contained in this section, "The Life of the World," derives from notes and tapes of Studio classes in Technique I taught by her in 1961, 1968, and 1972.

Stella Adler asks the student not to decry his situation, moaning, "All I see is my father who plays poker every night, so how can I play Julius Caesar?" Telling him that history is on display for actors to examine, she urges him to drench himself in the pictorial art and relics of past cultures found in museums and books.

Since the student ultimately must make selections for the stage from amongst that which he observes, he is urged to refine and exercise his judgment, learning to distinguish between the epic and the trivial things of life. The epic, that which apparently has gone on and will go on eternally, may be exemplified by a boy tossing a ball, a mother feeding her baby, wind blowing through pine trees, war being waged, and peace cultivated. Sensitive contact with these sometimes called old-fashioned or traditional phenomena, which vibrate with a cosmic rhythm, serves to sway the student's focus away from the minutiae and business of temporal existence, by inviting him to share in a sense of eternity. If he can identify with, by measuring up to, that which is universal, he may yield for himself a broadened, elevated, and poignantly dramatic approach to the ideas and events occurring in plays.

To explain another way the actor exercises judgment, Stella Adler tells the student to decide what is good or bad, beautiful or ugly amongst that which he sees. He is to discover how he feels about things. She suggests he gravitate initially toward things he likes, those which immediately

catch his heart. To really like something, however, Stella Adler is careful to point out, means it has been seen and known not peripherally and generally but clearly and specifically, according to its own norm, with its own nature and true function apprehended. If the student really likes something, if he has caught its especial life, he will react to it.

People react to things depending upon how they see them, as Stella Adler demonstrates:

Sometimes, when a husband and wife go on a trip together, he might say, "My God! Do you know what that is? Why, that's Notre Dame!" And she replies, "Yes, I know. I can see it." They are each seeing in Notre Dame something entirely different.

In other words, one person looking at Notre Dame might be gleaning the whole history of the Middle Ages, while another is viewing a church.

Stella Adler classifies observations three ways. The first and most common, almost exclusively concerned with the facts of a thing, is that which she calls "Banking":

If I ask someone, "What do you have there?" and he, holding a handful of bank notes, replies, "Five, ten, fifteen, twenty, thirty -- yes, I have thirty dollars in cash;" and, if describing what he saw at the grocery, he says, "I saw some grapes, and pears, and bananas," then he makes a good banker but not a good actor. He sees things in the manner of accounting.

The "Banking" way of seeing takes note of the facts. "It's a rose and it's red. It has a two-inch stem and four petals." This way, Stella Adler explains, is unhealthy for the actor, because the more the rose is described factually, the less

it is a rose. In other words, the moment an object is given a bank-account, it begins to die.

With the second way, "Seeing the Life," the viewer lets the object speak to him:

If with the bank notes again, he says, "I have some bills here that are rather dirty. Perhaps we can get them changed. Oh! here's a two dollar bill. Is that worth anything?"; and, if with the fruit, he says, "I saw some fantastic pears that were big, but looked too expensive to buy. Then I saw those wonderful Malaga grapes, long and very sweet. There were also some of those great big, blue grapes, and the baby ones, the little green ones. Those you can eat by the pound, and, by the way, they're very cheap." -- that is more the actor's way.

This way, heightened seeing, respects the object's nature, acknowledging that it has a life of its own. Also, because a relationship is born between the viewer and the object, a spiritual communication may arise between them. In so far as the actor looks into an object's nature, lets it be, and listens to its story, he may be fed by its life; hence, his work benefits.

Optimum for the actor, the third way, "Traveling," occurs when the observer not only lets the object live, but also gives it rein to lead him wherever it deigns. For example, picking up a pair of spectacles, Stella Adler demonstrates:

Well, these are mostly glass. I suppose a lot of people wear them, but they're really rather ugly -- just two pieces of glass. They're not meant for anything but to see through.

I used to wear glasses, but I've given them up. I guess I sacrifice because glass has no pleasantness in it. Wouldn't you feel much better if there were wine in the glass, or whiskey? But by itself, this

piece of glass has no personality.

The rim around them is kind of opaque. Do you know stones that are opaque? They are the colors of death, the pale greens. But this is almost a kind of brown, and it's plastic. It's nice when it's amber, like amber ear-rings. They change color. People don't wear amber anymore, except in Paris, where the shops are full of it. I guess that's because it's very hard for a Frenchman to give up anything he ever had in the past.

This way of seeing, not engineered by guess-work or supposition, is impelled by the object's power to rouse the viewer's recollection of things he may never have consciously considered, things that are, however, somewhere within his memory. With the object as catalyst to a chain of references, the observer goes and keeps on going. He travels as if he could go on forever -- discovering, uncovering, recovering what he holds but did not know he had. By practicing this way of seeing, the student may come to trust Stella Adler's contention that "every object contains one's whole life." She wants him to awaken himself to a sense of already knowing and having all there is to know and have.

Contending that "the actor is drawn to art because he cannot elsewhere express very much of what he has inside him," Stella Adler may summon the student to nurture his private, internal self by saying:

The actor is like a writer, full of impressions that speak to him. He does not go around being a sort of clerk without a job, saying, "I'll have bacon and eggs." When he gets bacon and eggs, he sees them as well as the waitress, the table, the restaurant with its rushed activity. He gathers in the place. He is able to see that the floor has dirt on it, but the table is spotless; the coffee is weak; nobody is really paying any attention to each other; everybody

is in a hurry. He takes in. He is not there just to eat, pay his check, and go out. He is able to live there, watching, seeing, and understanding by saying, "What is it? What am I looking at?" -- the way a painter does, the way a writer does.

Stella Adler promises the student that if he will meliorate his way of seeing, his spirit may richly resound with images and ideas and not ring hollow, with nothing to impart. When things are respectfully seen, when they are neither emptied out nor deprived of their lives, they resuscitate the viewer. Respectful seeing thus evokes a two-way flow of sympathy, or a functioning of love. Stella Adler exclaims, "The more capacity the actor has to understand the nature of things, the more compassionate will he be."

Although Stella Adler guides the student's manner of working with a partner mainly in scene study sessions during the second year of the training, at this early but crucial stage she pinpoints for him the correct disposition for listening; that is, to follow the picture, or to see what someone else is saying. To listen is to take in, not blot out, another's verbalized vision. It is not to wait for pauses, stops, or punctuation to react. The listener, active, not passive, needs to be as vibrantly alive with images of what he is hearing as is the speaker delivering the picture. And if the speaker is indigent within himself, the listener must fill in with his mind's eye whatever is lacking.

The student is told that he ought in no case ever find himself sitting without seeing. At any time, he may

travel anyplace, pursuing the life within the simplest object. His trips are not logical, but creative. His sights build, grow, expand until finally he realizes he could, as Stella Adler says, write volumes on what he is able to see. By means of observation, the student may make of the world outside an abundant resource within.

In essence, the Principle is: "BE FULL OF THE LIFE AROUND YOU."

The Life of the Imagination

"All life in art is imaginative."

In respect of the godlike nature of imagination, Stella Adler designates it the source of acting. Telling the student that the imagination embraces "everything that you know consciously and at least ten billion times more that you know unconsciously,"² she explains that for the actor conscious knowledge exists to awaken unconscious knowledge upon which to draw. By tapping the unconscious, which she calls "the life within," the actor is provoked to act.

The imagination functions for the actor in various ways. Overall, it serves as a filter through which the fiction of the stage is passed in order to make it real. The process involves the actor's taking every single element of

²All of Stella Adler's theory and direct quotations contained in this section, "The Life of the Imagination," derives from notes and tapes of Studio classes in Technique I taught by her in 1961 and 1972.

the script and stage environment, and, by the creative power of his imagination, granting to each a specific life, fitting to its own nature.

For example, the imagination provides the actor with a solution to his stickiest problem, which is to avoid speaking words or saying lines on stage that he neither believes nor feels. When the language of the text, including any idea, event, person, or thing about which the actor must speak, is given over to the imagination's life-imparting capacity, each reference can be verbally engendered on stage as something true. Each can be something truly existing because, having afforded each a context and a content, the actor has made it exist. By animating what was heretofore passive fiction, the actor eschews lying on stage.

The value of the actor's contribution to the stage production depends upon the fertility with which he uses his imagination. By building a world behind and under the words of the script, the actor, as Stella Adler says, shares in the miracle of life. She thus emphasizes that it is not facts that are presented to the audience, but creation.

The student begins to approach the use of his imagination by learning to picture anew. He is exhorted to divorce himself from seeing his own habitual circumstances, including his own culture, home, neighborhood, family; henceforth, with the eyes of his imagination, he is to envision fresh territories in which he sees himself active in uncustomary enterprise. Whereas actual life tends

toward redundancy and boredom, imagined life, adventurous, exciting, compellingly attractive, may transport the student to other times and unfamiliar regions with unknown people. To begin, Stella Adler may suggest to the student how much more interesting it might be for him to imagine preparing coffee in her kitchen using her coffee pot, than brewing it routinely in his own ordinary situation.

As with his observation of life in the material world, the student is instructed to rule his imaginary sights with clarity and the inclusion of detail. The more specifically he sees imaginatively, the deeper is he propelled into exploring his unconscious life.

Stella Adler postulates categorically that the student need not question whether what he imagines actually exists or not. Whether extracted from one's remembered experience or from the universal subconscious, whatever is enlivened by the imagination has the right to exist and does. If Stella Adler asks the student to imagine a lemon tree, she believes him capable of growing some specific kind of lemon tree, whether or not he has actually seen one; furthermore, as long as the lemon tree is alive for him, it exists and can be brought to the stage.

With Stella Adler narrating the outlines of a scene, the student is asked to penetrate, with his mind's eye, foreign terrain. For example, he may be asked to wend his way along a country road. When he hears "country road," he is expected to recognize immediately that he has been "placed"

(put into circumstances), and so must begin to visualize his surroundings in detail. By seeing specifically, he can know the place where he is, and from that knowing he might figure out what to do within that place. Also, by seeing specifically, he is protected from ever speaking of environs and circumstances into which he has never entered.

As Stella Adler explains,

The playwright is never going to give you a country road that belongs to you. He will only give you to say, "I was walking along a country road." You will supply the body, saying to yourself, "It is dusty, the color of rust, streaming through corn fields high on both sides." Though the playwright indicates the circumstances, he does not give them to the actor.

At this preliminary stage, then, the student learns to fill out facts and images spoken to him, so that later, when working with a text, he may apply the technique of informing words with specific imagined reality to making himself easy with any circumstances of which he must speak. In other words, the imagination lets the student know what he is talking about.

To know what one is talking about, Stella Adler explains, means to understand the logic of the place and hence the nature of everything within it. This she calls "managing the circumstances," the importance of which she may show as follows:

Suppose on stage I say to you, "Would you like to have a drink?" And your answer is, "No thanks, I have one." If we were in the Peruvian mountains, you wouldn't know what the hell kind of drink you were talking about. It could be fermented llama milk.

Or if you pick up your tumbler in a Shakespeare play, and say, "Health to the King!" and don't know what you are drinking, you are drinking the words.

By assimilating the logic of where he is, the actor can manage the circumstances. He can know what kind of drink that place has to offer, as well as the nature of everything else that comes his way.

The student is summarily directed to see in detail; to create, integrate, and personalize through the imagination every element given him by the playwright in order that the whole of the play may become his own property. It must not remain outside himself, the printed words of a playwright's text. "If it is Shakespeare's, throw it out! It has to be yours," Stella Adler says.

In order to dispel any mystery clinging to the student's concept of how the actor personalizes the facts of a script, Stella Adler explains that it is simply a natural process of slowly opening oneself up in order to give birth. For example, the student might begin to appropriate any section of a text by asking himself questions:

What am I saying?
 Can I say this in my own words?
 Can I put them into a place?
 What place is this?
 What is necessary for this place?
 What must be done in this place?

As a result of employing this technique, he is impelled to think, see, select, and finally imagine himself doing something somewhere. Stella Adler says that the depth to which the actor applies specific imagination to creating content

and surroundings for the textual facts is that same profundity with which he may knowledgeably and honestly speak on stage -- from imagined experience. She thus asks the student to plumb his imagination to its depths, that his subconscious life may surface and feelings flow.

Finally, the imagination may help to arouse sympathy for a character. Stella Adler tells the student that by devising a story in which he sees a person in action within circumstances, he may be moved to care about him. She may ask the student to imagine what happens to a man holding a large package while waiting for the bus. To care about this person, the student is advised that it is essential for him to see something like this: when the bus stopped, the man tried to board it; but the package was so big and there were so many people on the bus, that he just decided to get down, turn around, and walk home. It is not good for him merely to say, "The man didn't take the bus." The former, which is seeing the life behind a fact in living detail, lets the student feel the insides of another's shoes; while the latter, which is stating the fact, leaves him with cold feet.

This using the imagination to give life to facts is "a big secret of acting," Stella Adler says. In fact, she credits imagination with nine-tenths of the acting. It alone makes the actor's work honest. Without it, words are just words. The place is no place. The objects are nothing. The characters are nobodies. The actor is empty, and his acting is fabrication. With it, words have meaning. The place

and objects have reality. The characters are embodied. The actor, replete with images, sights and feelings, has the need to do something. In short, the acting is realized.

In essence, the Principle is: "EVERYTHING ON STAGE IS A LIE UNTIL YOU MAKE IT TRUTHFUL."

The Life of Ideas

"Nine-tenths of the attraction of acting is a love affair with ideas. A small part is money, fame, or something like that."

Just as the first-term student is encouraged to cultivate generosity of spirit, so, too, is it time to enlarge his mind to encompass the "big ideas" of the collective human consciousness. This mental stretch, toward penetrating thoughts profound and lifting his response to them high above street-level glibness, is essential to the training of the actor, because, according to Stella Adler,

Just as the good writer gets dissatisfied producing mystery novels, so does the good actor need more than light comedy. The actor needs big ideas. His size comes from his ability to understand the problems of our time, which he carries in his core. Understanding is the center of his being.³

The student must taste and imbibe those ideas in life and literature flavored with universality, and must season and serve them in a manner that relishes their scope.

³All of Stella Adler's theory and direct quotations contained in this section, "The Life of Ideas," derives from notes and tapes of Studio classes in Technique I taught by her in 1961, 1968, and 1972.

To awaken the student to the need for broadening his understanding of universal ideas, Stella Adler comments upon the thematic nature of modern dramatic literature. Referring to that body of dramaturgy begun by and composed since Henrik Ibsen, she holds that, even though the fundamental purpose of all theatre may be to entertain, the modern theatre is not one of jokes, but of moral ideas pertaining to human society. Since each play is written with a comprehensive ethical aim, contemporary drama abounds in "big" (immutable) ideas pertinent to humanity, as opposed to "little" (relative) ideas pertinent to a local sector.

The big ideas of a drama both refer to and propel its theme. As Stella Adler describes the typically modern theme, it has to do with the demeaning of mankind, or the loss of identity, due to modern life style. It may be specifically stated as the loss of tradition, including God; or the loss of community life, including the ethical order; or the loss of family life, including morality and honor. It is often dramatized through a "life-or-death" situation, and the demise in question may be that of the soul.

As with the ideology, the forces at play within modern drama are universal. The modern character, as opposed to the character in pre-twentieth century drama, is subject to the winds of vicarious fortune or fate. He is no longer subject to the gods, the king, or the Church. He is as bereft of religious guidance and traditional rules as an abandoned infant. He is left with only himself to scavenge for

a personal morality. He may end either fortunate or unfortunate, but cannot be judged either right or wrong. Stella Adler characterizes modern drama as conveying "the dilemma of people stranded in a world in which nobody wins, nobody loses, and there is no solution."

To emphasize, perhaps even to exaggerate for an effect, the universal point of view of modern drama, Stella Adler heralds it as larger than Shakespeare's. "Hamlet is interested in Denmark, but the modern character is interested in humanity," she says.

In explaining how the actor fits into the scheme of modern dramatic ideology, Stella Adler defers to the playwright. She says that he asserts and is able to assert a morality upon the play. That is because he understands mankind's loss of faith in modern life, and has suffered for that understanding. The actor, too, in turn, must understand and suffer the knowledge of moral loss. Stella Adler says that that is the price he pays for the privilege to ascend the platform.

In her opinion, the modern actor bears the tremendous responsibility of deeply understanding the moral questions of his day. For that, he requires clarity of mind and values. He must know what is necessary, what is appropriate, what is correct, and what is true, as well as the converse.

It is detrimental for the student to accommodate what she calls "audience" (common) thinking or "audience"

(conventional) standards. It is imperative for him to exhibit standards and unravel thinking as lofty and complex as the eminent ideas of modern drama. His vocation, "to interpret the author's ideas so that the audience might be aroused to an understanding of their own lives," puts him in the position of public educator or public servant, but not in the position of the public. Yet, he never patronizes the audience; the ideas of a play, after all, though propounded by writers, belong to and stem from the lives of everyone.

Stella Adler explains that the ideas of a play may sometimes seem unsuited to the actor's personal predilections. However, the play's moral aim, not his own taste, is his concern. Pointing out that there is "no play written about my life and my facts," Stella Adler directs the student toward the actor's path, which is to have an "on-going aim to serve, to give, and to sacrifice something along the way." Treading this path, which may include subordinating his personal beliefs to the large purpose of the drama, the actor may enable himself and the audience to increase in awareness, to elevate consciousness through the ideas presented.

The student of Stella Adler is urged to fall in love with big ideas. If not, he might commit the error of first memorizing the lines of a play, and thus, being headlong into rehearsed recitations, bury the ideas. Stella Adler explains that learning lines or saying words is the

final step in the actor's work, just as writing the dialogue was the end product of the author's labor. Anyone, Stella Adler reminds the student, can say words or recite lines, the banality of which she may bring home as follows:

Some actor wanting help once came to me and asked if I would read the part to him. I said, "Yes, certainly, but why? Don't you believe that I read English?"

Instead of counting lines and practicing line-readings, the student learns first and foremost to catch, and find a way to love, the ideas inherent in the text. His job is not to reiterate English, but to deliver his understanding of the ideas of a play. This demands not only that he unveil the excitement, color, and power of ideas, but that he "marry" them as well. Stella Adler makes the comparison that "the difference between a good actor and a student playing Hamlet is that the actor has made the ideas his own, while the student speaks English."

Asking the student to select an excerpt from an essay by Emerson or some other writer who speaks of big ideas, Stella Adler teaches a technique for making ideas one's own:

1. Understand within you what the author is talking about. Consult a dictionary for any word that has uncertainty for you. Use a thesaurus to find synonyms that stimulate you emotionally.
2. Write out the essay in your own words.
3. Return to the author's text, and read it in sequences of thought. Never memorize words! Study the sequences, finding the point of attention in each, so as not to wander. Find the overall growth, either upward or downward, of the sequences. Make them second-nature.
4. Using your own words, tell the sequences to

someone, making him understand you. Keep to the point of each, and get the growth.

5. Return to the text. Using the author's words, tell the sequences to someone, making him understand you. Fill the words with their full meanings that you have understood.

Through practicing this technique, the student necessarily begets a feel for language. The technique precludes his being casual with words or taking them at face value. He is told to particularize, to individualize the words with the sense and vibration he perceives behind and under them. This process, one of shaping and coloring, results in words not all sounding either the same or neutral. Imagination is, of course, the key to particularization. Stella Adler says that to enable others to see what he is talking about, the actor uses his imagination to see it first himself.

Some phrasing of a text, as that which is there to convey information, wants not so much animation as being put into perspective. It needs to be seated somewhere in the middle between the levels of light and dark. Other phrases and words, however, especially those which stand as sign-posts for the expression of big ideas, want a considerable and considerable response. For example, peace, war, struggle, love, death, children, humanity, hope, truth, charity are not colloquial words, do not convey information, and are not in the middle. They cannot be treated informally.

To locate these high level words and the big ideas which they announce, the student is referred to the plays of

Shakespeare, Shaw, Ibsen, Strindberg, and more recent social dramatists. In Shakespeare or Shaw, Stella Adler notes, the ideas are expressed with an abundance of words, disclosing a very developed command of language. In most modern authors, however, the words of ideological expression are generally fewer and less poetic. Nevertheless, the energy demanded of the actor to impart the ideas of modern drama, or to impress the mind of another, is of the same magnitude as that required to communicate the lavish and complicated thinking of Shakespeare or the intricate and dynamic thinking of Shaw. Thus, Stella Adler contends, "Realism is not about getting up on stage. It is also not the style of acting to the minimum. Realism is about acting a theme propelled by big ideas."

Acting to the maximum connotes being full of the energy derived from understanding and loving big ideas. The student is told that if he will get each sequence of an essay or prose selection or dramatic monologue inside himself through deep and thorough thinking and use of his imagination, and if he will have the determination to reach someone with the ideas, the theme of the piece will be acted as well as discerned and understood by his listeners. However, for the actor to act any theme truthfully, Stella Adler says, "The acting must be done as a human being fighting for some values. If it is done as an actor, the technique is weak."

The power to project the magnitude of a big idea

also comes from two physical aspects of the training: 1) extending the articulation beyond the level of everyday conversation; and 2) straightening the body to suit the content of the idea. When the actor's voice and body are correctly, not slackly, defined, the audience is affected. They are moved to pay attention to the meaning of the idea.

To illustrate the correct physical form for the expression of a big idea, Stella Adler might first describe what it is not:

If I have to say, "A girl friend of mine told me that the best way to get a maid is to read the New York Times ad section," it is possible, because of the nature of that statement, for me to sit leisurely down, even remove my shoes. It is possible to break [collapse] my posture while delivering that thought. When the English is not selected, then neither the body nor the voice needs selection. The form is loose.

When, however, the idea is sizeable and the language not colloquial, physical refinement is wanted:

A big idea needs platform, a presence. It needs from you a voice. You cannot have a crumpled tie and a banana in your hand. You cannot sit and be comfortable, but must be set in some place, located. You must be in the form.

The physical form for the expression of big ideas is a body worthy of sculpture and a voice worthy of recording.

To conclude, Stella Adler explains that, in conveying a big idea, the actor may be experiencing its content, or re-living its content, or explaining its meaning, or educating someone through it. Whichever form he is using to express a big idea, the actor must be thinking it through each time he articulates it. He gives birth to it,

discovering it as he speaks. By so doing, he is able to include his stage partner and the audience in his coming to terms with the idea; he is able graciously to afford everybody the opportunity to share in its unfoldment, as if they were together in discussion. He thereby might achieve that psychic size which ultimately makes the idea, the dramatic struggle, and himself more human on stage.

In essence, the Principle is: "UNDERSTAND! DO NOT LIE."

The Life of Materials

"The play comes nine-tenths from the outside, including from the ability to be at home in the costume."

Stella Adler is familiar with the young actor's attempt to approach a role by looking for it inside himself. The effort to bring out his internal sensibilities usually results in a mishmash of what she calls "emotional kvetching" (faked feelings) and lies, resulting in a frightened young actor. When admonishing the student who tries to leap into the emotions of a part, she might ask, "Who said, 'If crying was all that was needed in acting, the greatest actress would be my grandmother?'"⁴ She considers it preferable by far for the student to seek his stimulation

⁴All of Stella Adler's theory and direct quotations contained in this section, "The Life of Materials," derives from notes and tapes of Studio classes in Technique I taught by her in 1961 and 1972.

outside himself, especially in the life of materials. That life, in her opinion, is one of the best sources of creation for the student, as well as a tangible pathway to mirroring the many sides of himself that may lead to characterization.

Costume

In Stella Adler's experience, costume is a sure and dependable avenue to the inside self, because it provokes a response. It compels the actor to move, walk, sit in a manner different from his habit, in the manner appropriate to the costume. To put its legitimate value in perspective for the student, she may remark:

You think that costume is Brooks Brothers. But the costume is a whole creative point of identification for the actor with its nature -- its quality, texture, the way it hangs, and the reason for its being as it is. It is more creative than the emotion, much more than the words.

If the student learns to wear and use the costume as the costume demands, according to what she calls its "norm", he may "own" it. Her goal is for the student to appreciate the costume's nature and glean what that nature represents. He may then apply his understanding of the exterior to discovering the interior of the character inhabiting the costume.

Stella Adler proposes that the costume must be selected by the actor himself, rather than designed and constructed without his input and consent. To defend her point, she may relate the following:

When I was eight years old, my father said to me, "Well, you're going to play Young Spinoza. Now, I would like you to go to the library and get some

pictures of Spinoza, and then go to the costume designer and tell him what kind of costume you need."

Why did he say that? He said it because he believed that an actor is responsible, whatever age he may be. He was talking to a young actress. He was not talking to his child. He didn't have any children; he had actors.

The student is taught to understand and select a costume first of all from the point of view of social class. Stella Adler says that even though in modern society people's everyday apparel may appear to be mixed-up and class demarcation outwardly confused, on stage the dress must specifically designate the class. This class rendering grounds the actor, enabling him to know from whence his character came and what behavior he ought to perform -- based upon what he is wearing.

To motivate the student to experiment with costume, in order that the student may experience how he is influenced to conduct himself and feel differently by simply changing his dress, Stella Adler uses some examples:

In the Comédie-Francaise the actors all come into rehearsal in very formal, old-fashioned clothes to give them a sense of being in the theatre. They practice for hours and hours the behavior in accordance with the clothes.

In the old days [of theatre in America], the actors wore clothes that made them feel important. But you wear clothes that make you feel unimportant. If you want to put a man on stage and give him a real sense of defeat, let him wear your shirt. But put him in an officer's uniform with a sword, and he will never sit around the way you do.

It is Stella Adler's intention to establish in the student the desire to distinguish himself, by his selecting what he

wears and experiencing the effect of the selection.

The effect of any element of costume derives from its particular nature, which must be allowed to speak to the actor, not he to it. The student is told to apprehend the nature of each element, finding out how to treat it, handle it, wear it; otherwise, its life is denied. She may manifest the operation of this principle with the example of a top hat:

Find out its nature. Where does it live? It lives in a box, which gives you information about it. It has a certain value because it lives in a box that is tied with a ribbon. When you have a hat that is housed in a box, you know it needs a certain kind of care.

Warning the student not to impose an artificial nature upon something that yet has no nature comprehensible to him, she orders, "Do not put something on unless you know how to take it off." To call to mind how actors frequently murder the costume by parading a lie, she may inquire:

Have you seen people in the movies dressed as Christian Soldiers, walking around all slumped over? You see that a lot in the opera. They are wearing the costume, but don't know its life, or what to do with it. They don't know how to put it down, where it should be put down, how to pick it up, how to clean it.

Until the costume's nature -- what is logically true about it -- reveals itself to the student, it ought to be approached as a stranger; that is, tentatively, cautiously, respectfully getting acquainted with it, yet making oneself available to it. This technique is paramount, Stella Adler insists, when confronting any element of costume that comes

from another period of history. Such things can in no way be used as anything from modern times; a cape cannot be worn as a jacket. When experimenting, the student may find that to adorn himself with a cape, its nature requires but one clean sweep, rather than four untidy jerks.

Because the life of something historical is virtually unknown to modern people, costume of any by-gone era must be scrutinized in the light of the culture and social class for which it was designed. The cape, because it has a certain width and flow, tells the actor it was invented to offer the person under it a status, appearance, and relationship both to himself and the society different from that of a person wearing a coat.

Stella Adler explains to the student that the character's social class, and often the period of the play, is atypical of his own. A king, for example, might be in the habit of being ceremoniously assisted down steps and borne above the streets. He is also used to wearing a crown and perhaps a cape, and so is not bothered by them. To guide the student toward experiencing the normal use of the costume, Stella Adler says,

All the crown requires is for you to wear it. It does not require you to squint your eyes or stiffen your shoulders. Its nature does not allow you to bob up and down when you walk with it on. Therefore, you are actually protected by the life of the crown. Though you are in another culture, if you have understood the norm of that period and class, you will not distort the nature of the costume.

If the costume's nature is heeded and permitted to

express itself, it may be handled creatively rather than according to some stage convention. By personalizing the costume's use, the actor may make his acting more individual. Once he has discovered the cape's nature and norm of use, he may decide, for example, that he can fly with it, or cover something, or run with somebody under it. "The cape must belong to the actor," Stella Adler says, "not to Eaves Costumes." Just as the king does not "wear" the crown, as it is not on him but is part of him, the actor finally does not wear the costume but owns it; it is second-nature.

Whether the costume includes a crown or an old sweater, each element aids the actor in becoming a character. By simply lending his body to an aging, woolly sweater with sagging pockets, the student can sense his physical self following and conforming to the nature of the sweater; then, his behavior, and furthermore his attitude, can adapt to suit the style of the comfy old sweater, too. Because of these very sensible, practical results, Stella Adler esteems the costume, much more than the emotions, as the actor's most essential and reliable starting point for creating a role. She says:

You do not need the Method to put on the sweater.
The Method is to help you when you are in trouble.
At times, you cannot nor need not use it at all.
What you can use, and always need, is the norm of
the costume. Get it, and do not suffer it.

Not to "suffer it" means to know and control its nature. By listening to the costume and practicing what he hears, the student may correctly limit its manipulation.

No longer overwhelmed by a cape and its foreignness, he need not fear the loss of his direction in fussing with it.

Stella Adler is cognizant, of course, that the fabric and material accoutrements of theatrical costume are rarely of the same quality, texture, weave, construction as the real-life apparel they represent; nevertheless, that is all the more reason each element must be treated according to its nature in life, as if it were the same. Stella Adler thus teaches:

In the theatre, you will be given a metal crown. But when you have to take it off, do not take off a metal crown. Know that it is gold and has weight. The weight will help you take it off. You control the weight, whether the crown is actually made of metal or paper.

In other words, anything treated according to its actual norm is under control.

Because the actor is in control of an old sweater, a cape, a little kerchief from Russia, or the crown on Queen Elizabeth, the character, in Stella Adler's opinion, can enter into him. She believes, in fact, that the costume has the capacity to give the actor "the whole play."

Properties

Whatever techniques come into play in learning to possess the elements of costume also apply to the use of stage properties. Every prop has its own nature. Be it wide, large, narrow, small, heavy, rough, sweet, the nature must not be overlooked or dismissed, but noted and implemented. To exemplify, Stella Adler may offer the following:

If I say I am going to take a drink of milk, and then stick the cup to my nose, there would be something insane about that. I have to drink with my mouth. I must obey the nature of the cup, of the milk, and of drinking.

If some object's nature is unfamiliar to the student, he is told to study it until he understands it. He may observe there is a difference, for example, between writing with a ballpoint pen and writing with a quill. He may see that an historical or unfamiliar object cannot be employed in a contemporary or familiar way. In support of this, Stella Adler may say,

If I give a wallet to you, you know how to use it.
If I give a wallet to a monkey, he doesn't know how to use it. If I give a sword to you, you don't know how to use it, because it's a foreigner to you, and you to it. You must become a friend to it.

The way to befriend an object, Stella Adler teaches, is to heed it. It is the scroll, therefore, that tells the student how to open and read it.

The prop not only informs the actor what to do with it, but also helps him reveal his character. A cane, for example, as opposed to a gnarled stick, discloses the social class to which a person belongs; so does a fan, a lorgnette, a wig, or a crown. The props must be selected by the actor, Stella Adler stresses, and not left to the province of the Properties Person.

The student is instructed to base his choice of a prop upon his capacity to respond to it. To deepen the relationship between him and it, he is then asked to create an imaginative history for it, including such details as: how

it looked when it was first made or purchased; how it has worn or been altered since being in his possession. Building this kind of background for a prop enables it to have an identity, and enables the actor to relate personally to it.

By means of imagination, the actor also specifically denotes the current condition of every object. He may, for example, invest the prop pen with a crooked point, or imagine it is out of ink and needs filling. Stella Adler suggests that the student not make any prop depend upon or be confined to a concrete, stiff, banal lifelessness, but give it an imagined personality, some "reality" that is logical to the thing's nature. A black table might seem to be a burnt table. In this way, the actor develops with the object a special, interpersonal connection, warming him to it, letting him feel something about it when he uses it.

As soon as a prop is furnished with a specific past and present, it ceases to be a prop and becomes a living object. Thus, counseling the student never to take anything on stage for granted, Stella Adler remarks that finally for the actor there are no props but only his belongings, just as there is no costume but only his clothes.

In essence, the Principle is: "DISCOVER ITS NATURE."

CHAPTER III

ACTION: WHAT THE ACTOR DOES

In the second term at the Stella Adler Theatre Studio, the student begins to act. This is not to say that during the whole first semester he has never done an action. He has, but on the simplest physical level, neither complicated nor psychological. Doing actions, including the study of their specific natures, the circumstances around them, the attitude of the doer, and the justification for doing them, is the full domain of the second term.

Doing an action is the "meal" of acting, and rightly follows upon the preparatory work of honing tools and kindling the life of resources. Assuredly, advancing the body, voice, spirit, senses, mind, and imagination is a life-long pursuit; but, once initiated by the student, the world may come to be seen not so provincially, and possibilities for expression not so restrictedly. It is then time "to do."

The Physiology of Action

"The field of acting is not talking things over. They say, 'It's in three acts and twelve scenes, and things happen.'"

Throughout the student's training, to emphasize the danger of approaching acting through the words of a text, Stella Adler delivers such exclamations as: "We are up

against the word! Words are empty! Words need filling!"¹

The language of theatre is not the words on the page. Words cannot be taken literally as printed, since they often mean other than what they appear to mean. "Oh, come on," for example, does not necessarily imply "Come along with me." The language of theatre is the result of the life behind and under the words. This life Stella Adler designates as the "do-able nature" of words.

Every grouping of words, phrases, or sentences that comprises a sequence of thought has behind it some able-to-be-physicalized intention that in theatre parlance is called "the action." Stella Adler defines the action as "what I am doing most which involves where I am doing it." The actor's language, or mode of communication, then, is action -- the result of the life behind and under the words.

Since it has to do with the potency of some effort to be accomplished, the action is stated in the infinitive form of the verb. "To Study" is an action. Stella Adler advises the student to describe his action with whatever verb most moves him. "To Study" might be more provocatively expressed as "To Acquire," or "To Imbibe," or "To Pursue." It is important for the student to use terminology that motivates him to do something, because, beyond being

¹All of Stella Adler's theory and direct quotations contained in this section, "The Physiology of Action" (up to the ensuing subsections), derives from notes and tapes of Studio classes in Technique I taught by her in 1958 and 1967, and Technique II in 1973.

able to state the action of a sequence, he must need it, the need inciting the doing.

If the student is assigned an apparently inoperable action, due to its being too general for example, he is taught to break it down into its do-able parts. "To Work in the Garden" thus becomes viable when reduced to such chores as "To Rake the Leaves," and "To Trim the Hedges." Stella Adler tells the student to state the action as something able to be done.

All together, the actions found in a script form but the skeleton, the barest outline, of the play. They are a kind of recipe to follow, but not the banquet. The actor's job, by means of imagination and his other tools and resources, is to provide flesh for the bones.

Each character in a play pursues an overall main action, or direction, which is what he is trying to accomplish most in the course of his dramatized life. All his subsidiary actions feed this main aim, which, in turn, reflects the theme of the drama. As Stella Adler explains, the goal of acting is to do truthfully moment by moment, step by step, each successive action in some place; that is, to fulfill the recipe by supplying the ingredients. When each action is either won or lost, the actor, by means of a transition, proceeds to the next action. Stella Adler says, "Acting is telling the truth that is there for you. It is not pretending." Progressively, by activating each sequential truth, the main line of the character as well as

the thematic statement of the play are revealed.

Knowing the action informs the actor what to do in a sequence, but not how to do it. Stella Adler warns the student never to plan the manner of an action, since that, what she calls "following" (harassing) the action, imprisons the imagination. He is simply to know the nature of the action of each sequence. To illustrate the inefficacy of "planning the how," she may say,

An action is what you do most, but it never includes in what manner you do it. If my small physical action is "To Button My Coat," I do not say that I'll grasp the material with the right hand; take the button with the left; approach the button hole, gently sliding the button into the opening; and give a left-handed twist until it passes through. I simply button my coat. Just do your action.

Not planning the "how" keeps the action fresh, and as if it were being done for the first time always.

Explaining to the student that the actor is constantly being asked by the playwright, by the director, or by himself to do something, Stella Adler says that his ensuing responsibility is to be in charge of what he is doing. This requires understanding the natures of actions. To understand the do-able nature of an action is to recognize what it needs. If the student is asked "To Hold" something, he must know what is necessary in order to do that. Since the nature of holding, or of any action, is constant, unchanging, it can be ascertained once and for all time; that is, to hold is to hold, and is not to carry, or to clutch, or to bear. However, the doing of an action is adjusted

according to the action's "end" (objective), which is that point toward which the action is heading for its fulfillment, its accomplishment. In the case of holding, the end is that which the actor is trying to hold -- a book, a leaf, or a baby. The end tells the actor what he needs to do in order to carry out the action; therefore, the book, the leaf, or the baby, each according to its own life, tells the actor the adjusted nature of holding it.

Stella Adler says, "The action is in the end." By that she means that the objective is actually what makes it do-able. For example, "To Think" is impossible until provided with an end -- "To Think about Last Night." Likewise, "To Count" is amorphous until defined by an end -- "To Count the Lightbulbs in the Room," or "To Count the Dots on a Friend's Dress."

The end of an action enables the actor to experience it; the dots on the dress enable him to experience counting. The end also determines whether the experience is easy or difficult; the lightbulbs may be easy to count, the dots more difficult. But, Stella Adler explains, the amount of energy required to do any action, however easy or difficult, is not more or less than is necessary to reach its end. To count anything needs the amount of looking it takes to count that thing. If the energy used is more or less than is necessary, the action's nature is distorted. Therefore, the requisite energy expense for an action is also contained in its end; that is, to climb or to describe

a mountain costs more energy than to climb or to describe a stairway, or to hold the baby requires more attention than to hold a book. By focusing on the action's end, the actor may master what he is doing, while keeping the energy level sane.

As Stella Adler teaches, an action also includes "where I am doing it," since nothing occurs nowhere. At its most fundamental level, the environment of an action may be described by her as follows:

Every action has a world around it. I'm going to count the number of things on the table: a book, a lamp, two pencils, an ashtray, a cup -- six. What I am doing most is counting the things on this table. But as I am doing this most, what else is happening around me? I see that there is a white shirt there; she is moving her hands; there's a grey thing across the chair there; there's somebody with blue on; there's a little bit of red. This is the world around the action. Instead of paying attention to those things, I do my action, letting things happen around it.

Thus, the second-term student is supposed to know and experience the do-able natures of actions so thoroughly that, even as an action's objective or the world around it changes, he can sustain its do-able norm, however the doing of it is adjusted. Stella Adler says, "The tiniest nucleus of acting that you carry through all your life is that the nature of an action is hard or easy; it has a world around it; and you must try to do it."

Ultimately, to do an action from a script on stage, the student is told that he must supply answers to the following questions:

Who is doing it? (the character)
 Where is he doing it? (the place)
 What is around him? (the world of the circumstances)
 When is he doing it? (the period of the circumstances)
 What is his aim in doing it? (the objective)
 For whom is he doing it? (the partner)
 Why is he doing it? (the justification)

Except for the character, who makes his appearance in Chapter IV, the way in which these physiological problems may be solved for any action is the matter addressed in the ensuing subsections.

Simple Doing

Stella Adler initiates the student's practice of actions at their simplest level; that is, with the small, immediate, physical things people do in everyday life -- "To Sew" for example. She points out that when such activities are performed in life, because the person is fed by the reality of the objects at hand, he can do them automatically. However, to sew on stage, where props are drained of their reality, is not so easy. Objects must be invested with life by the actor in order that he may truthfully do actions in the theatre.

Since stage materials are generally representative of real things, as a glass of whiskey may be a plastic container of tea, or are perhaps absent altogether, the student's training entails working with real objects first, then with theatrically "real" objects, and with imaginary objects. Handling the real thing, he memorizes which muscles to what degree are exercised in using it. He may, for

example, repeatedly thread a needle, getting his muscles to remember the holding and moving of the needle and thread. He then does the simple action of sewing without the props in order to test if he can execute, normally and with ease, the steps of a physical action, with and without materials.

This elemental, physical drilling is, in Stella Adler's opinion, fundamental to all acting. To substantiate its importance, she says,

If an actor were really serious, and lived in a serious theatrical community, he would stop acting every five years to repeat his early muscle training -- to clean up, to stop the indication, to stop showing, to see where it has gotten faulty.

Musicians do that. They take off six months and go to Switzerland to practice. I lived next to Milstein, and, let me tell you, he practiced every day. He practiced scales. He didn't practice a piece. Well, these exercises are the scales.

Besides muscle training, the other part of Stella Adler's technique in working with objects is to maintain a sense of truth. Even though the muscle movement necessary to do a simple action may have been perfectly memorized, it must not be mechanically reproduced. Therefore, Stella Adler explains, nothing on stage can ever be taken for granted, nor can any action be presumed to be done. Every step of every simple physical action must be actually done. No step may be skimmed over if the actor is to experience, and have faith in, the reality of what he is doing. To

²All of Stella Adler's theory and direct quotations contained in this subsection, "Simple Doing," derive from notes and tapes of Studio classes in Technique I taught by her in 1961.

demonstrate, she might pick up an imaginary bottle while saying:

Please understand that you will never get ammonia on the stage, not in a thousand years. But if you open the bottle, really open the bottle, strangely enough you will be able to have ammonia. But if you don't really open the bottle, then the next tiny moment of "Phuh! ammonia, oh, god, that's strong." will not come. The principle is: When the body is true, the soul reacts; when the body lies, the soul gets frightened.

By beginning simply, the student gains confidence. By proving himself physically accurate, the audience can accept him, too. Stella Adler says, "In order to make them believe you, you must do it the way they do it at home." If, however, the actor indulges in the smallest physical lie, the audience intuitively rebels, withholding their trust -- possibly in the theme of the play, surely in the actor and his acting. Thus, she remarks,

It's like on television. When the girl picks up some jar and says, "Do you see this? It's cream." she is always "acting" a little bit. She is not really doing that tiny, physical thing, so it is terribly hard for her to convince me. In advertising, she doesn't need to; but on the stage, she will never be able to "act" like that. It is the tiny, physical thing that will release her to real acting.

No matter how psychologically complicated the dramatic situation around an action may be written, the student is instructed to commit himself, step by step, to the simple physical truths of any sequence. If he can sew on stage -- not show sewing; if he can shave on stage -- not do more or less than shaving, he may then take either action

into any circumstances, into any dramatic situation. That is, he may shave in a trench, using a rusty razor and the rainwater at his feet while bombs explode in the distance, as long as he has learned what shaving needs. However the plots of plays may change, the natures of actions do not, as Stella Adler teaches:

If you can read the letter, close the window, and put on your hat and coat, you can play any play I give you around that -- that you are leaving home forever; that you are going to the theatre; or that you are going out to kill a man. You can play any play if you can really close that window, if you can really read that letter. But if you are untruthful with the letter, and then say, "Now I am going to kill a man," you cannot go anywhere. You cannot get anywhere. You are physically false. You have to be physically true.

To play the simple truth of the play moment to moment is, in Stella Adler's memory, the single most important teaching given her by Stanislavsky. In other words, the foundation of real acting is successively and cumulatively experiencing each half-minute of a whole play.

She is thus convinced that every actor in the modern theatre is duty-bound to become an expert in doing simple actions, with and without props. The bulk of his legacy is not classical verse theatre, wherein the language is primary, but the theatre of doing, wherein communication emerges through the physicalization of the intention behind the language. While acknowledging that to some degree contemporary drama is neither unilaterally nor uniformly realistic, Stella Adler yet contends that, even in theatre so apparently stylized as that of Jerzy Grotowski, its basis

is the actor's creating a reality on stage.

To summarize the student's first physical step toward earning his inheritance, the modern theatre, Stella Adler may say,

Your style is what we call the realistic style. In that style, you are generally in a room, some kind of defined place. You are not in heaven or hell. You are not in purgatory. You are not in a Greek temple. You are on this stage. Being on this stage, you must find a way of being able to live on this stage. You must be able to live in whatever physical way I ask you, without talking. You must be able to tie your tie, smoke a cigarette, make a fire, set the table, put your books away, put on a record, fix a drink -- all this being very physically easy for you to do. You must not go to the words first. Always go to the physical life on the stage, and first see if you can live on it, with it, without words. Never go on stage unless you can say, "I am physically true in what I have to do. I can do one physical thing after another without words."

Learning techniques to make that reality on stage utterly alive for himself is the next step in the student's action training.

Complication of the Doing

Stella Adler explains that the stage, compared to life, is a severe and naked environment, possibly dead and boring for both actor and audience. It is a hard place to be, more so to do something. Yet, as she says, "Acting is something happening."³

³All of Stella Adler's theory and direct quotations contained in this subsection, "Complication of the Doing," derives from notes and tapes of Studio classes in Technique I taught by her in 1972, and Technique II in 1958 and 1973.

Things happen off the stage because life never goes quite straight. Rather than being simplistic, cut and dried, it is complicated, as Stella Adler notes:

Whenever I put on my jacket to go out, my maid is always brushing things off of it. It means my jacket has a life. Whenever I pick up the dog's chain, it is knotted. Something else has hair on it. In life, objects complicate themselves.

Therefore, to make things happen in the unhampered vacuity of the stage, the actor needs first to know what to do -- the action; he then needs to insert a complication into the doing so that it may come to life, as Stella Adler reveals:

In life, if I take a scotch and soda, it arranges itself. The soda is flat, so I take a fresh bottle. Or I say, "I just want that much. No thanks, I don't take ice." Other people do take ice. I know a Hungarian doctor who doesn't trust anybody with his drinks. When he takes a glass, he looks at it, then sterilizes it with his own handkerchief. But on stage, where everybody is always drinking scotch and soda, there is no life. Even if each actor would only ask himself, "How do I take my scotch and soda?" that would help. But they only do the convention of truth. They drink the stage scotch and soda.

A complication is defined as an obstacle put into the action that impedes it from moving directly toward its end. The student is instructed not to decide how he will overcome the impediment, but simply, by means of his imagination, to arrange that the circumstances around the action present some difficulty in dealing with them. To complicate an action is to invest it with "reality" and to control it.

Thus, when the student has become adept in the execution of simple physical actions, Stella Adler may say:

From now on, never take the simplest road. I want

you to decide: "I want to smoke a cigarette, but it's all crumpled, so I have to smooth it out first." Or make the matches wet, so you have difficulty in striking them. From now on, do not go to the simplest smoking of a cigarette, but have the control to complicate the simple, baby physical actions.

He is told that many actions, by nature, are already complicated. But every action that is a simple physical one requires the insertion of an obstacle to involve himself in trying to reach its end.

Through practice with actual and with imagined obstacles, the student learns to humanize the doing of many simple physical actions. For example, to put on his necktie, he must scratch off a spot of food; to read the letter, he must extract it from a sealed envelope; to put on his glasses, he must remove some sticky substance from the lenses; to put on his gloves, he must brush snow off them; to put on his socks, he must retrieve one from a shoe, the other from under the bed. By the actor's arranging for the props and circumstances to have "imperfections," spontaneity may arise within the action, due to the actor's heightened effort to surmount the obstacles.

Saying, "Your talent is in your choice," Stella Adler encourages the student to choose complications which cause him personally to respond emotionally, and which increase his need to accomplish an action. His choice is to be made toward, not away from, the end of an action, in order that, though hampered, the action will neither be abandoned in frustration nor rendered impossible. Also,

especially in the beginning, he is advised to avoid theatricality in his choices. For example, it is not so rare to have one's coffee-drinking impeded by cigarette ashes; it is quite extraordinary, on the other hand, to have it poisoned. The student is not to invent a tricky imposition upon the action, but is to adhere to the logical nature of objects and the circumstances when choosing complications.

In Stella Adler's opinion, complicating an action is one of the major means of living truthfully on stage, even if one is a "star." The beauty of it is that, by making the doing more true to life, an ambience emerges. To substantiate this idea, Stella Adler may defer to the philosophy of a playwright:

[Jean] Giraudoux says that to be able to live in the world, to know little things truthfully and to do them, is one of the greatest accomplishments in life. He says that you must respect God, but live your life.

In other words, the "big time" is not your picture in the papers. The real big time is: "I'm going to clean my skirt; I'm going to put on my glasses; I'm going to put on my watch -- and complicate it! I'm going to put on my watch, and, oh dear, the glass is loose, let me fix it -- there!" That's poetry. I'm really trying to do my simple physical action, and the poetry comes out. You don't have to make anything happen. It is there for you. The complication gives you the life. If you live truthfully with this watch, trying to fix it in order to wear it, you'll never be dead, but always alive. There is nothing better.

By putting complications, or reality, into his acting, the actor may relieve the props of the illusion of perfection and the actions of a mechanized numbness, and he himself may be released to the truth of life and natural impulse.

Circumstances around the Doing

An action always has surroundings, known as the circumstances, of which there are two sets. The larger, which answer the question, "Where is the play?", embrace the society and period in which the play is set. The immediate circumstances, which answer the question, "Where am I?", encompass the place and its effects, including the stage partner, in which the current action is being done. Both sets, sketched in the lines of the play, are made three-dimensional by the actor's imagination. By reading out (seeing what is there), not by reading in (imposing what is not there), the actor studies the script, gleaning facts and receiving impressions in order to give body and color to the playwright's drawing. He does not add fiction to fiction, but makes the fiction come to life.

In perceiving the circumstances of the play, the actor can discover his character's main aim and each subsidiary action that feeds into it. In other words, as Stella Adler says, "The action is found within the place."⁴ That is, the action the actor takes is determined by where he is and who is with him there.

⁴All of Stella Adler's theory and direct quotations contained in this subsection, "Circumstances around the Doing," derives from notes and tapes of Studio classes in Technique I taught by her in 1972, and Technique II in the 1960's and 1973.

The Larger Circumstances: Each play has its own present time coming from a past. The dramatist depicts the present and suggests what preceded it. The actor's responsibility, in Stella Adler's teaching, is to construct imaginatively a full and vibrant past logical to the information given in the play. The technique is to "activate the facts," or imaginatively experience a context for them in living color, in order to resurrect the life gone before. Awakening the character's past relationships within himself enables the actor to live knowledgeably within the present, doing and speaking from a history, not from a text.

To get the student practiced in creatively unearthing a background for a play, Stella Adler assigns him a sample plot: "I met Henry in Hartford at the Athletic Club. He phoned me at the General Electric factory in Brooklyn, where I work because I need money, to invite me to his wedding. The wedding of Henry, who attends Princeton University, will be a large, formal, Christian ceremony."

The student is first of all requested to compose his relationship with Henry, including an attitude toward him which may be that "I like him in spite of his faults;" or "I have much in common with him." Either of these factual attitudes is "activated" (brought to life) by the student's imaginatively seeing himself in action in various circumstances from his past with Henry; since from the past together, his attitude was formed. By giving specific

background to their relationship, the student is able to speak about Henry. For example, if he builds a scene in which Henry, after losing a game of racquet ball comes over to shake hands with him, then he has the right to say "I like Henry."

Likewise, the student must construct the background for himself, the character. He is reminded that the character's background is in no way the same as that of himself, the actor. Asking, "To what class do I belong?" he begins to establish a behavioral sense, particularly by finding out the values and general life-style of that class. He then imagines himself active within the environs peculiar to his daily round, including: the type of factory work he does from start to finish in a day and the layout of the space in which he works; the exterior and interior of his family's house in Brooklyn as well as what goes on within; the type of transport he takes to work. Stella Adler requires the student to test the viability of his imagined background, of which he has been asked to draw pictures, by actually "constructing" the rudiments of one of his environments on the studio stage, in order that he may learn to live there. He may suggest the basics of the factory, for example, and try to work there comfortably, performing simple actions without words. In such ways, the student may realize the past of his character, manifesting through imagined and real experience that which has contributed to

making him who he is now.

So, too, must the student build a background for Henry. He delineates specific images that manifest, for example, the ethics and political status quo of Princeton society, and the religiosity of a Christian wedding ceremony. This is in order that he may understand Henry's way of thinking, based upon his class upbringing, and how Henry's thinking might differ from his own. Thus the student, as a living someone, replete with background experience and an attitude toward Henry, is prepared to react to the invitation of his friend. In other words, by creating the past the actor is able to respond to the present.

Stella Adler warns the student that to apply this technique of devising and imaginatively inhabiting the larger circumstances of an entire play is painstaking, perhaps ever painful, work; it is, after all, a process of giving birth. Nevertheless, in order to interpret the whole present time of a play, it is imperative to know the past. Without knowing the background society of himself and the partner, as well as the evolution of the relationship between them, the actor cannot know what to think and what to do about him.

In addition, Stella Adler tells the student that there is no short-cut to "mothering" the large circumstances. The sole mode is slow, diligent, careful labor. The actor must absorb whatever impressions he gets from a play, filter

these and the facts of the script through his imagination, and nurture and enlarge upon them in great detail in order to produce an experienced background. As a result, however, he may be at home and at ease within the play, awakened, as he is, to the complete set of social truths behind the play. The principle to be learned from building the background is that whereas it is impracticable to try to respond to the partner through the inert facts, the lines, of a script, it is natural to respond to him through their social history.

The Immediate Circumstances: Remarking that "in life, everybody is a great actor because they accept the ease of circumstances," Stella Adler explains that the circumstances on stage are neither so easy nor so generous as those in life. To be comfortable on stage, the actor must create his own circumstances, since they are but indicated, not given to him, in the script. Then, to act on stage, the actor must grow very familiar with those circumstances.

The immediate circumstances, including the place, the situation, and the partner, exist to impell the actor to do something about where he is, with whom he is, according to who he is. In other words, the source of the action is within the circumstances, the place. For example, if Stella Adler "places" the student in a train station, he may find himself compelled to do the action "To Wait."

Referring to the immediate circumstances of any play as the "now", Stella Adler says that it must be wanted by

the actor. If he craves an alternative, his mind, heart and creativity are not in the play. For example, if he prefers a train station from his own life instead of the train station indicated to him; or if he prefers the train station of yesterday's rehearsal or that of last night's performance, he cannot act. Noting the unacceptability of putting one's own life on stage or of repeating anything exactly, Stella Adler guides the student to the one remaining possibility; that is, to do an action in specifically created circumstances experienced for the first time. The now of the play is his focus as well as all that exists for him.

On the other hand, it is by the grace and power of the actor's imagination and thoughts that the now exists on stage at all. From clues given in the script, he generates it. He makes the furnishings, the props within his surroundings alive for him by creating attitudes toward them, by investing them with lives of their own. Around the immediate situation, the actor enlivens a world that has a climate, sounds, smells, vibrations -- all manner of penetrations logical to that place.

The immediate circumstances give to the actor his action, affect the manner of his carrying it out, and determine whether he wins or loses it. (Terminating or abandoning the action prior to accomplishing its end constitutes losing it.) It may be that some factor (a telephone call) enters the circumstances to stop the action; or it may be

that the stage partner is resistant to the action; or it may be that the objective of the action is won -- at such points, the action is stopped, eliciting a time of transition. During a transition, the student is told, the actor may think, or verbalize the transition, or do some simple physical activity within the place to carry him over to the subsequent action necessary for the consecutive now. As Stella Adler explains, the action changes when and because everything else has changed. To illustrate, she may offer a situation that: "A man is at a party; he is hugging someone in the dark. The lights come on, revealing that the someone is another man." The man's action is lost because the circumstances have altered; there is a transition; his next action arises from the new set of immediate circumstances. The play is played by adjusting to the flow and ebb of one now to another now.

Stella Adler defines acting as not talking but doing something in a place and letting things happen. To the depth that the actor personalizes the circumstances, making everything within them familiar to himself, he has the capacity to let things happen in that place. Being at home there, he is liberated. He is available to life vibrating within the now, to obstacles within the action or intrusions upon the circumstances, to surprises, to things happening for the first time. Accordingly, Stella Adler poses a warning to the student: "Do not become hypnotized by this

clinical thing [the action's do-able nature]⁵ that I tell you to do in the action." Rather, she wishes the student to select whatever he needs from the immediate circumstances in order that he may freely and easily attempt to accomplish the end of his action.

To illustrate the importance of selecting from or for the circumstances that which facilitates the action, that which stimulates the actor to live within the place, Stella Adler may say:

There is a story about an actress in Roumania. The Queen had come to see the performance, and just as the curtain was about to go up, the actress, who had been doing some little last-minute arrangement, realized she had forgotten her handbag. She told the stage manager, "I need my bag." He went off and brought back a bag for her. She said, "No, that's not my bag." He said, "Use it anyway." She said, "No, I can't use that." He went and got another bag, again not hers, and the same things were said. Finally, he said, "The Queen is waiting for the curtain." She said, "I don't act for the Queen, I act for me."

The student is taught to choose his props and all the material and imaginative life he puts within the circumstances according to the logic of the situation divulged by the script. All his selections materialize as food on which to survive within the circumstances as indicated by the play. To exemplify, using William Saroyan's The Time of Your Life, Stella Adler may ask the student to consider what is needed

⁵Stella Adler's analyses of the do-able nature of actions is taken up in the next-to-last section, "The Anatomy of Action," of this chapter.

for the situation in which the prostitute, Kitty Duval, dreams of home while in a honky-tonk saloon:

What can you use to help yourself? The average choice is a skirt and sweater. But, for me, she is a girl who is dreaming of home, and the text says that she has no home. So how does a girl dress who has no home and comes to a bar? How is her hair done? The text says that she used to have a wholesome home. Is it good for her now to wear wholesome clothes if she is dreaming of a time when her life was wholesome? Would she wear a skirt and sweater?

Put yourself in a similar situation. Say to yourself, "I have nothing around me that has any value, but I used to be very rich." What serves your purpose in those circumstances? Sparseness, shabbiness, coldness. If you have nothing now, but used to be a very beautiful girl, an actress wearing wonderful clothes, what serves now? A shabby fur coat, left-over finery, handed-down clothes from show girls. What is the color of your hair? Dark at the roots. What is the quality of your hair? Poor.

Through such measures, the student learns to receive impressions from a script -- impressions of the background of the social class, of the character, of the situation. These he is told to put into a specifically imagined place in order to establish the circumstances. He is then to walk around in that place, seeing things, personalizing them, becoming familiar and relaxed with the place. The more specifically his imagination creates the surroundings, the more surety he has of using them to embark upon the action appropriate for the place, the partner, and the situation.

Stella Adler says, "Never do anything without the ability to cross and use the room." Familiarity with the circumstances engages the gears for inspired acting. If the situation is that the character is waking up in his bedroom

and his action is to get dressed, rather than the actor's having all his props and costume at hand, it is wiser for him to arrange that he must use the circumstances to perform his action. He may arrange, for example, that there are no clean shirts in the drawer; yesterday's is stuffed in the laundry bag hanging over on the door handle; his favorite socks are under the covers. By filtering the immediate circumstances through his imagination, he may use them in a personal way to help himself want to reach the end of his action, which is to be dressed. In so doing, he may reveal something about his character through his manner of dressing; he may release the actor in himself to his own talent, to inspiration through living within a place where things happen; and, when he speaks, he may take "the curse" (the weight of importance) off the words through letting them come out of what he is doing.

When teaching the use of circumstances, Stella Adler may recall one of her own early experiences in acting school:

They gave us a plot: "You're on a boat. The boat is sinking. Your two children have drowned, and you cannot find your husband." They said, "Do that action." Everybody, including me, went around screaming, "Ahhhhhhhhhhh."

Promising the student he need not anticipate being thrust into similarly horrific escapades, Stella Adler yet demands that he physically -- not emotionally, not verbally -- answer according to the logic of the place any circumstances

he is given.

To impress upon the student the consequence borne by the use of the circumstances, Stella Adler may pass on to him her own lesson absorbed from Stanislavsky:

Stanislavsky said, "If you don't physicalize when you have to do your action, if you don't physically use the circumstances to feed you, the theatre will go down."

He would give me three physical things to do in a place. When I did them, I immediately realized how smart he was. I realized that the play [the situation in a place] has to be physicalized enough by the actor to let "something" come through him. But if you have no play [no imagined circumstances], even if you are relaxed, nothing comes through you. You must never be on stage without a situation, an imaginative situation. You must not be on stage in your situation [from your own life]. It must be imaginative! Otherwise, it is not theatre.

Above all, then, before talking, before acting, the student is to accustom himself to the situation of the play, as he has materialized it imaginatively. A summation of the techniques he is taught to govern his becoming so inured might be outlined as follows:

1. Establish the set, props, circumstances. Everything is selected by the imagination for the purpose of feeding the ability to do something someplace. Personalize the selections.
2. Walk around in the set. Be there to see if movement can be comfortable and life can come in.
3. Give reason to the movement. Let come whatever surprise, accident, or choices spontaneously come. The circumstances are there for things to happen within them, and to give the acting its humanity and truthfulness.
4. Find the action, including its steps and end. Know that within its steps there is thinking and doing. Everything, props, costume, the set, used for the action affects the doing of it. The action will be won or lost according to the nature of its own development and sense of rhythm.

If, by means of these techniques, the student can learn to reside truly within the circumstances, having packed them with imaginative reality, he grants himself the right to feel something about them; that is, to have an attitude.

Attitude while Doing

To personalize the circumstances is to form attitudes toward them. The qualities with which the actor imaginatively endows the circumstances spark his responses to them. Broadly speaking, he does or does not favor the place and the partner.

Stella Adler explains that the actor needs to have an opinion of where he has been before he can react to where he is. For example, if the situation is that he is arriving home after a day at the office, how he feels about getting home is influenced by what happened on the way there. Depending on the play and the character, he may imagine that his means of transport home involved: either standing on a crowded subway, being crushed by strange bodies, and getting a headache from the bestiality of it all; or lounging on a fast train, playing poker with his cronies, and getting relaxed from the conviviality of it all. He thus comes to the place already warmed up, not nakedly entering a set from the wings, but fully clothed in the atmosphere of the situation whence he came.

To circumscribe the nature of attitudes, Stella

Adler notes that every human being has opinions and feelings built-in by experience and acculturation, and that such are constantly being exhibited on the street, at home, in shops, in restaurants. For example, a man passes a child playing hopscotch in the park -- smiling, he pats the little head; a barking dog approaches a letter carrier on the street -- he shies away; a man propositions a woman in the subway -- she screams. Such spontaneous responses derive from each person's having an attitude toward what the child, the dog, or the man is doing or saying. Stella Adler comments, "The wisdom of acting lies in knowing that it is not what a person says or does, but what reaction you have to what he says or does, that creates an attitude toward that person."⁶

Therefore, what one thinks about what something or someone else is or is doing inspires his response (his action) toward it or him. Stella Adler demonstrates:

Ask yourself, "Do I have an attitude toward a snake?"
Where does the attitude come from? From the snake.
The snake gives you what to think and do about him.
Would you go over to a snake and pick him up? So,
from the snake you think something, and then you
know what to do.

It is apparent, from Stella Adler's teaching, that the developmental process of an attitude is that it quickly arises, is straightway inculcated, and is carried over from

⁶ All of Stella Adler's theory and direct quotations contained in this subsection, "Attitude while Doing," derives from notes and tapes of Studio classes in Technique I taught by her in 1967, and Technique II in 1972 and 1973.

situation to situation. For example, if a person hears that one of the bag-carry-out-boys at the supermarket disappointed a girl by keeping her waiting, the boy's behavior might instantly be judged unreliable and an attitude of "I don't trust him" might be immediately formed toward him. Then, if the person finds himself in the position of giving his own groceries to the boy at the supermarket, the way in which he instructs him to find his car in the lot will be colored by his judgment, his attitude. In other words, an attitude once formed tends to stick. Stella Adler may inquire of the student if he is aware that she has an attitude toward him; she may take him seriously or be amused by him. Also, she points out that he, in turn, holds an attitude toward her, which, even at a party outside the studio, would guide his behavior in relation to her, as would hers toward him.

In these ways, Stella Adler substantiates that, like the person in life, the character on stage must be pregnant with attitudes. These, indicated in the script, are revealed through the actor's response to the place and to what the partner is doing within the place. That is, because of what he thinks about the partner in the situation of the play, the actor's response might be, for example, to protect, or to exploit, or not to give a damn about him. Stella Adler insists that any and all attitudes, these instantaneous adjustments to the partner and the place, must somehow be physicalized through the doing of the action. The audience,

in order to understand the actor's response to his circumstances, must be able to see what he thinks and feels about where he is and with whom he is.

From out of the realization of attitudes found within the script, conflict is born on stage. Also, the level or mood of the action, whether light (comedic) or dark (serious), may be determined. For example, if the actor thinks the partner is behaving idiotically, he may respond, according to who is the partner and what is the place, by picking a fight, or trying to persuade him to change, or teasing him. The actor's attitudes, even while stabilizing him through telling him what to think and do about his circumstances, evoke ripples of feeling between himself and the partner, thus instigating drama and helping to humanize the stage. Once concretized in the circumstances and aware of what to do by means of his attitudes, the actor but needs to do it.

Justification of the Doing

The need to undertake an action, though contained in its end, begins within the actor. By supplying himself with a specific reason for doing something in a particular place, the actor "revs" himself up to try to do it. Justification, the "heart of acting,"⁷ pumps the action

⁷All of Stella Adler's theory and examples of work contained in this subsection, "Justification of the Doing," derives from notes and tapes of Studio classes in Technique I taught by her in 1972, and Technique II in 1973.

into circulation, getting it going. Telling the student that real acting is not playing the play but needing the play, Stella Adler offers playing the justification as the means really to act.

The actor's reason for starting an action, Stella Adler explains, ought to be creative rather than logical. It ought to spring from his imaginative insight into the circumstances. For example, a reasonable explanation for someone's praying for rain might be "because the earth is dry;" though logical, this lacks sufficient impetus to ignite the prayer. A more stimulating kick-off to the action might be "because the children are dying of thirst." Justification is selected by the actor according to its power to agitate him, in order that he may both crave the action's end (the rain) as well as experience the doing (the praying).

To train the student in justification, Stella Adler asks him to delineate three separate areas on the stage, and do a simple physical action with an object within each area. To connect the trio, he is to provide for himself a plot that justifies his moving the object from area to area. By so doing, he learns to realize Stella Adler's teaching that "the situation in the theatre is the place justified."

Justification, then, takes into account the nature of where one is about to do the action. It acknowledges something happening within the circumstances that demands a specific action be undertaken; for example, "the children

are dying in this dry place which must be made wet by praying for rain." Also, if the actor chooses his justification according to the nature of the place, he may perform the action in a dramatic rhythm natural to the stage, which is a rhythm different from that of daily life. Though praying is praying both on and off the stage, the reason why one is praying on the stage must relate to the potential for drama within the circumstances of the play, within the place. The actor's sense of theatricality, his talent, is unleashed through his choice of justification.

The technique of justification serves the actor in another way. It is actually that which allows him to "activate the facts" of the play, so that he may speak them not as a journalist reporting, but as someone who, by virtue of his imagination, has experienced the facts. For example, if the text reads, "I walked out of the cafeteria," the actor may activate that fact by giving himself the reason (and experience) that his ex-lover walked into the cafeteria. Again, the justification is not logical, but creative. If the actor has to say, "The man got on the bus," it is better for him to imagine that it was in order to flirt with a woman than to go home. Through his choice of justification, the actor involves himself in experiencing life behind the words of the script, and avoids involving himself merely in words.

To become practiced in activating facts, the student

is instructed to justify spontaneously what he sees happening around him in daily life. He is to stipulate an unordinary reason; for example, why is someone walking down the street slowly? -- because he is searching for money on the sidewalk; why is another walking quickly? -- because he is picking pockets. Stella Adler asks the student to avoid justifications that convey someone's physical condition or emotional state; that is, the man is walking slowly because he is tired, or quickly because he is hungry. Such causes, she says, not only pile fiction upon fiction, but are passive in nature. Rather than accelerating the actor's involvement in the life happening behind the fact, they leave him rather dry, sucking on the fact.

If the facts of the play are activated by the actor within himself, he can intelligently, dramatically, and feelingly convert the plot to experience. Also, Stella Adler says, because he has plumbed his imagination, he can be rewarded with a sense of himself as an actor; that is, a person creating situations, rather than someone bound to recite commonplaces.

Ultimately, the situation on stage is dramatized through the actor's moment-to-moment imaginative justification of the facts and of the place with its potential action. Deciding that he is drinking tea not because it tastes good but because the doctor ordered it, the actor may upset the humdrum repetition of daily life, turning it into the experience of theatricalized daily life. All that remains for

his action, then, according to Stella Adler's teaching, is to uplift it by connecting it to a theme.

In essence, the Principle is: "DO A MILLION LITTLE TRUTHS, ONE AFTER THE OTHER."

The Theme in Action

"If you do not raise the ordinary fact of the action to a high, universal level, you will be looking for the lines, and not for what the author wants to say."

The capstone to the student's examination of the vital processes connected to an action in a script is to relate every little thing he does on stage to the character's main aim, in order that the level of even simple physical action may be elevated to embrace the theme of the play. He is instructed, when studying a script, to illuminate as soon as possible those ideological comments which, through the circumstances, he is supposed to be making about life or the society or human beings or the collective human condition. He is thus encouraged by Stella Adler:

I want you to draw something epic from the stupid little action of amo, amas, amat. Get some idea out of your action that makes it big. You must be objective enough to know that the writer put something in that is very large and very human; therefore, you must not think of your action as something small.

If the action is "To Read a Book while Drinking Tea," you may get the impression of coziness. Then you can lift it, by supposing that coziness is something mankind has always wanted. He has wanted to be enclosed in a house, and to feel the warmth of being

protected. He has found ways of getting that.⁸

To demonstrate further the ideological elevation of a simple action, Stella Adler may offer the following concepts: "All opinions and all modern life are canned," elevates opening a can of tomato soup; "People are tied to traditional behavior," elevates going for a walk; "Hurried work exhausts life uselessly," elevates rushing to meet a deadline; "The world of imagination exists eternally," elevates rehearsing a scene. Contending that what the author of contemporary dramatic literature wants to say is not to be found in the language, as is the case of classical drama, Stella Adler wishes the student to track down an idea within the situation. In other words, the human truths of modern drama are revealed through the poetry of some action in circumstances, not through verse or by reporting them.

In Stella Adler's interpretation, contemporary dramatic themes concern themselves with the clash between two elemental human tendencies; that is, between the "gimme instinct" and the "search for something higher." The plays, she says, dramatize these two opposing ways of life through a character's internal conflict as to whether or not he should make some personal sacrifice; for example: Should he spurn money or acquire it? Should he reject power as corrupting or seek it?

⁸All of Stella Adler's theory and direct quotations contained in this section, "The Theme in Action," derives from notes and tapes of Studio classes in Technique I taught by her in 1972, and Technique II in 1972 and 1973.

Stella Adler explains that the internal conflict of the character must be externalized by the actor. His every action needs to be related to the character's main aim to resolve his conflict, thereby revealing the theme. For example, if the ideological situation is that the character failed the partner, or vice-versa, even in simple action, the character's overall intention -- to expose himself or to expose the partner -- must somehow be manifested.

By tying all his efforts into the theme, and by trying to resolve the character's conflict, the actor engages himself in mankind's eternal struggle to find out how to live. Stella Adler tells the student, "You must fit the play, not make the play fit you." By experiencing, by externalizing the character's internal antagonistic forces, the actor lifts the action, fits the play, and makes of himself an honest theatrical celebrant rather than a Pharisee. Stella Adler notes the difference:

For these kinds of modern themes and actions, you need to pay the price. This is the difference between English and American actors. The English do not pay it. You can see that in their playwrights and tradition. We are closer to the Russians in that we are interested in what is going on in you, not in what you are saying. Here in America we experience the action.

Stella Adler teaches the student to respond and react to the values exhibited by the partner through his action, not to cues. Watching, listening, thinking, weighing the opposing ideas, he is not to "sit upon" his partner, waiting for his own turn to speak, but is to live in the

circumstances. He is to answer the partner out of his own need to resolve the conflict within himself, within the situation. His answer, which is some action illuminating the theme, raises the pertinence of the play because he is reflecting, experiencing, and trying to solve its problem.

Contending that "the audience goes to the theatre for the story and becomes involved because of the conflict," Stella Adler inspires the student to plumb the depths of the play's ideology:

Unless the actor perceives the conflict of ideas, the play is too small to get him going and the audience involved. The conflict, coming out of the theme and the aim within him, makes the audience understand more about mankind and opposing ways of life. Therefore, in the play, the character must have an objective that gives value to all his actions, justifications, and attitudes. Everything must be affected by the theme, because it gives the key to the conflict. Otherwise, the acting is not interesting.

Thus challenged to reach for the epic size of himself as a representative of the struggle for a way of life within modern society, the student is given the choice to render his acting universal, important, and influential, or common.

In essence, the Principle is: "REVEAL THE TRUTH THAT IS IN YOU."

The Anatomy of Action

"The action is something the actor says, 'I am going to do.' and it must happen."

The action is that upon which the actor depends, no matter what, in each sequence of the play. It is his foothold and foundation for a dependable performance. Without knowledge of what to do in the circumstances, the actor has but unreliable, vascillating instinct with which to act; hence, the acting may collapse. But if the actor couples knowledge of what to do with whatever instinctive inspiration may surface through the doing, he can guarantee himself a secure performance, more or less exciting according to his talent, or the theatricality of his choices, and his understanding of the theme within himself.

To know what to do on stage, the actor must understand the nature of every action found in the play. The nature of any action other than a simple physical one can be apprehended in terms of what Stella Adler calls its anatomy; that is, a description of what the action does, or the key to doing it.

The natures of some actions may be indigenous to the student's everyday activity or close to his temperament; these he can easily physicalize without analyzing their natures. Others, however, like the mighty actions implanted in epic dramas ("To Make a Revolution" or "To Arouse the Troops") or those in modern dramas ("To Accuse the Neighbor" or "To Defend the Truth"), as well as less grandiloquent

actions unfamiliar to the student, must be approached, Stella Adler explains, by means of a technique. To get at the anatomy of an action, the student is instructed:

First, look in a thesaurus for a synonym that relates to your understanding [of the do-able nature of the action]. Look to life to find the heart of the action at work in the world. Look to yourself to find what you have done when doing that action. Look into your imagination. Or go directly to the play to understand the nature of the action. You must shop -- in your own history, your imagination, the world, and the play -- until you find [the nature of] the action.

The purpose of the technique is to isolate the action's deepest do-able nature. As a source, the student's own life is considered valid -- with one reservation; that is, the student must appreciate that his own life, own situation, is never the same as that of the play. Although an action's do-able essence remains consistent everywhere, its execution is wholly adjusted according to any change in the circumstances. With that in mind, the student may search in his own past for the deepest do-able nature of an action. For the action "To Take Care," he may remember what he did when he took care of a baby, and extract from that experience the action's key, which might be "to pay attention to its needs." Stella Adler explains to the student that how he felt when doing an action in his own life is irrelevant to the stage, or to the circumstances of a play. "To hell with

⁹All of Stella Adler's theory, examples of work, and direct quotations contained in this section, "The Anatomy of Action," derives from notes and tapes of Studio classes in Technique I taught by her in 1958 and 1972, and Technique II in 1970, 1972, and 1973.

the emotion. Rather, technically steal the essential doing of the action," she says.

To test his comprehension of an action's anatomy, the student is asked to put its do-able essence into various circumstances on stage, circumstances utterly removed from those in which he found the action. For example, he may take care of the patient in the hospital, or the flowers in the garden, or the vegetables at the grocery -- all by paying attention to their needs. Thus he finds that however the execution of the action is adjusted according to the place and the action's end, its anatomy is the common denominator.

Stella Adler says that it is the action plus the going over it that helps the actor accept the play. Nevertheless, an action is never repeated exactly, not even in the same circumstances from one performance to the next; nor is it copied from its source in one's life or the world. Its execution is always influenced by the "now" of each time. Stella Adler senses that today's Method actor may tend to cheat the playwright and audience of the play by reproducing his own past actions, situations, and feelings on stage. As a warning against this redundant and inappropriate acting, she informs the student: "Using the circumstances of the play [to do the action] is what makes great acting. Being in one's own circumstances is what kills acting in America."

By understanding and controlling the logic of the play's circumstances, the actor may react to them. He thereby proceeds from the experience of one action to another,

allowing the words and his emotion to flow with what he is doing rather than precede it. Stella Adler thus views the evolution of an action on stage:

First comes thought. Then physicalization, which is the experience of the thought. It is an experience when your mind and emotion and soul are all working together, when your whole being understands with your whole being what your whole being is doing.

The student is urged to become "a person married to the world for his need to find and know a wealth of actions." Wishing the student to discover and experience a repertoire of actions upon which to draw, Stella Adler analyzes for and with him the do-able nature of many actions, relegating each to one of three categories: Inner Action, Verbal Action, or complicated Physical Action. Particularly, she concentrates upon those actions frequently found propelling the themes of modern dramatic literature, uncovering their anatomies so that the student may stabilize and legitimize his work on stage.

Inner Action

To commence the student's in-depth study of the nature of action, Stella Adler examines the type she calls Inner Actions, or those, poetic in quality, that are born and grow within the actor. Dependent upon the actor's ability to see specific, dynamic images, these actions summon "a mental motion picture" (to employ the phrase Stella Adler attributes to Stanislavsky). The picture, developing within the actor, is projected and viewed by himself, outside himself --

in front of him, so to speak. In other words, the "movie" is externalized by the actor.

Referring the student to the works of Shakespeare and of poetic American playwrights, including Eugene O'Neill, William Saroyan, and Tennessee Williams, to find literary examples of inner actions, Stella Adler delves into their anatomies.

"To Dream", in Stella Adler's analysis, is to transcend the immediate circumstances in favor of another place. The person dreaming, becoming so wrapped up in his visual images of that place "there" which embraces everything that means anything to him, barely acknowledges what is "here."

The dreamer, therefore, is not a practical person. He would not be aware, for example, that the partner with him in the immediate circumstances needed a refill of coffee; he would, in fact, hardly notice his cup. A time of dreaming is not one for being busy or teetering around in the place. The dreamer's body, actually, is rather immobile, preferably not so erect, as, Stella Adler notes, it is difficult to dream while standing up. Physically, then, dreaming is to stretch one's whole being toward a definite, central thing -- the dream.

The psychological aspect of dreaming, in Stella Adler's view, is to lose one's conscious self. The actor must open up to the dreamer within, letting that person emerge. The situation is that he is being quiet, and suddenly his general self is getting lost as the dream is being found.

He is not mourning; he is not necessarily sad; he is deferring to the dream. The actor's key to the action, Stella Adler teaches, is not to make the dream but to reach it, leaving the place and his usual self behind. The dream has its own substance into which the dreamer enters.

It is also within the nature of dreaming, Stella Adler notes, for one to depart from and return to the dream. The dreamer, being neither mentally ill nor sleepwalking, may go freely in and out of the dream, though he prefers being in it. If he must break away from the dream to the reality, and it may be painful for him to do so, the actor can, Stella Adler says, relate to the place or the partner, though without becoming involved; he does not stay long away from the dream. Until the action is completed, until the dream is fully realized or stopped, the dreaming is never so aborted that it cannot be resumed. Practically speaking, the actor dreaming uses the immediate circumstances, if at all, only to assist his immersion in the dream, though he can adjust to the world around. "Mostly," she says, "the dreamer wants the dream."¹⁰

"To Reminisce" in Stella Adler's understanding, is a poetic action whose key is to bring back to life something that in reality is gone forever. The person

¹⁰ Stella Adler refers the student to Kitty Duval in Saroyan's The Time of Your Life, and Robert Mayo in O'Neill's Beyond the Horizon to work upon the dreamer in action.

reminiscing resurrects, simply by remembering it, some powerful scene heretofore asleep in eternity. Reminiscence is a miracle! It is an action, Stella Adler says, given to the poet, the artist, the soul who cannot bear this world. It is for the person who possesses an extra-human dimension, who has the magic to raise up that which has died. This he does not by means of the words he speaks, but by means of the power within him.

The nature of reminiscence requires that the actor create in front of himself an extraordinarily felt vision from the past. To this he returns and surrenders. The action, Stella Adler holds, may well elicit in the actor a sense of achieving some psychic stature, and is included in literature for the audience to share in a sphere higher than the downtrodden, material world. "Reminiscence," she says, "is the author's way of saying, 'For Christ's sake, let's get some size into life!'"

The student is told that, when reminiscing, the actor forfeits his pedestrian body. He is seemingly lifted off the ground as his mind and spirit stretch toward his recreation of the past. Because a wonder is happening, his body cannot be rooted and his speech cannot be glib. Rather, he gradually, tenderly realizes a complete world for which the character has a pristine feeling of joy, of pain, of love.

Unlike the action of story-telling, during which the actor builds his tale toward a climax for the purpose of

spellbinding and captivating the partner, the nature of reminiscence, Stella Adler says, is more passive. The actor does not pull the partner along with him, though, as with dreaming, he may sometimes include him, as long as it is not with the intent to tell him something. Basically, reminiscence is a solitary action, into and out of which the actor may drift as he loses and recovers his awareness of the immediate circumstances.

Thus, when reminiscing, the actor has nothing to sell; there is no denouement, moral, punch-line, or common sense to push. His only objective is to make a special something live again. His attitude toward the action, Stella Adler says, may be one of amazement that he can remember at all that which passed away so long ago. To reminisce, a fully creative action, she concludes, is "art bringing the emotion existing in tranquility alive in all its glory."¹¹

"To Unmask", from which exposure, revelation, and confession branch, is a courageous inner action according to Stella Adler. It is to communicate something in all its immediate pain, despite knowing it will not be understood. A stripping-down to the core in front of someone else, to unmask is to relinquish pride. Unashamedly naked, the person unmasking is able to say, "This is what is left of me. Yet, still, I want to give it away."

¹¹ Stella Adler refers the student to the dramas of Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams, Clifford Odets, and Maurice Maeterlinck to work on the action "To Reminisce."

Since it is the nature of unmasking to go unrequited, Stella Adler considers it an action peculiar to modern times. That is because, in her opinion, every human being today who does not fight against the degradation and humiliation inflicted by modern life feels deeply insulted; yet, since he who does resist is even more demeaned by the fray, the contemporary human condition is not to win, or not to be compensated. The only honest recourse, then, is to reveal the remnant of combat that is oneself; that is, to unmask.

In the end, however, there is a positive aspect to the action. Although the person unmasking is not understood by the partner, through doing the action he himself experiences a sagacious understanding of what is true. The price of wisdom or truth, then, is a soul bared in surrender. And that price, Stella Adler contends, is the creative person's payment due -- lest he suffer the alienation of fitting in nowhere all his life.

Stella Adler holds that in order to know the nature of unmasking, or exposure or revelation or confession, the actor must experience it. This idea is what she calls one of the great acting techniques discovered by Stanislavsky; that is, "You have to go through the pain in order to talk about it." She thus upholds these unmasking actions as that imperative sacrifice which the actor must make for his discipline, as well as his only chance for fulfillment as an artist and a human being in modern times.

"To Expose", in Stella Adler's analysis, is that action which, behaving as an x-ray, penetrates the skin to lay bare an essence. Its anatomy is to disclose the truth.

"To Reveal", she insists, works best for the actor when he inserts an obstacle; for example, "I don't want to reveal this." Its do-able nature, which is to wrench from inside a world of things not apparent and not clear, implies pulling against resistance. Revelation precludes telling or reporting to the partner; rather, as with the process of psychoanalysis, it is more a case of the actor's haltingly descending into himself, extracting old and forgotten images, in order to clarify and understand them for himself.

"To Confess" is to make the deepest possible plunge into one's inner self, in order to vomit up the absolute truth of human existence, of oneself in a tragic situation. Confession implies failure. It is recognizing a revelation of fate; for example, "I did it. I could not do otherwise. I didn't know how to take care." It is recognizing the human condition, which is to fail. It is to have nothing left but the confession of one's utter deficiency. It is to give way to the gods.

Stella Adler says that confession requires a partner. Though he understands that there is no help for himself, the person confessing wants and needs to unmask in front of another, as if to say: "I want you to know me. I have betrayed. I have failed. I have caused hurt. Please forgive

me." She suggests that the actor justify confession with an image of some heinous wrongdoing longing to be ripped out of himself; basically, the sin is a sinning against his own humanity.

Stella Adler admits that the action may erupt into anger. But the indignation must be with oneself, not with the partner. "There is no chip on the shoulder," she says. "It is not that lousy shit of 'I'm going to tell you how mad I can get at the situation.'" Rather, confession is basic spiritual nudity: "I'm stuck with myself. I cannot be different than I am. I'm caught. I'm in trouble. I brought a faulty instrument. I brought something to life that is not a whole person."

In other words, confession is a completely modern action, in that the situation permits no solution. The actor, Stella Adler says, must acknowledge his condition -- "I'm trapped." He therefore neither begins nor ends the action with words, but with the internal experience of human failure. Some awful, true image surges up from within him, causing him to spew out words that trail off into inarticulateness, not knowing what to do about himself.

In order that the student may experientially understand this retching from the spiritual guts that is confession, Stella Adler asks him to dig down into himself to find where, in some major area of his life, he, as everyone else, has hopelessly failed and wasted himself. She may say, "You

cannot help being a killer. Who was the first killer? Cain. So there's a killer in all of us, and nobody can help it. We kill our profession. We kill our love for human beings. We are all killers." Thus lifting the level of confession to the universal, Stella Adler calls it "the big time of modern acting." She believes it to be the deepest action any actor can have to do.¹²

Verbal Action

Born of conflict in ideology, verbal action is the pulse of realistic drama beginning with the works of Henrik Ibsen. The more sophisticated of these actions takes into account both sides of an issue, neither of which is right or wrong, and engages the actor in a search for truth. Each idea, infinitely debatable, is aired from opposing points of view, and then the actor as character and human being is left to choose a way of conducting himself. For whichever path he takes, especially off the beaten one, some price is paid, some loss sustained.

Stella Adler explains that the largest of these verbal actions are informed with epic stature as well as modernity. That is because the character experiences himself pinioned in a social situation that calls for self-sacrifice. The actor, with conviction and with faith, must express the

¹² Stella Adler cites the plays of Anton Chekhov, Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams, Clifford Odets, and those of any playwright who discloses the "no exit" theme, as literature containing the unmasking actions.

very center of the human struggle for a way of life. It is a kind of expression that can be effected only by a love for truth.¹³

"To Explain", an action recurrent in life and literature, is analyzed by Stella Adler in a progressive context. At its simplest level, which is to elucidate a situation, the action requires an obstacle. The actor, who knows something that the partner does not, must stimulate himself to pursue his explanation despite objections. That is because, Stella Adler explains, it is within the nature of explanation to carry on -- to the point, she says, where the action may accelerate into "To Convince."

When the actor is either explaining or convincing, his need to affect the partner is very real, very sincere; however, Stella Adler warns the student, the emotion of explaining or convincing circulates within the actor's ideas, not within him. However hot is his body of knowledge, the person explaining is cool of mind. Thus she notes, as for the verbal arias found in the plays of George Bernard Shaw, "When there is a lot to say, it is very directly said."

"To Advise" differs from explanation in that it involves some risk. The adviser, having clarity of perception, is aware of another person's exposure to some harm of which

¹³Stella Adler's analyses in this subsection, "Verbal Action," familiarize the student with a spectrum of actions necessary to realize the conflict of ideas found in modern European and American playwrighting from Ibsen to Albee.

he is unaware. The anatomy of the action is to persist in giving over the objective truth of some impending detriment to the partner, in spite of the fact that the odds are against the advice being taken.

Stella Adler says that a person who has the capacity to give advice is one who has earned insight from experience. The action requires of the actor, therefore, a spiritual largesse denoting wisdom attained.

"To Lay Down the Law" is giving advice, raised to the -nth degree. It occurs when the harm has already encroached upon the partner. The actor, Stella Adler explains, while cutting off communication from the other side, while pulling no punches, reaches for universal truths in order to dictate an ethic of behavior for another human being. Primarily, she says, laying down the law is telling it like it is.

"To Chat", like the action to explain, is a common and basic one which may grow into more intense actions. Its essence is to make light conversation on a subject of mutual interest. Though there may be variance in viewpoints, the participants' level of involvement and degree of caring is likened by Stella Adler to that of passengers conversing on a bus. When the action develops into "To Talk Things Over," as might happen between a teacher and student, the stakes are heightened.

"To Discuss", that action which forms the foundation

of modern realistic drama, rises above chatting or talking, in that it involves conflict over ideas that are profound in themselves. Also, discussion results in learning -- learning the partner's way of thinking as well as one's own. Stella Adler says that discussion is the playwright's vehicle for the audience to enlarge and clarify their own thinking by hearing and seeing a problem defined from opposing points of view.

The actor's approach to discussion, she explains, is first of all to cool his temperament so he can listen and think. Discussion is not a childishly impetuous "shooting off at the mouth;" rather, it is a "grown up action," involving exchange. A person with a viewpoint has made inquiry; he has researched the information he is giving away. His attitude is civilized, not opinionated. The actor, therefore, must elevate the psychic level of the action above "I am right." This he does, Stella Adler says, by allowing for the possibility of his own way of thinking to be adjusted, to be enlightened, even to be won over to the other side, or to be strengthened in itself. The nature of discussion is an honest back-and-forth giving, receiving, considering, and responding with real understanding.

"To Argue" is to interpose an attitude of separation between the actor and his partner, who disagree on what is right. The nature of an argument is to catch just barely what the partner is saying. Being not really interested in the partner's opinion, the actor seeks to thrust out his own

tenaciously-held viewpoint, packing it with heat and the desire to win. Taken to its extreme of separation, arguing degenerates into the action "To Fight," which, Stella Adler explains, is a confrontation lacking control. Its anatomy is to strike out in every direction, in any manner necessary, to beat the opponent, the partner.

"To Attack with Words", on the other hand, is an action pervaded with an atmospheric temperature quite chilling compared to that of an argument or a fracas. Its nature is imbued with neither complaint nor anger. It is calculated, emotionally controlled, and concentrated into one direction: to devastate the partner's viewpoint. Stella Adler says that as an animal attacks with his mouth, his claws, his limbs, his whole body, so, too, does the actor, attacking with words. He puts his entire fund of physical energy behind verbalized images in order to devour the opponent whole. When verbally attacking, she suggests, the actor might imagine himself to be a bomb, since within the nature of attack there is explosion.

"To Denounce" is a verbal action selected by Stella Adler for the student to experience a stretch in psychic size and dramatic range. A classically royal action, denouncement belongs to a person of noble bearing and generous proportions who represents a house, a community, a nation, a kingdom. He may be the general with his army, the monsignor with his flock, the revolutionary with his fellows, the

queen with her court. In other words, he has numbers behind him to assist his denouncement of the other side.

Stella Adler explains that within the nature of denouncement there is: a sense of power so substantial that the actor can consider himself inviolate; a sense of security so stable that he can say, "Yes, I know what I am saying, but what can you do to me?"; and a sense of knowing that he can kill. The actor's attitude, one of superiority over what he believes to be an inferior opposition, develops from the weight of the group he represents. It is because the denouncer acts as a representative for a whole community, Stella Adler says, rather than as an individual for himself, that he can harbor the mentality of a winner.

Stella Adler teaches the student that in order for him to reach the psychic level of denouncement, he must learn to embody the norm of power; that is, a sensation of complete integration that lives in the gut. To do the action's essence, which is to belittle and dismantle publicly the other side, demands of him might and majesty, stylized gesture and movement (according to the play's period and character's costume), and the spiritual ability to be as unafraid as a steel ball crashing against a building in order to wreck it. His head cannot be hot. He cannot scream. Denouncement, she says, wants clear thinking and a cool temperament. Recurrent in the history plays of Shakespeare, to denounce is to portray an epic action.

"To Arouse", directed toward one's own side, logically follows upon denouncement of the other side. In the plays of Shakespeare, the action is often found directed toward one's own army to get them to fight. In modern drama, as in that of Tennessee Williams, it is directed toward some scattered remnant of humanity to rise up and live. As Stella Adler notes, the whole main action of Clifford Odets' Waiting for Lefty is to arouse the oppressed working class to revolt.

The student is taught that with arousal, he must particularly take cognizance of the society of the play. In Shakespeare, for example, the character arousing stands for that segment of the society from which he has inherited his ethics, morality, customs, and behavior; therefore, when the King in Henry the Fifth urges his army, "Once more unto the breach, dear friends," his arousal is backed by "Cry 'God for Harry! England and Saint George!'" -- the tradition. On the other hand, in Waiting for Lefty, where there is no communal morality, where there is division in the ethical view, the arouser has only himself and an idea with which to stir up followers. Stella Adler thus explains that, whereas the modern age allows an instigator to say, "Let's change the society!", such an outcry in an historic period might warrant the death of the provocateur at the hands of a community for disrupting the code. The actor arousing thus needs to adjust the action in accordance with the conditions

of the play's society, conditions of which he must have absolute understanding. If not, he cannot know the way of thinking of his group; cannot impel them to rise up. Also, he cannot afford to feel insecure or nervous, as, Stella Adler notes, it is not within the nature of arousal to be intimidated by one's situation or one's community.

To study how this action relates to the themes of twentieth century drama, Stella Adler asks the student to examine respectively the position of the arouser and that of his counterpart, the sleeper. The counterpart's condition, she says, is one of spiritual death caused by consistently responding only to that which satiates the appetites -- food, drink, and sex. With his soul in abeyance, he is reduced to speaking with inglorious words, to ignorance, to indifference, and to neglect. His stupor, a manifestation of the anti-life position of a disintegrated society, derives from the instinct to be bad -- to lie, to cheat, to steal, to kill. It is not, however, a personal badness, Stella Adler notes, but is the result of the social sickness of accepting as fact the impression that life is meaningless, empty. The sleeping character, as a personification of modern humanity in spiritual coma, is thus led to admit: "I don't care. I simply don't care. I don't know why, but I haven't any curiosity." Therefore, he experiences that deepest action found in contemporary drama; that is, to confess -- specifically, to confess that nothing makes him respond anymore.

The alternate position, that of the arouser, is a protective one. His attitude, based on the instinct to be good, fed by a personal code of ethics and a personal morality, is pro-life. Reacting to the spiritual lethargy of his counterpart, aware of the disease infecting the society, his action is gently, proddingly to wake up a dead soul.

Stella Adler's intuitive exploration of Inner Action, culminating in confession, and Verbal Action, culminating in arousal, thus progressively immerses the student in the complexity of action, in order to prepare him to tackle the large spiritual themes of twentieth century drama.

Physical Action

In Stella Adler's teaching, the anatomy of a complicated physical action may be best understood by finding out its basic behavior from doing it in various circumstances, justified on a light level and a dark level. For example, the nature of "To Help" might be known by experiencing the common do-able essence of helping a friend prepare a dinner party, and helping a patient through an operation, and helping a person make the correct decision.

Stella Adler recommends that the student first imagine himself rather than the character in the circumstances, in order that he may be drawn emotionally closer to why the action needs to be accomplished. He asks himself, "What would I do here to help?" -- the "here," of course, being

the circumstances of the character, not his own. Through practicing the action as himself in the circumstances of the play, the actor may gradually merge with the character in his situation, instead of always viewing him as someone separate from himself.

For example, if the student is assigned the action "To Take Care," he may decide upon being a doctor treating a cancer patient in the hospital. His procedure to develop the action is first to justify it, in order to get it going, on a dark, serious, life-or-death level. Then, lest he appear to be an amateur medic, he needs to investigate and be able to perform skillfully with ease the technical behavior of the profession -- the doctor class. Finally, he asks himself what would he do, if he were a doctor, to take care of this person who is dying of cancer.

Stella Adler teaches that a physical action, once mastered, wants a boost up to the ideological domain, so as not to be mired in routine, external procedure. The actor as doctor, therefore, might dispose his mind and spirit toward doing care-taking activities within a place that exists world-wide for the purpose of salvaging and aiding the recovery of human life in crisis. A physical action buttressed by an idea is granted a luster that enables it to transcend the physical and become worthy of the stage.

To synthesize the study of the ultimate action from each of the three categories of action, Stella Adler concludes the student's exercise in physical action with that

broadest, most physically and psychologically complicated of all action; that is, the action "To Escape." Expecting that the student is unaware of its nature from his own personal experience, she asks him to espy it at work in the world. For example, he may catch its do-able essence from the exertions of a cockroach trying to escape from a kitchen sink flowing with tap water. The insect's situation, Stella Adler says, is basically that it has no place to go. In every direction, at every turn -- flung, drenched, sucked toward the drain, slipping, sliding, crawling, climbing, falling, groping -- everywhere, it meets an impasse. Yet, giving its all, it attempts to escape until it can no longer.

The anatomy of the action to escape may be stated as to run from one danger into another danger into another, threatened by loss of life at each turn. It is an action so seldom completed, so consistently unsuccessful, that it nearly always, Stella Adler explains, results in the death, at best the defeat, of the character. When practicing the action, the student is therefore instructed to imagine his circumstances so perilously full of obstacles that they stand one hundred per cent against his escaping them; in fact, Stella Adler says, the circumstances around the action are by nature inescapable. For example, if there are waves, they are swelling to fifty-foot heights; if there is fire, it is burning every exit; if there is shooting, it is from every direction. The actor escaping must so plague the place with

imaginative disaster that, without losing control of his senses and the action, he is forced to run really for his life.

The action to escape, Stella Adler tells the student, may be found in the lives of many characters of dramatic literature whose situations loom large with impending doom other than that of immediate physical death. She cites, for example, the case of Medea, whose initial action is to escape from tormenting thoughts by fighting them off; or that of Hamlet, of Ophelia, and of Macbeth, whose overall action, she says, is to escape (none of whom does alive) each from his own menacing circumstances; or, to contemporize the situation, it may be for the character to escape a spectrum of materialist perils, endangering the life of his spirit, as Alma tries to do in Tennessee Williams' Summer and Smoke.

Stella Adler thus rounds out the student's study and experience of Inner, Verbal, and complicated Physical actions by reaching the pinnacle life-or-death action of each group.

In essence, the Principle is: "TO UNDERSTAND AN ACTION, BE ABLE TO DO IT IN ONE THOUSAND CIRCUMSTANCES."

The Emotion in Action

"In life, feelings are run down. We speak without meaning and pretend the words."

When the student initially enrolls in the Stella Adler Theatre Studio, he may bring the notion that acting is feeling. His belief is soon corrected. Acting is doing;

but if imagination is applied fully to the action, feelings will issue from the actor. In Stella Adler's teaching, it is disastrous for the student to attempt to feel. Any strains to emote, which she calls "pushing" or "squeezing", are, to her, the surest give-away indication of bad acting, or a lack of technique. To play the mood (and she notes that "mood spelled backwards is doom"), or to suffer the emotion is to not do; that is, to act without an action.

Nevertheless, Stella Adler does not ignore emotion or states of being. Rather, she teaches the student to find physical means through which to release their expression. For example, if the line of a text reads, "It's cold in this room," the actor must somehow believe in that condition. Stella Adler's solution is to close a window, put on a sweater, build a fire in the fireplace; that is, do some physical activity to deal with the cold. In other words, by buttoning up his overcoat, the actor enables himself to speak the line not as an empty fact but out of the experience of doing something about it.

The same technique may be applied to realizing a line that describes one's own condition; for example, "I've got a splitting headache." Stella Adler says that if the actor will physically brace himself against the pain, by pressing his hands into the table, his feet into the floor, or his back against the chair, the articulation of his discomfort may come out of reacting to it. As an additional

technique, especially useful for expressing pain, she offers Stanislavsky's "As If"; whereby, the actor may imagine his mouth feeling as if a razor were cutting into his jaw in order to speak about a toothache.

Stella Adler tells the student he need not be so concerned with feeling temperature or pain, but ought to be very concerned with reacting to them. What he does physically to rectify, or acclimate himself to, or somehow acknowledge an emotional condition or state of being brings more life to the emotional or atmospheric aspect of a script than does any amount of his simulated feelings.

On the other hand, the text may ask the actor to describe the condition or emotional state of someone else. It may read, for example, "When he saw the phantom of Christmas Past, Scrooge was astonished." To convey the truth of Scrooge's condition, the student is told to observe imaginatively Scrooge in his circumstances, seeing what he is doing in response to the phantom that could lead one to consider him astonished. He might be seen leaping to the door, pulling and crashing against its bolts and locks; or dashing across the room to hide under the bed, grabbing the blankets to cover himself as the bed slats fall on top of him. By imagining Scrooge assiduously engaged in a struggle to escape the ghost, rather than seeing him standing there with an astonished face, the actor can speak the line from having involved himself in the man's

dilemma.

To find a specific means of expression for any emotional state, in order to avoid continually floating in a general mood on stage, the student is taught the anatomy of emotion. Stella Adler instructs him to hunt for emotions in his own life and in that of the world. He is then to recede (work backwards) from the emotion to locate its source in action; that is, he is to recollect what he or someone else was doing that caused that emotion to develop, to surface, to become apparent. Through this technique, he can capture the specific do-able nature of any emotion, which, when done, will release the feeling in him as well as convey the true external appearance of a particular emotional state.

For example, Stella Adler suggests that the do-able nature of love might be "To Hold Onto" something or someone. It stems, she says, from a shared past, an established history (imaginative for the actor) of caring for and about the beloved.¹⁴ The feeling of love, therefore, may be evoked by, and revealed through, a character's holding onto his beliefs, beliefs he has cared for. Stella Adler notes that this is an action dominant in the lives of Shaw's Saint Joan and Ibsen's Dr. Stockmann and Socrates.

¹⁴Stella Adler comments that love for the past, in the sense of holding onto it, pervades the action of the entire fourth act of Chekhov's The Cherry Orchard.

These people, clinging to their creeds, despite severe impediments such as the stake, public shame, or alienation, can be said to love them.

The do-able essence of an emotion, once traced to its source in one's life or in the world or even in literature, can then be transferred to any circumstances on stage.¹⁵ For example, if the student is given a plot that says his dog was just hit by a car and he is taking it to the veterinarian, he may experience and manifest his love for the dog, insofar as he imagines a past of caring for it, by cleaving to its life, holding onto it, trying to keep it.

Stella Adler contends that, by virtue of the actor's imagination, theatre is more emotionally truthful than life. Words uttered off the stage, she surmises, are rarely felt or wholly believed. But on the stage, where the actor can animate the true nature of emotional

¹⁵A sampling of Stella Adler's further analysis of the do-able nature of emotion is:

Sadness - to disconnect from, not taking in, the cause of the sadness.

Suffering - to attach deeply and painfully to someone, something lost.

Shock - to withdraw, to hide from the cause of the shock.

Anger - to face, to control, even to annihilate something, not by means of the anger but by a tremendous power which one knows he has.

Rage - to strike out, wanting to break, wreck, kill the cause of the rage.

Boredom - to want to get rid of things and away from oneself.

Embarrassment - to recede, holding oneself back from things, people, and situations because nothing, not even to say hello, seems simple.

conditions and states of being through his imagination and through physicalization, the meaning and feeling behind words can come alive. As a result, the actor can believe in himself as well as make himself believable.¹⁶

In essence, the Principle is: "THERE IS NO GENERAL EMOTION ON STAGE."

Fear - to be unable to face the source of the fear.
Joy - to explode, to burst out toward the source of the joy.

¹⁶All of Stella Adler's theory and examples of work contained in this section, "The Emotion in Action," derives from notes and tapes of Studio classes in Technique I taught by her in 1972, and Technique II in 1970 and 1973.

CHAPTER IV

CHARACTERIZATION: WHO THE ACTOR BECOMES

When Stella Adler teaches characterization, which extends over the second-year training, she consults the ideas of Michael Chekhov, a noted character actor throughout his life. She concurs in Chekhov's belief that for the actor to sustain a keen interest in the art of acting and to nourish his gifts he must characterize, but she also agrees with him that most actors do not. The average actor exhibits his own attributes, own values, own off-the-stage situation, playing himself as a type over and over again. It might have been that in the actor's first role he was lauded; he was an exciting personality by dint of being novel; then, having tasted success, he repeats the initial picture, as if always painting a self-portrait. Having denied himself open access to his imagination, to his talent, and to alternative choices, the actor's style and forms die, and he becomes tired. And his wages, Stella Adler says, are paid not for acting but for stating the facts of a script.

Stella Adler feels that the actor who confines himself in a narrow career forsakes the privileged joy of acting -- to change oneself. To impress upon the student the abject nature of such a course, she may recall the story of

one from her own family who capitalized upon an emblem until its saleability was exhausted:

I had a cousin who was a great star in the American theatre. [Katharine] Cornell played with her. Tallulah [Bankhead] played with her. She was a little bit ahead of them, maybe five years older. Her name was Francine Larrimore, and she was Miss Enchantment.

She was born in Russia, but came here early enough to get rid of the accent and develop this wonderful kind of American thing. She was The Most American. If someone wanted Miss America or Miss Chicago, she was it. That was her great fortune.

She had a red carpet, a Rolls Royce with gold fittings, and was absolutely the star of stars. But she grew older, and when you grow older you cannot do that Miss America thing. I mean, it's silly. But she couldn't stop doing it. And because she never could give up that star personality, life was very hard on her.

Stella Adler concedes that it is tough to relinquish a personality that has been applauded. "That is what people are coming to see," she says. However, believing that "life says you must change," she considers monotype acting unnatural. The actor's path to personal truth and artistic salvation is alteration, effected by creating a whole variety of types and living individually within each.

Stella Adler teaches that "the live character is the true center of theatre art," and is able to be brought into existence because the actor has established the differences between himself and the character. Fundamentally,

¹ All of Stella Adler's theory and direct quotations contained in these opening remarks up to the first section of this chapter derives from notes and tapes of Studio classes in Character taught by her in the early 1960's, 1966, and 1974.

the character is a mask worn by the actor. Paradoxically, as the actor recognizes the mask, his own intrinsic self is unveiled. Stella Adler thus postulates that "character acting permits you to reveal through another person what you have been conditioned to hide in real life." But without the mask, the actor becomes frightened. Instead of revealing himself through another person, he conceals himself behind stage conventions. As a result, he does not and cannot contribute his own human truth to the theatre.

The student of Stella Adler is persuaded that even though he may show but scant aspects of himself to the world, he has within him all forms of humanity, as within a block of marble. He is taught, for example, that even if he is a generally irresponsible person, never on time for an appointment, he may yet portray Mr. Reliable. To find the pulse of this character, seemingly unrelated to himself, the student is instructed to ask himself in what one situation from his past might he have been judged absolutely reliable. Once perceiving where in his own life he has demonstrated reliability, the student may extract the essence of what he did then, and, amplifying and activating it, transfer it to the circumstances of the play. He hypothetically says to himself, "I have reliability in me and so can be, if I expand it, Mr. Reliable."

Characterization requires not displaying one's usual facets, but unearthing one's universality, as Stella

Adler explains:

You are everybody in some area of your life. You are a killer, a crook, a liar, and a whore. You are a genius, a god, and pure. You are everything. There goes a man who is going to be killed. There goes you. Somewhere, you are that man.

If this non-dualistic, all-embracing principle is understood by the actor, he may absolve himself from ever belittling, patronizing, or disliking the character. He may see every character as not separate from his own soul but as a manifestation of it.

To illustrate the art of characterization in operation, Stella Adler may point to the soulful versatility of a former student:

Take an actor like Marlon [Brando]. Do you realize that he cannot be typed? He has a range that, I think, makes up more than any actor we have seen on the screen. He is the Godfather, the Waterfront, and the Irish Peasant. He can play anything, everything.

How long would his career have been if he had only "talked like dis"? You know, he does not "talk like dat." He was brought up a military academy boy, and his English is absolutely distinguished.

When he played Stanley Kowalski, he changed everything there was to change -- his neck, his feet, his teeth, his eyes, his hair -- and each thing that he changed affected him. I went to see him in dress rehearsal [for A Streetcar Named Desire], and afterwards I went backstage. But he wouldn't see me, because he didn't yet have that speech, that particular thing that was Stanley Kowalski, that lazy mouth. When I went the opening night, there was a complete character. He just took the part, along with the whole play, and put it in his pocket. Now, you must understand that Streetcar is not Stanley Kowalski's play. It is a play about Blanche DuBois. But for poor Blanche, there was nothing. There was just Stanley Kowalski.

There are basically two kinds of performers: those who transform themselves and those who do not. Stella Adler, asserting that "you cannot play yourself on stage, if only because yourself is too unenergized," insists upon character acting in order to bring out that universal self that is energized. Though she insists also that one job of the director is to enable the actor to live the character, knowing the actual conditions of commercial theatre, she urges the student to develop the ability to characterize before leaving the studio. She says,

Today, in your theatre, there is no training for characterization, and none of the people outside will help you with it. You simply have to make up your mind to have a range of parts that you can play. I want you to play parts that demand absolute characterization from you. You cannot play the devil without being costumed in character. You cannot play Puck, you cannot play Caliban without it. I want you to take parts for which you have to say, "There's nothing about me that I can use. I have to change everything. I have to die." Take big, big parts. Take Peer Gynt. He has nothing that you have. You will have to change.

Characterization is changing oneself to fit the character.
It is not changing the character to fit oneself.

Character According to Type

"Maturity in acting is to understand another person."

When approaching a character, Stella Adler's student is told to catch first and fundamentally the framework of his type, and to hold onto it. That is because, no matter how unusual the character is, on stage he must

be recognizable as belonging to some group of humanity.

A type is a category into which a person puts himself, based on choices he has made. Generally, in Stella Adler's explanation, a character's type is determined by his profession, or by what he does most often in life. He may be the struggling artist, the elegant impresario, the political fanatic, the loquacious preacher, the frow-sy chorus girl, or the motherly mother.

The student's homework is to search in the world for those overt, obvious types recurring in life and literature, and to study them in their environments. Accordingly, Stella Adler says,

You immediately from the word "bitch" get something. Anybody can see a bitch. If she's put on stage, she's a bitch. If she's in the movies, she's a bitch. If she's in a room, she's a bitch. You know her, don't you? She's a type.

The bitch will create in you a need to go somewhere in life where you can find and watch her. The first thing to do is to go down to Tenth Avenue, go into the cafes, and watch. Go over to any cafeteria on Eleventh Avenue. The range of types of that society around the wharfs where the boats come in are all there. If there is a tough-guy type, you immediately see that he walks tough, talks tough, and lives in a tough society. Get the voices, the way they sit, what they order, and what they think as a general type.²

In other words, a spectrum of types peoples a society unto itself. That society is a stratification of

²All of Stella Adler's theory, direct quotations, and examples of work contained in this section, "Character According to Type," derives from notes and tapes of Studio classes in Character taught by her in 1966 and 1973, and Advanced Character in 1974.

the large society, from which it takes a social, an economic, a political, and a moral viewpoint. These viewpoints are varied by the sub-society according to its own needs. Therefore, the way of thinking of the type on marriage and family, money, government, and conduct derives from the values of his society; basically, the character within the type is for or against those values. Thus, the life-long aim, direction, or purpose of the type, as well as his day-to-day activity, are handed him by the society he has elected to join.

To illustrate the patterned thinking and unified behavior of one social strata, Stella Adler may present her observation of that group she calls the Ivy League, or those whose profession is to maintain the status quo. She relates:

I have a home near Southampton [on Long Island, New York], and all the people there are absolutely Anglo-Saxon. There is not an Italian in the lot. I don't know where the minorities hide. I don't know where they put the Jews, where they put anybody.

I went to a party there, and I felt, "These are corpses, mental corpses." All of them are wealthy, and, as a result, what happens regarding their thinking, is that they never exert themselves. Life comes to this particular crowd, the same way food comes, the servants come, money comes. There is no effort. It's marvelous.

They never talk about anything but "our land, our children, our parents." They have land in perpetuum. Nobody else can buy or sell their land. So, they have a great sense of control over something that is unchangeable, and it has affected that group. Being with them was like having doughnuts -- everyone is the same.

Stella Adler teaches that there is no one, sure

avenue of approach to realizing the character as a type. Offering several routes, she tells the student that whichever one he takes must terminate in a character with an outside and an inside.

One way, the external approach, is to shop in the world or the imagination for the appearance of the type. For example, the grande-dame type may be imagined by the student as tall, wide, and big-busted, while tucking her hands in at a pinched waist over large hips. Her chin is lifted and eyes roundly made-up. She is decorously costumed, copiously be-jeweled, and her hair is intricately done. The student is then instructed to keep her image in mind while slowly, gradually relinquishing her own physical attributes to those of the grande-dame. She must believe in the ability of her own body to assume a rotundity, height, and weight that influences her to walk, sit, stand, and move in the manner of taking up space. She is then told to imagine herself with the grande-dame's body doing simple physical actions in the grande-dame's circumstances. By doing them, the student may penetrate to the interior of the type. She may discover, for example, that the grande-dame's conduct is domineering, demanding, and self-oriented; that she is temperamental; that her way of thinking is egotistical. Thus, by physicalizing the outside of the type, the actor may catch a certain rhythm of behavior correlative to the inside of the type.

To demonstrate the opposite way, the internal

approach, Stella Adler may put the mentality of the absent-minded professor up for consideration. It may be imagined that the professor's way of thinking is abstract and disconnected. Living mostly inside his concepts, he is unaware of his surroundings, not in tune with average behavior, and out of step with the rhythm of everyday activity. In dissonance with the physical world and uncomfortable with materials, he cannot quite fit in anywhere. He is eccentric. The student is told to take the professor's sense of abstraction and his material unconsciousness, and let them affect his doing simple physical actions in the professor's circumstances, in order that his exterior manner and appearance may reveal itself. The student may find, for example, that to study his tomes the professor uses thick, rimless spectacles, but that they are of no use to him in focusing on the world around. As a result, he seems to be forever searching for something over or under his glasses. To do his research he needs to have multitudinous quantities of notes, books, and papers at hand, but he cannot seem to put his hand on what he needs. As a result, papers are everywhere, falling from drawers, bags, his pockets. To concentrate upon his concepts, he forgets his body; his necktie is askew, suit crumpled, and hair a shambles. The student thus learns that the inside of a character may lead to the outside, and that the outside reveals the inside.

Stella Adler suggests other paths to reach a type in action. If the student has difficulty in imagining a character's inside or outside, he is urged to look in the world and nature for some object or creature that strikes him as similar to the type. For example, something about the manner of a bus might fit his sense of the boss type, in that, from the bus's point of view, everything around it is infinitesimal and inconsequential. It seems to be neither touched nor affected by its surroundings, but pushes ahead on its own course, regardless. Or, for the dizzy-blonde type, the student might pick up the image of a butterfly -- a lightly flitting, free creature in love with little things. Or, the behavior of the enlisted-soldier type might be likened to the pesky manner of a bumblebee upon a flower. Stella Adler, telling the student that "Zero Mostel made a whole career out of playing a petal," advises him to observe things in life or nature, to steal some aspect of its manner, and to physicalize that in an action, in circumstances, without words. He is not to assume the entire image; that is, he is not to become the bus. He is to assume the attitude of the image; that is, he is to become the bus-like boss. So, if in characterizing the boss type, the student's action is "To Bawl-Out" his secretary, he might help himself by doing it in the manner of a bus toward a Volkswagen. The student is thus encouraged to draw upon the attitudinal life on display in the world to affect his realization of types for the stage.

Individualizing the Character

When approaching the individual within the type, the student is advised to stretch as far away from himself as possible. Taking the script, he goes through it line by line, comparing himself to the character. He concentrates upon defining the character's mind, temperament, and will in order to ascertain: 1) how the character's mind is different from his own -- does it work more quickly, more slowly, more precisely, more vaguely, more deviously, more openly; 2) how the character's temperament is different from his own -- are his feelings warmer or colder, more or less passionate, more or less loving, more effervescent or more controlled; 3) how the character's will is different from his own -- is it weaker or stronger, more or less tenacious, more or less insistent upon achieving an aim. These differences he lets seep into himself.

Stella Adler tells the student that Stanislavsky believed the theatre must be rid of those people who do not play the play through character. In other words, as there was never Stanislavsky on stage, there must never be the actor himself on stage. To assure the student that Stanislavsky worked hard to understand profoundly the differences between his own ways and those of the other fellow, she may point out:

When you read Stanislavsky's breakdown of Dr. Stockmann from An Enemy of the People, you can see where he got the man's exuberance from -- from the childishness in him. I mean, Dr. Stockmann is a child.

He is over-giving, over-truthful, and a little bit stupid. So, Stanislavsky got him from the point of view of his emotion [temperament].

On the point of view of Stockmann's mind, he [Stanislavsky] is brilliant. [According to Stanislavsky's breakdown], Stockmann thought other people would understand him. He thought if he would just go out and say, "It's not fair," that other people could understand that. He thought if he would say to a wealthy man, "People are starving and need food," that that man could understand it. That was stupid.

So, in this way, Stanislavsky built him. He failed, by the way, in this character, and then worked on him for ten years. When he played him again, he understood him. You do fail in character, and then you find it.

Stella Adler explains that, since a person is reflected in his thinking, the actor may be led to creating a role by grasping the mind of the character. The student is expected to make distinctions among various ways of thinking, and is offered descriptions of contrasting minds to assist him:

The dean up at Yale never goes all the way out [to another person]. He is very delighted to see you, but then immediately must have an idea to follow. The idea pulls him back into himself. Actually, he is much more at home with being alone, than being with you, because with you [he thinks] he has to do something more. So, his way is to say, "Oh, I'm so glad to see you. Ah, yes, you must come to dinner. What day are you here?" His whole way of thinking is having to make something happen.

Now, take somebody else, somebody very exuberant. He says, "Hello! How are you?" giving you everything, because as soon as that is said, he's finished with you. He says, "Darling! Oh, you're such a doll," and then asks, "Where's the coffee?" His whole way of thinking is to be done with things.

It is especially important for the actor to figure out the character's way of thinking in order to create attitudes for him, attitudes toward each thing within the

circumstances and toward the partner. Stella Adler explains that, whether the actor is Laurence Olivier working almost completely from the outside, or Marlon Brando who (Olivier says) begins with the inside, finally, the actor's development of attitudes is that which melds the character's external and internal aspects. Since the attitude of a character toward his situation determines what he will do about it, the attitude leads to the revelation of who he is.

Stella Adler may posit that if the situation is that the house is on fire and everybody runs except for one person who sits down -- a character is born from an attitude. Or if the situation is that two women are on the bus and one has her change for the fare all set in her hand, but the other, because she has no idea how much the ride costs, has no money ready -- the conformist and the non-conformist are born from their attitudes.

To illustrate the significance of attitudes in individualizing a character, Stella Adler may relate:

At the Moscow Art Theatre, I saw a production in which maybe fifty to sixty peasants were on stage with the Prince, who was talking to them, giving the land away, and telling them "no more serfs." They were all listening to him, but one of them was looking at his coat. And out of those fifty to sixty people, this one peasant -- he had blue eyes -- was there, standing there, not saying anything. But the way he was looking at the Prince -- his eyes were swimming with admiration as if he were looking at a beautiful girl -- it was as if he were saying, "Aeiii, if only I could just touch his coat."

Now, in that audience was Harold Clurman, Lee Strasberg, and myself. And all three of us went out asking, "Who was that actor?" He was among fifty

to sixty people, and he just stood there, dressed like a peasant, with peasant hair, but there was so much love in him -- that kind of Russian love you hear about was in his eyes -- for that coat, that you could not avoid seeing it. It was as if he were playing Hamlet, he had so much.

While noting that, in general, the attitude toward things is missing in performance, Stella Adler tells the student that she must be able to see whether his stage articles bore him or he adores them; whether his bread is tasty or not. His attitude toward each prop and each partner has to be clarified. It must be able to be seen (through what he is doing, not saying) whether he likes or dislikes each thing, whether he is or is not on the partner's side. Everything the actor does must contain one more step toward revealing the entire mentality of the character; thereby, at the end, the audience may say, "I know who he is and how he thinks."

When the student is learning to differentiate between his own temperament and that of the character, he is asked to evaluate the depth of feeling shown by various people. One person, for example, may respond heartily to things, exuding emotion; another may keep his feelings in check; and yet another may suffer them internally. To illustrate a contrast in temperament, Stella Adler may compare the degree of emotion experienced by her niece, Pearl Pearson (the Studio instructor of night classes), to that of another teacher:

The words that Pearl uses do not fit her emotion.

They are inadequate for what she has [inside]. Whenever an actor who was a student here comes back to visit, she says, "Hello. Ah, sit down. Ah, oh, how are you?" These are not the words she wants to use. What she wants to say is: "Joy! Joy has come. Everything is shining and bright!" She is never just saying hello. It is always more than that, and the words are not suitable.

On the other hand, there is a marvelous English woman, a teacher. She says, "How do you do? Hello, I'm delighted to meet you, Miss Adler. Well, I'm just thrilled to see you." I don't know what she means by that. The words are much more than she has emotionally, much more. The words are really very thrilling, but she leaves her inside [internal response] to the words. There is an emotional control.

Generally, a character's temperament is discovered through how he feels about his situation.

The will of the character governs the magnitude of his action and aim in the life of the drama. While a stubborn person, whose will is strong, will go to any lengths to get what he wants, one of weaker will, an impressionable person, will allow himself to be diverted. Also, a person's clarity of direction, Stella Adler explains, depends upon his will. To illustrate a person vacillating due to a lack of will, she may cite such an instance:

You may say, "I want to be an actor. I'm very emotional. I adore the theatre. But I think a little bit slowly, and you talk so fast. I can only take in one thing at a time. But I love acting. I love people. But, gee, my father wants to give me a car. I have to think about this."

Then, to show a will clearly in control of one's destiny, she may offer her own case:

There was a time when I was offered a tremendous sum of money. I would have been able to leave you,

and you could have studied with Lee Strasberg. I wanted it very much, but I didn't have the will to go. I was afraid. I was afraid that if I did that, I would break.

There is always some kind of will at work within the overall aim of the character, Stella Adler reminds the student, to affect the actor in his characterization.

To demonstrate how the actor may create a role through the will of a character, Stella Adler may ask the student to imagine a weak-willed person, whose goals are rather trivial. She suggests that this poor fellow, lacking confidence in his own resources, forever scavenging for assistance outside himself, can be easily led by the nose. He is as if he were an insect, a narrow-minded thing, always hankering after something. She may then direct the student to image the life of an insect, a kind of precarious existence constantly full of troubles and woe. To the insect, if only because its own self is so negligible, it needs to get into something, though nothing proves satisfactory, as all is too overwhelming. From the image of the insect the student may extract some useful quality, as its attitude toward the environment, and put that into human form. He might enact: "I'd like to sit down, but the chair is over there. Maybe I'll just stand here. But, oh, the light's shining on me, so possibly I ought to move in the other direction. But the floor is slippery. Oh dear, oh well, perhaps I should just try to put on my coat again and go out. But, oh my, there was such a big step when I came

in. Oh heavens, I don't know what to do." Every simple though seemingly gargantuan task this ineffectual character attempts to accomplish is terribly difficult, terribly fatiguing; finally, he just lets each activity die away, revealing his aimlessness. Beginning with a weak will, the actor may arrive at a physicalization of an individual within the brow-beaten housewife type, the salaried employee type, or the petty aristocrat type.

Having once perceived and defined the differences in mind, temperament, and will between himself and the character, the actor may best fit himself into the character's shoes by living his daily life, doing simple physical actions in his imagined circumstances. The student is told first to spend a day with the character, observing how, in what particular manner, the character does things; how he eats, washes, sleeps, reads the paper, boils potatoes, blows his nose, ties his shoes, different from how he himself does. He needs to let these differences affect his own body, his own way of doing, so that he can live daily life in the rhythm of the character. In so doing, he may learn a lot about how this person thinks, discovering his internal attitudes through externalization.

Stella Adler encourages the student to use those same sources available to writers and designers and all artists in order to help himself build his own character creations. He is to study books and magazines, the street and

daily life, the world of animals, insects, plants, and objects. He is to stimulate his imagination by looking outside himself for the character, and is to pose questions to himself about the character. In summary, those questions are:

1. To what large type does he belong, and what is the thinking of that group?
2. How does he think, particularly about life, the society, and his situation?
3. What is his temperament?
4. How strong is his will, and what is his aim?
5. What animal or object is he like?
6. What is his history and daily life?

In the character classes, the student is urged to go ahead and make a fool of himself that he may do away with a sense of shame, a sense not conducive to changing oneself. He is encouraged to give up his own body, by raising a shoulder, impeding the speech, getting a limp, in order to conquer it. Any way of walking, Stella Adler says, is preferable to his own. The initial and the essential goal in characterization is to erase personal mannerisms utterly from the work.

Coloring the Individual

Stella Adler teaches that the psychological make-up of a character is imbued with various colors (personality traits) stemming from one main character element. These traits are revealed through the way in which a character approaches action and through his choice of action.

To pinpoint a character's main element and colors, the student is instructed to gather impressions about him from reading the play, paying attention to what the other characters say about him, what he says about himself, and what he does in response to his situation. Every impression that is a quality needs to be translated into action. If the character is said to be charming, the actor must choose things for his character to do that enable others to view him affably, be charmed by him. If the character is a nurse conceived by the playwright as efficient, the actor as nurse might arrange and clean the instruments for surgery in an efficient manner. If the character is superficial, the actor could select the action to chat, but not to discuss things seriously. By the actor's translating adjectives into action, a character's inside can come out.

When Stella Adler proposes a character element to the student, he is expected to activate it in a variety of circumstances, in order to find out what that element does. If the quality given is "mean," from doing mean things like tearing up letters soliciting donations for charitable causes, the student may discover that the do-able nature of meanness is to cut oneself off from the human need, not responding to it.

He is also asked to activate the opposite of each element assigned. In order to experience what meanness does not do, as well as to be able to physicalize both sides of

a human tendency, the student activates the quality of "nice." By putting niceness into various circumstances, he may see that it makes effort to understand and help people and the situation, as compared to meanness which abuses people in order to arrogate the situation for its own benefit. A nice person plays cards to enjoy the game mutually, while a mean person plays to beat the others.

The student is given the opportunity to translate many contrasting qualities into action in order to externalize opposite kinds of personalities. He is also assigned character types and asked to reach for the central element of each that made him choose to be the type he is. For example, if the type is a salesperson, Stella Adler suggests that in his mind everything is saleable; that he ought to be built "bigger than Barrymore, going a mile a minute not only to sell the very air, but also to create it;" that he is progressive, disregarding tradition and whatever does not go forward; that he ignores the small-fry; that he is practical and does not dream; that he is always a doer; and that if the salesperson is a woman, there is something masculine about her -- in her jaw, in her stride, or in the squareness of her shoulders. In other words, those traits inside the type that enable him to be the type must be seen on the outside in his body and in what he does. Stella Adler asks the student if the character is selfish, where is it on the outside -- in a raised

eyebrow, a thin smile, a tight spine? If he is naive on the inside, where is his artlessness located physically -- perhaps in near-sightedness, as might be the case of Ibsen's Dr. Stockmann.

The student works on coloring characters that exist both within and without dramatic literature. Beginning with an element, he may end up with a physicalization easily applied to someone already existing within a play. Taking "timidity," for example, it could be considered the main element of the innocent-girl type, and activated as "To Shrink," "To Retire," "To Close Up," and "To Hide" away from others and the situation. Withdrawing into its own tiny self, timidity does not want to participate in the world, and needs to touch it but in a small way. Its mind thinks, "I'm threatened." Unable to withstand the bold things of life, it is fragile, pulling its eyes and senses inward, away from stimulation, away from anyone daring or anything powerful. It therefore makes contact indirectly, conditionally, and communicates circuitously, hesitatingly. Its movement and way of walking is tenuous, not rooted to the earth. Knowing all this about timidity, Stella Adler points out, is to know the heart and mind of Laura from Tennessee Williams' The Glass Menagerie. Once experienced in action in any circumstances, the behavior of timidity may be activated in Laura's circumstances, playing Laura's play.

On the other hand, beginning with an existing character, the behavior of his main element may be analyzed, and transferred to the circumstances of other existing characters exhibiting the same main element. For example, taking Nora from Ibsen's A Doll's House, Stella Adler sees her basic interior as childish, colored with naiveté, credulity, and amazement. She plays at being a wife and mother, does not want to grow up, and what she tries to do most (until the point of crisis) is to keep the right things and the right people in their conventionally right places; hence, all her actions are scented with infantilism. Stella Adler then draws a parallel between the center of Nora and that of Mary Tyrone, from O'Neill's Long Day's Journey into Night, and then that of Blanche from Williams' A Streetcar Named Desire. Although the immediate and past circumstances of these three women vastly differ, as do the natures of their partners, all three approach their situations childishly. Thus, whether in middle-class Norway, provincial New England, or the French district of New Orleans, immaturity is recognizable as immaturity. And even though the culmination of each one's stage life differs -- Nora is overcoming the childishness, while Mary is drowning in morphine, and Blanche is being institutionalized because of it -- this main character element, activated in the circumstances of each woman, affords a rhythm of behavior, frame of mind, and aim for

which to live -- similarly.

Stella Adler's teaching demonstrates that similar types, with similar professions, with similar elements, with similar aims exist throughout literature, but the differences in their circumstances make different plays. No character exists outside a situation. What he does in response to his situation reveals who he is; and what happens to him because of who he is reveals the theme of the play. Finally, then, the character's main element and traits, aim and actions, must mesh with the theme of the drama, revealing it through all he chooses to do and the manner in which he does it.

To illustrate how the life of a character divulges the theme of a play, Stella Adler may analyze Peer Gynt, the title role of Ibsen's verse play. From clues in the script, she first of all ascertains that he is of the peasant class and a rebel type. He is known to be a rebel from what he does. He disrespects that which his mother respects. He scoffs at her Christian morality and ethics. He disobeys her. He pits himself against the religious community. He scorns a belief in God and delegates himself his own god. He formulates his own principles of hierarchy and concept of power. He lies. He steals. He cheats. He is also known to be a rebel from what others do in reaction to what he does. Intolerant of his ways, others disparage and punish him; he is, for example,

forbidden the company of nice girls. Peer Gynt's type, therefore, derives from what he is doing most -- rebelling.

Asking what does a rebel need, Stella Adler suggests that he must have godlessness to presume he himself can create his own life; courage to forge his own trail; arrogance to believe he can blaze the way better than anyone else; strength to assert an individual brand of law and order; exuberance to thrive alone as free as a gypsy; and boldness to want to rebel.

Peer Gynt's rebellion is bold. Asking what does boldness do, Stella Adler teaches that it faces and surmounts obstacles; it extends itself fully without fear and without needing pity; it springs, going non-stop, full-speed ahead; it pushes beyond limitations, and, having panache, it shows itself off. It is brightly colored -- brazen, brash, daring, full of humor, joyful, impudent, and impertinent. Its colors are activated by enjoying to joke, to provoke, to "kid around." Its senses are keen; its mind is alert; its body is vibrant, flexible, and without tension. Its voice is laughing; its speech is poetic, extraordinary, flamboyant, articulate, responding not to reality but expanding upon it.

Stella Adler says that with his whole being Peer Gynt brandishes the words, "I want what I want; catch me if you can." The liveliest of peasants, he is the rebel gone overboard, the rebel's rebel. His entire attitude

toward his situation is shaped by immoderation: to his mother he is defiant, unavailable when needed, and though he does help her, it is in his style, not hers; to St. Peter he is contemptuous, blocking him; to Death he is flip-pant, making a gay mockery of him as if to disallow even death to be boring.

Since Peer Gynt shatters all the precepts of Christianity, the play, in Stella Adler's appraisal, is about breaking rules -- who breaks them and how. The bold one breaks them by going overboard. The author's aim, she says, is to make the audience understand that in rebellion, the rebel is excessive. Each one of the actor's choices for the character must be carefully selected to reveal the playwright's theme.

Heightening Character

Stella Adler defines heightened character as the type externalized to its theatrical extreme. As is the case in farce or melodrama, it is characterization so stylized on the outside that the inside can almost be forgotten. Drawn in broad strokes, vividly colored, a heightened character is based upon a dualistic attitude; behavior is right or wrong, values are good or bad, and life is not muted.

The actor's technique for heightening a character is to see him through the eyes of his social opposite, or at least through those of someone radically dissimilar.

It may be to perceive the servant from the master's vantage, the capitalist from Khrushchev's, the Hollywood starlet from the New England spinster's, the cowboy from the Indian's, the doctor from the child's, the secretary from the boss' wife's, the homosexual from the truck-driver's, the black from Archie Bunker's. Heightening takes what Stella Adler calls a "slanted" (biased) view, a view that results in the stereotype theatricalized.

Heightening gives the student the chance to change everything about himself externally almost instantly. He selects a type, puts him into a situation, and physically portrays him as his opposite would see him. For example, he might choose to be a Japanese military officer interrogating a P.O.W. American soldier-boy from the point of view of the boy's mother. Seeing the Japanese through the mother's eyes, the student may spontaneously change his own voice, accent, posture, gestures, rhythm, and mental attitude. Or, as an American Method actor rehearsing the role of Romeo from the point of view of the British Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts, he may combust into a slob. He awakens in his trousers from a mattress on the floor at noon; wipes himself with a dirty tee-shirt; puts on but one shoe because he cannot find the other; hunts for a cigarette butt inside fourteen sour coffee cups. Wielding a broken guitar, he begins his speech to Juliet, saying, "Wherefore? Wherefore what? Wherefore da coffee? Deny

dy fadder. Dat soonavabitch, deny 'im. Whaddya need 'im fer? I always sez yer ole man wazza creep, so deny 'im!" By means of heightening, the student may almost immediately become someone he may never have imagined himself becoming.

The principle that governs the technique of heightening is to accept a vision of reality, however biased or illogical, as true. The principle may be applied by the actor not only to heightening farcical or melodramatic characters, but also to realizing plays such as fantasy and theatre of the absurd that are written with wholly unrealistic or heightened situations. Stella Adler explains that although the circumstances of heightened theatre break all rules of logic and are impossible, they must be used by the actor as if they were possible. For example, he accepts that he can walk on water, or eat the air, or row a boat with straws. In so doing, he remains true to the nature of things and action, even if the situation is beyond nature; that is, he eats air as air, not as meat, knowing that it is air but believing that it can be eaten. Or if he is playing the Red Queen from Alice in Wonderland, who runs and runs and gets nowhere, he really does run though he gets nowhere. Thus investing his faith in a logic antithetical to that of life, the actor creates a theatrical vision of reality.

Stella Adler refers the student to the novels of

Charles Dickens in order to witness a parade of heightened characters, and to the clown creations of Bert Lahr and Charlie Chaplin in order to catch the social implications behind heightening. In fact, she says, the social view that heightening takes may be used by the actor to influence externally his portrayal of any character, even those psychologically complex ones from realistic drama. Blanche DuBois, for example, from Williams' Streetcar, in Stella Adler's opinion, is a character already heightened as written. She is begging to be theatricalized by the actress, as are most of Tennessee Williams' characters. "He wants them terribly social, with every moment physicalized," Stella Adler tells the student. She suggests building for Blanche a frilled reality of iced drinks, hot baths, and poetic gentlemen as seen through the starkly practical eyes of Stanley Kowalski; and to build his reality as that of a human beast as seen through the romantically slanted eyes of Blanche. Each, then, makes a ripe social statement upon the other, more richly externalizes the play's conflict, and helps spotlight its theme.

Knowing that all dramatic types and situations are somewhere apparent in Nature, Stella Adler recommends that the student watch how people even in life will switch personality gears to meet their circumstances. They assume attitudes that automatically heighten their situations socially. To illustrate, she may offer an experience of her

own:

I went to the doctor, and found myself talking to him like this: "Uh, is that going to hurt? I mean, you won't hurt me, will you? No, I'm very comfortable, thank you, thank you very much. Yes, I'm terribly comfortable, and thanks very much for paying so much attention to me." And when I went to say good-bye to the assistant, I said, "Oh, thank you. It was lovely. You really took good care of me. Thank you very much." It was a role. It was a whole role I was playing. I was playing the role of a mouse.

Stella Adler comments that, upon her departure from the office, she realized she had given them a show and thereby had engaged them in performing for her too. For the purposes of the actor, she remarks that she was not at the time consciously saying to herself, "Hey, I'm a mouse," or "Hey, I'm a polite, little girl and you're the big, smart man." She was, however, truly viewing and living the situation as if she were little and he were big. What the student may learn from her experience, she says, is:

Because I did the mouse once, I now know how to do it. The meaning of it is: The partner is big and I am little. He knows everything, including how to write with a pencil and read a book. I can say to him, "Gee, isn't that lovely, what a lovely, big book!" What results is a very polite, very neat, very tender, very undemanding person -- the element of polite from a slanted angle.

Because of Stella Adler's attitudinal response to the "medical establishment" circumstances, a character emerged from within her. And her commitment to the heightened social attitude of that character, she recalls, enabled her to play that babe in the authority's office scene very well. Thus, Stella Adler says to the student, "What I want you

to do, all I want you to do, is play the scene very well."
To play it very well fundamentally means that the actor believes in an imagined vision of reality.

In essence, the Principle is: "IN BUILDING A CHARACTER, LEAVE NOTHING TO CHANCE."

Character According to Society

"The actor must have a wide horizon. He will be called upon to present the life of the human spirit of all peoples of the world, present, past, and future."

While the actor resolves his characterization according to the manner of the type, his acting style is defined according to the manner of the society to which the character belongs and/or with which the play identifies. Very early on in the student's training, even before the actual classes in characterization, Stella Adler begins to introduce him to what she calls the "large social classes." These are various historic, societal groupings based on differences in life-style. Her intention is for him to work with his fellow students on developing the ability to physicalize certain attitudes underlying dominant characteristics typical of each group. The general characteristics she considers necessary for the student to understand, mainly in order for him to stylize his actions, are: the attitude toward and use of the body; the way of wearing the costume and using properties; the way of thinking and the system of values, including the communal ethics and the

religious attitude; and the manner of emotional expression. She contends that the typicality within each large social group she assigns needs to be recognized by the student, in order for him to understand the average level of behavior and average manner of doing before he can create the un-average. She says, "You don't have to understand Picasso. And you don't have to read Dürrenmatt. And you don't have to know who Firbank is. But you do have to know the norm of the class."³

At various times during the student's two years of training, then, he is asked to study and manifest with his group, usually without the use of dramatic texts, some societal breakdowns. Among others, those always selected and named by her, and the reasons for their inclusion are: The Greeks, to assist the student in reaching that psychic size she has been asking him to reach all along; The Clergy, to enable him to practice formalized behavior, ritualized movement, and opposing actions; The Aristocracy, to help him develop the sense of self and the use of period costume; The Peasants, to allow him freedom; and The Middle Class, to let him objectively view the median level values of his own society and of the society that forms the basis of many modern plays.

³All of Stella Adler's theory and direct quotations contained in this section, "Character According to Society," derives from notes and tapes of Studio classes in Character taught by her in 1966, 1968, 1970, and 1974.

The Greeks

Asking the student to enact situations and paraphrase monologues from Greek drama, Stella Adler notes for him the fundamental difference between the social ethics of Ancient Greek plays and those of today. She says that Greek drama is generally comprised of characters who represent something greater in magnitude than themselves as individuals. A protagonist's yearnings and quest parallel that of some collective whole, perhaps the populace of the city; therefore, unlike the modern mentality based upon a concept of individualized responsibility, the Greek mind and aim are conceived by the actor not impersonally, but larger than merely personally.

If the student can incorporate within himself this Greek sense of mass accountability, his behavior will be affected. His acting may become presentational, public, opened up and out, and free of tension. "With one thousand people behind and the gods looking on," Stella Adler says, "there cannot be a struggle in the body. There is an elixir of being, and of being here."

For the classical body, the student is instructed to make every movement intentional, none accidental. His gestures, though as if they could be sculpted, are not to be posed, but directed -- to throw the discus or to drink the hemlock. Greek movement, Stella Adler says, ought to signify a "readiness to do and to die," as if its very

need were to idealize the moment.

She suggests the student assume the attitude of marble for manifesting the unification of the Greek body and mind. Sculpted marble, relaxed and solidified, may lose a hand, a leg, both arms, but does not die inside. As with the Greek warrior, or Keats' "Ode to a Grecian Urn," or Martha Graham's dance, its essence is eternal duration. The image of marble, to Stella Adler, represents that psychic size necessary for classical plays; that same size he may bring to enrich all his acting, as, she says, Katharine Cornell did:

Her face was somehow romantic and beautiful, and her acting implied that life goes on inside the play, that she would not die, and that love would not stop. She would not permit the curtain to come down. Her face did not change.

The student works upon physicalizing the character element of power in order to sense this psychic size that is without physical strain. "Greek power," Stella Adler tells him, "is the power that does not exert itself. The still point of the dance, as in the Red Queen from Alice in Wonderland who says, 'It takes all the running you can do to keep in the same place.'"

From Greek power, the personality traits of acuity, arrogance, a sense of justice, hatred (activated in scheming and plotting), but never weakness may radiate. Pinpointing the whole of the Greek temperament, welling up from the social tradition of contact with the gods and

responsibility for the populace, she contends:

It is dramatic to the end. A boy might be struck by his father, or a girl by her mother, whom she either loves or hates. The rhythm with which the characters live is "strike him dead" rhythm. That rhythm gives the temperament.

If there is hatred, it is Greek hate -- vengeance by fate. One thousand years of the House of Atreus, plus cursed. The power is [built by the actor] from the vengeance inside and the relaxation outside. No matter what a character goes through, he does not let the body give way [break the form].

The result of the contrast between the internally dramatic temperament and the externally plasticized physicality is a face eternalized, or the mask of Greek drama and of the plays of Eugene O'Neill. Behind the mask lies the sense of "I am," of not being deserted, of the city and oneself together. It is this sense of central indestructibility and theatrical immortality that Stella Adler urges the student to realize, in order to stylize his performance. She suggests he compose himself physically, as if girdled with steel, and take her advice:

Never mind being small. That's for other people. Don't talk to people who aren't big. Talk to those people who treat you as if you were a queen or a king or a princess. I was brought up that way, and now I don't want to beat around the bush with you. Get marble. You need marble. Marble is a great thing, because it cannot break inside.

Through his work in the Greek style, the student may aspire to an image of himself within a larger than mundane reality.

The Clergy

When Stella Adler exercises the student in the manners of the Clergy, she shows him slide-projections of paintings depicting St. Francis of Assisi that he may sense the nature of poverty, paintings by Goya that he may sense the nature of outrage, and paintings by Lorenzetti, Simone Martini, Fra Angelico, and the Florentine school of artists that he may imitate the clerical posture, bearing, and conduct. She is interested in his physicalizing, in groups, historical, traditional images of the Clergy, not necessarily those of modern times.

She is interested in his developing a ritualistic style of behavior of a society, founded in the non-industrialized Middle Ages when the Church was sovereign, whose way of thinking is based upon a concept of right and wrong, of saint and sinner, of spirit and body. The clerical mentality is examined in order for the student to clarify his action and movement. He is to understand that when the social values are neither confused nor shaded, but are black and white, any middle-ground, any half-way sea of leisure in which to float, is negated. He is to understand the nature of action motivated by the need to perpetuate a belief in God; that is, the nature of toil performed to attain reverence. At the same time, he is to understand the security derived from a sense of being aligned with God.

Stella Adler teaches the student to think of the cleric's body as a vehicle ostensibly used for performing ceremony. Concealed beneath gowns, it is asexual, in repose, and almost silent. To experience the rhythm native to the costume and its refining effect upon his body, the student clothes himself in clerical dress. With his fellows, he walks in procession, kneels, stretches toward heaven, and prays in unison. Stella Adler asks:

Wearing these clothes, do you see how easily you can live without pockets? Wearing these clothes, could you ever think of leaning on a chair? Is it ever necessary to look for the chair before sitting down? Is your aim in sitting not bigger than "To Sit"? Are you not sitting in order "To Listen" or "To Witness" something? When you believe "Dust thou art and to dust thou shalt return," are you not secure? Is the floor no longer the floor? Is it not the earth?

The student is given the action "To Suppress" as a primary aim for the Clergy; that is, to suppress personal inclinations in order to serve the Church. His understanding of the action is assisted by an image of the "Pietà," a work of art, in Stella Adler's opinion, wrought to depict the concealment of profound suffering. Suppression, a religious trait, may be activated by containing oneself, by holding back impulses, by checking feelings. The student is also asked to activate its opposite -- "To Release" oneself. In keeping with the code of a society based upon contrasting values, the clerical character's release is done in private.

Through working with characteristics of the Clergy, the student may see that when the values of a society are clearly defined -- as they are not in the society of modern plays -- movement is more formal, gesture less inadvertent, and action partakes of strict control or its dramatic opposite. In other words, unlike the path of the modern character in a struggle for identity, the aim of the Clergy is communal, shared, and understood.

The Aristocracy

Since, in Stella Adler's assessment, except for a kind of spiritual aristocracy, the United States is without an aristocratic tradition, she looks to the paintings of seventeenth century French court life, as well as the art of Velazquez and Goya, to assist the student's visualization of the society of the aristocrat. This society she examines within the perspectives of Greek classicism and Church ritual in order that the student might physicalize the differences in each group's way of thinking about itself.

She teaches that, like the Clergy from whom the aristocrat inherits his carriage and rites of behavior, he is able to believe, "I am here by the grace of God;" however, unlike the Clergy, he gives importance to his body. Because of the aristocrat's position in the society and his tradition based on blood-ties, his entire direction needs to be toward himself. Unlike the priest as a servant

of God and His people, and unlike the Greek as a representative of the people, the aristocrat considers himself to be the people.

The student is instructed to arrange the circumstances of the aristocrat to render himself important and large. His accoutrements are to be selected for their ability to create an attitude toward himself, and to decorate him. His costume is to be chosen to make him appear big, as if he deserves access to palatial space. Therefore, to reach the physical typicality of the Aristocracy, he is first of all to obey the costume, which, Stella Adler says, will result in movement and gesture that is generally not liberal.

A primary purpose in the student's working upon characteristics of the Aristocracy is to differentiate their world and mentality from that of the Middle Class. To wield power, rather than to acquire material, may be the main aim of the Aristocracy. This power, the power that rules, requires a sense of impersonality and non-involvement, which, Stella Adler suggests, may be found in the scenes of warfare, coronation, and ceremony in Shakespeare's history plays. With the Aristocracy, the student may experience a society, in contrast to the Middle Class, not suffering from alienation, a society that assumes God to be on its side and the people to be contained within itself.

The Peasants

It is Stella Adler's intention for the student, through working on traditional peasant characteristics lifted from the historical art of painters like Breughel and Van Gogh, to liberate himself from physical inhibition, "polite" behavior, and conceptual thinking. As she is not so interested in having him characterize any specific peasant out of literature, but is interested in having him understand the nature of peasant life, particularly in contrast to that of the Middle Class, the student performs without text in "communal" groups.

She explains that the culture of the peasant begins and ends with the earth. "He [in contrast to the gypsy or migrant-worker] is not a wanderer on the land; he is part of the land," she says. His entire existence is connected to Nature. In the Breughel works, Stella Adler points out, the mud of the earth is tracked indoors onto the floor, while the contents of the house spill outdoors onto the path.

Therefore, the student is instructed that whether he is digging out potatoes from rough and rocky ground, washing himself in the stream from which he drinks, tearing and eating by hand the food he has grown, imbibing from a skin sack the wine he has made, building a table or a stool from the trees around him, or sleeping on the soil or a wooden floor -- he ought to keep himself rooted, close

to the earth to which he and all his effects belong.

He is taught that the society of the Peasantry is based upon a community way of life. The people are neither alone nor lonely, but unified through a shared purpose; therefore, when the student as peasant performs his tasks, prejudices are not to be drawn, not even according to age or sex. He is to be unified with his group through physical contact. Touching is not to be peripheral. There is to be no shame and nothing to hide. Everything, including his sexuality, is to be as exposed and as robust as amongst animals. Babies are to be fed openly at the breast.

This naturalness of the peasant life-style, Stella Adler tells the student, is heretofore absolutely unknown to him. She says,

It is not within your education. It is not within what you have seen. Individually, you might have had a drunken night, but [within the Peasantry] full, sexy, masculine men have unsentimental fun partying, dancing, and mating with earthy women. Everybody is a somebody familiar, to whom you do not have to say hello. The body is normal, very much of a whole, like the potato.

For the student to realize the peasant attitude toward the body, Stella Adler tells him that he must "take out the whole Middle Class." But, when he misunderstands, she adds: "It is not the body of a slob that gives over in an American way. It is all of a piece, not divided and not needing a chair to hold it up. The body sits unconstrained, as rude as the stool it's spread upon." It is a body, she teaches, made rough and heavy by work. It

is a primitive body, whose movement is organic; and when at rest or asleep, it is abandoned.

In consideration of the peasant mentality, Stella Adler may offer her memory of what Stanislavsky said:

I know how to play a peasant. I know how he wipes his nose. I know everything about him. But I don't know, when he stands for four hours, what he is thinking. I know what I think, and I know what my friends think, and what an actor thinks, and what [Ibsen's] Brand thinks, and what many other people think, but I don't know what he thinks.

Stella Adler contends that the peasant does not think -- except in images. Everything of his mind, she says, is as singular and as simple as possible. If the student is given to count potatoes, she suggests that it may be tedious for him. "But," she exclaims, "do not play an idiot; the peasant is smart as hell." She teaches the use of the imagination to respond to the sources, the origins of language. Every word the student uses ought to be basic; for example, baby, fire, death, fun, food. Any word new to him is a puzzle to be solved through experience; for example, he learns the meaning of punishment through a beating with a stick, sleep through falling down, work through having something to eat. He is told that it is not necessary to make sense with words, but that it is necessary to speak through action. He may not, Stella Adler says, speak English, nor the language of a nation. He is to devise a kind of gibberish completely understood by his own group with its absolute oneness of thought.

Due to the peasant's contact with Nature, Stella Adler explains, he is on intimate terms with spirituality. Having all his truth at hand, he is stable and secure; unlike the Middle Class, he does not have internal anxiety. As a result, she says, although the peasant face may sometimes appear distorted, it generally ought to look vigorous and colorful, perhaps charming, but never romantically soft. The peasant is graphic. The peasant is overt. The peasant, Stella Adler wishes the student to understand, is not the farmer. He is someone, she says, who no North American limited to North America, has ever seen. Through the peasant characteristics, therefore, the student has the chance to free himself from himself, and from everything of his background that is opposite to a society whose values are not in conflict.

The Middle Class

Stella Adler uses photographs from magazines such as Life to impress upon the student images of the bourgeoisie. After tracing the growth and development of the class to the rise of industrialization and a dependence upon machinery in connection with daily life, she focuses upon modern times in her analysis of the life-style of this society. As its values and subsequent conduct determine the dramatic questions in the bulk of twentieth century plays, an objective understanding of the median level of the class' way of thinking and doing is paramount in

the student's education.

The student is asked to understand the problems found in middle class plays by comparing the nature of its society to that of the societies previously studied. In Stella Adler's view, the Middle Class is void of that communal sensibility that coheres in the Peasantry, the Clergy, and the Greeks. It is a class divided, riveted in states of conflict between husbands and wives, parents and children, and political platforms. In the plays, argumentation or discussion erupts because the Middle Class lacks a firm, steady, binding ethical ideality. There is no mythology (as with the Greeks), no king (as with the Aristocracy), no God (as with the Clergy), and no immediate contact with Nature (as with the Peasantry) to evolve a permanent set of ethics and morality. Though comprised of a non-revolutionary people, the Middle Class sustains a condition of revolt against the impracticality of the current standard of how things ought to be. The members of the class, therefore, are spiritually alienated from each other. Only when uniting behind a social, economic, or political cause do they connect.

The condition of the mentality influences the attitude toward the body. Stella Adler teaches that when a person's body is not organically joined to the earth, or is not the temple of the soul, or is neither representing nor containing the people, it is a shell. When discovering

the typicality of the middle class character, the student needs to physicalize, she says, that the body is somehow constrained; that its natural tradition, as the spiritual tradition of the soul, has been lost.

Besides the body, the house and the things of middle class life, as well as the emotions, are kept under control. In fact, Stella Adler says, the predominant feature of middle class society is orderliness. The purpose of this arrangement, she tells the student, is two-fold: to impress others and to conceal the truth. To be concerned about what others think, in contrast to an indifference toward opinion of the aristocrat, is a middle class obligation, she says.

The general way of thinking of the Middle Class is referred to by Stella Adler as "the institution of 'I believe.'" It is the mentality of the person who has the ability to appropriate what is told him without experiencing it. The thinking is organized, and the attitude, created from accepting what the newspapers print, is institutionalized.

To summarize Stella Adler's typical middle class person, he is seen as someone living a family life, whose thinking, morals, and values have been supplied him respectively by his government, his church, and his economic situation. He has no need to change the world. As the activities of his daily life are familiar and the people

around recognizable, he is at home and at ease in a pleasant place, a place that is actually made pleasant by the institutions which he follows.

Given that base, when the son dates the chorus-girl, or when the executive grows a beard, or when the daughter brings home the bohemian, domestic conflict over standards ensues. The contention which occurs between the husband and wife when he grows a beard, Stella Adler points out, arises not due to her disliking the beard because she dislikes beards, but due to her disliking the beard because the institutions dislike beards. Thus conflict is the result of the group-thinking being challenged by personal thinking. In this sense, Ibsen's Ghosts, in Stella Adler's opinion, is a great middle class play; it reveals through Mrs. Alving the suffering and turmoil brought about by institutionally-enforced thinking, specifically that of the mid-nineteenth century.

Stella Adler tells the student that when acting the middle class play, the expectation of the society is that the circumstances will be used logically; for example, the expectation for a chair is something upon which to sit rather than upon which to drape one's feet. Also, there is a tendency to give importance to facts, and a hesitancy to penetrate the depths of another person, or expose one's own, in communication. Generally, more is said than is believed or felt. What the student is to look for in the plays of

Ibsen, Strindberg, Shaw, Williams, Arthur Miller, Edward Albee, Neil Simon is that mainstay of social gatherings and domestic life; that is, the social performance of human deportment. The acting, therefore, involves experiencing pretense; it is the pretense that stylizes the acting.

Just as the type of the character is established until the play's social situation reveals the individual, the conventions of the society are established until the social situation reveals the unconventional. Until Nora, from Ibsen's A Doll's House, challenges the standard role of the woman within the institution of marriage, her home life appears to be correct according to middle class form.

The student is thus led to recognize that within each of the societies studied, there is a general expectation regarding behavior; there are standards due to some commonality within the society's approach to life. The actor must understand the basic rules of the play's society, and, through his acting style, establish them. The style stabilizes his performance. Then, to reveal the individual within the society, he may break the rules.

In essence, the Principle is: "EVERYONE EXISTS WITHIN A SOCIETY AND IS INFLUENCED BY ITS LIFE."

CHAPTER V

TEXT: WHAT THE ACTOR KNOWS

When an actor first approaches a play, Stella Adler explains, it is alien to him. Woven with words not of his choosing, peopled with strangers, marked with events unexperienced and situations unexplored by him, the play stands all in shadow. It must be infused with the light of life. Confronting the words of the text, the actor systematically works backward from them to the sources of the play and then forward finally to speak the words -- simply and meaningfully. The process is one of tremendous creative research to find that which will fill the text with as much insight, thought, and imagination as was stewing within the playwright unto the point when he at last arrived at the result of his work -- the play's language.

Stella Adler teaches the student initially to read the play in order to uncover the plot line -- what happens in the story. He is also to note the sequences of action -- how the play builds -- including the direction of each sequence, up or down. A summation of these sequences, not words, is committed to memory that they may be articulated in answer to her demand: "I've never read this story or

seen it on the stage. Tell me what it's about."¹

The student next reads his part aloud, allowing whatever sense and sensibility is in the text to emerge. He does not impose anything upon it. He is not to act or even interpret, but is simply to see what is there for him to understand. At the same time, he is advised to discover the energy level of the play, in the respect that it is written in verse or prose and that it is comic or dramatic. This is so that his reading may be styled more distinctively and colored more vibrantly than an amorphous beige. He is also asked to seek out and accentuate the conflict or any confusion between characters, in order that the play's contention over ideas may be immediately agitated within him and not pacified.

From his reading the student is told to gather and write down impressions, scene by scene, having to do with: the atmosphere or mood of each scene; who his character is; who his character is with; the place where he is; and the period of time and society of the play. These impressions are then traced back to specific lines, statements of fact, within the text. This is so that the play's social situation may begin to be drawn in concrete, verifiable form. As Stella Adler tells him, "If you do not know the social

¹All of Stella Adler's theory, direct quotations, and samples of work contained in this chapter derives from notes and tapes of Studio classes in Technique II taught by her in 1970, and Technique III in 1973 and 1975.

situation, you will not know how to act." In other words, it is through the actor's understanding, expanding upon, and internalizing the play's social situation that he can externally interpret the text.

To demonstrate the importance of a social situation in terms of its definitive effect upon one's behavior, Stella Adler may relate her own experience of finding herself in the company of an American doctor and his wife, a former member of the Nazi Youth Movement. In that circumstance, Stella Adler says, she was prompted to announce, "Either she or I leaves this room." Understanding the social situation therefore tells the actor what attitude to assume toward the partner and what to do about him.

The social situation, known from the facts of the play, is to be stated in the present tense by the actor. It offers him a springboard from which he may dive down into deep levels of thinking about and imagining the way of life of the society that led to the play's social situation. The facts or words, then, are there to stimulate the actor to think. They are to make him mentally construct a whole background for the play, including the class's way of thinking, politics, way of making money, accepted morality, ethics of behavior in national and domestic matters, and religious attitude. As this background gradually develops in the mind and gathers body in the imagination of the actor, Stella Adler expects that he

will be inspired to seek additional literature and art set within the same nationality, class, and time as that of the play. He is to immerse himself in images characteristic of the play's society. He may then bring a wealth of correct attitudes to the play's present social situation, as well as remove himself utterly from the tenets and behavior of his own everyday social context. He may understand how to live and react within the code of the play's society.

Stella Adler insists that in the modern theatre the play, which is the social situation and its inherent conflict, is contained within the place and can be acted because of it. To illustrate, she may ask the student to consider the circumstances of a hospital. It must be immediately understood by him that a hospital implies a rhythm, a logic, a sense of purpose, and a way of doing and being different from his own. These he begins to get by picking up impressions from the text. For example, while a play like Sidney Kingsley's Men in White, set in a hospital, gives facts to tell the actor the time of day, the season, the country, and the century in order that he may build the background, it also indicates the nature of the immediate circumstances and the behavior required.

Using impressions gathered from that play to analyze the society of a hospital, Stella Adler notes that it is a place closed off from the regular world and full of

activities generally incomprehensible to outsiders. There is separation between the staff and the patients; however, both groups are imprisoned within the place, and neither group is free to act personally. The staff, a hierarchy of people in uniform, practices a formal, non-intimate kind of behavior toward the patients and amongst themselves when on duty. Therefore, when the personal enters into the scene, when a kiss surreptitiously occurs between a doctor and nurse, the pattern of formality is broken and drama (or comedy) ensues. Any behavior against the rigidly formalized nature of the place, including against the nature of the starched, white, unadorned uniform-costume, indicates individuality within the class or professional type. The social situation within that place, therefore, pushes the kiss into high relief. It is spotlighted as unsterile, personal behavior in a sterile, impersonal place between otherwise cleansed, orderly people. Thus, to the extent that the actor thinks about and is affected by the nature of the circumstances where he is, his attitude toward what he and the partner are doing within the place will surface. Through the kiss, he may expose the core of the play; that is, the conflict within the social situation.

The character, then, is approached through the commonality of the type until the play reveals the individual. Containing first of all the differences between the type

and the actor portraying him, the character is narrowed down to a person with a name. The character might be an artist (type) in modern times, a stage actress: Stella Adler, the individual. The actor needs to discover how the individual lives in accordance with his type. That is, how he manages to carry on within his society; what he does and where he likes to go in his daily life. This is all imaginatively created as background to the character, built out of the facts and impressions from the text.

When he understands the commonality of the type, the student is asked to disclose his character's aim, or that which he wishes to accomplish most in his life. The aim is chosen in relation to the playwright's theme and all the actions chosen for the character are in relation to his aim. Therefore, the theme -- that main idea spoken through the social situation -- must be known. Also, every sequence of action must be directed toward fulfilling the aim, whether it is ever actually fulfilled or not, in order that the character might reveal the theme through what he does. The character's individuality, then, comes through those actions he chooses to do in response to his circumstances; that is, his aim is his personal answer to the general social situation.

Stella Adler admits that it is often difficult to pinpoint a character's aim, and it is conceivable that a wrong direction might be taken. Nevertheless, unless the

actor finds the right choice for his character in those circumstances, his acting cannot reveal the conflict of ideas within the play. Arriving at the aim or intention of the character, she says, is the very center of the Stanislavsky System.

To do so, the actor returns again to the words of the play, which set him to thinking about what needs to be accomplished. For example, Stella Adler may assess the intentions of Konstantine in Chekhov's The Sea Gull by beginning with her impression that he plays a nostalgic part, and with various characters' comments upon his depression. These are clues to Konstantine's behavior, and afford the actor a key to the character's aim, which might be: "To Resolve My Feelings of Nostalgia and Depression." This aim is selected in respect of Chekhov's thematic statement that the artist must have faith to survive. All of Konstantine's undertakings, all his writing, his attentions to Nina, his seeking the love of his mother, may then be directed toward resolving his lack of faith in his own life, even though in the end the obstacles to resolution are too great for him to overcome. Konstantine's depression does win out in an act of suicide, leaving his own aim unaccomplished, but Chekhov's thematic point is realized.

Stella Adler teaches that the actor, especially with these modern plays, must understand and physicalize

the complexities of the character's psychology. He is not on stage to relate the plot, she says, but to activate the character's aim. This he can safely do as long as he directs the performance of each physical action, verbal action, inner action toward an overall purpose; in fact, all the actor can do is play the actions toward the aim. He cannot possibly play emotions, or a characterization, or images, or an atmosphere; these, until translated into action, are not playable, not do-able. To exemplify, Stella Adler may remind the student that when a Moscow Art Theatre actor as Romeo explained the character's intention as to be hopelessly in love, Stanislavsky corrected his interpretation by saying it is rather to be hopelessly attentive to Juliet.

The actor cannot allow himself to wallow in a scenic atmosphere, but must discover what he can do to evoke an atmosphere. He also must think on stage, and reflect upon the play's circumstances before going on stage. He must find thoughts that excite and agitate him -- be they thoughts of himself as Romeo in relation to Juliet in their social situation, or of himself as Konstantine in relation to Nina in their social situation. That which he thinks about enables him, for example, to pay attention to Juliet hopelessly, thus producing an atmosphere of love through an attitude based on thoughts. These thoughts can come only from the actor, and cannot be imparted by the

director, as, Stella Adler says, "the director does not know what thoughts inspire the actor."

The actor's thoughts also allow him to feel his character's situation. Stella Adler explains that if the actor does not think about the character's circumstances, and if he does not think about what he needs to accomplish overall when doing each action, his feelings will not be freed. But when an action is done with an overall direction, within a deeply understood context that is being given consideration, the actor's emotional memory may be awakened and feelings may well up within him. Then, he can believe in the reality of his work.

The actor's artistic goal in any play is to have faith in what he is doing. That faith derives from knowledge of the life behind the text. To act without that knowledge is to have no confidence and thus to die on stage. This, Stella Adler says, is the lesson for all artists to be learned from Konstantine, who died from a loss of faith in his work.

All the technique is directed toward the actor's being able to discover what he needs to put behind the lines of the text minute-by-minute, sequence-to-sequence that will reveal the play. Then, being able to believe in that life behind the lines, because he knows it, the actor can think and do and feel on stage. He can live as a real person in a real place, over and over again, not

redundantly.

The student has the opportunity to experience the techniques variously applied to texts in the course of his classes in Technique III (script breakdown), Play Analysis I and II (modern European and American play-writing) and Scene Study.² However, to awaken initially his thinking about the life behind a text, Stella Adler may give him to study a section between Ann Field and Pat Farley from Philip Barry's Hotel Universe. Her approach to evolving the background life, the type of questions she suggests the actor ask himself, and those principles thereby brought to effect may be exhibited by an application of technique to Barry's text:

When you know the plot and the sequences and how they build, up or down, read through the text and get some impressions.

Eg. There is a feeling of love.
 She is concerned about him.
 He knows what is important, but pretends not to know.
 He is thinking of something bigger, even though he may love her.
 What he is thinking of is more important to him just now than loving her.
 They are of the Middle Class, so family life is important to both of them.

SEE WHAT IS THERE. DO NOT IMPOSE UPON THE SCRIPT.

Read the scene aloud, letting whatever you think come out of the play. Don't read into the script. Don't act. Don't make it colorless. Through reading, something will happen. There will be some

²The Appendix to this dissertation consists of a detailed account of Stella Adler's ways to approach building the life behind the lines of a text.

conflict. Look for and activate it.

WHEN READING, IMMEDIATELY SEE THROUGH YOUR IMAGINATION.

The plot leads you to building up the background to the larger circumstances, which include:

1. The Period - The play is in 1929 before the Great Depression. What is the social morality and what are the social habits of the class at that time?
2. The Class - The play depicts the Middle Class. The characters do not speak poetically, but colloquially. Their speech gives you the style.
3. The Characters - What is their nationality? Class? Costume? How does each one announce himself socially? What are three problems they have shared and how was each solved? What are some private things they have revealed to each other?

YOU MUST DE-FICTIONALIZE THE FICTION BY ACTIVATING THE PAST.

The facts of the text lead you to building up the background to the immediate circumstances, which include:

1. The Partner - Write out his history and build your relationship. When and where did you meet? Why did you like each other? What has his life been? You must have the ability to have a relationship with your partner in three or four different sets of circumstances, each of which you justify. Select justification that is toward, not away from, your action; justification that comes quickly, maximumly from behind the lines and makes you respond. Your talent lies in your choice of justification. Nothing is pushed, especially in realistic theatre.
2. The Set - Make a drawing of the set. You cannot do an action unless you are in some place. First place yourself. Then use the stage physically with ease before going to the lines. Be able to live alone in the set.
3. The Action - What is your action? Physicalize as much as possible. It is better to use the body than words. Begin with simple physical actions, doing one after another several times truthfully. In the beginning, do many things, even over-do; later, you can select.

GET USED TO PRESENTING AN ILLUSION OF TRUTH.

Go to the text. Play the actions for an aim.
 Eg. Ann's aim in the play is "To Close the Space
 Between Us."
 Ann's immediate action in the scene is "To
 Fight Him Back Point by Point; To Become
 His Equal."

Physicalize the intentions.

Eg. At Ann's entrance, she must do something;
 she might come in to tear up a letter.
 She must not announce herself with the line.
 She must do something in order to say the
 line.

Ann: I won't have it, Pat, I just will not
 have it.

(She should stay away from him.)

Pat: It? What's that you won't have?

(She might pick up a bottle of whiskey which
 is half-gone. Looking at it, thinking --
 out of that comes her next line.)

Ann: Something's burning you up. Tell me
 what it is!

(She should go to him.)

Pat: I'm afraid you're imagining things.

His action, taken from what the partner is
 doing, is "To Cool It."

IF YOU CAN DO THREE MINUTES, YOU CAN DO A WHOLE
 PLAY.

Using and refining the techniques, the resources,
 his tools, and himself, Stella Adler's student is at last
 urged to go out from the studio and make a contribution.
 As his profession is acting, his contribution is through
 the play. And because the human being is the subject, and
 the playwright's theme is the object of the play, the ac-
 tor is a character who as a human being is responsible
 for revealing the theme of the play. He is to make it
 clear to the audience, so it may touch their lives.

All the student's study for two years finally adds up to and pinpoints his ultimate vocational objective as an actor: to understand and to reveal through what he chooses to do on stage the theme of the play. Therefore, the first and last requisite of the actor is having the ability to physicalize his understanding.

At the termination of the student's course of study, Stella Adler frames for him a picture of how he may conduct his life-long pursuit of extending the play from the printed text to realization on stage. These processes of extension might be explained by her in a summation elucidating four obligations of the actor:

1. UNDERSTAND YOURSELF AND YOUR SOCIETY.

You must give up your mask and your masked ideas of yourself. You must be able to answer the question, "Who am I?" This question is answered in relation to the basic theme of life in our modern society, which has to do with the fact that everyone of us wants to get the most out of his life, and so has to do that in this world of difficulties and problems. You must know your own aim in life and the price that you have to pay for that aim.

You must know your society. No one of us exists outside of a place and its society. In our large society, we are basically uneven, unbalanced people who are being pulled away from our centers by many forces. You must know yourself in relation to the conditions of this society.

Once you determine who you are, then you must ask yourself: "What is the opposite?" "Where have I seen the opposite in life and in myself?" These answers will help you know yourself even better, and enable you to play both sides of an idea relating to a theme.

2. UNDERSTAND THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN YOURSELF

AND THE CHARACTER.

From knowledge and from intuition, you must discover the difference between the way in which you think and the way in which the character you are portraying thinks.

You must know your character in relation to two basic directions of mankind: 1) to live by and for the satisfaction of one's appetites; 2) to struggle for something higher than appetite gratification by aiming to give oneself. The theme of most modern plays involves the conflict between these two basic directions of mankind and the price that has to be paid for each direction. The price for the first direction is self-destruction; the price for the second direction is self-sacrifice. Understanding these two directions is fundamental to building the background to the play and to the character.

You must determine what price your character is willing to pay for the direction he chooses. Therefore, you must know his aim. Ask yourself: "Wherein lies his hope?" "Where has his life wanted to go?" "What price has he already paid for becoming who he has wanted to become?"

If you know your character's aim in life, you can see how he thinks and what his attitudes must be toward everything and every person in the play. You will then realize that his internal struggle or his conflict with the partner derives from his attitudes.

Through justification you can become fully on the side of your character, and can give birth to how he thinks and feels -- different from yourself. You can get to every role through the character's attitudes and thoughts, and through justification of his position in relation to the theme. The words of the play must affect you as a character who has specific attitudes. No role is you, but you are in every role.

3. UNDERSTAND YOUR PARTNER IN RELATION TO YOUR CHARACTER.

You can know your partner from what he does, from his attitude toward the place, from his use of the props and the immediate circumstances, and from what you perceive to be behind his words. Listen to and understand what

the partner is saying underneath the lines.

Your attitude toward the partner -- how you estimate and judge him -- is determined by his existence in comparison to your character's existence in relation to the theme. Therefore, how you speak and respond to your partner contains your understanding of his relationship to the theme; that is, his aim in life. In relation to the theme, your partner will be either struggling, or a failure, in the society.

The theme affects everybody in the play. It is the spine of the play; for example, "Life ought to be enjoyed." Your character exists only because he is related to the theme. Your character can be understood by you only in relation to the partner's relation to the theme of the play. In other words, your character's internal life on stage is contingent upon what you perceive as the internal life of the partner in relation to the theme. Therefore, what you put behind your lines depends upon what he puts behind his lines -- both in relation to the theme.

4. REVEAL YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE THEME IN YOURSELF THROUGH WHAT YOU DO ON STAGE.

Your character is understood by the audience not just through the ideas he speaks, but primarily through what you do. The audience must be able to see, to recognize, and to understand who your character is and what is his aim in relation to the theme.

What you choose to do on stage is important. You must not do just what you feel like doing, and you must not just be busy. You must make choices, thinking choices, regarding the way in which you handle your props and those of the partner, according to where you are and its effect upon you.

If you do not make thoughtful choices, your acting is all of no use. It will lack the relation to the theme and the truth of the life in the play. The play contains some crisis. Its conflict, a universal dilemma, must be broached by you, the actor. You must ask yourself: "How do I as this character find for myself a solution as to how to live that is different from the solutions of other individuals, even though I am a human being in the same

struggle as everyone else?"

Making choices of what to do in order to reveal your understanding of the theme of the play is the technique that makes you truthful on stage. That truth talks to the audience. It speaks its humanity through you, the actor, not through the words, to the whole world.

Through practicing these four processes of extending the play, the vocational task of the actor in the modern theatre may be fulfilled. He may get his understanding of the ideas of his own large society, and of the specific society of each play, on a level with that of the writers of modern dramatic literature. Then, using his craft, he may enact, not simply state, those ideas and the conflicts over them. In a sense, the actor himself is a medium for enlightenment, for education, for the joy of discovery. He discovers himself; and he discovers the nature of the human being and the human condition in modern times for the audience through himself. Finally, the actor, because he plays his understanding of the theme of the play, is the play.

Stella Adler tells the student that "the actor has a very big job;" that most of his acting work is thinking about and understanding and realizing the four extensions of the play; that he must find and make the contributions correct for the play according to his own understanding of it within him. She says,

The actor who is a real actor will ask himself: "What can I give the play? What can I contribute? What truth can I find and reveal?" The dividend for him is a growth in self-revelation.

That growth comes through this work of understanding, which helps him become what he wants to become -- the artist-human being.

The ethic of the actor, then, which Stella Adler passes on to the student, an ethic for which she herself is indebted to the wisdom of her own teacher, Stanislavsky, is: "Have the discipline to love the art in yourself, rather than yourself in the art."

In essence, the Principle is: "YOUR BIGGEST CONTRIBUTION IS TO FIND THE SELF WHICH YOU DID NOT KNOW."

CONCLUSION

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ARTIST-HUMAN BEING

"To overcome your estrangement, you go on stage."

Stella Adler's life in the theatre has been long and the influences upon her diverse. Behind her stands a theatrical family headed by impressive parents, the Yiddish theatre actors and managers, Boleslavsky, Stanislavsky, Clurman and the Group, Brecht, Reinhardt, descendants of Stanislavsky, and Michael Chekhov. She has continued to study and work with dramatic literature, her students, and what she observes daily in the surrounding world. No other instructor of acting can claim the same wealth of background.

Given the richness of the influences upon her, it is difficult to pinpoint the origin of any one of her principles; the general sense of them, however, is available within the writings of Stanislavsky. What, then, within Stella Adler's teachings characterize them as belonging to her? What is her contribution to the teaching and art of acting? She has said that her uniqueness, if any, lies in her sense of theatricality. How does that function? By reviewing each principle, noting its progression into her consciousness, and pointing out applications distinctive to her, Stella Adler's contribution

might be defined and evaluated.

The teachings of Stella Adler are an imaginative transformation of Stanislavsky's theories, and suit the needs of acting students in latter twentieth century America. They are a transformation much in the same way that the actor changes himself in order to make the playwright's work his own.

Many concepts that appear in the books of Stanislavsky re-appear in the teachings of Stella Adler under different terminology. What he calls "communion," she calls "reaching the partner." What he calls "poetic realism," she calls "the truth of the stage" or "theatricality." His "super objective" of the play is her "aim of the author." His "essential kernel" is "the theme" to her. His "subtext" is expanded by her into "the life behind the lines," and what Stanislavsky defines as "the circle of attention" is "the now" to Stella Adler. These vocabulary variations prove that Stanislavsky's System has been adjusted, interpreted, and re-formulated by Stella Adler according to her own understanding. She has been able to alter Stanislavsky's language precisely because she has absorbed him so completely, integrating his theories into her being on her terms. In combination with all the other influences upon her, Stanislavsky's trail-blazing has given her a direction; she has made her own way. That kind of transformation is exactly what she urges her students to do with what she teaches.

In this dissertation's Chapter I, The Development of the Actor, when Stella Adler addresses the Artistic Standards which the actor needs to set for himself to become an artist-human being, or, to use Stanislavsky's image, "a cultured person ... able to pull himself up to the geniuses of literature,"¹ fundamentally, she is requiring that the student AIM HIGH. In this first principle, the influence of her father's reverence for art and education, and her mother's taste for theatrical excellence, can be felt. What Stella Adler herself has to offer, in terms of the student's achieving standards, is inspiration; however, the standards proposed and the means to implement them are potentially awesome. The very height of her standards operates against Stella Adler's having a wide impact upon actor-training, no matter how deep her impression upon the student who stays to graduate might be.

It is only a particular breed of student, one ripe to struggle within his spirit against inherited conventions in order to awaken himself, that continues on through the nine courses she teaches over two years. Others, unable or unwilling to take the long, arduous road toward building a craft and refining themselves, quickly go. Also, as she is known to encourage the student to try for the gamut of theatrical styles from Aeschylus to light comedy,

¹Constantin Stanislavski, Stanislavski's Legacy, ed. and trans. Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1968), pp.27-28.

those drawn exclusively to television, movies, or Broadway stardom (especially in musicals) are not attracted to the studio of Stella Adler.

She is averse to "typing," restricting, or deluding the student. Based on her own experience in the New York commercial theatre and Hollywood, she speaks unfavorably of producers, agents, and the power, having economic ramifications, wielded by critics. She does not assist the student in hunting for employment; her studio offers no courses in audition techniques or how to break into show business; moreover, her initial discouragement of the student's finding slots of entry by himself is a dilemma for him, a novice who wants to perform.

In Stella Adler's mind, by means of the first-year teachings, she is endeavoring to protect the student's talent until he is more aware, more skilled in technique, and less vulnerable. The average student is young, in his late teens or early twenties. While she wishes his creativity and vitality not to be run down before he has the chance to grow up; while her projection is in terms of a lifetime; while she is maintaining that the studio is the only place where he can fail without rejection -- he might be yearning to land parts; the decision between the long view and a fast start is difficult for the young actor in America. Stella Adler's focus upon the growth process instead of on career results can but eventually function to improve the reputation of acting overall.

That Stella Adler has not espoused a "franchise" approach to teaching evidences her personal commitment to actor-training. Rather than farming out the classes to graduates of her studio or opening up branches staffed by trainees throughout the country (propositions which have been offered her), she persists, even now over the age of eighty, to teach by herself the essential courses in the craft of acting, characterization, scene study, and play analysis. She gives to the student all she deems necessary for ensemble and repertory stage acting or, if in want of a cohesive company, for creative acting with the partner.

Unlike the actor in Stanislavsky's theatre, he in contemporary American theatre is likely to play without an ensemble atmosphere or even with a less than stimulating, dissimilarly trained partner. Stella Adler therefore teaches not only adjustment and responsiveness to the partner, but also the means to fill in what might be missing from his performance.

Her teaching adapts itself to current theatre conditions; as contemporary drama changes, she attempts to reflect those changes. For example, in former years her two courses in Play Analysis dealt with the more standard modern European and American dramatic literature, including that of Ibsen, Strindberg, Chekhov, Shaw, O'Neill, Odets, Williams, and Miller; in later years, she has frequently added a course covering more recent or innovative

works, including those of Brecht, Beckett, Genet, Giraudoux, Wilder, and Neil Simon. Also, in 1973, having seen that the student could grasp a playwright's themes in general yet was still having trouble finding the life behind the lines, she devised and added Technique III, a course in line-by-line breakdown of texts.

Succinctly, the demands she places upon her own continued education, growth, and flexibility can have either an igniting or dampening effect upon the student. Some students seek the requisite self-discipline, while perhaps fifteen of the approximately forty-five enrolled in the first term leave the studio within two months; another ten depart at the termination of the first year.² There is a strenuousness implicit in meeting three of her expectations: psychic size, maximum acting, and an artistic way of life.

"Psychic size," a concept not original to Stella Adler, might, in a diluted form, be called "stage presence," or "charisma." Michael Chekhov, in To the Actor, approaches the quality somewhat mystically by alluding to the actor's radiation of "rays" or energy and creation of an atmosphere on stage. Stella Adler, by teaching that: 1) psychic size, a quality natural to the human being, is not to be sought after but brought to

²These figures do not take into account those students from New York University who attend her classes for college credit, or those professional theatre folk who follow her out-of-studio Play Analysis course.

fruition; and 2) it may emerge from the actor by his immersing himself in cultural tradition, has de-mystified charisma. To her, it involves the actor's striving, as Stanislavsky urged, for what is eternal in art, "that which will never die, which will always remain young and close to human hearts."³ Stella Adler's teaching thus equates a sense of universality, derived from aging the soul through the experience of historical tradition, with authentic charisma or psychic size.

Her idea that the qualities necessary for creative work are native to the human being, in addition to her notion that by virtue of the limitlessness of imagination a person already knows all there is to know, are concepts more often acknowledged in the Orient than in the West; yet she does not profess an acquaintance with Oriental philosophy. Simply, she understands the human spirit.

Therein lies Stella Adler's faith in the actor's capacity for "maximum acting;" however inhibiting is his culture, the human being is born for full experience. With the second principle, DO NOT WITHDRAW FROM LIFE, which initiates the student into the practices of finding little things to do for others and eternal meanings in little things, she spurs him on to present himself fully to the

³Constantin Stanislavski, An Actor Prepares, trans. Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1948), p.181.

world and accept the world fully into himself. These techniques for living are given so that the actor, on stage, might have the confidence to push, as Stanislavsky asked, even small action to the limit of possibility -- to the boundary of human truth, faith, and the sense of "I am" -- in order to give it a deep significance.⁴ Stella Adler's teaching thus equates a sense of freedom, derived from generosity in life, with maximum acting.

The Spiritual Standards she defines for the actor are inspired by her comparative reading of classical and modern dramatic literature. Plays are her bible, and the illumination of them is her supreme gift to the student. With the lessons of Ibsen and his descendants in mind, that is, that the modern human being must choose how to live, she puts before the student the choice to protect his body or his spirit. The latter, which implies adherence to Stanislavsky's tenet that "the fulfillment of natural obligations (is) a form of highest freedom,"⁵ is Stella Adler's basic formula for an artistic way of life; it is also a deterrent to the student's completing his studies at her studio.

Stella Adler's examination of the actor's Physical

⁴Ibid., p.277.

⁵Constantin Stanislavski, Building a Character, trans. Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1949), p.131.

Standards harkens back to an image of her father's impressive demeanor as well as to Stanislavsky's requirements for physical excellence, which take up more than half of Building a Character. Writing that "there is no such thing as ideal human structure," he asserted that it must be made, and directed the actor to learn to walk and talk all over again.⁶ Every conscientious teacher of acting asks for trained bodies and voices. Stella Adler, however, again relates the art of living to the craft of acting. Theorizing that the very need for physical discipline, correct posture, respect for materials, and good health is due to the perverse conditions of contemporary American society, she suggests that these conditions must be rejected by the student if he is to experience what is natural to a cultivated human being.

The student of Stella Adler, given the third principle, DO NOT DO MORE OR LESS THAN THE ACTOR'S NORM, is essentially expected to adjust himself physically and vocally to a condition akin to a clean slate; that is, not only free of misplaced tension and poor deportment, as acting instructors generally advocate, but also uninhibited by cultural mannerisms and social-class habits. This is pertinent preparation for characterization; it encourages the actor to become externally "empty" enough to mold himself into any type, or meld with the behavior of

⁶Ibid., p.37.

any society, other than his own.

Even though the artistic, spiritual, and physical challenge confronting the student in his progression toward realizing himself as an artist-human being is formidable, Stella Adler unhesitatingly presents it. This indicates her detachment from a fear of failure to produce graduates. Rather than trying to keep the chairs of the studio filled, she is dedicating herself to those students willing to fulfill themselves. Due to her understanding of the parallel between the artist's way of life and the way to art, she is aware that, unless the actor battles for his own humanity, there can be no truth on stage.

The acting techniques, as detailed in Chapter II of this dissertation, The Resources of the Actor, have Stella Adler's personal stamp upon them. She has picked up a melody from Stanislavsky:

The actor who merely observes life around him from the side lines, experiencing its joys and sorrows without ever seeking to probe into their complex origins, or ever looking beyond them to the grandeur of life's events, the inherent drama, the high heroism --⁷ that actor is lacking in true creative instinct.

She made a theme of it. Uncovering the natures of objects, of people, and of actions by seeing into their essences might be considered the cornerstone of her teaching, crystallized in the fourth principle, BE FULL OF THE LIFE

⁷Stanislavski, Legacy, p.31.

AROUND.

Although Stanislavsky does not describe different ways of seeing, he does recommend that actors look around in the world for things they like. This is in order to know what stimulates them and to develop artistic enthusiasm, which generates intuitive emotion.⁸ Stella Adler's delineation of seeing is innovative in the teaching of acting. Through her techniques to perceive life other than factually, the actor might come to find stimulation in any and every object. Essentially, the attitude toward the world that Stella Adler wishes the student to adopt is similar to the Zen teaching of non-imposition upon, and respect for, the lives of material things.

On stage, according to Stanislavsky, perception entails trying to reach the living spirit of an object, or being in communion with the partner, place, and things.⁹ Advancing this idea, Stella Adler proposes the possibility of a symbiosis between the actor and the things around him, whereby the more he appreciates the essential nature of an object, the more, in turn, the object nourishes him. This serves to keep the actor "at one" with the circumstances of the play.

⁸Constantin Stanislavski, Creating a Role, trans. Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1961), pp.9-10.

⁹Stanislavski, Actor Prepares, p.189.

The liability, with Stella Adler's demonstrating creative seeing, is that the student might become dependent upon her talent and imagination. It is a risk inherent in studying acting and is, in fact, a fault Stanislavsky himself admits to having had early in his endeavors; he copied the performances of good actors. However, through imitation there can be progress, if the copy is finally made one's own.

Imagination is that which makes something one's own. Stella Adler frequently says that everything must be "filtered through the imagination." Max Reinhardt, in his essay on acting in the Encyclopedia Britannica, contends that everything on stage must be "transformed through the sovereign power of imagination."¹⁰ Stanislavsky, in An Actor Prepares, writes that "everything must be real in the imaginary life of the actor."¹¹ These teachers concur that anything assumed from another source must be infused by the actor with a content exciting to him and applicable to the play.

It can be seen from Stella Adler's teachings overall that, as the student progresses through her elementary exercises for memorizing the muscular movements of simple actions and techniques for "stealing" walks, dialects,

¹⁰Toby Cole and Helen Krich Chinoy, Actors on Acting (New York: Crown Publishers, 1949), p.277.

¹¹Stanislavski, Actor Prepares, p.148.

attitudes from the world, he is to provide for each a justification or imagined content. This requirement impels him away from conventional, imitative, or cliché acting and compels him to make a contribution. From his first work with props, through learning to live in given (not his own) circumstances, to realizing an entire scene as a character (not as himself), the student is expected to create on stage an imagined reality. The fulfillment of that expectation, the terminus of the actor's craft, acknowledges the fifth principle, EVERYTHING ON STAGE IS A LIE UNTIL YOU MAKE IT TRUTHFUL.

If the actor does not create an imagined reality (logical to the social situation of the scene) it is not theatre; just as if he does not create a character (logical to the playwright's sketch) it is not acting. These points are the crux of Stella Adler's attitude toward the stage. Because she believes that degeneration, or lying, issues from the actor's representing himself in his own off-the-stage circumstances on stage, she offers techniques using materials, including the body, voice, props, costume, to manifest alternate characters and realities. A creative use of these materials comprises the mask from behind which the actor's humanity is liberated. Stella Adler's affinity for the actor's implementing material resources and making physical adjustments to change himself is in keeping with Stanislavsky's contention that the

actor can produce the mask even without the make-up.¹²

The actor's making a mask to free himself is as much for the audience as for him. Stella Adler, influenced by both Stanislavsky's preoccupation with the actor's holding his concentration to his own side of the footlights and Brecht's consideration that the actor is the mirror of the audience, recommends that the audience be included in the performance. When, with the sixth principle, UNDERSTAND! DO NOT LIE, the student is tempted to hunger for big ideas, he is being prepared to absorb the depth of a playwright's theme; in performance, he is to serve it back, through all the variety of action, to the audience for their consideration.

Stella Adler's impression of the modern theatre as one of ideas that are "infinitely debatable" bars glibness from the performance. Her actor, given to think through the character's situation (for which there is no right or wrong solution), cannot afford mental complacency. Through action and words, he thinks through ideas, as the audience, an active witness, thinks along. The actor, the partner, and the audience -- human beings together -- mutually agree to acknowledge and expose a conflict over ideas common to all their lives. This, Stella Adler's approach to modern theatre, treats the audience compassionately.

¹²Stanislavski, Building, p.27.

The approach also exhibits her sense of professionalism. If the actor is to think and feel on stage, he has the responsibility to make himself "at home" in the play; he cannot be a foreigner to the circumstances and they to him. By applying those techniques that comprise the seventh principle, DISCOVER ITS NATURE, the actor, like the Zen archer, can be at one with his resources and the character's aim. Stella Adler's vision of professional acting, which demands there be a human being in the performance if any idea is to be born of it, depends absolutely upon the actor's assimilation of, absorption in, and hence unification with the nature of life; in other words, the actor is above all a person without arrogance. Stanislavsky concluded that he himself, in trying to become a better actor, became a better man. Stella Adler believes that, through the actor's becoming a better person, he also becomes a better actor.

All the techniques described in this dissertation's Chapter III, Action: What the Actor Does, enable the actor to be at home in the circumstances and respond to them. The material of the chapter is an expanded, yet more succinctly delineated, version of Stanislavsky's theories on physicalization as presented in Creating a Role. Stella Adler's eighth principle, DO A MILLION LITTLE TRUTHS, ONE AFTER THE OTHER, is based on Stanislavsky's

suggestion that the actor always and only think about what he has to do.¹³ The techniques (common to both Stanislavsky and Adler) -- to put an obstacle into the action, to create background to the circumstances¹⁴ and attitudes toward the place and partner, and to justify the action -- help the actor to do each step of an action truthfully. Providing none of the components described in *The Physiology of Action* is missing, a complete action can be expressed on stage: each component is wholistically oriented, and all function co-operatively.

The result of cohesive action is an ability to live in the "now." Stella Adler, like Stanislavsky, emphasizes present-time. However, her sense of theatricality causes her to regard the "now" as eternal. By acclaiming the performances of those actors whose faces, at the final curtain, seem to be declaring that life within the play continues on, she is suggesting that if the actor keeps to the present, his acting is beyond time; as Life (in its highest meaning) goes on forever, so does the play. Her teachings on action consistently demonstrate how each component of action functions in life; thereby, in addition to validating Stanislavsky's

¹³ Stanislavski, Actor Prepares, p.142.

¹⁴ Stanislavsky, in Creating a Role (pp.12-18), does not divide the circumstances into sets, the larger and the immediate, as Stella Adler does. He combines the past, present, and potential future into the "external" circumstances.

proposition that his System is derived from Nature, she is able to clarify how the truth of life is altered to become the truth of the stage.

Making distinctions between life and the stage underlies her teaching of *The Theme in Action*. Pointing out that the actor cannot simply be busy on stage, Stella Adler holds that what he does must mean something. The implication is that even if an action is physically correct, it is untruthful to the stage if it lacks the poetry of an idea. The viewpoint is theatrically sensitive and sensible. Without the actor's functioning on stage according to the ninth principle, REVEAL THE TRUTH THAT IS IN YOU, that is, without his lifting simple action to the level of idea -- he is a trespasser on stage.

Stanislavsky writes that "people come into the theatre for entertainment but, without their being aware of it, leave with awakened emotions and thoughts, enriched by the experience of having witnessed the beautiful life of a human spirit."¹⁵ Stella Adler's position is that classical drama, because the ideas are poetically rendered, inherently possesses power, by means of the language alone, to move the audience; while modern plays, wherein the language is colloquial and the ideas are in the situation, lack by themselves the potency to enrich

¹⁵Stanislavski, Legacy, p.198.

the lives of the audience. Therefore, in the modern theatre, it is up to the actor to beautify the human spirit and render the production artistic.

Stella Adler's differentiation between classical performance of the lines and contemporary performance behind the lines is a broad depiction of two basic acting styles. In general, for pre-Ibsen and post-Ibsen drama, the picture is valid; however, this rather cut-and-dried, systematic approach disregards the rare talents of a Brecht, Shaw, Synge or even Euripides. To study subtleties in writing, and hence acting, styles, the student of Stella Adler is offered her courses in Play Analysis.

Regarding The Anatomy of Action, Stella Adler is acutely attentive to subtle variations. Her succinct descriptions of the do-able natures of actions are exemplary manifestations of a search for perspicuity and authenticity in action. Although her breakdowns of some verbal actions are reminiscent of instruction available in public speaking texts, the analyses on the whole are original to her, psychologically astute, and invaluable to the actor. To know the anatomy of an action is to be grounded. If the actor even moderately applies the tenth principle, TO UNDERSTAND AN ACTION, BE ABLE TO DO IT IN ONE THOUSAND CIRCUMSTANCES, once having found the action of a scene, he can be stable in it forever.

Stability is one thing; but whether the actor's performance is interesting, impressive, and entertaining

or not depends upon his choices. According to Stella Adler, choice is a question of talent, and rehearsal is largely a process of selection. Choices for the stage are definitive, not random and not necessarily familiar to the actor's everyday habits. Behind the eleventh principle, THERE IS NO GENERAL EMOTION ON STAGE, lies the understanding that the actor does not stagger from mood to mood. On stage, he chooses those actions, justifications, and attitudes that allow him to experience the dramatic conflict and evoke those feelings correct for the play.

Stella Adler's teaching on emotion agrees with Stanislavsky's; he notes that feelings cannot be played, represented, or called forth point blank.¹⁶ The actor can but establish the conditions for emotions to emerge.

Consequently, Stella Adler opposes the method of acting whose point of departure is re-awakening emotions from out of the actor's own past. She considers this approach unnatural in that it begins with, rather than leads to, feelings. Her teaching uses Stanislavsky's technique of emotion memory only as an exercise to find physicalized reactions to emotions or feelings, but not to recreate them. Her implied intention in avoiding the actor's own past feelings is to spare the stage from being used indulgently or for exhibitionism.

¹⁶Ibid., p.187.

Whether or not dredging up one's former sensations to mix in the performance can actually cause neuroticism in the actor, as Stella Adler suggests, is for the actor himself to determine. Clearly, however, a less confusing and more dependable avenue to acting is characterization.

For the material comprising this dissertation's Chapter IV, Characterization: Who the Actor Becomes, Stella Adler indirectly credits her parents, who played a variety of roles and styles in costume. She also expresses admiration for Stanislavsky's eclecticism. To teach or observe physically idiosyncratic and stylized performance delights Stella Adler. With characterization, she is at her most creative.

Her instruction on this subject is valuable if only due to the number of approaches offered. Most telling of these is her subdivision of a character into mind, will, and temperament. In An Actor Prepares, Stanislavsky recounts these three elements, but only in terms of the actor himself. He holds that there are three "impelling movers in a person's psychic life, three masters playing on the instrument of the soul. These -- mind, will, and feeling -- interact, supporting and inciting one another, to stir up creativity."¹⁷

Stella Adler asks the student to discern the nature of the character's mind, will, and temperament with

¹⁷ Stanislavski, Actor Prepares, pp.232-233.

regard to his own and then the partner's character's. He is to accentuate the differences, though whether similarities are to be assumed or ignored is unclear. In any case, by application of the twelfth principle, IN BUILDING A CHARACTER, LEAVE NOTHING TO CHANCE, the actor is to realize that no aspect of a character -- from his hair to his gait, from his thoughts to his conduct -- can be taken for granted. He is to select both outside and inside elements for his character, different from his own, in order to arrive at a rounded characterization that masks himself.

Although Stella Adler expresses admiration for the skill of her brother, Luther Adler, in making a mask with make-up, she neglects to teach make-up techniques. Her concern is more with the selection of the character's voice, body, costume, and props, and with the manner of using these, than with paint.

In a sense, her techniques for character heightening are applications of make-up or means to create the mask; surely, they evidence her sense of theatricality. On the few occasions when she has directed students in studio productions, she has chosen non-realistic material, including Alice in Wonderland and plays by Thornton Wilder. This fondness for stylization is at the source of her teachings on heightened character and heightened theatre, whose "slanted" viewpoint is her own device. By

incorporating this viewpoint into a characterization, the actor could eradicate any reluctance to change himself. However, unless a social statement supports the heightening, it might easily sink into travesty.

Stella Adler is interested in the social aspects of drama. By breaking down human society into groups or classes, she is attempting to establish -- for the purposes of play reading -- what is typical of one group mentality as compared to another. It is a method of social "typing" in order to discern basic and broad distinctions among life styles. However, it deals in generalities and the classification is rigid; as a result, neither individual nor national/cultural characteristics are reviewed. The somewhat superficial analyses, therefore, tend toward being satires, even indictments of value systems.

Nevertheless, for the acting student, the material is useful insofar as it is understood that the group-as-type is a working foundation similar to that of the character-as-type. Stanislavsky, with his study of Woe from Wit in Creating a Role, demonstrates the expediency of recognizing Famusov, Sophia, and Chatski not only as types but also as members of distinct social groups. Nowhere in his writings, however, does he offer definitive descriptions of social classes.

Stella Adler offers them, suspecting her student is unfamiliar with any class or society other than his own.

By acknowledging the thirteenth principle, EVERYONE EXISTS WITHIN A SOCIETY, AND IS INFLUENCED BY ITS LIFE, the student is to broaden his perspective; he is to see not just out of, but also into, contemporary middle class society as well as into the societies of other times and places. If he is to absorb the social background of classical plays and ascertain the conflict over ideas of modern plays, he needs to experience basic differences in ways of thinking and resultant behavior; essentially, she believes, he needs to exhume the cohesive stance of a society that subscribes to a unified religious/ethical code (pre-modern) as opposed to a society which does not (modern); that is, if he is to embody on stage the themes of plays.

The artist-human being in relation to the themes of plays is the topic of this dissertation's Chapter V, Text: What the Actor Knows. In order to follow the fourteenth and last principle, YOUR BIGGEST CONTRIBUTION IS TO FIND THE SELF YOU DID NOT KNOW, the actor is bound to combine the techniques for creating a stimulating reality appropriate to the play, and a mask appropriate to the character, whereby his subconscious, or humanity, might be unleashed.

Stanislavsky suggests it takes a lifetime to absorb his System; when in performance, the actor discards it, letting nature be his guide.¹⁸ In keeping, Stella

¹⁸ Stanislavski, Building, pp.282-286.

Adler assures the student that if he knows the nature of the circumstances, he can dispense with the System on stage.

Technically speaking, the System could be considered a rehearsal method for text interpretation, whose objective is to resurrect the subconscious. In effect, the actor has, from the first reading, to see the play objectively, with a receptive frame of mind. Stanislavsky says that the actor's own opinions about the text are preferable to ones foisted upon him, since those generate prejudice which blocks or corks up his soul.¹⁹ In agreement, Stella Adler exhorts the student to read out from the text, gathering impressions, facts, thoughts, and attitudes. In this way, while digging down into the text, his subconscious might "pop up," as she says, unfurling the subtext, or the life behind the lines; that is, revealing those inevitable choices or that inevitable direction the role must take to elicit accurate interpretation. Finally, the actor plays the scene as he, and only he, must play it.

The System, like meditation, is elusive except through using it. When the actor's subconscious, or humanity, emerges in the role, the function of the System is fulfilled. Essentially, meditation is of the same design; that is, to make the subconscious conscious, or the

¹⁹ Stanislavski, Creating, p.4.

spirit, mind, and body as one.

Before his acting reaches enlightened integration, however, Stella Adler's graduate-becoming-actor or actor-becoming-artist-human being reportedly passes through a period of confusion and disintegration. The techniques radiating from her principles for a way of living and creating enter into him piecemeal. Since they are all interactive, developmental, three-dimensional, and not linear, it might take years to accept them en masse.

The proposed methodology and standards require daily consideration and assimilation. At some point, apparently, the actor must be prepared to embrace the "whole world," sort it all out, and put combinations of it back together again on stage. As such, his vocation is illumination.

The teachings of Stella Adler are valid for the craft of acting because with them the actor can construct a reality on stage. Each technique is tied to the truth of life and, before all else, takes consideration of the ways and workings of nature. The actor is given the means to see life as it is and then imaginatively; to use his tools correctly and then creatively; to select materials from life intuitively and then to refine the selections; to examine plays perceptively and then perform them experientially. As any good craftsman, he learns to yield to the natures of things in order to let them work for him; to be a recipient in order to become a doer.

Stella Adler's teachings are appropriate for the art of acting because they dignify the actor as a creative contributor, who renders the play within himself paramount in the theatre. From her origins, Stella Adler's destiny has been to serve the art of acting; the craft she has picked up as a journeyman along the way, and in no small measure from Stanislavsky; yet, even now, she assumes no mastery but is engaged in an on-going discovery of the nature of the stage as compared to the nature of life. She makes mistakes; she is strict; students leave her; some graduates become discouraged, others become film stars; most remember her in letters. Withal, her work habits are correct as she disseminates that which she has created out of living with her eyes open.

Her teachings are useful for the theatre because they have kept alive, indeed evolved, the truth of acting in the modern theatre as first proposed by Stanislavsky. Her contribution to the teaching of acting has been to take his System outward, penetrating even further into an understanding of contemporary times, of the actor's position in these times, and of the universal nature of the human condition. She has not allowed Stanislavsky's foundations to lie in state to be eulogized; nor has she let them decay. She has enabled them to grow.

Other teachers of acting, including Robert Lewis, Sanford Meisner, Sonia Moore, Uta Hagen, and Lee Strasberg, have also been influenced by aspects of the Stanislavsky

System. More or less, these teachers have either followed Stanislavsky to the letter or held to his early teachings. In the case of Lee Strasberg, by focusing upon the psychology of the actor himself, the System was turned inward; he condensed the System into a method.

Stella Adler's teachings are less determined and more fluid than those of other teachers who have not expanded upon Stanislavsky's System. Her work is not estranged from new movements in drama or possibilities for acting techniques; it is abreast of those social and ethical and theatrical vicissitudes reflected in the playwriting and art of the society contemporaneously and historically.

Her teachings speak more ahead of than of their times. They point to real collaboration in the theatre manifested through the actor -- with the circumstances, with the partner, with the theme, and with the audience. They push forward as a force to uphold ensemble acting and theatre as community, wherein no one is estranged from another. They speak of independence to the students of acting, and of progress for the future of the theatre.

APPENDIX

The following edited transcripts of six classes in Technique III (script breakdown) during 1973 reveal Stella Adler's method of working with a text. Her intention is to define the attitudes and actions of, and the relationship between, two characters. This is in order to discover the life behind the lines, exposing: the conflict between the characters contained within the social situation, and the relationship of the aim of each character to the playwright's theme. In its entirety, the presentation demonstrates that the playwright, expressing his theme through the characters' ways of thinking, appeals to the mind of the actor to manifest that theme through action.

SUMMER and SMOKE (Part I, Scene 1) by Tennessee Williams
 Time. 1915
 Place. The mall of a small town in the South, U.S.A.
 Chars. John Buchanan, Jr. and Alma Winemiller

This first section is a paraphrased summation of three classes entailing a line-by-line breakdown of the scene. The purpose of the work is not to read in, but to take impressions from the text, seeing what is there and looking at them within the light of what the playwright

is saying through the social situation about modern society in general.

IMPRESSIONS:

The Society - Southern U.S.A. about 1915

Alma - formal, traditional, holds onto the past, insulated, religious, spiritual, prudish, fears the realities of life, talks superficially but has big ideas.

John - friendly, casual, enjoys life, realistic, imaginative, adventurous, drinks but is in control.

The Immediate Circumstances - Alma is sitting on a bench in the mall. The life-style is old-fashioned, Southern, with nothing "citified" about it. There are the Gulf winds, and there is the small-town tradition.

BREAKDOWN:

John throws a firecracker. It goes off. Alma screams. A Southern lady is "hit", by something.

John: Hey! Hey, you! (Alma sinks back weakly on the bench. John solicitously advances.) Are you all right?

He might run after the boys playing on the mall, pretending to try to catch one of them, as if a boy threw the firecracker. He has put himself into a predicament.

The society is changing. It seems that children are no longer respectful. Before, genteel people could sit on the mall, vendors would sell flowers, ices, hot-dogs. People, wearing nice white gloves, could eat there, comfortably seated under umbrellas, or could play croquet. Before, there was no permissiveness; children were not indulged.

Alma: I can't seem to catch my breath! Who threw it?

He might help her seat herself.

She over-reacts to the noise. She is extremely shocked. She is short of breath. She has a particular kind of nervousness derived from a sheltered, middle class life. It has made her hyper-sensitive.

She is shocked not so much by the noise as by the impertinence of children. Children run in and out of the mall.

John: Some little rascal. I think you need a little restorative, don't you? (He takes out a flask.) Here!

He might throw a stone at the boys.

A young doctor [John] helps this Southern lady [Alma] by offering her a drink. He feels that she, over-excitable, needs a drink. He has a flask on him. A doctor who carries a flask is someone caught between two worlds.

Alma: What is it?

John: Applejack brandy.

It is more of permissiveness to offer a lady a drink from your hip pocket, especially a cheap, strong home-brew.

Alma. No thank you.

John. Liquid dynamite.

She refuses. She is very polite. Hers is a refusal of life; for example, "I don't drink, smoke, have sex, or speak dirty language, and do not want you to know

that I go to the bathroom."

He has a strange, unusual side to him. To take the push off the words, he might take a drink himself, and then return the flask to his pocket.

Alma: You're -- home for the summer? Summer is not the pleasantest time of year to renew an acquaintance with Glorious Hill -- is it? The Gulf wind has failed us this year, disappointed us dreadfully this summer. We used to be able to rely on the Gulf wind to cool the nights off for us, but this summer has been an exceptional season.

What she is saying is a way of saying hello, of acknowledging him. She could offer him her hand. He could move closer to her.

She converses about unreasonable weather. Hers is not a normal manner of conversing, but affected. It is from a genteel age, and does not deal with reality. She speaks higher than reality, philosophically and romantically.

She is formal towards him, hiding her recognition of his masculinity. She could "take him in" [observe him]. She let's him know that she is no longer the little girl he used to know. She is estranging herself when talking about the weather. She is going back into her world. She wants an uplifted society.

Williams is saying that she is a lost lady in a society that cannot help her because it is combative to her, as is the firecracker. The society is in transition from the genteel to the permissive.

She might take a handkerchief to fan herself, to wipe her brow. So doing, she might drop her bag. The fact that she is already disturbed must be physicalized.

He is home for the summer. He has been away at Johns Hopkins.

John: (slowly) Are you -- disturbed about something?

She has given him a clue that there is something wrong with her.

His action changes here. He becomes the doctor. He is trying to find out about her reactions.

Alma: That firecracker was a shock.

John: You should be over that shock by now.

She is still shocked. She has been trying to escape the shock.

He can see that she is sick. Normal people would be over that shock by now.

"To Be Sick" must be activated by the actress. She must physicalize sick habits and mannerisms. She could touch her forehead, rub her hands together, physicalize anxiety symptoms.

Alma: I don't get over shocks quickly.

John: I see you don't.

He gives her a medical report.

She is over-sensitive. Something more than the firecracker is happening with her. She was surprised that he offered her a drink. The social forms are beginning to be broken, and it is not easy for her to break form. She

keeps up the forms by singing in church, going to church teas, being polite to her elders.

In the past, she might have been shocked by the approach of a man, by odors, by dirty language. The sexes have become more permissive with each other. As a result, she is victimized.

Alma: You're planning to stay here and take over some of your father's medical practice?

She continues to make conversation, welcoming him home. The conversation is all on her part, and it is very light, skimming the surface.

She thinks medicine is a glorious profession. John's father, the family doctor, is not too busy to be human. He will see Alma at two in the morning. He makes house calls. Most of his patients are his personal friends. He has time to listen. John's father's kind of life is genteel, trimmed with beauty. The new society has made life untrimmed. Williams believes that genteel people cannot survive the change in society.

John has followed the tradition of inheriting the father's profession. In the tradition, the profession itself, not making money or the economics of the profession, is appreciated. The profession puts a person into a special class, making him special.

John: I haven't made up my mind yet.

He might take out a cigarette, take out a drink, take out a pad and write something down.

He is unclear about his plans. He, too, is running away from reality. In medicine, he sees too much harsh reality. He now carries a flask, and has questions about being a doctor. How many roads are open to him in his home town? He could study music, join the amateur theatrical group, participate in religion.

He has not made up his mind entirely about anything yet. He thinks he could be attracted to her. She has beauty, elegance. He looked forward to seeing her again. She is what every man secretly wants -- a goddess. But John also wants a whore.

Alma: I hope so, we all hope so. Your father was telling me that you have succeeded in isolating the germ of that fever epidemic that's broken out in Lyon.

She says "we hope so" so as not to be misinterpreted. "Your father" is a social form of talking. She speaks like a lady.

She talks of his accomplishments in medicine, thinking she has a right to speak of medicine. Yet, she is still shocked -- at medical experimentation, at his appearance, perhaps at her own father's first heart-attack [if a heart-attack is put in her family background].

John: Finding something to kill it is more of a trick.

He uses his own language to speak about medicine, countering her fanciness. He's got her number.

He knows reality. He is too realistic to think

that medicine can save the world; after all, men still kill each other.

Alma: You'll do that! He's so positive you will. He says that you made a special study of bacter -- bacter ...

She romanticizes and generalizes reality and responsibility, continuing to speak abstractly about medicine, about his father's faith in him as a doctor.

Williams is saying that there is something so harsh in America that it must be escaped, romanticized.

John: Bacteriology!

He is breaking the romance right here.

Alma: Yes! At Johns Hopkins. That's in Boston, isn't it?

Because of his factuality, she retreats into her shell. She is off the mark, nervous.

John: No. Baltimore.

He gets her grounded.

Alma: Oh, Baltimore. Baltimore, Maryland. Such a beautiful combination of names. And bacteriology -- isn't that something you do with a microscope?

She senses she is being grounded, and has to get away to somewhere. Hers is a very feminine, very gracious way of conversing. Williams is saying, "Get to where you have to go. Live where you can live, and God help you if there are cross-currents."

She has the wrong facts. She flits around with picked-up notions of science, of language.

John: Well -- partly.

His language counterpoints hers.

Alma: I've looked through a telescope, but never a microscope. What ... what do you -- see?

They are separated. She has her way of life and is strong within it. She has a rhythm and she has poetry.

John: A -- universe, Miss Alma.

He says "Miss" to her as to a lady. He, by seeing a "universe", identifies with her poetic side. He is not one-sided.

Alma: What kind of a universe?

They are onto each other.

John: Pretty much the same kind that you saw through the lens of a telescope -- a mysterious one ...

He understands her and her need to poeticize life. He admires that side of her. But as a doctor, he knows that she is sick. Talking about "a mysterious one" is his way of talking about men and women. He is diagnosing her.

The point is that a person must be balanced.

Alma: Oh, yes ...

She is attracted to him, to his "mysterious."

John: Part anarchy -- and part order!

He has [psychic] size. He has a philosophy of life. There are two sides to his character -- the realistic and the poetic.

She has sickness (anarchy) inside, and has language and clothes (order) on the outside.

Alma: The footprints of God!

She is saying that God is in everything -- in order and in disorder.

John: But not God.

The scientist is speaking.

Alma: (ecstatically) To be a doctor! And deal with these mysteries under the microscope lens ... I think it is more religious than being a priest! There is so much suffering in the world and it actually makes one sick to think about it, and most of us are so helpless to relieve it ... But a physician! Oh, my! With his magnificent gifts and training what a joy it must be to know that he is equipped and appointed to bring relief to all of this fearful suffering -- and fear! And it's an expanding profession, it's a profession that is continually widening its horizons. So many diseases have already come under scientific control but the commencement is just -- beginning! I mean there is so much more that is yet to be done, such as mental afflictions to be brought under control ... And with your father's example to inspire you! Oh, my!

She escapes into high talk on a light level. She has enthusiasm for medicine, for saving the world by curing sickness. This is high-minded mysticism she is expressing. She lifts ideas up, but her ideas are not really functional because she has no knowledge. She's in an exalted state. Her whole vocabulary is high. She needs to be high so as to have a world in which to escape. She does not want to know how medicine works, but wants only the miracle. To her, joy itself is to be a doctor, to help. Since Darwin, priests are confused about God, so it is better to be a doctor. She is very open about all this. It reveals that her own mental affliction is deep.

Williams is saying that life has become too practical.

John: I didn't know you had so many ideas about the medical profession.

He is not so open. He has learned what life is. A doctor knows about medicine, not about pretty speeches about medicine. He does not think medicine is particularly high-level. He sees it as hard work, down to earth. For him, escape is to get a girl and take her to bed.

Alma: Well, I am a great admirer of your father, as well as a patient. It's such a comfort knowing that he's right next door, within arm's reach as it were!

She admits she needs a doctor desperately.

John: Why? Do you have fits?

He questions her directly, trying to get her down to a level where its communicable. He is pretty cruel with her.

Alma: Fits? (She throws back her head with a peal of gay laughter.) Why no, but I do have attacks! ... of nervous heart trouble. Which can be so alarming that I run straight to your father!

She is confessing that her sickness is extreme, that she is running.

John: At two or three in the morning?

He talks to her in Freudian terms, knowing she is psychologically disturbed.

Alma: Yes, as late as that, even ... occasionally. He's very patient with me.

The society with its new ways has affected her.

She is part of a society that is giving up religion, manners, tradition. Williams is saying that the breakdown of social forms causes dislocation of the human being's internal life.

John: But does you no good?

He is very direct, confronting her with the truth, making her face reality.

Alma: He always reassures me.

John's father is old-fashioned. He talks to Alma as if she were his own daughter. He comforts her.

John: Temporarily?

Alma: Yes ...

Alma needs a man, but in the new society men don't marry women like her. She's too withdrawn. Relationships are difficult for her.

John: Don't you want more than that?

He is asking her, "Don't you want the truth?"

Alma: What?

Under Alma's "what," Williams is saying that she has to have her illusions. She has the need to love, but she cannot leave her own world. The more one lives in a separate world, the harder it is to get down to reality.

John: It's none of my business.

Alma: What were you going to say?

John: You're Dad's patient. But I have an idea ...

Alma: Please go on! (John laughs a little.)

Now you have to go on! You can't leave me up in the air! What were you going to tell me?

She wants to find out what he has to say.

John: Only that I suspect you need something more than a little temporary reassurance.
 Alma: Why? Why? You think it's more serious than ... ?

She believes completely in her heart condition.

John: You're swallowing air.
 Alma: I'm what?
 John: You're swallowing air, Miss Alma.

This is the doctor with the patient. She wants to find out what is wrong with her. He gives her an analysis of her superficial symptoms.

Alma: I'm swallowing air?
 John: Yes, you swallow air when you laugh or talk. It's a little trick that hysterical women get into.

By "hysterical" he means frustrated, easily shocked, nervous, out of control, over-emotional. He is telling her that she is psychologically in chaos.

Alma: (uncertainly) Ha-ha ... !
 John: You swallow air and it presses on your heart and gives you palpitations. That isn't serious in itself but it's a symptom of something that is. Shall I tell you frankly?

His action is "To Tell It Like It Is."

Alma: Yes!
 John: Well, what I think you have is a doppelganger! You have a doppelganger and the doppelganger is badly irritated.

He understands "doppelganger" to mean the ghost of a living person which is actually the truth of the person that is not visible.

Alma: Oh, my goodness! I have an irritated doppelganger! (She tries to laugh.) How awful that sounds! What exactly is it?

She coquettes with the diagnosis, trying to make a

joke of it. She is afraid of the reality, but wants him to explain it to her because she doesn't understand the language.

John: It's none of my business. You are not my patient.

Williams is saying that every person is on his own, wandering and lost.

Alma: But that's downright wicked of you! To tell me I have something awful-sounding as that, and then refuse to let me know what it is! (She tries to laugh again, unsuccessfully.)

She thinks he is kidding her, teasing her.

John: I shouldn't have said anything! I'm not your doctor ...

Alma: Just how did you arrive at this -- diagnosis of my case? (She laughs.) But of course you're teasing me. Aren't you? ... There, the Gulf wind is stirring! He's actually moving the leaves of the palmetto! And listen to them complaining ...

Her laughter is a part of her hysteria. She again escapes into talking, into making conversation, into the Gulf wind.

CONCLUSIONS:

Alma - There is no indication that she has accomplished anything, but she is educated. She is too far up in lofty ideas for a person having no profession. She has a need to lift up life in order to avoid its grim facts, its harsh reality. She goes to the poetry of things. She idealizes the situation. She is romantic. She floats. She feeds her spirit, affirming that aspect of herself. She doesn't know tangible things. She doesn't admit to having basic needs, especially sexual desire. She represses. Her sickness is psychological. She is nervous, disturbed, up-tight, neurotic.

John - He is a doctor. He deals with matter more than with

the soul. For his profession, he doesn't need the spiritual side of life. He's interested in Alma because she's romantic. He is at the crossroads, grappling with life.

The Theme - Williams is saying: The human being is in revolt against his situation. There are dangers in being too down-to-earth, the dangers of becoming mechanical, of not being able to feel. A person needs to escape. There are two kinds of sickness, an inner and an outer. There is a personal sickness, which is a failure against one-self; there is a social sickness, which is society's failure against the individual. There is no solution.

.....

In the following edited transcript of a class discussion between Stella Adler (S.A.) and her students (Stu.), her method of establishing the large circumstances (the background to the play) in order that the actor might know what he is talking about, is demonstrated.

S.A.: The external of the play, the words, gives you the facts, the class, the nationality, and the historical moment. Therefore, it is not good for you to say simply that this is an American play. It is better for you to say that this is an American play coming out of the late forties and fifties which includes, as the playwright, the director, and everybody knows, a sense of "I don't know how to solve the loneliness I feel. I don't know how to live because I'm alienated from society."

The play is set in the 1900's. But would you say that what is contemporary about it is the conflict between

spiritual ideologies and the sense of defeat? Could someone take another guess at what the author is trying to say in this play?

Stu.: Both Alma and John are avoiding reality, each in a different sort of way. He is sort of brutalized by his life. He knows too many facts.

S.A.: Then do not say he is avoiding reality. Rather, say that reality has done something to him.

Stu.: Reality has brutalized him; whereas, she escapes from reality. It is difficult for them to deal with each other, because they are not on the same level. He is trying to bring her down.

S.A.: He is trying, as a doctor, to advise her where the truth lies. But Tennessee [Williams] is saying that that kind of truth [reality] has to be understood by living in society, and that she cannot get it from him.

Stu.: Isn't the play saying that man's spiritual condition has been replaced by physical technology, which doesn't --

S.A.: That's right. But you have to understand that statement in terms of your character. You have to go to the play and live in that society. In the play, you immediately see something happening that indicates a change in the society. A doctor throws a firecracker. You see that the society does not behave according to what Alma

values. Her demands are not to be frightened, not to be brutalized, not to be shocked.

Is that not more and more what is happening in the society? In a way, are we not the culprits? We are not so "Southern" [as Alma]. How many of you realize that the society [since then] has become more and more brutal? How are we brutal? There are people who are either on alcohol or on drugs. How many people are killed by assassinations, riots, murders? Do you know the crime rate among children? Do you know the forcefulness and brutality of adults? Do you know how many people, even police, are on the streets robbing people? Do you know, or do you not live in such a thing? So, what Tennessee is saying is that Alma is just the beginning; the next is Stella; and the next is Stella's daughter; and the next is --

Stu.: Is he not also offering us a choice? If you are the dreamer, or the poet, or some man or woman who wants something more than these machines right here, you die. If you accept the machines, you exist. He is offering the choice to the audience to decide which is more important.

S.A.: The audience sees and identifies with the problem. You have the play now, as I say, intellectually. But when you get to the next stage of your work [the imaginative life behind the lines], you will find that all this intellectualizing is just the beginning, just done to open

things up. You may understand the problem, but that won't make you act.

Now, start with the facts. The play says that I am in a park or square somewhere in Mississippi. Am I in a big city or a small city? A small town, yes? Now, I start with the park. I say, "Well, how are the benches at this time in Mississippi? Benches, like people, are on the sides. The colored people are on the other side. They have some seats over there, and I am here."

Alma: Summer is not the pleasantest time of year to renew an acquaintance with Glorious Hill.

To renew an acquaintance with this hill means that I knew this hill and how it was very beautiful when the grass came out. I am seeing, watching this happen. I am not just saying it. Therefore, before saying that line, I would go to Glorious Hill to acquaint myself with it, thinking what does Glorious Hill mean specifically to me.

So, "glorious" is your responsibility. Do you understand that "glorious" is chosen by the author? He does not say Crimson Hill; he does not say High Hill; he does not say Big Hill; he says Glorious Hill. You have to consider, then, the gloriousness of her relationship to nature. For example, that one hill is all hills; the trees when they are coming out; how she used to run through the trees and arrange parties behind the trees; how her father didn't know she was playing amongst the

trees. If you know Glorious Hill from your past with it, you will be stabilized. If you do not know it, do not act it. All you have to do is know what you are talking about.

So, the time of the play is important to your study. The scenic artist realizes this. He gives you a little garden, a set. This, too, speaks to you. I myself take something that is good for me. I give myself that the Negro children are over there sitting down, playing. I see them, and I activate that I was not allowed to play with them. I see the relationship of colored and white in the South, and I build up the relationship in me by seeing things that are happening [at that time] in the South. Sensitivity is seeing and watching things happen.

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The next edited transcript of discussion, while continuing the problem of generating the life behind the lines, delves into getting oneself close to the author's theme. It also considers the creation of the attitude toward the partner, based upon knowledge of one's past relationship with him. The way in which an imaginative background to a relationship may be built is revealed.

S.A.: At first, in discussing the play, we generalize, and somewhere within that you might begin to recognize

something familiar. Recognition makes you less afraid, less banal, and have less feeling that you must push the words. You begin to say, "I know a lot now, understand a lot, feel a lot." So, from understanding, you get the feelings.

Here we have two very typical Tennessee [Williams] characters. One who with his approval escapes. The author recognizes the woman and her dilemma in modern society. Nothing works for her anymore. She is not treated like a great lady. She is not catered to. She is not romanced. Rather, she is asked, "Well, how about it?" Her romantic, inherited self has been completely displaced historically. So, she makes up what does work for her.

[As Alma] you have four or five ways to escape: to want and to affect a life of grandeur; to sing and to read literature; to create an atmosphere which includes, "How beautiful the sea is!" and "How wonderful the wind blows!"; to use language that is not natural. When you escape, you go to where it is easy to exist and to live, and that place gives to you a far-off, poetic life that is not very real.

However, Tennessee says that there still is the reality. But is it for people? Some writers suggest that life is not for people; that life is too terrible and too hard. How can you go through a life in which children are killed, people are murdered, and others die of disease,

cancer, and suffer blindness? It's too much. It's not human. Most of us deal with it, but not very well. Because Tennessee himself doesn't deal with reality very well, he has [in this play] a man [John] wandering in the deepest reality, medicine, and through him says that even the deepest reality is not enough, because a human being needs more than reality.

She, Alma, needs less of reality. And she knows a thousand places to go where there will be less of it. She knows how to make fancy language, and how to enter into fancy images. It is very touching when she does that.

I remember, as a girl, I had a lot of her in me. I was completely unable to deal with reality. Once, when I was crossing the Atlantic, an actor came and spoke to me. He knew the family name, so he spoke to me. I was telling him about the shore, the line of it, the surf, the ocean, and all that. He turned and said, "I don't know what you're talking about." That happened about a thousand years ago when I was eighteen, but I still remember what I thought: "I'm going to have a tough time, because I don't know how to talk to men." He walked away. He must have thought I was crazy.

So, this poetic quality isolates you, and you realize that you are isolated; and the more you are isolated, the more you fake it. You do things that are very alienating. Alma is compulsive about alienating herself,

compulsive in her choices. So, Tennessee is saying that she is bound to fail -- bound to! -- and that she is bound to get up against men who could help her, but don't have the patience or the need to help her. So, she sinks. She goes down and down and down. She goes down like Blanche [in A Streetcar Named Desire] or like Laura [in The Glass Menagerie]. She goes completely off [balance]. So, we have got the character straightened out, yes?

Take John in his quest for some transient thing. What does he do when he gets to a town? The author helps you understand him. He gives him a flask of whiskey. I ask you, what does he do in his quest? When he arrives at a station, does he visit the horticulturist? He goes to a bar, does he not? A bar is a place where you do not belong to anybody. The author is using the bar as a symbol, not just to say that he is having a drink.

Do you understand that this is how the play is lifted? As a writer and as a man, the author understands this cosmic estrangement. It isn't the estrangement of "Have a drink." It's the estrangement of "If I'm going to have a home, it's going to be where other people have no home -- a bar. If I'm going to go out with a girl, it's going to be to take her to the Moonlight Casino, not to the museum." That's a key, is it not? That's a key to your understanding that he's struggling between two things -- her abstract unreality and reality.

This struggle is Tennessee's. He says that these men are drawn to these women. These men are drawn to this fey, lost quality. He puts it in every play. In Street-car, Mitch, the nice boy, wants to marry Blanche. He is drawn to her and doesn't know why. These men, as does the doctor [John], need both worlds. In all the plays, the person who is drawn to both worlds is in a terrible struggle.

Tennessee indicates that he would like the doctor to settle for less; but the doctor cannot. This is where you get the big, big time. He is not just this doctor, but he is Man in a convulsive struggle between the two things in life that are opposite -- reality and poetry. This is where you get the size of the play -- in the struggle. If you don't give the play this size, you can't act it. If you don't give the play this size, the author isn't going to be the writer about whom we're talking. So, the size comes not from the words, but from digging down into the play, and into what is this man, and into why and how his struggle is big. So, let's get to it.

John: Do you have fits?

Is that the way to talk to a girl? Exactly what is he trying to do? Is there not in it a certain kind of "making her face it"? Why? He suggests that his father's way isn't good for her. Given the way he talks, wouldn't it be good for you to say to yourself, "The way in which

I can help her immediately is to make her face the reality which my father is not making her face."? In other words, given the way he talks, he is going right at where it hurts. If, to a girl like her, you say, "It's pretty revolting, yes, to have fits and roll around on the floor. It's pretty revolting, yes, but do you have them?" it's brutal.

I would suggest to you, then, that here already their fight is made. In other words, "I have not just met you, Alma, but I have met the extreme." It is the Devil and God, the materialist and the dreamer. This is not a matter of a doctor asking, "Say, do you have fits?" It's a matter of getting the conflict of extremes inside you.

Now, take her and her reaction. What does she see when he asks her if she has fits? What kind of people have fits? People who are drunk, who are taking drugs, who are mentally sick. They all roll around on the floor, having fits. Seeing them and seeing many things that are "fits" would make her think: "But that's other people, not me. That's the man who falls down. I mean, that's someone who is hysterical, running down like that. Oh, no, I couldn't do that." In other words, when she laughs, she is saying, "I'm beyond anything like that."

So many girls who are already lost are like Alma. They say, "Oh, I'm fine. I've just passed through two

breakdowns, but, oh no, not in hospital. No, that's for them. No, no, I've never been better in my life! That's for the others to fall apart, but not for me. I've no need for that. I'm fine." That is typical of Tennessee -- "I'm fine." You are fine, yes, until you go and get carried off.

May I tell you a story? I had a good friend who told me he knew a girl, an actress, who was getting on very badly. She was getting older. She was insecure. Things weren't working out well, and she wasn't looking well. She disappeared. And then she came back. She had on fur, and jewels, and such new things, that he said, "Oh, I could hardly recognize you." She said, "Oh, it was such a dreadful year. I've been with my aunt. She's getting on and hasn't been well." She was talking all affectedly. She had made that not-well-self into her "aunt." She got herself an auntie, and she became somebody else. She got herself a doppelganger.

The author likes the girl with an illusion. Blanche DuBois has a whole world of her own. The author wants that. He is saying, "For God's sake, it's better than crawling, better than nothing. Go crazy! It's a great place to be. Go to your fantasies, where it's creative for you. Go where it glows for you. Go where there's a melody. Go to the sea where it shines. Go anywhere that doesn't destroy you!" That's his theme.

Do you begin to see that Alma would have to laugh hysterically at anybody suggesting that she has fits? She is conservative, but lovely. She is "I'm fine," but she is also living in another world. So, we are digging down until we have an attitude from her. It's not an attitude toward the line, but, in general, an attitude toward herself and toward life.

Now, let's take the sequence.

Alma: Fits? (She throws back her head with a peal of gay laughter.) Why no, but I do have attacks! -- of nervous heart trouble. Which can be so alarming that I run straight to your father.

John: At two or three in the morning?

Alma: Yes, as late as that, even ... occasionally.

From the doctor's point of view, why does she have these fits at two or three in the morning? Isn't it that the sickness takes over when, at two or three in the morning, the truth comes out? From his point of view, whatever is equivalent to a fit takes place at the time when she can't read any longer, when she can't face or fool herself any longer -- at night.

I want to know, when does a person get caught off-guard? When they are alone, and can't face the real truth. What does she have to face at three in the morning? She's an old maid. She's perhaps twenty-eight. In that period, if you don't get married, what are you going to do? Die. Also, you not only die, but in that society how are you treated? You live in shame. So, at three o'clock in the

morning, who does she belong to? Nobody! No father, no mother, no husband, nobody. The whole world is ashamed of her. What is she?

Stu.: She's an outcast.

S.A.: You are a very young student. However, that may be good to start with. Let's see what an outcast does. But let's see her. Let's watch her in her circumstances, fire them in ourselves, and get warmer to her dilemma. Then, you may get to the second stage of your work, which is getting the play into yourself.

What does she do at two or three in the morning? She can't sleep. What does she have in her room? Does she have a mirror? Does she have dresses, clothing? Does she have a light? Do you know what a twenty-eight year old girl, who lives in a conservative way, looks like at three in the morning? What does she do? She gets up, and turns on the light, and sees. She looks, and she sees that it's grey outside. She thinks, "What shall I do? Shall I go to the station to see somebody out of town? Will I get lost in doing that? No, that is a way, but not for me. What shall I do?"

What do you do in this situation? What do you do at night when you think that you don't know how to face the morning? What do you do? I see that I do not let it alone. I see that I begin to say, "Yes, three o'clock in the morning is no good for a girl that's not married."

It is not good because it's the moment historically when a girl reaches out to a man. She just reaches out. Then, I say, "But I mustn't do that. No, that's not ..., but this is not ..." From this I see that I develop certain protective things. I'm telling about me now. I'm not saying about you.

Are you interested in seeing that people develop protective things that come without their even knowing it? They develop things like esophagus problems, by which they can't swallow air. They develop certain symptoms like she has. All of these come from terror, fear, anger, and frustration. There are people who can't drink city water, and finally require an operation. A psychosomatic sickness is there. What sickness does she have?

Now, without really analyzing this situation, let's just see how life can come into the work to reveal these patterns. I would think of a friend of mine, a wonderful girl with wonderful parents; a rich girl who needed no money; a girl who had talents. She gave a concert, and she was told that she was not good. She went home, and after a week or so she began to have palpitations of the heart; such palpitations that she was taken to the intensive-care ward. She stayed for two weeks, and nobody knew what was the matter with her. Nobody could say what these palpitations were. She had something like two hundred and fifty counts. It was just death, and nobody could say anything

except, "Go home." I think we all knew that she was sickened by the insult, just sickened. Another person, a man who was insulted when his book came out, started hemorrhaging and was taken to the hospital. So, life comes in to reveal the play.

This psychosomatic reaction is classical in certain people. Tell me, who feels this insult? Sensitive people feel it. Alma feels this insult, and it is not even so logical, so trace-able [to a specific instance] for her. For you [the actor], it must be logical, trace-able [to an imagined instance in Alma's background].

What do you do when you're in terror? What do you do that you get such palpitations that you have to run to the doctor in the middle of the night? What do you do to get that? So, you have to develop this within yourself. It's easy for me to develop, because I feel related to all sickness, to all sadness. Technically, what I do is go to her condition. I see where her condition exists in life. I see it, and I begin to activate, stimulate, and agitate the condition within me. I don't just say, "She's an outcast." I must have a technique to develop what an outcast does in the circumstances of this play.

So far, we have not touched the relationship between Alma and the older doctor [John's father] or Alma and her parents. Suppose you go to her parents at this point. She lives at home. She's a girl who runs to the

doctor next door with the fright of the world at three in the morning. What about her parents? She has a crazy mother, and her father is a minister.

How does the father feel having a girl who is twenty-eight, and has nobody? Would you say that that is comfortable for him? It is very comfortable to have a daughter around. No man wants to give away a daughter, somebody to take care of him. Do you know any daughter with a father who wants her to take care of him? Do you know any father who has used an elder daughter in that way? If we take that premise -- and take it, since you have nothing better to try -- would you then say that he needs her? I would like you to consider from his point of view: Is she a good front? Is she very polite? Does she know how to take care of social things? Well, let's accept that premise and go on building it from the father's point of view; so that, by the time you know the father, you will know the girl's reaction to the father; and you will know the girl's reaction to the older doctor; and you will know the girl's reaction to herself, and to John. Maybe, then, the play will come to life, because you will know what is underneath it.

Do you not think that the writer knows what's underneath it? Didn't he build this man, Alma's father? Do you know how to build this man who is a minister with an insane wife? Let's get down to it. What does a minister

do? He inspires people to believe in an after-life. Is that not his major work? Would you say that he would disapprove of someone escaping because she's not married? His way would be to say, "Take it." This situation is very much like that of Laura [in The Glass Menagerie], who has a lame leg. If this were her father, wouldn't he say, "Do you not trust in God? This is your fate. So, let us work with the little happiness we have from life; and the little happiness we have is us being together. You have me, and I have you."?

Stu.: But, according to the text, the father also has this "cross to bear" [his crazy wife], which is, anyhow, the Christian way. I would think that he would see that Alma, too, has a cross to bear in that she's not married. But he's actually treating her as if she were a fifteen year old girl, by monitoring her.

S.A.: Suppose you take the other side. Suppose you say that he's a very nice man, and bears his cross with great patience. To be with an insane person is not just to say, "I've a cross to bear." It is to be very punished by life. Not everybody can sustain it. Only someone very spiritual can. So, I would consider both sides of him in order not to paint the villain.

You must gradually get to, and understand, the relationship [between the father and daughter] that helps the play come out. The play is not speculative. You can afford

to speculate for a while, until the play evolves. You can say, "I will judge this man." But you also must say, "On the other hand, I will judge him differently, another way." Then you will know which side is better for the play, finally. The better thing for the play is that Alma doesn't have an easy way out. If the father were a villain, she would have an easy way out. But she doesn't have an easy way out, so we cannot paint a villain.

Stu.: But if she were able to relate to her father in a nice, warm way, she could run to him rather than to the doctor next door.

S.A.: But she cannot relate to him. You tell me why she cannot.

Stu.: Because of his Christianity.

Maybe she doesn't want to hurt him.

Because at three in the morning she is no longer "up there." She's looking in the mirror. As for her father, he's "up there" all the time.

S.A.: I would like you to know that she has nowhere to go not because the world is bad. If the world were bad, you would have a very, very short melodrama. You do not. What you have is good and bad in everything. Do you think it is good for you to find for Alma, in this relationship with her father, an obstacle that reaches you, but not an obstacle that makes him bad? If you give her a very tired

father, one who is spiritually exhausted, who works, who doesn't really talk to his daughter, but who encourages her by saying, "Sing and do things, Alma; we love you when you sing," then would she run to him? The father-daughter relationship is made by Tennessee so as not to be brutal.

Stu.: Yes, but it is also not a love relationship. I mean, it's on a particular level, and there it stops.

S.A.: Let's say that there are more obstacles hidden in Alma. Make it so that she can't hate her insane mother. Change it in yourself, so that she is sorry for her insane mother. It will develop in you a sense of how false Alma is in her speech and to herself. She is false to herself; therefore, you would have to create for her the action "To Overlook." The father overlooks, too. You would have to create for her all the things that would stop her from saying, "You bitch, you've ruined my life, and you've lived yours."

Alma has disguised everything. Alma would not know if she herself were a whore. It would not touch her, because she is already someplace else. Do you understand? A person can be pure, although she whores all her life. The Russians know this. The Brothers Karamazov are pure, and they whore. Blanche is pure and a whore. It is a purity that's complicated. It's above the practical, above the natural, above the explainable. Alma is above the explainable. She's a creature of survival, of insanity in

order to survive. The greatest gift a person can have in this generation, from Tennessee's point of view, is to go crazy. There, you can create a world. This world here, you cannot create. It is here, and it's impossible. "Go where you can create your world." That's his theme.

Therefore, it would be very bad for you to build up this cruel mother and this desperado father; because it is a too easy thing to say that they are villains, and she is the heroine. There is no heroine.

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This final discussion of the scene continues building the relationships between the characters, by discovering what is underneath the lines. It also leads to the disclosure of the center of Alma, by relating the lines to the playwright's theme.

S.A.: Now, do you understand that you cannot evolve a play so simply? You must build it. You must build Summer and Smoke so that Alma finally has no choice. What is closest to what the playwright is saying is that she is surrounded by everything harsh, and she can't take it. She is beaten down, not simply insulted, by life. If you make the father insult her, you have a lesser theme. Even though maybe he does insult her, even so she wouldn't hate him.

Stu.: But she doesn't even know she's insulted by life.
I mean, you can't play that!

S.A.: You can play "I'm sick." Now look, sweetheart,
when you are right, I'll go along with you. But when you
are just stubborn, I'll tell you to learn more. Learn,
darling. Don't battle me.

I'm telling you to build the father three ways.
Build the mother three ways. Go away from the plot line
in order to get down to what is human in each of them, and
maybe that will be good for the play. We're opening up
the play by challenging you to make choices. Then, final-
ly, when you read the play again, you'll say, "I know how
she feels about her father. It's there for me. I feel it."
And what you feel isn't in the text at all. It's under
the text. That feeling is what you build inside yourself.
It's not what you say; not even what the author says. The
author gives you the skeleton only, and you build the body
under that skeleton the way you want, which is the way you
have to. There is no body you can build which is right or
wrong. There is only that which you can contribute that
helps the play emerge in and through you, not through the
lines.

If you finally realize that the play isn't in the
lines; that the play is what you build underneath the lines,
then the play will emerge, and you can say it means that
Alma has destroyed herself. She has destroyed herself.

Maybe that's the tune. Maybe she didn't have it to survive. Maybe Tennessee [Williams] knew that she didn't have it, and maybe he loved her for it; because he does not particularly love the people who do survive. He himself is a very destroyed person. He knows more about destruction than about survival. There's no reason for Tennessee to be destroyed. He has made millions of dollars; he is acclaimed; he's a fantastic success; he's adored; he's loved; and he's a wreck. Why? He's too incapable of dealing with life. It's a theme. The whole of [Chekhov's] The Cherry Orchard is that theme: the incapability of dealing with life -- over-sensitiveness. There is no hero. There is no villain. Alright?

Stu.: When we were last discussing the play, didn't you say that Tennessee thought it was better to lose some of the melody of life, than to withdraw from it? We were talking about Jim [the gentleman caller in The Glass Menagerie]; and didn't you say that Tennessee has compassion for Jim because he's dealing with the realities of life?

S.A.: He has compassion. Look, dear, do you know which people love actors? Businessmen. Do you know that, historically, businessmen go to where it's abstract? They don't know why. Do you think they understand what they love in Milton Berle, Eddie Cantor? (Getting up to date, I haven't seen anybody!) They just love. These actors create a dream world, and people love them. People are

drawn to where it's not severe.

I've said that Tennessee creates a character, Mitch, who likes Blanche [in A Streetcar Named Desire]. He's drawn to her dream world. So is Jim drawn to Laura's [in The Glass Menagerie]. The young doctor is drawn, too. Tennessee also creates the drawing away from the dream, with those who say, "Let me be thoroughly realistic." He creates a Stanley Kowalski [in A Streetcar Named Desire] who is thoroughly realistic-life itself. These are archetypes! Does that answer your question?

I want you to take the doctor, John's father. From the lines, you get indications. You get that the father is very tender with Alma; whereas, you get that the son is very tough with her, in that he's saying, "Have you got this? If you say you've this, you'll get well. If you don't say you've this, you're going to stay a sick girl." You get an indication that the toughness belongs to the younger man, and that the lack of toughness belongs to the older generation. This is what the play says.

From that, you have to go and build. What do you think the father feels about this son of his who has this difference from himself? What does a conservative, old-fashioned doctor, used to being a family doctor, think about a son whom he expects to carry on in the tradition, but who is wandering?

We're talking about the conditions of this, a

social play, that is concerned with our modern society; our industrialized, mechanized society, with alienation, with people who don't care, and with no family life; our society which produces conflict between people who can broach reality and those romantic, old-fashioned ones who cannot, and conflict between two generations.

Do you know that, in families, your own permanence is achieved, in part, by carrying on the professional tradition, whether it is to be a doctor or an actor? Do you know that the son is going to be a [practicing] doctor, which is what his father wants; but that he, the son, is broken into other directions, because of his attitude toward life? Would that brokenness reflect upon his father? Would there be a conflict between the father and the son? Would it be built up [by the actor], so that the son would finally have to say, "Look, it's either you or me. I mean, it can't be both of us. I can't go your way, because it's just not in the cards."? And the father would have to say, "You'll have to go your way, but I can't approve of your way."

You can't have people on stage who are born on stage. They have to be born out of these things, in the society, which you build. You have to dig down under what is the relationship between the father and the son. Unless you build the father, you can't say anything to or about him, because the lines won't mean anything. The lines

mean something, only if you have a relationship with this father, who is a doctor in a Southern town; who is treating a deeply, deeply sick girl, whose father is a minister, and whose mother is insane. You need to understand the son in relation to the father; and the father in relation to this tragic girl, whom he understands, but about whom, perhaps, he says nothing to anyone. You need to understand this father who hopes that, maybe, his son will be good and nice to this girl who needs somebody she's grown up with.

The actress [as Alma] builds them, the father and the son; and she builds her relationship to each in two or three different ways. Then the play begins to tell her, "I like the father, but not the son." If she builds each of them, she can have inside herself: "I haven't seen him, the son, since he's been back from Johns Hopkins. He didn't come to see me. I wonder what he'll say to me when I meet him." Then, when she does meet him, if she knows the father, she can say to herself, "I see that the son treats me differently than his father does. The son offers me a drink. Well, I have to laugh at him, because his father would never do that. He knows I don't drink."

So, your job is not to play your part. If you know your part, you're cooked. Your job is to know the other people, and to have an attitude toward each of them. You live, finally, off the attitudes toward everything

that reveals the play, not your character. The play has to be revealed.

In the second phase of our work, we have gone deeper under the facts, have we not? If you now have John fighting with his father, the older man, you can immediately get visions of what each looks like -- differently. How many of you see the older one as a doctor with a gentle, quiet face? How many don't see the son that way? Therefore, as soon as you begin separating the generations, you immediately begin adding visual images.

I was thinking about Alma the other night, and I began thinking about how she looks. I was thinking of her having that kind of thin skin that doesn't take sunburn very well. When you begin thinking, the character immediately starts helping you. You visualize her hair and how she combs it. Oh, I can see her nightgown. I can see that white, homespun nightgown and that little, dotted-swiss, washed-out kimono, too. She begins to have a tall, thin, drab -- yes, very drab -- appearance.

We now know that it's not so important for us to lead the facts. Rather, it's important for us to be led by the facts to the places we have mentioned. His telling her she has fits has led us to her hysterical mind. His telling her he is not her doctor, and that his father is not going to help her, has led us to the inner relationship between the father and son. In other words, by letting the

facts lead you to build the other characters two or three different ways, you finally get to what your part says in the play.

Let's see it again working within the text. We were at the point where John tells Alma she has a doppelganger, and we went further with that by making her completely incapable of seeing herself in that light. Now, go on.

John: At two or three in the morning?

Alma: Yes, as late as that, even... occasionally. He's very patient with me.

Tell me, given the way he is treating her, would you suspect that there's already a sign of his being impatient with her? Would you say that she already knows the son is going to be different from the father? She says, "He's very patient with me." She could laugh; she could smile; she could do all kinds of things to get that withdrawal from John's difference. Underneath, she is saying, "I think you had better be patient, too." She's not just stating the fact that his father is patient with her.

John: But does you no good?

Alma: He always reassures me.

Underneath, would she not be saying, "I like it better the father's way. I see that the son has his foot up there on the bench. The father treats me like a lady; whereas, he treats me already as if I were not."? Do you see that you feed off what he is doing, much more than you

feed off what he is saying? You also, at the same time, feed off what you know the father does, differently from the son.

First, you must learn to say her thoughts in your own words. For example, "You have your foot up there. I know what that means. I know how young men are. I've been with them, and I can't bear to be treated that way. If only you would put your foot down! Oh, no, I mustn't, I mustn't do that now!" Say it in your own words, until you have her beginning to be activated. One more foot up there on the bench; one more "your doppelganger" out of his mouth; one more insult, and you are going to have her getting heart palpitations there on the spot. Do you understand that it is better for you to talk it out under the lines, as you feel it and as you see it, than to say the lines? You talk it out, until you become so close to her in relation to him, that you will be able to do the scene.

Alma: He always reassures me.

John: Temporarily?

Alma: Yes ...

John: Don't you want more than that?

Alma: What?

John: It's none of my business.

Now, here you have a key, a very big key, the biggest in the world, the biggest the author can give you. You have a rotten "what?". All you can say here is that the whole action is indirect. That's all. The whole

action has to be indirect. It can't be on the period, the punctuation. You must make it indirect. That is why I give you these plays -- to make you make it indirect. These plays are not on the period, and these plays are not on the line. Therefore, I keep on saying, "Talk it out underneath the line. Make it indirect."

When he says, "It's none of my business," what could he do? What is his business? Does he have any business? No, which is the whole point. Now, a very good thing for you to do would be to have him withdraw physically. I want you to begin to see what people in life do when they withdraw. People in life might hum when they withdraw, instead of just saying, "It's none of my business." It's not an on-the-line play. It's a psychological play with a lost man, who does not have a way to go; who has no business; who is getting tougher because he doesn't know the road, not because he does know the road. Underneath, he's saying, "You're not my business; and drinking isn't my business; and survival isn't my business; and digging the earth isn't my business. None of it is my business." That's better for him than going to the line. It's better because it goes to the big theme of the play, which is "I'm lost."

Now, will you please take it off my shoulders? I can't be so creative; it's tough. Do you understand what I'm talking about? Do you? Don't be dead; I can't take

it; it hurts me.

Stu.: Well, Stella, I was thinking of him going to the fountain.

S.A.: Yes, going to the fountain, bending down, and taking a drink, saying, "It's none of my business." Give him something to reveal his revolt, not his logic. He has no logic, goddammit! Go away from that stupid logic! Go to the interior of a character, and let some lines be born out of thinking about his situation and understanding it.

You have got to give birth the way Tennessee gave birth. He didn't easily choose these lines. These lines were chosen out of the depth of his understanding of this guy. Otherwise, everybody could write a play like Summer and Smoke. Instead of that, this one is in every library. It is classic. It is going to remain in American literature, and it isn't going to remain because of the words. It's going to remain because every person reading this play says, "This is in the third dimension." You have to know this kind of play, because it is your theatre. You were born for this game. You were not born for Shakespeare. You were born for this.

Finally, in the third stage of your work, when you get through building the actions and attitudes toward everybody, you must make every line relate to the main idea, and not to the line itself. The main idea of the play is: "You and I cannot reach each other, not in our

lifetime. We're too separated and too devastated, each in our own way. Each of us has a separate road, and crying about it isn't going to help."

Get to the big idea. Alma is a challenge to him. She is a challenge in many ways. Otherwise, he would leave her; he would propose; he would do something. She is a challenge. She's a challenge to the spirit of this man. Somewhere along the way, he doesn't want this challenge; he doesn't want to take it on. Even medically, he doesn't want it. That's the cheapest thing that he doesn't want. He doesn't care. He says, "It's none of my business." What is he saying? He's saying, "Jesus Christ, I have no destiny in this lousy medicine business that everybody's dying from. The hell with it." Get the disparity between these two characters. Get the difference between their behavior, not their lines. The lines are English and rather childish. So, as you work, you put in that she's a challenge to him. She is not just Alma; she is soul. "Alma" means soul. He meets this challenge. Either he solves it, or he does not. He sees it, and something happens to him; that gives the actress [as Alma] something with which to work.

Before, I didn't know that she's a challenge to him. I got it just now, from getting angry and from doing the work. What do we work for? We work for what I just now got, which is subconscious -- that's a rotten word --

which is something that comes through you from the work. That's what the technique is supposed to give you. It's not supposed to give you the answers that are logical. It's supposed to create in you a digging, and a digging, until something pops up that gives you a road to the part. How many of you think that, if she becomes a challenge to him, she will know how to play the part all the way through?

The key is to find a center for him; to give him somewhere from which to jump off -- his center. If you work like this, you'll get it. If you don't work like this, you'll struggle and struggle and struggle. But it's good, what you're doing. It's good, even if I do it more than you do. It doesn't mean that I'll go on doing it. It means, you know, that all French children [eventually] speak French.

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