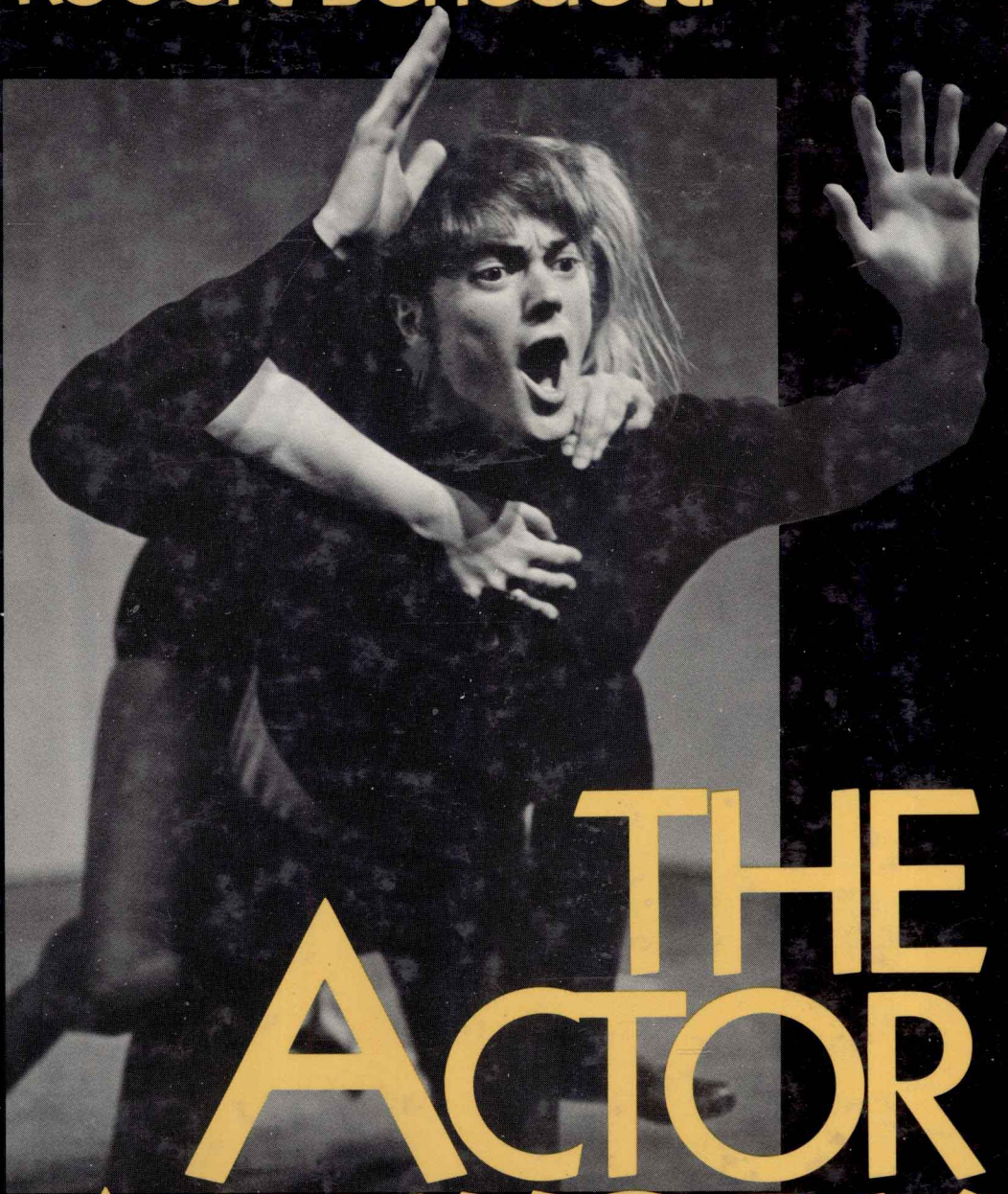


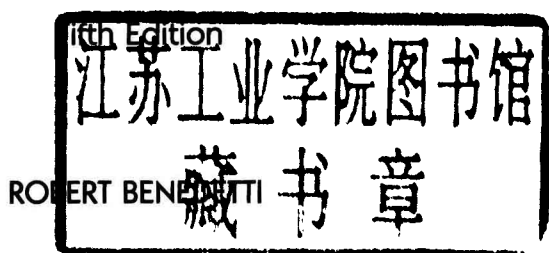
Robert Benedetti



THE ACTOR AT WORK

FIFTH EDITION

The Actor at Work



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Foreword

Ted Danson

I met Bob Benedetti (or “Beny,” as he likes to be called) nineteen years ago, when I was in his second-year acting class at Carnegie Tech. As long as I have known him, he has been exploring, discovering, and sharing what it means to act.

His classes filled me with the kind of excitement athletes must feel when they are in full stride. He taught me how to get acting out of my mind, out of theory, and into my body, into action; he gave me a point of concentration, so that my mind would not be censoring every impulse that came up.

He was also fun to be around, and he planted in me the thought that acting, and performing could be joyous. I will cherish him always for that, because as far as I’m concerned, acting, if it is nothing else, had best be joyous, both in the childlike spirit of play and as a profound celebration of life. For me, acting is a wonderful excuse to live life as fully as possible.

My mother had a prayer that has always stayed with me: “Dear Lord,” she would say, “please help me to become fully human.” The job of all of us in life is to experience the human condition and our own humanity fully; your job as an actor is to reflect what you have experienced in a way that clarifies and enhances people’s life.

As an actor, you are a *pleader of causes*. The characters you play have a cause, a purpose, and it is up to you to plead it with utmost integrity and commitment, as if a life depended on it—for in fact, it does.

To be able to do this, you must master the techniques of acting. You stretch your body, your voice, your thoughts and feelings so as to encompass as much of the human condition as possible; you must develop the capacity to reflect it all, not just that small portion with which you feel comfortable.

You must also live the same way: You must push past the comfortable, easy answers and explore the scary side of life and of yourself, for finally you have nothing to offer but yourself, your insights, your truth, your slice of the human condition. As you grow and expand, remember that at any moment in your personal journey as an actor, you have only yourself to offer: who you are at that moment is enough.

As you work to master technique, then, keep your attention focused outward. Don’t worry about yourself, think about everybody else; don’t worry

about being interesting, just be interested in everybody else, in life itself. All the technique in the world will be meaningless unless you have something worth sharing through it; technique is the tool you will use to communicate whatever you have to say, through the characters you choose to play, about the human condition.

To me, acting has itself become a life process. Whatever is next in my development as a human being will happen either through my everyday life or through my acting; they are completely intertwined. This blending of acting and living is never more obvious to me than when I am working on a film (or a play or any other creative group effort); when everyone is aligned toward the common purpose, then there are no more “accidents;” everything that happens at home, on my way to work, in front of the camera, all contributes to our creative purpose.

Only when you hold your acting separate from your life do they interfere with one another; when they are aligned, they feed each other. You can become a better actor by becoming a more complete human being, and you can become a more complete human being by becoming a better actor.

Back to technique!

Preface

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

In most situations, each of the four Parts of this book provides a full semester or quarter of study. For advanced high school students and beginning college students this book presents a two-year acting course.

If you are working within a program in which voice, speech, and movement are taught in separate classes, this book can be used as an acting studio text by skipping some of Part One and proceeding to the concept of action in Part Two. Depending on prior experience of the students, you may wish to begin with Lessons Seven and Eight which contain excellent introductory exercises to induce a playful and unselfconscious frame of mind. Intermediate students could begin directly with Part Two.

If either of these strategies is followed, I recommend that you read Part One carefully, as it contains basic principles important to the later work.

For an introductory class when no outside classes in technique are available, you might consider working on Parts One and Two simultaneously, using the development of physical and vocal skills as an ongoing parallel development within the acting class.

I would like to thank the following people for their assistance in reviewing *The Actor at Work* 5/E. Marc Powers, The Ohio State University; Michael J. Hood, University of Alaska, Anchorage; and John Cooke, George Mason University.

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Introduction

The Actor in You

You are already an actor. You “play a role” every time you adjust your behavior in order to achieve some desired goal: to get someone to do something, to persuade someone of something, to win love or respect. In various circumstances, in various relationships, you pursue your needs by behaving in certain ways, doing things to other people and reacting to the things they do to you. It is this interaction with your world, this give and take of doing things to others and having things done to you, that shapes and expresses your personality, your *character*, in everyday life.

In fact, you play *several* roles everyday—student, son or daughter, friend, employee—each with its own appropriate behavior, speech, thought and feelings; your own little repertory company!

To this extent, you already know how to act, because the art of acting is based upon these same life principles. As an art, however, acting requires that these everyday abilities and processes must be heightened and purified. As Brian Bates of the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art says in his book, *The Way of the Actor*,

Almost everything that actors do can be identified with things we do in less dramatic form, in everyday life. But in order to express the concentrated truths which are the life-stuff of drama, and to project convincing performances before large audiences, and the piercing eye of the film and television camera,