

The Science and *Art* of
Acting
for the
Camera



A Practical Approach to Film, Television,
and Commercial Acting

John Howard Swain

A Focal Press Book

ROUTLEDGE

The Science and Art of Acting for the Camera

The Science and Art of Acting for the Camera provides a precise yet practical approach to help unlock the mysteries of acting for film and television as well as commercials. Written by veteran actor, producer, director John Howard Swain, the book offers a clear-cut, no-nonsense technique that equips aspiring or working actors with the necessary skills to succeed on camera. The technique teaches you how to build multi-dimensional characters; construct truthful and exciting relationships; ignite stimulating emotions; craft a series of discoveries guaranteed to energize your work; and much, much more. The book also provides instruction for actors working in commercials—from slating, to the dreaded “tell us about yourself” interview, to nailing “the tag” and embracing the cliché—and provides sample copy for students to practice.

John Howard Swain has coached a myriad of clients ranging from first-time performers to Emmy Award-winning actors, Supreme Court Justices and Fortune 500 executives. In addition to his New York stage credits he has also guest-starred in dozens of television’s most iconic shows, including such classics as *Hill Street Blues* to *Law & Order: SVU*. As a director he has staged over twenty plays, including such hits as *That Championship Season*, *Veronica’s Room*, and *The Owl and the Pussycat*. He has also directed four films: *Whose Life*, *Uncommon*, *Stand-by*, and the multi-award winning short, *A Younger Man*. Students from his program continue to work across the globe, and can be seen starring on Broadway, in television, and on film.

Praise for *The Science and Art of Acting for the Camera*

“John offers practical, common sense advice for actors on how to approach a text from both the analytical perspective as well as from the inner life of a character. He emphasizes that along with the importance of clarity and economy in technique and analysis, that the actor’s work is also deeply personal and individual. It is the fusing of these elements—technique, analysis and individuality—that is the foundation of all great work.”

—Tony Glazer, Director, *Junction, After the Sun Fell, Hostage, Those Things We Hold, Mired*

“John uses a clear and concise approach to simplify an incredibly complicated art form. In addition, his honest and realistic outlook on the business is refreshing and will be a great help to aspiring actors.”

—Philip Huffman, Casting Associate, *Law & Order: SVU*

“John’s approach to acting is the foundation of my work. He’s given me a set of tools that I continually rely on. As I learn more from my experiences, I’ve gained even more respect for the depth and flexibility of his technique.”

—Sumalee Montano, Actor, *Nashville, Nip/Tuck, Big Love, Boston Legal, Losing Control, West Wing, GloryDaze, Transformer Prime, Lincoln Heights, Shark, Final Approach*

“Since I started studying with John I’ve booked six national commercials, ten regional commercials, about twenty industrials plus roles in two different television series. Do I believe in what’s he’s teaching? You bet.”

—Dave Boat, Actor

“I know when I see John Swain’s name on an actor’s resume that actor is serious about his craft and will be prepared. This is high caliber training.”

—Joan Spangler, Owner, Look Talent Agency

“‘You’re booked’ ... are words our clients who study with John hear on a regular basis.”

—John Erlendson, Owner, JE Talent Agency

“John’s students are more confident, better at taking directions, and seem to be having a damned good time at their auditions. Thank you for making my job easier.”

—Martha Sherratt, Sherratt Casting

“Film acting is, indeed, a science and an art. How many times has a young actor gone to a Meryl Streep or Johnny Depp film and marvelled at their ability to communicate a difficult or emotional scene so naturally? Luckily for the reader, John Howard Swain demystifies a medium that for many actors proves to be daunting and elusive. *The Science and Art of Acting for the Camera* should be on the bookshelves of every actor hoping to have a career in film and television.”

—Jamie Harris, Agent, Clear Talent Group

“In his book, John takes something that can be so complex and makes it easy to understand. He’s developed a wonderful technique that allows actors to do honest and compelling work on camera.”

—Fred Rubeck, Department Chair,
Performing Arts College, Elon University

“One of the dichotomies of acting is that, while it is difficult to do, it is even more difficult to teach. John Howard Swain understands the actor’s challenges, and he understands filmmaking. He combines his knowledge of both in an invaluable handbook of practical, manageable techniques for bringing a character to life on the screen. *The Science and Art of Acting for the Camera* should be required reading for actors new to film, and experienced actors will be gratified to find the tools of their trade so comprehensively presented in one volume.”

—Mike Langworthy,
Golden Globe Award winning writer



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The Science and Art of Acting for the Camera

A Practical Approach to Film, Television,
and Commercial Acting

John Howard Swain

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Shout Outs

To put what I've been teaching in a studio onto the pages of a book required the help of many dedicated people. It's impossible to name everyone so let me express my thanks to a few that represent the many.

To the teachers that taught at Full Circle Productions in San Francisco where this technique was developed: Celia Shuman, Joie Seldon, Janice Erlendson, Mary Moore, Kate London, David Skelly, Tom Kelly, Mary Mackey, Elizabeth Ross, and TJ Metz. To the administrative staff who held everything together so we could do our work in the classroom: Jennifer Skelly, Kristie Cox, Soraya Knight, Ginger Nicolay-Davis, and Jessica Raaum. And to Elizabeth Pickett for her many contributions.

To my New York crew: Stacey Scotte, class assistant and editor extraordinaire who made more corrections on this book than I would like to admit; Jessica Raaum Foster (same person as listed above, only married now and living in New York), ace camera operator; Sarah Ann Rodgers for her outstanding assistance; to Bill Brooks for the fantastic design work he did, inside and outside, on the first iterations of this book; to Al Wright for his wonderful photograph; and to the people at Routledge Publishing, especially Simon Jacobs, for championing this project.

To the actors: to say that I got as much as I gave is not an exaggeration. Each actor came with lessons to learn and lessons to teach. My goal, every time I stepped into the studio, was to stay open and receptive to what each person brought to the work because it is only from a place of openness that any real communication can take place.

And always to Marsha Mercant who has been and continues to be the brightest light in my life.

The proof of any kind of instruction is: does it work? The actors who studied the techniques outlined in this volume have booked, at current count, over 8,500 jobs. Not a week goes by in which I don't hear from a student about a new project he or she has booked.

Many of the actors who started with me when I began teaching are still in the business. Most have continued on as actors, several others have gone on to become directors, producers, and writers, but all of them cite the

experience of working with this technique as being the foundation for their work. Sharing this information has been an exciting, life-affirming experience for me and I thank you one and all.

John Howard Swain

***Acting—**
creating an active thought process
that ignites an emotion that
provokes a behavior.*

John Howard Swain



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Introduction

The purpose of this book is to introduce actors who want to work in the film/television industry to a practical, proven technique. This technique, this way of working, with a few notable exceptions, also applies to actors working on stage.

Today there is a great deal of emphasis placed on naturalistic, instinctual acting. There is also a misconception that technique and instinct are not compatible. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Science, for our purposes, isn't about formulas or equations or the periodic table; rather we're talking about a systemic yet flexible body of knowledge you can employ throughout the course of your career. You will see how the science of this technique can enhance instinct and thereby produce art.

A shortstop on a baseball team will spend countless hours fielding grounders, practicing, working on his technique. With each ball hit in his direction he reminds himself, "Keep my eye on the ball. Put my body in front of the ball. Watch the ball into my glove." He does this hour after hour, day after day, transforming what are initially awkward, erratic actions into graceful, fluid movements. When game time comes he knows what to do and how to do it. It's ingrained in his consciousness and he no longer has to think about it; technique, the science of creating a body of knowledge, has transformed itself into art.

The same is true after he fields the ball. Before the batter steps into the batter's box, the shortstop has already worked out all the possible scenarios; he has planned in advance what to do in each situation. One out, runner on first, throw to second to start the double play. No outs, runner on second, check the runner and then throw to first.

The difference between actors and ball players is that actors know well in advance where, metaphorically, each ball is going to be hit. That doesn't mean we (and I include myself here as I am proud to say I made my living as an actor for nearly forty years) can relax, but rather the opposite—we need to be fully engaged at every moment. Our tools are more intangible than the bats, balls, and gloves of a baseball player. We are story interpreters, and to play our "game" we use words, movement, and action. We use these things to evoke emotions, not only in ourselves but in others as well. If our actions

aren't carefully planned and executed we will be regarded as bush leaguers, unworthy of the price of admission.

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO BE AN ACTOR?

Actors are the hardest working people I know. When we first start out we often have to juggle a full-time job or several part-time jobs around audition and/or rehearsal schedules. Factor in an acting class once a week and you're rapidly approaching overload. Yet we do it. We work eight hours at a temp job or wait tables at two different restaurants and then go to a rehearsal where we spend four to six hours each night blocking, running lines, digging into the emotional lives of our characters, which also means dredging up our own emotional experiences. It staggers the mind. And yet we do it. Every actor I've ever known has done it.

The workday doesn't get any easier once actors break through and start "getting paid" for their work. The average day on a film shoot is ten to twelve hours. Sometimes sixteen. One project I worked on, we shot for twenty-two hours. And the conditions aren't always great. If we aren't working under blazing hot lights in a studio, we could find ourselves in the middle of a snowstorm, real or manmade. If a scene takes place in a blizzard we still have to say our lines, hit our marks, produce the right emotions, take after take, to insure the director gets his coverage. This isn't an occupation for the faint of heart.

Acting is also deceptive. When the work is good, everybody watching thinks, "What's so hard about that? I could do that." When the work is bad, those same people say, "Those people are getting paid to do that? I *know* I could do better than that." The reality is that acting is damned hard work. If you don't have a technique, a science you can rely on, then creating art, which is already difficult, becomes impossible.

ACTORS ARE SOME OF THE BRAVEST PEOPLE IN THE WORLD

I don't say this to diminish the heroic deeds of many other professions—police and fire personnel, the military, etc.—but actors, in order to do our job properly, do something every time we work that most people, given the choice, wouldn't do in a thousand years. We do in public what most people won't/can't do in private. We allow other people to see what we're feeling.

This isn't easy because from the day we're born we're assigned certain roles to play and we're programmed to act accordingly. Girls play with dolls; boys play with guns. It's okay for girls to cry; it's not okay for boys.

These attitudes are deeply ingrained in our consciousness. Yet in order for us to do our work we often have to break those molds and venture into uncharted territory.

If you've been cast in a film as a father whose children have drowned in a boating accident and you have to cry, can you do that? On cue? Repeatedly? In front of strangers?

In order to honor the emotional needs of the character, the actor playing the father has to overcome those stereotypes and go against the social conditioning he received while growing up. That takes a certain amount of grit.

WHAT MOTIVATES ACTORS?

What is it that drives us to do this sort of dauntless work on a daily basis? To swim against the tide? To work exhausting hours at every stage of our careers? What sets actors apart from most other people? The answer, in a word, is *PASSION*. The dictionary defines *passion* as "extreme, compelling emotion; intense emotional drive or excitement."

Thousands of years ago the religious leaders in ancient Greece realized their citizens needed an outlet, a public forum where they could express the intense emotions they were feeling. To accomplish this they created theatre, large interactive events where the combined efforts of the priests and the audience would culminate in a "play." This emotional channel was so important those early "plays" became a form of worship.

Today human beings feel those same emotions, but our inhibitions, our fear of being inappropriate, hinder us from expressing them in public.

The audience (and I was a member of the audience long before I became an actor) goes to see a film or a play because we want to laugh; we want to cry; we want to be scared. We want to be moved in some way. We go because we have the same needs the early Greeks had. Only today, instead of playing an active part in the story unfolding before us, we get our emotional hit from the safety and security of a darkened theatre where nobody can see us as we are guided to those emotional places by a company of actors.

I say "guided" because that is exactly what good actors do: they guide the audience; they take them up to, but not quite through, the final experience. That part of the journey, the final part, is up to each individual member of the audience. The actor's job should be to stimulate but never to dictate.

WHAT IS THE ACTOR'S FUNCTION?

We're interpreters. We bring the writer and director's visions to fruition. We're also the gatekeepers of emotion, the torchbearers who hold up the

light so each member of the audience can peer into his/her own soul. And because of this, the actor's job is more important now than ever before. The more intricate and complex the world becomes, the more meaningful our work is.

Our job, first and foremost, is to serve the story, the script. In order to do that, we need to understand the arc of the story. Once we know what the arc of the story is we then need to determine the emotional journey our character is going to take in order to fulfill that arc.

Then, in order to fulfill the character's emotional journey, we must have the craft necessary to successfully navigate the endless series of pitfalls the writer and director have intentionally created for us. Merely skimming the surface, getting from Point A to Point H without touching on the emotional peaks and valleys along the way, isn't very interesting. But getting from Point A to Point H with a fully developed character who understands the emotional journey—who dives down into the depths and soars up to the heights—is both interesting and exciting. And while we're plunging into those dark holes and finding those bright shining moments, we also have the responsibility of delivering not only ourselves but also a group of strangers—the members of the audience who have put their trust in us—safely on the other side of the last hazard.

To compound this issue: we must display those emotions in the precise amount at the exact right moment. Too much, too little, too soon, too late and we have failed.

To successfully complete this journey we can't simply report the events. That's what a newscaster does. As actors we have to live them. We are the scouts, the trailblazers, and if we don't lead the way, if we don't go on the journey ourselves, the audience can't go either. It's as simple as that.

FILM VS. STAGE

There are a variety of ways that working on stage is different than working on camera. In theatre we're trained to reach the guy sitting in the last row of the third balcony, not only vocally and physically but emotionally as well. We want him to see, hear and feel the things we're trying to convey. After all, he's the guy who really wants to see the play and the nosebleed seat he bought is the only one he can afford.

Much of that changes when an actor prepares for a role in film or TV because everyone in the audience, whether they're in a movie house or at home, is metaphorically moved up to the front row. Actors have to adjust accordingly; otherwise, they'll be guilty of the biggest sin of all: overacting.

While watching a play, the audience have a lot of things vying for their attention: the actors, of course, and the set; but the audience will also see the curtain, the lighting grid, the interior of the theatre itself, other audience members, etc. In a film or a TV show the director not only dictates what the audience sees but also the size of what they see. If the movie is about a guy gambling away his fortune, the director will probably start off with a wide shot of a casino, cut to a single of the protagonist, then to a close-up of the worried look on his face, then to an extreme close-up of his right forefinger nudging his last poker chip into the pot. In a large theatre this move might require the stage actor to use his arm, perhaps his whole upper body, to convey the same physical gesture.

Additionally, on stage the images are more or less constant. In film, images change quickly. There are a couple of reasons why this happens. One, because with film we have the ability to do it and, two, the film/TV audience have learned to absorb and assimilate the information presented to them at a faster rate. So, in order to keep the audience engaged, the director, working with an editor, pieces the scene together from the different angles he/she shot. And now, thanks to the advent of MTV, things have sped up so much that there'll be a cut approximately every three seconds. You can test this by counting how often cuts occur in a film or TV show. This again reflects how much the director dictates the viewing experience.

This is why the work you do, especially at the beginning of the process, when it's just you and the script, is crucial. Not only do you have to know what you're doing but you'll have to be able to repeat it take after take, often from a variety of angles so the director can get his/her coverage.

This is how Mark Rylance (multi-Tony Award and Academy Award winner) explains the early part of his process: "I like to do all this work before, which to my mind is like turning the soil in a garden . . . [Then when rehearsals start] the soil is all very turned, it's all bouncing around in my psyche."¹

My grandfather was a farmer and I remember helping him as a kid (as much as a five-year-old child can help an adult) while he worked the fields. He was unbelievably patient as he explained how a single kernel of corn could grow into a 7-foot-tall cornstalk bearing many ears of corn. He told me, "First you've got to turn the soil. You got to break it up so when you plant the seeds they have a better chance of growing." And that is what this process is about: tilling the soil, laying the groundwork so your crop—acting, developing a character—has a better chance of succeeding.

WHAT IS ACTING?

Ask any actor, or acting teacher for that matter, and you will get a different answer. Some acting teachers think acting, especially acting for the camera, is reacting. And while I basically agree, there is much more to it than that. An actor's reaction happens because the character he/she created stands for something or desires something. So, before you can have an honest reaction you have to know, your character has to know, what he/she stands for or what he/she wants. That is what this work is all about: developing your characters so you know these things. You simply can't "react" without having first done the homework. This technique shows you how to explore your characters so that you'll know what they want and why they want it and how they plan to get it.

We will get into this later, but an essential component to every scene is that one character wants something, either from another character or from the situation. And the other character, or the overwhelming circumstances of the situation, works against that happening. This creates conflict and tension, two of the cornerstones for good storytelling.

Years ago, when I was first starting out, I stood in for Jeff Bridges (Academy Award winner) on a short film, *The Girls in Their Summer Dresses*. He likes to develop his characters by improvising his way through the script. Meryl Streep (winner of three Academy Awards with nineteen nominations), whom I have never worked with but would like to, does tons and tons of homework before the cameras ever roll. Mel Gibson (Academy Award winner) likes to wing it and not rehearse. I recently heard Robert Downey Jr. (multiple Golden Globe awards) tell a story about working with Mel on *Air America*, an action-based film about helicopter pilots flying illegal missions into Laos. Just before shooting the film's most harrowing scene, where their helicopter crashes, Mr. Downey, a more studied, traditionally trained actor, kiddingly said to Mr. Gibson, "I don't need to rehearse this. Let's just wing it, okay?" To his dismay, Mel said, "Yeah, great. Let's do it." Different strokes for different folks.

It's important, as you read the following chapters, to remember that the intention of this process isn't to restrict you to a set of choices but rather to open you up to the idea of making choices. Once you start working with your scene partner and a director, you will find yourself making new discoveries based on their input. You may also discover that what they brought to the party isn't as good as what you brought and, if that happens, you'll be very happy you did your homework.

WHY IS TECHNIQUE IMPORTANT?

Technique is the science that turns your acting into art. During the course of our careers we will all encounter a role or two that fits us like a glove. We don't have to do a lot to master those roles because they sing to us and instinctively we know what to do. The technique described in this book is designed to provide you with a foundation so you can successfully create the hundred or so other roles you will get to play in your life.

The information contained in this book gives you an array of tools that will help you at every phase of your career: from the very first moment you thought you wanted to be an actor to those early, often difficult days when you knew what you wanted to do but didn't yet have the skills to do it, to your first professional job and, finally, to the time we all strive for, when you've reached the point in your career where you've mastered the science of your craft and you're making a real contribution to the world through your art.

Anyone who has seen HBO's *Angels in America* knows what I'm talking about. The stellar cast, headed by Meryl Streep, Al Pacino, Emma Thompson, Jeffrey Wright, and Patrick Wilson, along with director Mike Nichols and writer Tony Kushner, not only created a masterpiece, but they also helped the world look at the global crisis of AIDS with new, more compassionate eyes. That is the power of art.

THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

If you've made the choice to be an actor, to go on this very complex but rewarding journey, I salute you. Acting is an honorable and noble profession. It is also a profession that will test the limits of your courage and endurance. Along the way there will be laughter, tears, frustration, and great triumphs. In the end, however, you'll have the satisfaction of knowing you've done your part to make the world a better place. You've made this decision because there's a passion stirring inside you. You hear the beat of a drum few people hear. Celebrate that. It means you're alive!



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Things Every Actor Should Know

THE THOUGHT PROCESS

There are probably as many definitions as to what acting is as there are actors. This is mine:

acting is the result of a thought process that ignites an emotion that provokes a behavior.

Everything discussed in this book is designed to enhance that thought process. What starts out as a thought in the actor's mind then ignites the actor's emotional center: the heart. Once the heart is engaged, it produces a series of behaviors that help define the character.

The original thought that results as the character's behavior comes from the actor's personal pool of information. But because the audience sees and hears the effect that information has on the situation the character is in, they assume the information originated with the character. It's only natural they would think that; in fact, that is exactly what we want them to think. Actors want to create fully realized, believable characters.

The camera may not know exactly *what* we're thinking but it certainly knows *if* we're thinking. In fact, what the actor is thinking—the material he/she uses from his/her “real” life in order to create the “reel” life of his/her

One of the things that makes film acting so difficult is that the camera has the ability to see our thought process.

character—may have little, if anything, in common with the character’s actual circumstances. But because the actor’s thought process produces the desired emotions and behaviors in the character, the audience make the leap. In their mind, what the actor is thinking and how the character is acting are one and the same.

For many of us, the most difficult journey we’ll ever embark upon is that eighteen-inch trek from our brain to our heart. Because of the nature of our work (our art) we’re often called upon to repeat what we do, whether it is take after take or performance after performance. In order to do this, we need a technique (a science) that allows us to delve into the deepest depths of our souls without causing any irrevocable harm to our psyche and without interrupting the flow of the story.

This process should be so smooth and so clean that it’s impossible for the audience to see the artist in the work. The only thing they should be aware of is the character living moment by moment. It isn’t important for the audience to know what the actor did to get the results he/she got. What’s important is that the characters are real and the emotions are genuine. Then, whatever the behavior is, it will seem as if it originated with the character.

The more we know about which thoughts produce which reactions in our emotional center, the easier it is for us to navigate our character’s journey.

THE GOAL

In spite of what our ego thinks, the shooting schedule on a film set revolves around the lighting. As an actor you could spend anywhere from an hour to eight hours in your trailer while the gaffers are setting and adjusting the lights. Then, when you’re called to the set, you have ten, fifteen, maybe twenty minutes to nail the scene. If the scene is difficult and you have to show a range of emotions, you can’t afford to get stuck anywhere along the way. You need to be able to do your work quickly so the crew can move on to their next setup. Too often in our business, art is compromised by commerce. So, the faster and better you are at doing your job, the more attractive you become to producers.

Think of the shoot as being a well-oiled machine. You’re one part—an extremely important part—but only one part of that machine.

The goal is to have your craft in such good shape that you can, without sacrificing any of your character’s integrity or emotional honesty, plug yourself into whatever the situation is, do your job, then disengage and be ready the next time you’re needed.

This may not sound glamorous, and it's certainly not very satisfying to the ego, but time is money in the film business and if you can save directors and producers either one or both of these two most precious commodities, you will work all the time.

DON'T LET THE LIMITATIONS OF OTHERS LIMIT YOU

As an actor, when you receive a film script you'll have at best 30 percent of the information necessary to create a fully realized character. The rest is up to you, and you'll need to fill in a lot of blanks. Even minor characters have major lives. We may not see the entirety of those lives played out on the screen, but that doesn't mean those characters don't have them. You must explore those lives so that, regardless of the amount of screen time your character has, we see a real, complete human being.

The better prepared you are, the better job you'll do. The better job you do, the better you make your director look. The better you make your director look, the more that director, and subsequently other directors, will want to work with you. And so it goes.

The same is true for your fellow actors. If you set high standards for yourself they will rise to your level. If their standards are lower than yours, if they aren't prepared, don't get sucked into their vortex. If they aren't up to your level, you don't have to be a prima donna to make your point. Just do your work and the work will speak for itself.

Another benefit of this technique is, if you've done your prep properly, the instant you look into the other actor's eyes it will be immediately apparent to you if that actor is ready to play at your level. If not, then you'll know you need to stick to your game plan and execute the scene the way you prepared it.

If, on the other hand, you look into the other actor's eyes and you see they're ready to play at your level, that they're as prepared as you are, that's when magic happens. And it's those moments of magic we all live for.

Another advantage of this technique is that, because of its thoroughness and attention to detail, it provides you with the potential to create that magic, not just once or twice during your career, but every time you work.

The amount of detail you provide determines how interesting your characters will be to watch and how much fun you'll have playing them.

YOU ARE YOUR OWN BEST RESOURCE

Nobody knows what makes you tick better than you. Every event you experience has an impact on you. Each incident sparks an emotion, and nobody knows better than you how that impact influences your emotions. Nobody knows what makes you truly happy or what makes you miserably sad; how you feel when you've been betrayed, or how jealousy eats away at you.

As an actor, one of your tasks is to categorize and store those emotional memories so you can use them in your work.

Emotions are our stock in trade, and your emotions, and the memories and events that sparked them, are money in the bank.

There may be some events from your life you can't use: memories that are too painful, scars that run too deep. Don't flog yourself by trying to make those memories work. Unlike other people who fight to repress their emotions, we as actors need to do a careful investigation of our lives so we can figure out which memories serve us and which don't. What

memories can we call up that will allow us to tap into the most basic of emotions—joy, sadness, anger, fear, jealousy, betrayal, embarrassment, and confusion—so we can do our work? Once we determine which memories are safe, which ones produce the results we want, we can use them to develop our characters' realities.

Whenever possible you want to use the power of a real event. The goal is to extract the emotion you need from it as seamlessly as possible so you can move on to the next beat of the scene.

Knowing what the journey is and how you're going to accomplish it step by step does not diminish your effectiveness as an actor; it enhances it. True, you need to allow for spontaneity in your work but you also need to prepare for the emotional demands of each scene so you have a foundation from which to work.

THE WHAT IF'S

If you're playing a mother who kills her children and is then racked with sadness, you don't have to kill someone you love to evoke that emotion. It's very possible you could duplicate the emotion by using an event from your real life, e.g., remembering how you felt when your puppy, Buster, was run over.

But what if Buster wasn't run over? What if you've dug into your memory bank and you can't come up with anything that approximates the