A Sense of Direction

Some Observations on the Art of Directing

William Ball

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Objectives

THE GOLDEN KEY

In the empty space before us there is a chair. Let us say the chair is an ordinary household chair—straight backed, wooden, and green. Now, in our imaginations we place someone in the chair. This is the beginning of acting. The someone we place in the chair will be the character that we wish to portray. We can visualize him sitting there. We can sense him. We can smell him. We can hear his movements—for the purpose of this exercise, I'm going to use "he" or "his." Suffice it to say, the person in the chair could be a male or female.

The actor's purpose is, first, to observe the model in the chair and then to go sit inside the skin of the person in the chair. Before the actor goes and sits in the chair, he must observe the person in the chair with methodic scrutiny. When the character in the chair has been observed completely, the actor assumes the skin, contour, and personality of the character in the chair, as if stepping into the model's space, or sliding into an invisible envelope.

Let us look for a few moments at this character sitting before us. What is there about him that interests us? What could move us to imitate him? Let us list those aspects that fascinate us:

his appearance  his hobbies
his movements  his social status
his smell  his politics
his nationality  his accomplishments
his habits  his attitude toward death
his memories  his family
his laugh  his friends
his failures  his religion
his dreams  his passions
his daydreams  his intellect
his nervous gestures  his education
his smile  his language
his mannerisms  his voice
his health  his posture
his loneliness  his weight
his age  his strengths
his fears  his diet
his weaknesses  his goals
his biography  his energy level
his needs  his likes and dislikes
his experiences  his sexuality
his wants  his eccentricities
his clothing  his sense of humor
his income  his temper
his birth sign  his pride or lack of it
his perceptions  his morality
his name  his self-confidence
his profession  his love

We could add more; when the list was complete, we would have a fair and accurate picture of his character.

His name is Leslie. There he sits, gazing and breathing silently and motionlessly in the green chair before us; sitting there in his own clothing, in his own posture, in his own complexion, in his own thought, and in his own history.

I am the actor. I stand before Leslie observing him. He the
borrow his central nervous system. I am going to borrow the story of his experience. I am going to borrow his mentality, his awareness, his pleasure. I am going to borrow his sense of humor. I am going to borrow his rhythms. I am going to borrow the pair of shoes he is wearing. But where shall I begin? Where is my golden key?

I return to the model. I study the model. I will give Leslie no rest until I have observed him completely. I will not rest until I have scanned and memorized everything about him. I will watch my model night and day. He will never be out of my presence. He will yield to me all his secrets.

I will walk around him for hours. I will pester him with questions. I will be exacting in detail. This is the first step in the acting process. I study the model:

Leslie, where did you get that coat? What is in your pockets? Where did the smudge on your collar come from? Do you have callouses, freckles, corns? Do you have any scars? Have you ever had an operation? Ether? Flowers afterwards? From whom? When do you feel most lonely, Leslie? Whom do you love? Leslie! What are you thinking at this moment? Who is your favorite playmate? What foods give you heartburn? Can you keep a secret? Do you owe anyone money? What makes you laugh? Do you complain? Do you pray? Do you masturbate? What do you feel most lost without? Do you drink? Do you daydream? Do you worry? What, Leslie, is your absolutely most favorite thing in the world? What do you do in secret that no one is aware of? Tell me. How did your spinal column get the way it is? What is your strongest childhood memory? What is your pet peeve? What pain do you have in your body right now? Is there anything or anyone you hate? Is there a supreme being for you? Whom do you imitate?

As the actor, I study the model. I move around him steadily. Gradually, systematically, relentlessly, courageously I persuade him to yield up his truth to me; his heart, his being. Only when I know him thoroughly can I become him. Only when I share his thoughts, his hopes, his dreams will I be permitted to go and sit in the green chair in his place; only when I love him will he allow me to slide into his skin. The actor studies
the model. This is the first step. But where is the golden key? When the golden key is mine, then I will go to him, sit in his place, and become him. Then I will place my feet where his feet are. I will place my knees where his knees are, and my hands where his hands are. I will assume his carriage, his gait, his glance. I will take upon myself his mentality, his pain, his memory, his loneliness. I will take his voice. I will like what he likes. I will laugh at what amuses him. What he finds sexy will turn me on. What he has achieved will make me proud, and what he resents will make me indignant. His convictions will be my principles. I will consent to take onto myself all his life. When I agree to take on his life, I may be taking on a lot of weight, a lot of sorrow, a lot of suffering, a lot of resentment, a lot of fear, a lot of loneliness—all strange to my usual nature. I may take on ugliness, despair, bigotry, uncertainty, ill-fortune. But when I enter him I will include all, and I will dare to accept the entirety of his being. I will become Leslie.

The enormity of the task seems to be awesome. We have asked so many questions and received so many impressions. The sheer number of facets of Leslie’s life and experience cause us to seek a simple, sure, and effortless method of becoming the character. We do not want to spend countless and unsystematic hours asking random questions and patching our haphazard impressions together in the hope that some accident will ignite a coherent and truthful performance. We need the golden key. We need a technique that will bring the multiplicity of impressions into alignment and unity.

Thanks to the methods articulated by our master, Constantin Stanislavski, we have a golden key. His study is a revelation to every serious actor.

Every skilled professional actor will be able to spot the golden key immediately in the following list of character traits. The golden key will leap out and light up as the one valuable tool for the actor; the other characteristics in the list will recede into the shadowy recess of secondary consideration. Can you spot the single golden key to which the actor should anchor his full attention from among the many we have discussed?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>His Appearance</th>
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<td>His Loves</td>
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<td>His Politics</td>
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lently, fearlessly, effortlessly. This technique is the key to all success in acting. This golden key is the sine qua non—or "without which nothing"—of the art of theatre. The professional actor could spot the golden key on that list from a mile away. The amateur is still puzzled. There is one and only one "open sesame" to creative acting. There is one and only one way to enter and know and experience and express the inner life of a character in a play. And that technique is the systematic and thorough pursuit of the wants of the character.

How simple it seems! How prosaic. How obvious. His wants. But the overwhelming majority of rehearsals are mired in confusion, frustration, and non-success, because the artists fix their attention on the secondary paraphernalia of results.

Wants. Wants. Wants are what create drama. Wants are what give life to the character. Wants are what the waking individual is never without. Wants are perpetual. Wants cause action. Wants create conflict. Wants are the very energy of human life and the System of Wants is the aspect of character to which the actor gives his relentless and obsessive attention. The actor tracks down the wants. Everything else is classified as a condition. The golden key is the character's system of wants. And after I have studied and structured and tested and assumed Leslie's system of wants, then, and only then, am I permitted to occupy his inner life and express his personality. Of all the questions I ask Leslie about himself, the overwhelming majority have to do with his wants: "What do you want?" "What do you want now?" "What is your ultimate want?" "What do you want from the other person?" "What do you want in the play?" "What do you want in life?" When I succeed in making Leslie's wants my wants, I succeed in the process of acting. The want is the golden key.

A SYSTEM OF WANTS

I will want what Leslie wants.

It is essential at this point to divide wants into two classifications and to throw one of the classifications away.

Leslie may want a motorboat, a wife, a moment's peace and quiet. These are nouns.

In another category, Leslie may want to earn enough money to buy a motorboat; he may want to win Georgia's heart, to eliminate the distractions to his peace of mind. To earn, to win, to eliminate. These verbs are the wants.

We narrow the focus of the actor's pursuit now by stating clearly that, for our purposes in theatre, Leslie never wants nouns. His wants are expressed as verbs.

When asked what Leslie wants, a skilled actor will never answer that Leslie wants an object, or a person, or a job, or love, or independence. A skilled actor always states Leslie's wants in the form of a verb. What does Leslie want to do?

I WANT TO _(verb)_.

The behavior of an individual is caused by what he wants. What does Leslie want to do? What does he want to do for, or to, himself, and what does he want to do for, or to, other people? A serious actor doesn't give time or attention to any other aspect of the character until he has made a thorough study of what the character wants to do. Leslie is always wanting to do something. If he is awake he wants to do something to himself, to others, or to his surroundings. The one thing that is perpetual and constant in Leslie's consciousness is that he is always wanting. There is never a moment when a human being is not wanting to do something. Leslie may want to make himself more comfortable in his chair; he may want to convince me of his disinterest; he may want to get out of the room; he may want to fall asleep. He may want to figure out why I am gazing at him with such interest; but Leslie is always wanting to do something. He has many characteristics, but the one thing that he always has—if he is alive—is that he wants to do something. His entire life has been composed of a system of wants.

As an actor I say, "The only thing that interests me is what Leslie wants. I will study what he wants; when I know what he wants I will borrow his wants and make them my own. His wants
will become my wants; and when I want completely what he
wants, I will have entered the inner life of Leslie. Everything
I do will flow from his nature."

The system of wants in Leslie is what the actor gives his abso-
olute, continuous, and undivided attention to. The actor is like
a detective hunting down those wants.

We have already narrowed our focus to eliminate nouns:

**NOUN**
- I want a motorboat.
- I want a wife.
- I want peace.
- I want attention.
- I want order.

**VERB**
- I want to EARN enough for a motorboat.
- I want to WIN Georgia’s heart.
- I want to ELIMINATE distraction.
- I want to FASCINATE everyone.
- I want to ORGANIZE this mess.

Now let us narrow further and eliminate adjectives:

**ADJECTIVE**
- I am angry with her.
- I am nervous.
- I am frustrated.
- I am in love.
- I am being charming.
- I am confused.
- I am giddy.
- I am drunk.
- I am friendly.
- I am arrogant.

**VERB**
- I want to DESTROY her.
- I want to FOCUS my attention.
- I want to FIND a way out.
- I want to TAKE CARE of her forever.
- I want to DAZZLE the guests.
- I want to FIGURE OUT a solution.
- I want to CONTAIN my rapture.
- I want to PRESERVE business as usual.
- I want to WIN him over.
- I want to BELITTLE him.

Listed below are a number of frequently recurring “actable” verbs:

- I want to CONVINCE.
- I want to ENCOURAGE.
- I want to PREPARE.
- I want to ENLIGHTEN.
- I want to ANNihilATE.
- I want to GET EVEN.
- I want to OVERwhelm.
- I want to REASSURE.
- I want to BOMBARD.
- I want to SUPPRESS.
- I want to BELITTLE.
- I want to LAMBAST.
- I want to HELP.
- I want to SEDUCE.
- I want to IGNITE.
- I want to BUILD.
- I want to HURT.
- I want to AWAKEN.
- I want to MOCK.
- I want to CRUSH.
- I want to INSPIRE.
- I want to DESTROY.
- I want to INCITE.
- I want to TEASE.

Having narrowed the focus of wants to the choice of specific
verbs, let us take the first of two steps in refinement. An ade-
quate expression of the want is a verb by itself. A superior, more
subtle, and certainly more actable expression of the want will
include the person to whom the want is directed and the re-
sponse sought from that person, so that a first-class actor ex-
pressing an individual want of the character would include all
three elements:

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<tr>
<th>VERB</th>
<th>RECEIVER</th>
<th>DESIRED RESPONSE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I want .. to WIN .......... Gloria’s ....... admiration.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I want .. to AWAKE .... my father’s .. enthusiasm.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want .. to REDUCE .... my lover .... to tears.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want .. to IGNITE .... the crowd ... to riot.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I want .. to PERSUADE .. Ann ......... to kiss me.</td>
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</table>

This is the most sophisticated and effective expression of
Leslie’s wants because it includes the other person’s response.
This three-part mechanism requires Leslie to be dependent on
the other character’s response. The other character’s slightest
response will tell Leslie whether he is getting closer to the ful-
fillment of his want or whether he is beginning to lose what he has been wanting.

In summary, the actor is working at his best when he, as Leslie, has a vivid want at all times. Secondly, the actor’s power is increased when his want is directed to a specific person, Georgia. And thirdly, the vitality of the want is amplified when Leslie’s want is immediately dependent on a specific response from Georgia.

So we say that at the heart of every moment Leslie spends on stage there exists—

1. An ongoing want
2. A receiver
3. A desired response from the receiver

Before we go any further, it is essential to clear up a point about terminology. We have been discussing what we have called a system of wants. And we have defined this system as an interlocking series of verbs. Here is a list of terms. Each of these terms is used at various times by directors and teachers to describe the want of the character:

- The OBJECTIVE
- The GOAL
- The PURPOSE
- The AMBITION
- The INTENTION
- The DESIRE
- The NEED
- The PURSUIT
- The ENDEAVOR
- The VERB
- What are you AFTER?
- What are you trying to GET?
- What are you DOING?
- What are you PLAYING?

A great deal of confusion would be saved in our profession if all directors and teachers would use the same word to describe the want of the character. Most of the skilled directors I know use the word objective to describe Leslie’s want. Communication in every rehearsal would be made more efficient if every actor could be brought to the realization that all the above words mean the same thing!

Each of the words in the list is intended to signify Leslie’s want, and each of the words in the list requires a verb to illuminate his want. It is a pity that so many teachers have cluttered up the nomenclature. And it is consoling and liberating to the actor to discover that although he may work with ten different directors, each using a different name for the want of the character, all ten directors mean exactly the same thing. In deference to my teacher Allen Fletcher and to the tradition of Stanislavski, I encourage the use of the term objective to refer to the system of wants experienced by the character. The character moves from one objective to another through the course of the script. It is customary for each of the different objectives in a scene to be called beats; any given scene is composed of one beat after another. Each character maintains his own independent series of beats, and each beat changes at the moment when the objective, or want, of the character changes.

**THE QUEST FOR THE OBJECTIVE**

The only real reason a director is needed in rehearsal is to perform the following function: persistently to draw the actor to a more meaningful and appropriate choice of objectives, and then to persuade the actor to lend his full commitment to those objectives. This is the purpose of a director. He helps the actor choose an objective and then encourages him to play it with all his heart. Any director who avoids this practice is wasting everyone’s time. The entire goal of rehearsal, from beginning to end, is to draw the actor toward a strong, appropriate objective, and to persuade him to put his shoulder behind that objective and push hard. Relentlessly and continuously the director asks the actor, “What is your objective?” He consistently refuses to take an adjective or a noun for an answer. If the di-
actors have never learned to make the transition. They are very poor actors. They spend their entire careers indicating the feel-
ings rather than experiencing them. They are phony. They never actually experience the feelings of the character, whereas the entire art of acting is based on the performer’s ability to sustain the experience of the inner life of the character.

So the director is there to persuade the actor away from the representation of the feeling and into the experience of the feeling itself. To do this the director uses one technique, and he uses it all the time. It saves a great deal of energy and confu-
sion. Rather than lengthy discussions on the merits of each scene, and rather than delivering long directorial expostulations on the character, the skilled director simply asks one question relentlessly: “What is your objective?” At first the actor will not know. He will try to offer an adjective.

And so the question “What objective are you playing?” is repeated, and the director will only accept a verb as an answer. Pin the actor down; he probably doesn’t want to be pinned down. There is safety in vagueness. There is comfort in “indicating.” There is painlessness in remaining uncommitted. Actors tend to run like pigs in a barnyard to avoid pinning down the objectives. Frequently they will throw up a barrage of adjectives: “Well, you see his anger here, the pent up fury, the resent-
ment from the past; he’s really bitter, he’s gotten cynical, he’s sour; he’s rejected, disillusioned, full of contempt, and it all erupts in a torrent of rage and recriminations and revenge . . .” And on and on he goes, flinging colorful adjectives and nouns about like confetti. This kind of waffling should be stopped. After the second sentence, the director should gently step in and say, “Those are adjectives. Please give me a verb.” Once again the actor experiences a sense of resistance. He suddenly realizes that he is about to commit to experiencing the character’s want and in the company of that want will come some discomfort, some suffering. “I think he probably wants to annihilate his wife.” Immediately the actor has committed himself to experience a very painful desire. The director says, “Thank you for that verb; ‘annihilate’ is a very playable objective.”
A SENSE OF DIRECTION

Gradually, the actor abandons this avoidance technique of hiding behind decorative emotional descriptions. Adjectives and nouns are of no use and must be avoided during the rehearsal. The skillful director limits what he says. He systematically draws the actors toward the right verb and encourages them to give their full personal commitment to that verb. This is the business of directing.

INDICATING

Not all verbs are actable. But before proceeding to a discussion about refining the choice of verbs, let us once again give our attention to some terminology.

Here is a list of words that directors commonly use when they are criticizing an actor’s work:

- you are GENERALIZING
- you are TELEGRAPHING
- you are INDICATING
- you are PLAYING ATTITUDE
- you are PLAYING the ADJECTIVE
- you are PLAYING RESULT
- you are MODE PLAYING
- you are BEING SCENIC
- you are DIRECTING YOURSELF
- you are ANTICIPATING
- you are ILLUSTRATING
- you are DEMONSTRATING
- you are MUGGING
- you are BEING PHONY
- you are UNBELIEVABLE

Each director has his favorite phrase, but all the above phrases mean exactly the same thing. Once again, we see how much simpler our profession would be if we were to establish a uniform vocabulary for our techniques. These phrases all carry the same message from the director to the actor. The message is this: “You are allowing yourself to represent a picture of the experience and avoiding a personal commitment to the want of the character.” To put it another way: “You are indicating a feeling rather than playing your objective.”

There is a value in the actor knowing which phrase a director customarily uses. But it is even more helpful for the actor to be aware that when he hears any of the phrases on the above list, they all mean, “You do not have an objective. Find one and play it.”

FINDING ACTABLE VERBS

Once we have persuaded the actor to respond with a verb when asked for his objective we have opened the door to creative acting. Now we have two refinements that will increase the effectiveness of these verbs. The first of these refinements might be called the preference for actable verbs. The second we shall refer to as upgrading the verbs.

Are all verbs equally actable? No. An actor will offer a wide variety of choices, but the director should be prepared to accept only the verbs that an ordinary person could get behind with his shoulder and push hard for at least ten minutes. This immediately eliminates the following classification of verbs.

Intellectual verbs These usually come in packages of three syllables or more. They are lofty or elegant. No ordinary human being ever spent two seconds, much less ten minutes, pursuing them. Cogitate, for example, is the intellectual form for a more ordinary activity: figure out. No one can put his shoulder behind the frail verb reciprocate, but anyone could push hard on get even.

Behavior or Condition verbs These verbs describe a state of being or an action that does not require a strong commitment of intent. They are usually reflexive or subconscious activities that can be accomplished without effort—sleep, laugh, sneeze, cry, eat, wait, or stand usually require no hard pushing.
**Existential verbs**  These verbs include those vast activities that go on without our volition. They are too vague to be endeavored in. For instance, one can hardly push hard for ten minutes on the verbs *to be, to exist, to die, to become, to live, to use, to try, or to think.*

**Adjectival verbs**  This classification is extremely subjective, and one director will consider a certain verb in this category to be dangerous, while another will consider it acceptable. The determining factor is this: Does the choice of the verb sound dangerously close to indicating—or playing the adjective? For instance we might discourage the use of a verb such as *argue*, because it slides so unnoticeably into the adjectival playing of *argumentative; charm* because it slides into being *charming; pity* leads to *pitiful; imagine* leads to *imaginative; deceive* leads to *deceptive,* and so forth.

**Trigger verbs**  These verbs depict actions that occur so quickly the door could not pursue them for ten minutes: *shoot, slap, kick, kiss, touch, quit.*

**Actable verbs**  These verbs, it is worth repeating, are commonplace, gutsy activities that an ordinary person could put his shoulder behind and push hard for ten minutes. One can certainly work hard for a long time to *convince, excite, tease, encourage, destroy, prove, entice, intimidate.*

The following rough chart could be augmented and refined by any student of directing. It provides a graphic way of looking at actable verbs. Gradually the director becomes selective in listening to the actor; so that, for example, when the director asks, “What is your objective?” and the actor answers, “I want to castigate him,” the director will suggest, “Give me the down-and-dirty form of ‘castigate.’” The actor might say, “bawl him out”; “give him hell”; “curse him out.” The director: “That’s better, those are more actable. You can’t push your shoulder behind ‘castigate’; it disappears. But you can really push hard on ‘give him hell!’ Use the down-and-dirty form; it’s more actable.”

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTABLE</th>
<th>INTELLECTUAL</th>
<th>BEHAVIORAL or CONDITIONAL</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>hurt</td>
<td>reciprocate</td>
<td>walk</td>
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<td>inspire</td>
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<th>EXISTENTIAL</th>
<th>ADJECTIVAL</th>
<th>TRIGGER</th>
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<td>think</td>
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<td>grieve</td>
<td>flash</td>
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<td>begin</td>
<td>judge</td>
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It becomes apparent that nearly seven-eighths of the verbs in spoken English are of absolutely no use to the actor. So we have, once again, narrowed the field of choices, enabling the director to focus his attention on a small list of very refined verbs that he will find himself using over and over again. It may seem astonishing to the novice, but frequently an experienced director comes to the sudden realization that play after play he is using the same small group of verbs. Theactable verbs turn out to be a mere handful of words used over and over again, by character after character. The conditions that surround these actable verbs vary widely, and these different conditions give definition and color to the drama.

UPGRADING THE CHOICE

In the early rehearsals, the actor is tentative and his choice of a verb may be weak, frail, thin. His choice may be a verb, but one that is not strong enough to throw one’s shoulder behind. Particularly in the first scenes of a play, in which the playwright is wrestling with the artfulness of his exposition, the actor comes up with a shrug: “I’m merely telling him about the procedures around here.” The director asks, “What would happen if we were to upgrade that objective?” For example, the actor gives us TELL, and the director suggests that it may be upgraded as follows:

TELL
INFORM
RELAY
DOCUMENT
EXPLAIN
PROVE
CONVINCE
OVERWHELM
BOMBARD
DEVASTATE
ANNIHILATE
OBLITERATE

CHARM her
FASCINATE her
DAZZLE her
WIN her
MANIPULATE her
SEDUCE her
SURROUND her
OVERWHELM her
DOMINATE her
VICTIMIZE her
CONQUER her
TYRANNIZE her
POSSESS her
OCCUPY her

COMPLIMENT him
FLATTER him
PRAISE him
REINFORCE him
ENCOURAGE him
STRENGTHEN him
FORTIFY him
INVIGORATE him
ELEVATE him
EXALT him
IMMORTALIZE him
LIONIZE him
MONARCHIZE him
DEIFY him

Now, how would it be if, instead of telling or informing him of the procedures of the house, you were to overwhelm him with the procedures, or even bombard him with the procedures? The upgraded verb may seem outsized at first, but we remember that it is inevitably modified by the conditions or given circumstances of the scene and will therefore not appear to the audience as an exaggerated choice. The hefty size of an upgraded objective—its definiteness, its ability to be used like a club—will seem attractive to the actor. It gives him something tough and clear to grasp—something powerful, something to which he can easily lend full commitment.

Let us look at some other examples of the verb being upgraded.

Some observations should be made at this point:

An actor may be “stuck” with a weak objective. When the director invites him to upgrade it, he does not force the situation. He suggests the possible options. He encourages the actor to broaden his thinking, to consider splashier possibilities, thus adding color and fervor to the beat.

The audience never sees the actor’s choice. For example, suppose the actress is to say to her lover, “What a wonderful, kind, thoughtful person you are!” The audience will hear only
those words. But the degree of her conviction will be revealed by the actress’s secret choice: whether to flatter him, to fortify him, to exalt him, or to immortalize him.

Actors love poetic words and even words they may not understand. It could be quite meaningful to suggest to the actress who is praising her lover that she oil him, smother him, consume him, or arouse him. But the actress might respond to lionize him, because of its connotative rather than its exact explicit meaning. Even though she doesn’t understand the meaning of the word, her imagination is captured by it, and she happily envisions her lover becoming a rampant lion as she speaks of him.

When we use this technique of upgrading the verb, we sometimes lose track, temporarily, of the second and third components of a well-constructed objective—that is, the receiver and the response. After the verb has been upgraded, we merely add them in; so that the progression goes this way:

I want to FLATTER him.

becomes

I want to PRAISE him.

becomes

I want to STRENGTHEN him.

becomes

I want to GLORIFY him.

becomes, with the receiver and the response included,

I want to GLORIFY him into realizing his true worth.

All this discussion of actable verbs and upgrading of choices pales by comparison when we come to consider two immensely powerful verbs—the giant crowbars of acting technique—get and make.

THE CROWBARS: GET AND MAKE

No matter how much homework a director may do, it is impossible for him to know in advance all the objectives of all the characters in a play. If he did he would be straining badly and

would also be obviating the purpose of rehearsal. But what if the director gets stuck? What if he doesn’t have a clue to what the next scene is about? What if he is required to work rapidly with a script with which he is unfamiliar? What if he is tired, angry, or disinterested and can hardly bring himself to the quest, much less savor the subtle differences of choice?

Fortunately, we have a rescue tactic. It is an all-purpose, shortcut, surefire, knockdown, bring-'em-back-alive, fail-safe, self-cleaning, inexhaustible magic trick, which, no matter how cruelly employed, will always work. It is the crowbar of directing and will always produce satisfactory results in bringing the actor close to the choice of the right objective. This powerful lever is the interchangeable use of the giant verbs get and make.

Either of the following questions will always get the director out of trouble:

“What are you trying to GET him to do?”
“What are you trying to MAKE him do?”

Some directors, desperate to cover for lack of preparation, manage to get through the entire rehearsal period on these two sentences alone. In fact there are some directors who, unable to be bothered with refinements, have built an entire career on these two handy sentences.

“What are you trying to GET from him?”
“What are you trying to MAKE him give you?”

These two questions require an answer from the actor, and the answer has built into it the three components needed for the most effective statement of an objective. The answer must—

1. Contain a verb: “I am trying to CONVINCE.”
2. Contain a receiver: “I am trying to convince HIM.”
3. Contain a desired response: “I am trying to convince him TO GO WITH ME.”

“What are you trying to get him to do?” may be asked beat by beat, scene after scene. It will never wear out. It applies to the beginning, middle, and end of a play; to lead characters and extras; to verse and prose; to old and young; to rich and poor;
to active and passive; to real and imagined; to morning, noon, and night.

When there is any uncertainty about how things are going in any scene, the director merely inserts the crowbar:

"What are you trying to MAKE her do?"

"I'm trying to MAKE her relax, MAKE her cheer up, MAKE her smile at me."

Presto. Both actor and director have something to go on. The scene has been pried loose and is actable now. The objective may be changed, modified, refined, or upgraded later, but, at least for now, we have—

1. a verb
2. a receiver
3. a desired response