The Dynamic Actor Workshop: The Movement Score

After you’ve spent some time rehearsing and exploring a driving action, break the scene down into its beats. Remember, a beat change is usually triggered by a change in tactic. It is a shift in the direction of the scene, so when you have to take a new approach toward getting what you want (or when a new obstacle arises), it’s a new beat.

For class scenes, there are mostly likely five to ten beats. Don’t micro-dissect it, but don’t find just one transition.

Now: create a gesture that expresses each beat of the scene: what is happening, what tactic might you be using to carry out that driving action? It should vary from beat to beat.

Make it broad and expressive – not something you would use in the scene, but a large, abstracted statement in gesture. A “pleading” gesture is large and engages the whole body (not naturalistic). Or alarm that expresses itself only subtly in the scene might call for a full, dramatic “duck and cover” gesture. If you were to paint the action of the best into one static painting (of a dancer), what would it look like?

Practice each of the five to ten gestures interpedently, then start to practice them back to back. As you work, begin to weave the beat gestures into one fluid score that describes the scene. Develop transitions that take you from one gesture to the next, so that the separate gestures begin to tell one story with a beginning, middle, and end.

Once you developed your story, practice it several times. It should be exactly the same every time, like a choreographed dance. Specific. Specific. Specific. In its physicality and its meaning. Always keep a sense of ease and flow so you don’t wear yourself out. Let it fill your body, not strain it.

After you’ve done the score a few times, release. Take a deep breath. Run your scene.