

The Set

The Color Studio. 'Downstage' Right is the low platform with the round table, three swivel chairs. On the Right wall, the windows of the Control Room. At the start there is no set and the floor space is empty but for the three video camera pedestals with cameras more or less side by side and pointed off to the left. Against the back wall are various elements of the set that will later be jumped into position on the floor. The center of interest at the beginning is the 'upstage' Right corner where a big drafting table is fitted with an anglepoise lamp (with photoflood bulb) over the collection of drawings, set plans, designs and a model which are on it.

The INSTRUCTOR walks to the table, switches on the lamp and, as he begins his narration, glances now and again at the papers or texts on the table.

1) Section One (① AND ②)

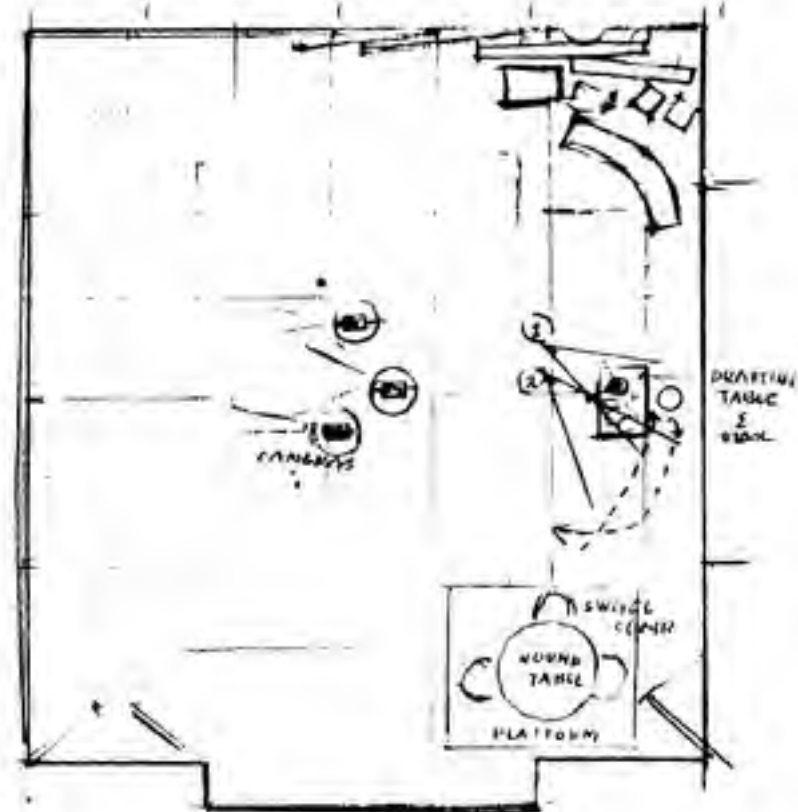
INSTRUCTOR

How does a director work? When he prepares to shoot a scene in film or video, how does he go about it? Reading the text, what is he looking for? Talking to the Designer, as they plan a set, what do they discuss? When the actors arrive, how does the director begin rehearsal, how does he know where to put the camera? How does he plan the camera 'coverage'? How does he know where the actors ought to move - and when?

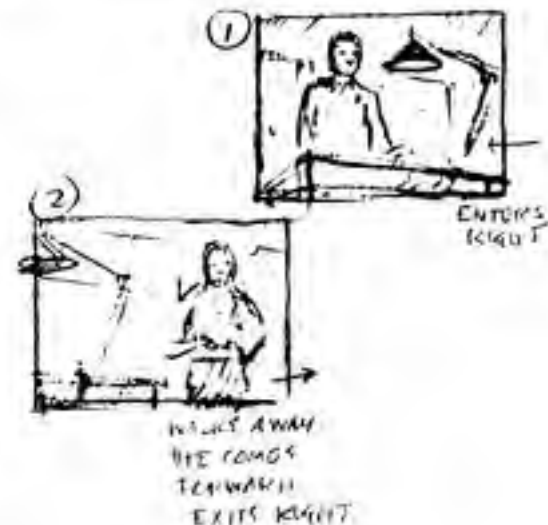
(All the above at the drafting table and more or less in a medium shot. But now the Instructor moves out onto the floor)

Well, the first point to make is that there are no 'rules'. None. There cannot be, simply because no two directors will ever work the same way. Indeed, the same director won't work the same way under different circumstances or working with a different kind of scene.

Having said this, I'll try to show you how



73



2

1

2) Section Two

Overlap the move from the table. The INSTRUCTOR crosses to the center of the floor, in the area of the three cameras. This, possibly, could be shot with simultaneous coverage of two cameras, one an angle which pans with the Instructor in a Medium Longshot, the other a much longer angle from high above - though not yet the extreme 'bird's eye view' of the bug-eye from the gantry.

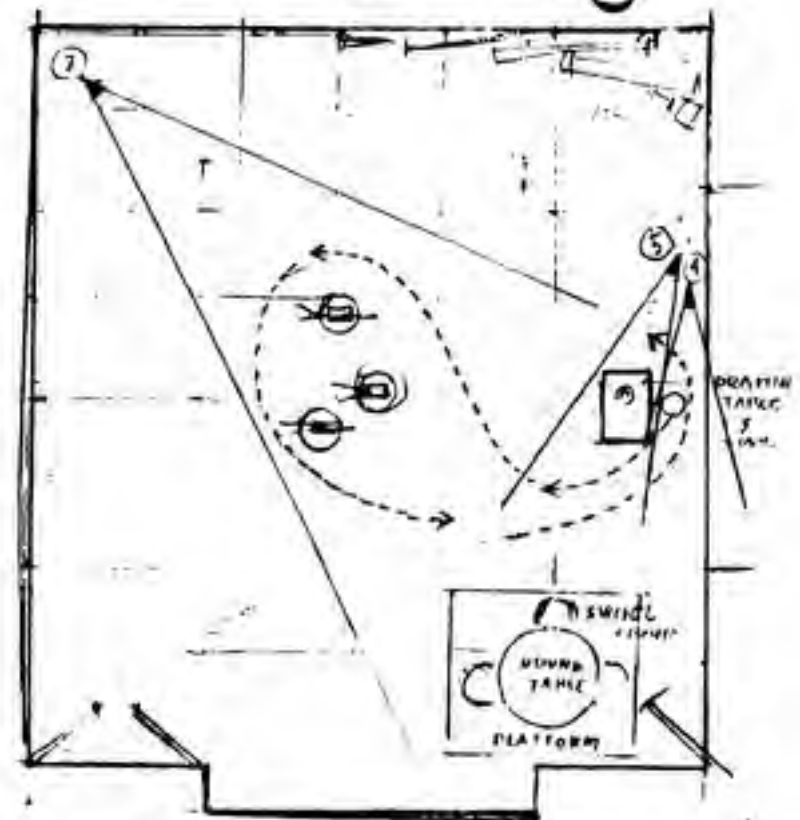
INSTRUCTOR
(continuing)

③

(Consulting the small book in his hand, the Instructor is making for the table 'downstage' Right, explaining)

The scene I'm going to use may seem to you an odd choice. It wasn't written for film or television. It's from a stage play - and not even a modern play, at that.

I've picked it because I've been reading again a small book by an old friend of mine, Peter Brook, the English director



INSTRUCTOR
(continuing)

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who has worked both in theater and in the cinema. It's called 'The Empty Space' and it's mostly about the theater, but there's one passage in it where Peter is discussing a point that I'm trying to make - a point about dialogue. About the difference between dialogue for the stage and dialogue for the screen. Really a point about the relation of the text as written - and the action as it becomes visible on the screen, the small screen or the large.

The INSTRUCTOR. (who really ought to be moving from Right to Left at this point) is making for the table as he exits shot -

3) Section Three

Note: the material below will need to be intercut with existing shots, including one which shows the INSTRUCTOR in backview with the two actors beyond. However, I would like to add both some additional lines from the Instructor and also to cover his reactions to the offscreen delivery of the actors lines as well as an insert of the text that is being read, as seen in the clipboard in the hands of the Instructor. I suggest, therefore an angle which, excluding the actors, shoots towards the windows of the Control Room, with the Instructor's eyeline Right towards the actors. (Could we also shoot to playback of the actor's lines while covering the reactions?)

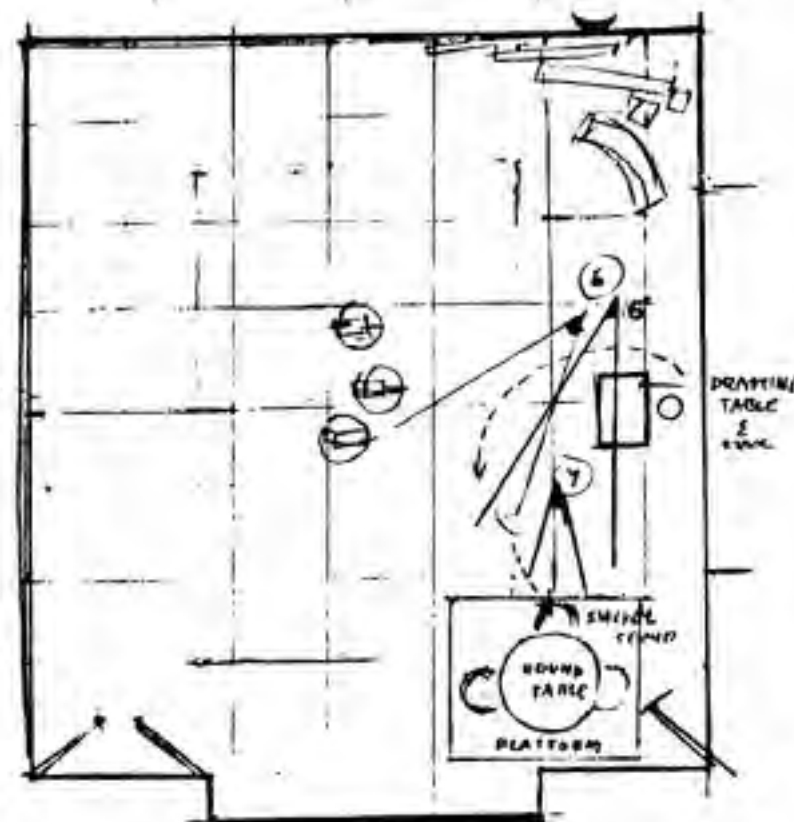
(At this point, the Instructor should exit frame on the Left, the book in his Left hand. We cut to existing material. Entering frame Right, the Instructor takes a seat at the table where there are two other empty chairs. The clip board is on the table already)

INSTRUCTOR
(continuing)

The exercise that Peter Brook developed was from Shakespeare -

(he is seated)

- It's Romeo's farewell to Juliet, a fairly well known scene.



INSTRUCTOR
(continuing)

(turns away from camera.
The light is dimming)
We've got two actors here to help us.
(Actors enter from the
Right of screen and take
their seats at the table)
This is Murphy Cross - Matt Landers.
Let's go through and read the thing
quite straight - as in a first reading.
So let's hear it.

NEW MATERIAL

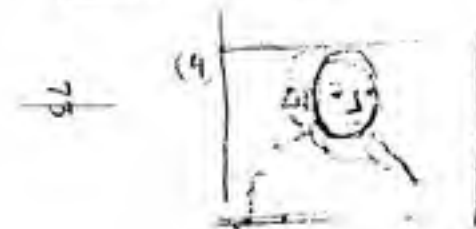
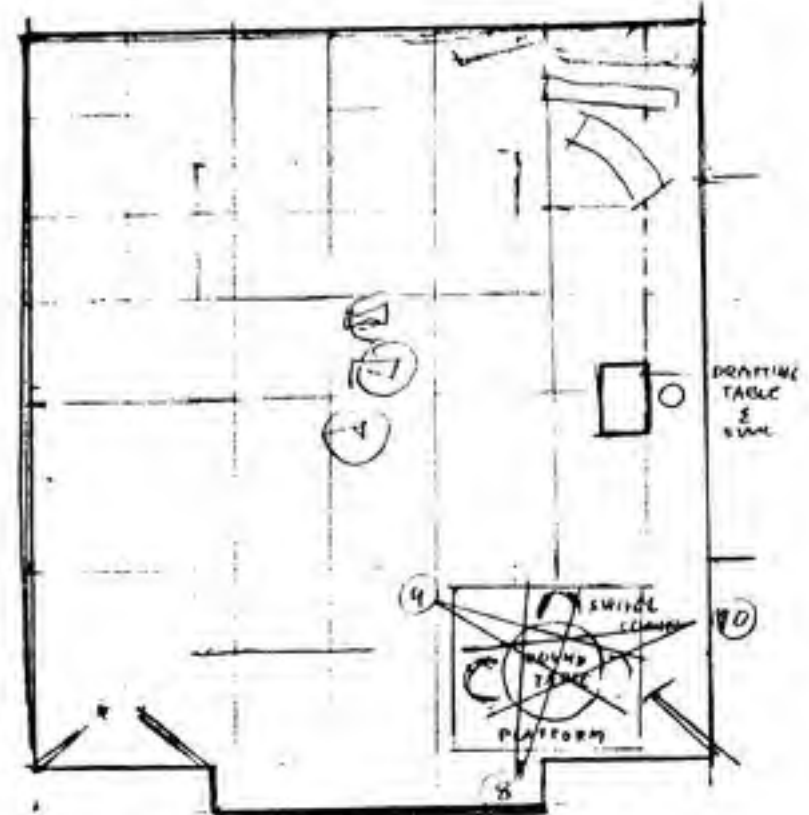
Let me explain what I mean about 'quite straight'. I mean really - 'without too much expression'. Without a lot of 'acting'.

This is standard procedure at the first reading. Indeed, there are directors and actors who go a lot further - who say that, during the first reading of the text, the actors should try to read the lines with no meaning whatsoever - rattling them off in a monotone as if they were a page from the phone book. In practice, this can be quite hard to do - to memorise all the words quite mechanically so that they can be memorised at machine-gun speed - coming to your memory without a split second of thought or hesitation. The theory behind this is that the emotion should be deliberately repressed until it can be discovered at a later stage. More of that a bit later.

We needn't go that far. But just let's hear the lines as they come quite naturally.

JULIET

Wilt thou be gone? It is not yet near day.
It was the nightingale and not the lark
That pierced the fearful hollow of thine ear.
Nightly she sings on yonder pomegranate tree.
Believe me, love it was the nightingale.



ROMEO

It was the lark, the herald of the morn
- No nightingale: look, love, what envious streaks
Do lace the clouds in yonder East.
Night's candles are burnt out and jocund day
Stands tiptoe on the misty mountain tops.
I must begone and live, or stay and die.

JULIET

Yond light is not daylight, I know it, I.
It is some meteor that the sun exhales,
To be with thee this night a torch bearer
And light thee on thy way to Mantua.
Therefore stay a while. Thou shalt not go so soon.

ROMEO.

Let me stay here - Let me be ta'en and die.
I am content, so thou will have it so.
I'll say yon grey is not the morning's eye.
T'is but the pale reflex of Cynthia's brow.
I'll say it is the nightingale that beats
The vaulty heaven so high above our heads,
And not the lark, the messenger of morn.
I have more care to stay than will to go.
Come, Death, and welcome! Juliet wills it so.
What says my love? Let's talk: 'tis not yet day.

JULIET

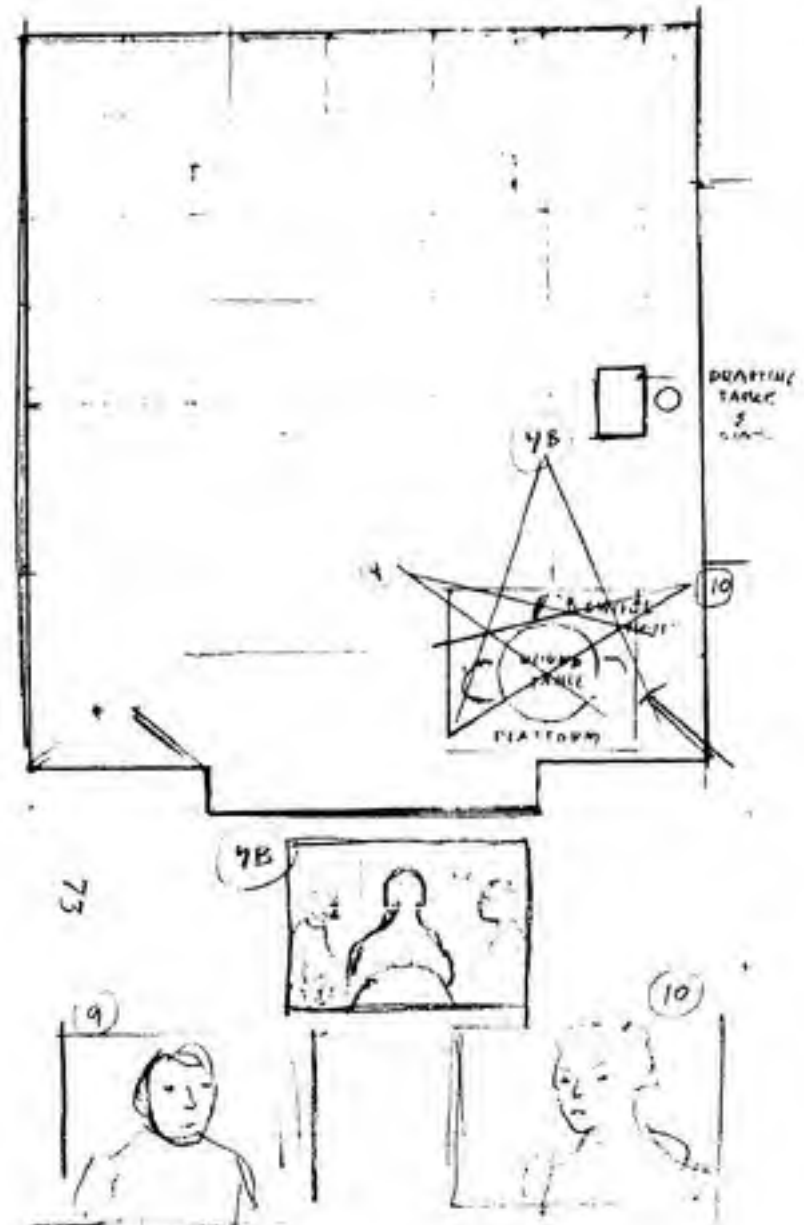
It is, it is! Be gone! Fly hence!
Away to the lark that sings so harshly out of tune.
Straing harsh discords and unpleasant sharps.
Some say the lark makes sweet divisions;
This doth not so, for this divideth us.
Some say the lark and loathed toad changed eyes.
I would they had changed voices, too.
Since arm from arm her voice does not affray-
Hunting they hence with hunt's up to the day.
So now be gone! More light and light it grows.

ROMEO

More light and light; more dark and dark our woes.

INSTRUCTOR

Thankyou. Fine!



NEW MATERIAL

INSTRUCTOR
(continuing)

Thankyou - fine!

One more point. During this stage, while the actors are reading the lines, the student director is apt to feel impatient. He's in a hurry to 'start directing'.

Now this is a mistake! The directing has already started!

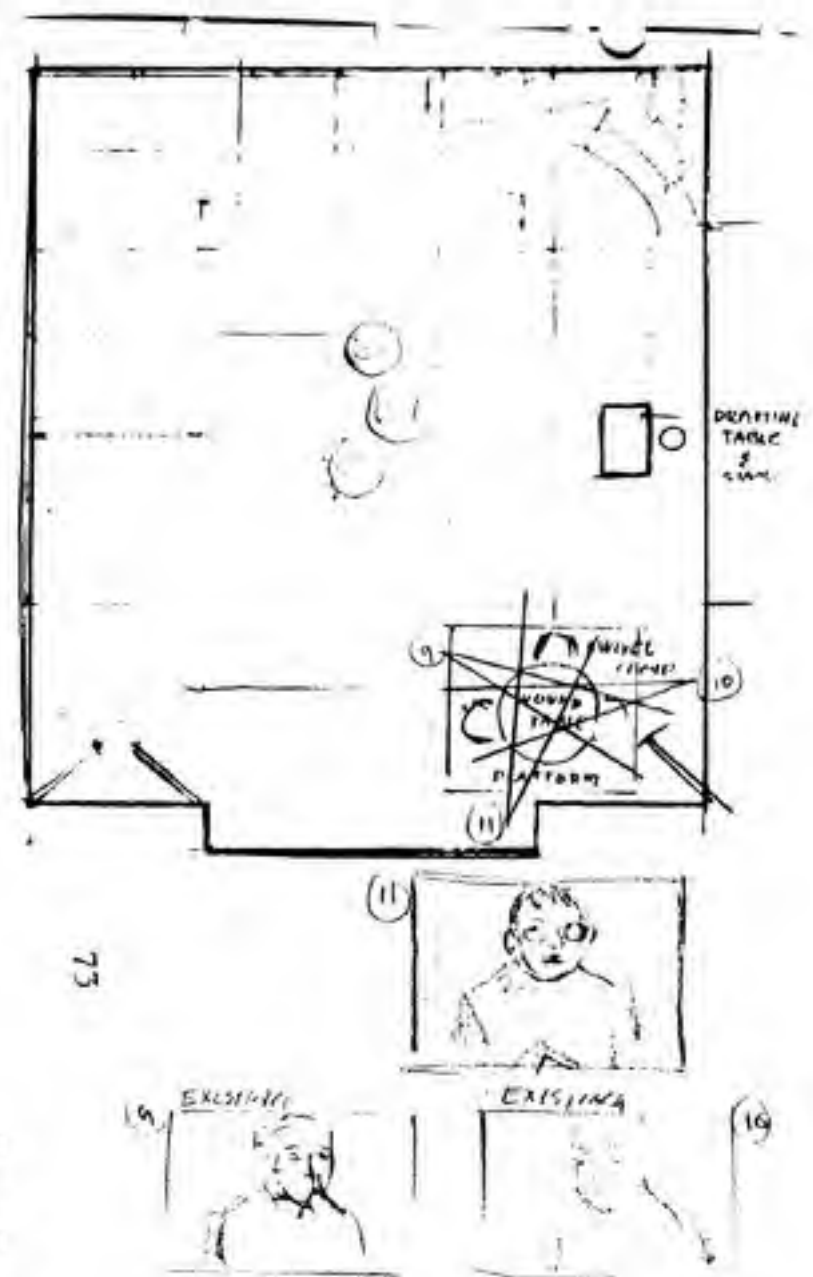
Because the first and most important thing that a director has to do with the actors is listen. Just that - listen. And it may not be quite as easy as you think. Just as the actors can make the mistake of jumping a bit too soon to the most obvious reading of the line - the intonation and the phrasing that comes first to the lips - so too the director is likely to have read the lines on the page and to have 'heard them inside his head'.

If you do that, you may find that when the actor plays the line not exactly as you had heard it, somehow it 'sounds wrong'. You may in a way be 'deaf' to the new sound of the line as it comes from this particular actor.

This is to fail in your first duty as a director. What a director needs from the actor is not an imitation of the way the director might play the character. That will always be second-rate - since nobody can give as good an imitation of you as you do yourself. What you as a director need is the particular quality that this actor can bring to the scene. So listen! Listen and watch! Keep your mind open to the individual qualities that this person can bring to the role.

Section Four

Note: a problem here. In the existing material the Instructor turns at this point in the direction of the camera which was shooting on his back. If we have



now decided to eliminate an audience of students who would be behind him and whose presence would justify the turn, will it be plausible to use this turn? Or do we have to shoot some of the Instructor's speech over again?

INSTRUCTOR
(continuing)

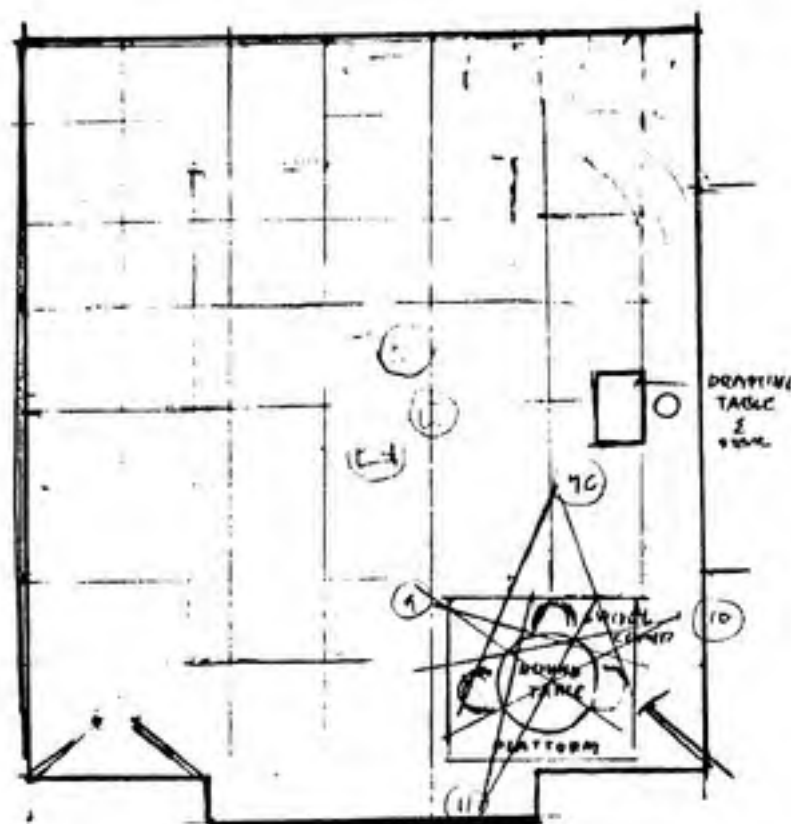
We've read the text - as written. The spoken word.

Peter's exercise was to ask the actors to select only those words that they could play in a 'realistic' situation - 'the kind of words that could be used unself-consciously in film.

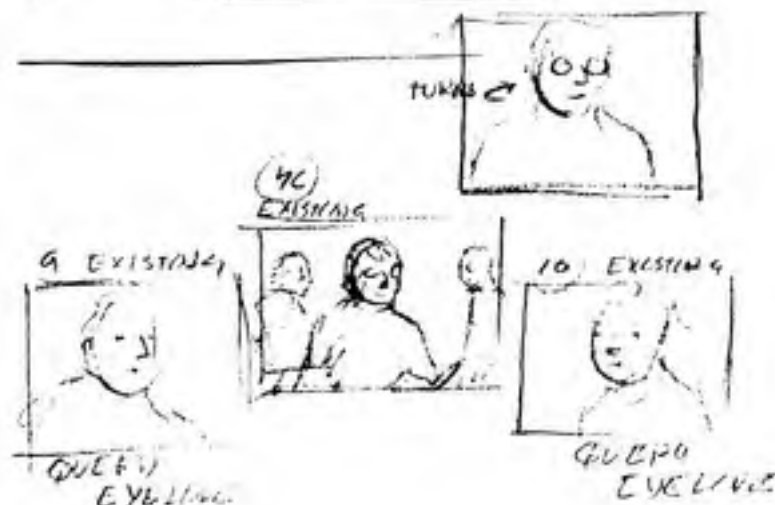
So I'm going to ask them to read the scene over again - but speak aloud only those of the lines that are 'like everyday speech'. Meanwhile, as Peter Brook suggests, they should still retain the rest of the speeches, the 'poetic' passages - but unspoken, as if they were listening to them as 'interior thought', things heard inside the head.

Let's try it.

RESUME EXISTING MATERIAL



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JULIET
Wilt thou be gone?

(A LONG PAUSE)

I must be gone and live - or stay
and die.

(ANOTHER LONG PAUSE)

JULIET
Therefore stay a while. Thou shalt
not go so soon.

(PAUSE)

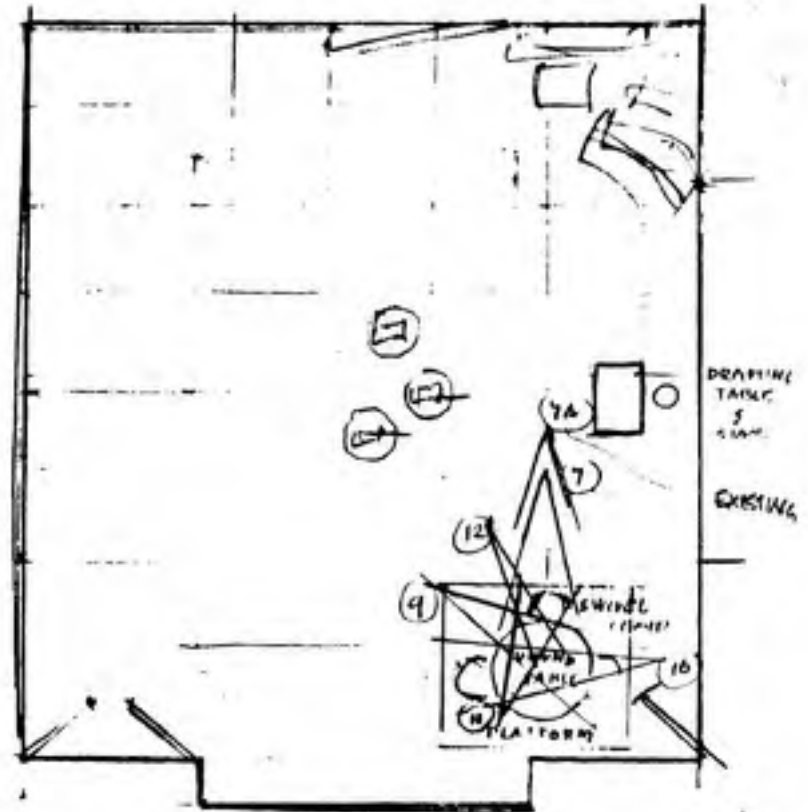
ROMEO
Let me stay here -
(PAUSE)
'Tis not yet day.

(ANOTHER PAUSE)

JULIET
It is - it is!
(PAUSE)
More light and light it grows.

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NOTE: During the period when the actors are speaking
I should only some of the lines, I think we ought to have
material on the Instructor as he listens, consulting
the clipboard in his hands - as well as insert detail
the text to show his hand editing out the poetic
messages, leaving very little else.



5) Section Five

The INSTRUCTOR rises from the swivel chair and starts back in the direction of the drafting table at which he began.

INSTRUCTOR
(continuing)

So much for poor old Will Shakespeare.
We've thrown him away. There's nothing
left of all that marvellous language -
nothing but words that are bald and banal.

I wouldn't have had the nerve to suggest
this exercise - a castration of a kind -
if I hadn't found it in what Peter Brook
has written here. Peter, of all people,
who has directed some of the most famous
of Shakespearean stage productions.

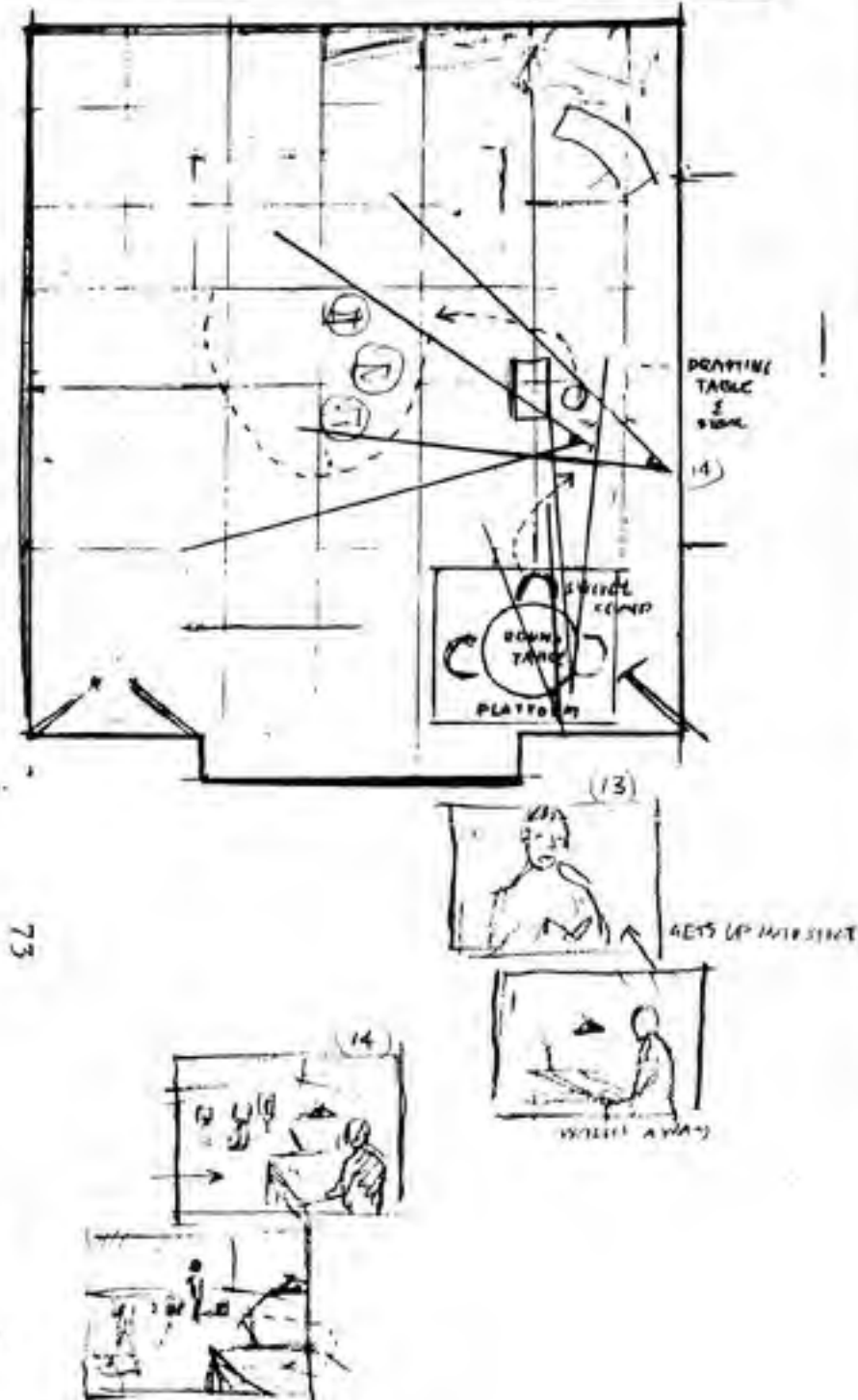
But Peter was making a point that I need
to pursue in relation to the questions that
we asked first: how does the director start
when he begins to plan the staging?

One answer is that he has to dig underneath
the written text to explore for something
else: the action of the scene. Regardless
of what the characters are saying - what
are they doing.

(Arriving back at the drafting
table, but now with the camera
so that we can shoot with the
material on its top in foreground
and the studio beyond)

INSTRUCTOR
(continuing)

We've had the actors read the text. The scene
is Juliet's bedroom. It's pretty obvious what
are the elements that we need in the set.
There's Juliet's bed. A window that looks out
on the dawn, et cetera. How do we arrange these
elements? Where do we put them?



Well, when the beginner walks on to a sound stage like this, he or she is apt to take for granted some things that might usefully be questioned.

Example: here are the cameras. In the center of the room. If you don't bother to think about it, you might assume that, of course, I'll put the bed and the window over there -

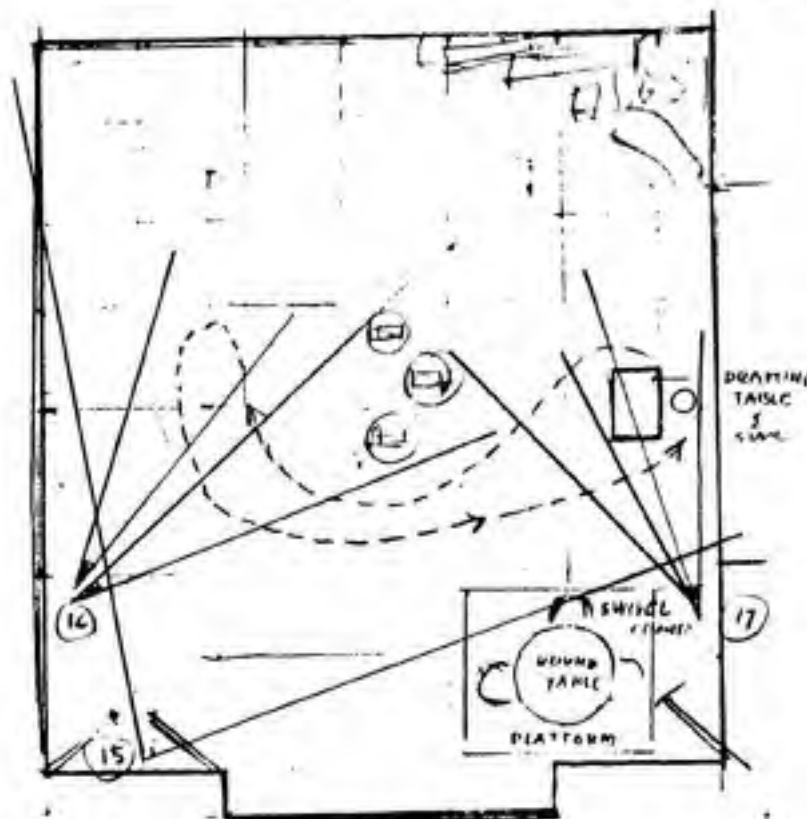
-right?

(A jump cut. The low platform that represents the bed and the window piece abruptly assume positions in front of the three cameras, near to the Left wall)

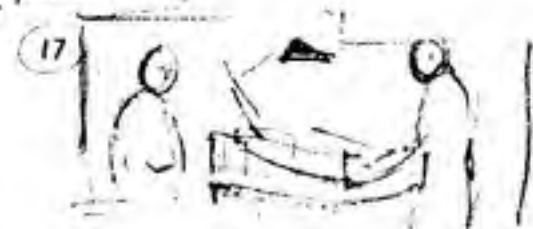
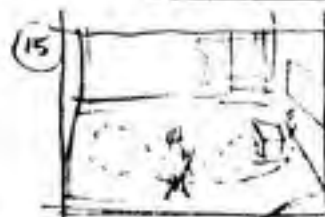
Well, yes. That may be what we want. It's not necessarily 'wrong'. On the other hand, consider. We have left these three cameras here - perhaps for a 'mastershot' and two closer angles. The cameras are more or less side-by-side and all shooting in the same direction - more or less. Is that really what I want?

By 'mastershot', we mean simply the longer angle in which we see both of the characters that are in the scene in the same frame. If the shot is to hold both the window and the bed then I have to bring this camera back a bit. Do I have room? Yes.

(Center camera is moved by to a position in front of the Control Room window. The Instructor moves back to the drafting table, studies the set plan, makes some digrammatic scribbles.)



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(11)

INSTRUCTOR
(continuing)

We could get a mastershot roughly like this. In order that both are in the frame it has to be an angle in which Juliet, who may be on the bed and Romeo who is likely to move to the window, are full length figures. Quite small in the frame. Now this may be exactly what I want. If, for example, I think that it is more important to show all the surroundings, the room et cetera, rather than the figures, then this will do it.

Also, if I leave the other two cameras in that position, shooting in the same direction then, when Romeo is turned towards Juliet and Juliet is looking at him, the camera will see them in profile. Is that what I want?

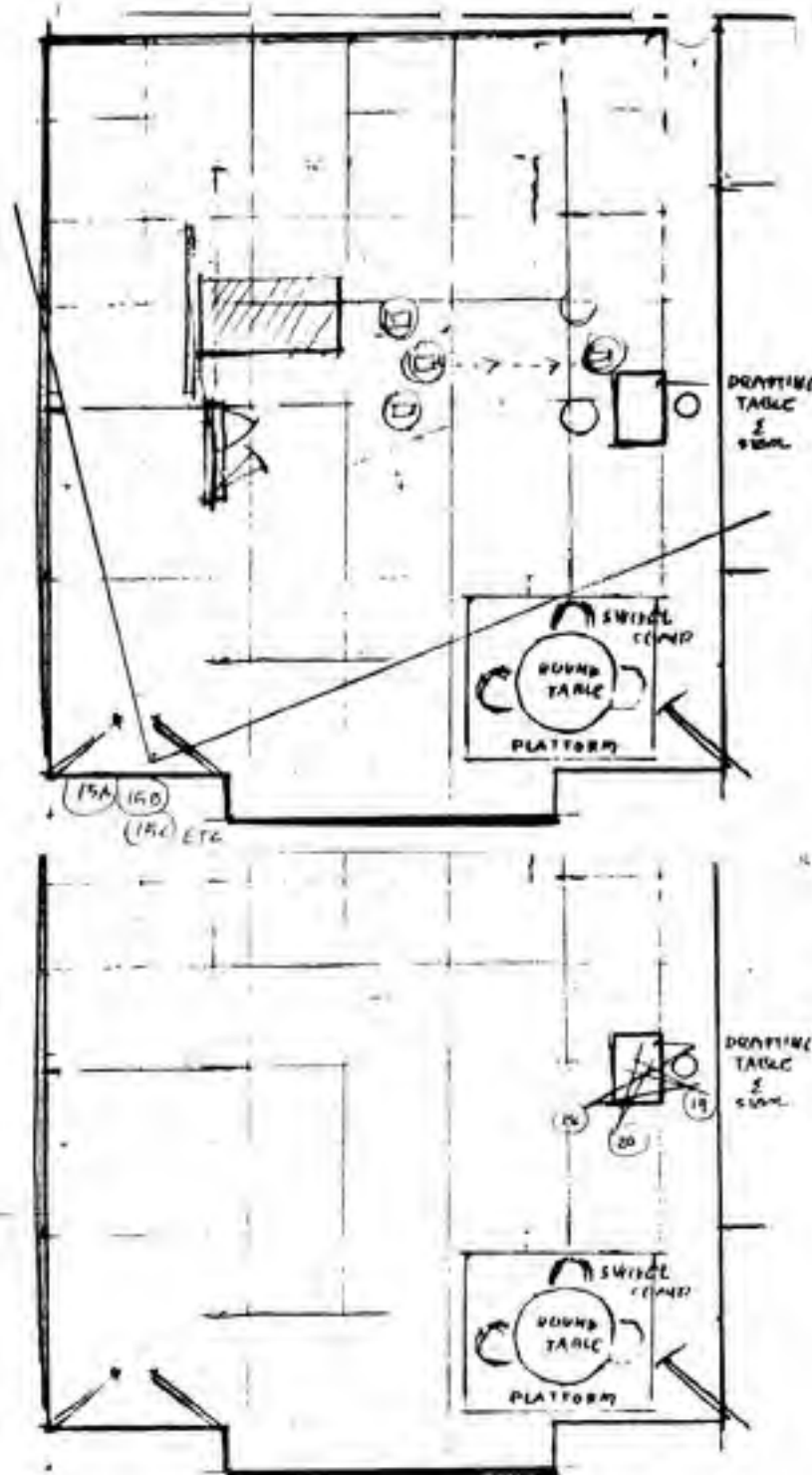
What I have done here, in fact, is arrange all of the elements as if we were in the live theater - as if cameras were an audience that was sitting back and looking at a theater proscenium. Which is, incidentally, exactly the way in which the very first pioneer movie makers, like the Lumiere Brothers and Georges Melies shot their films at the start of this century.

Since then, directors are more apt to approach things differently. Let's start over.

(The bed and window vanish)

For myself, my first instinct would be to ignore the camera positions. Get the cameras out of the way. We'll decide where they should go a bit later.

(Cameras also move back in the direction of downstage Right. Instructor is at the drafting table)



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INSTRUCTOR
(continuing)

Whether it is on a location, or as here on a sound stage, it's my habit to look for what I think of as the 'longest axis'. The word axis means simply an imaginary line of 'tension' between two points of interest - usually between two actors but also between two important elements in the set, the areas where there is likely to be dramatic action or stage 'business'.

So where is this axis? Arbitrarily, since the stage is empty, let's say it is this diagonal - that corner to this.

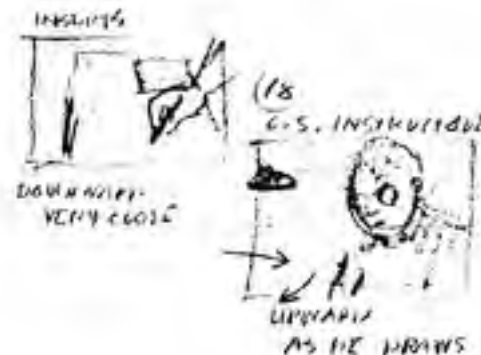
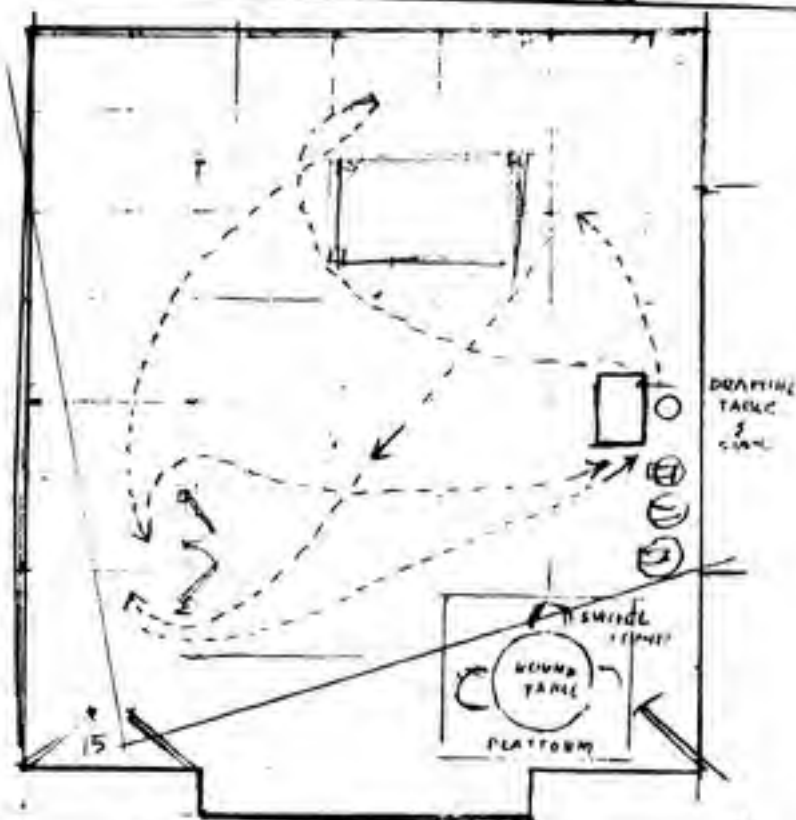
I decide to place these two elements on this line. The window over there. The bed back here. And, as I consider where I will place the camera for a mastershot, I imagine that I may place the camera so that it shoots along this line - either here, from the bed in foreground towards the window. Or from the window, back towards the bed, like this.

I could also, of course, put the mastershot on the other side of this line, this 'axis'. Either here, behind the bed towards the window. Or outside the window, looking back in the direction of the bed.

For the moment, I don't make any decision - because I have learned from experience that in all probability I may use all of these. But I do think in terms of staging that is 'in depth' - meaning camera angles that are placed along the line of a principle axis.

What's the point? Well, you'll see that if you think in terms of story-board diagrams that indicate the composition of the frame. Like this.

(Details of the Instructor's hand making scribbled diagrams of the shots on a pad placed on the top of the drafting table)



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(13)
INSTRUCTOR
(CONTINUING)

To take the mastershot, for instance, it means that Romeo at the window may still be a full length figure, but Juliet on the bed will be a Medium Shot or a Close Shot and the composition will be a little more quote-dramatic-unquote. There will be less 'air' around the figure. The image will be composed more 'tightly', more of its area devoted to the actors and less to the set.

Again, this is not necessarily better. As the Italian director, Antonioni has said, 'the actors are not always the most important thing in the scene' - but it is at least a point to which you should give thought.

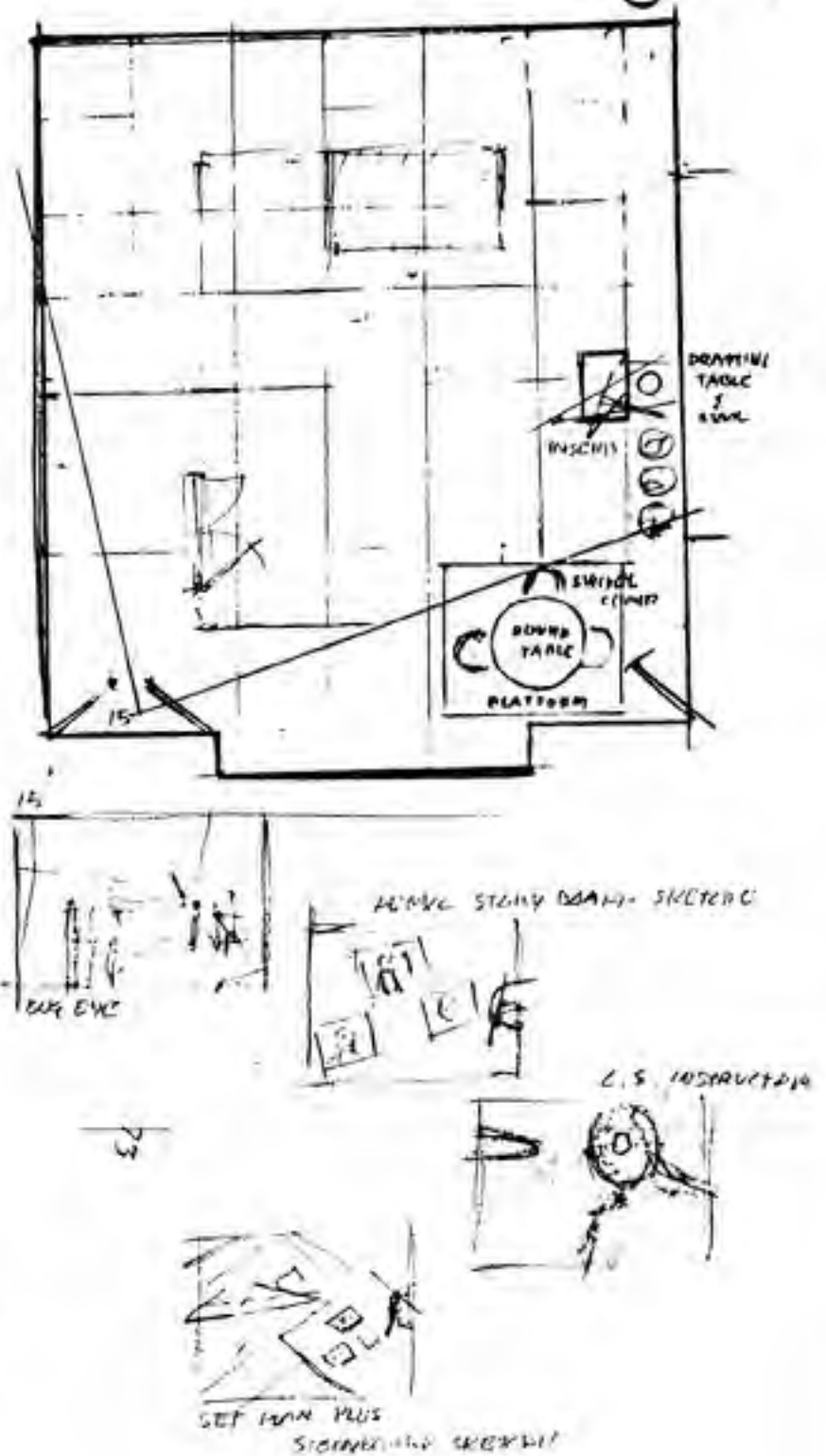
Moreover, when it comes to the positioning of cameras that may cover closer angles of the two angles, I'll consider that these should also be close to the axis - in fact, a little closer to the axis than the master, 'inside' the longer angle in relation to the master.

You may see the point of this in diagramming the coverage. This way, the faces are seen not in profile but more frontally - with the 'eyeline', which means the direction of the look past the camera rather closer to the lens. When the eyeline is closer to the lens there seems to be much more impact of the personality of the actor. We feel more sense of identification with his or her thoughts and emotions.

The cut from the mastershot to the closer angle also seems to have more point, more of a reason for the jump in space and is thus 'more natural', paradoxically a cut that seems 'smoother' because it leaps us to a place where we can see more of what we want to see.

These are standard formulas of 'film grammar' - as it applies both to cinema and to video.

(Instructor leaves the table to move on to the floor)

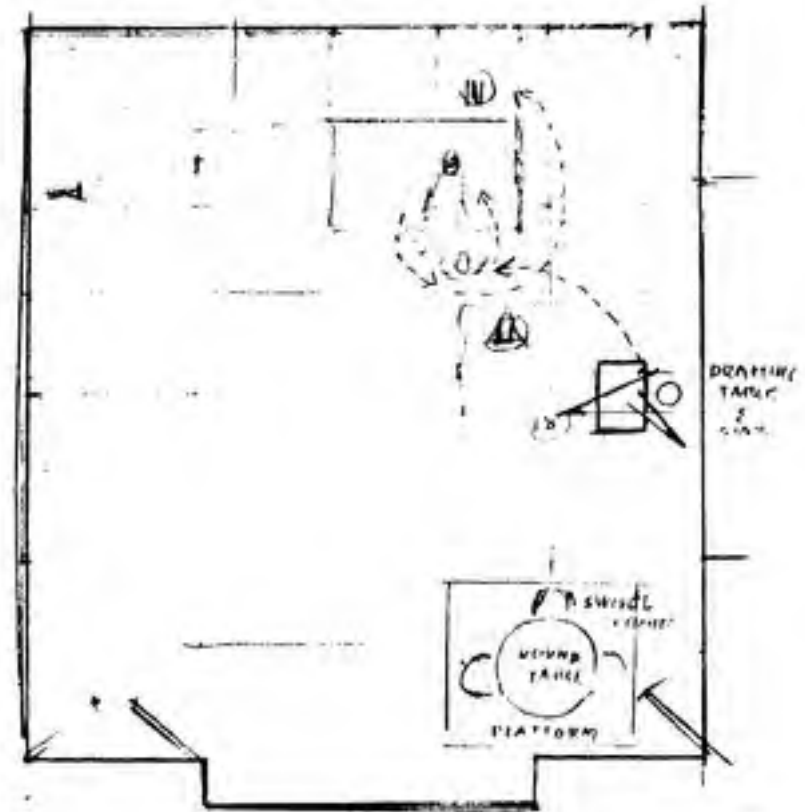


INSTRUCTOR
(continuing)

Incidentally, one should also keep in mind that the 'axis' works not only in the horizontal but also in the vertical plane - and this is often slightly more of a problem in television than it is in film. Take the height of the bed. If it low, like this - and if somebody stands beside it looking down on the person who is lying on the bed, then the axis obviously is on a slope, steeply up and steeply down. Studio television cameras tend to be mounted on pedestals like these that have a very limited range in height. To keep really close to the axis, looking up past the actor lying on the bed in foreground, I would have to be at floor level - which means that I'd have to have a huge are of ceiling piece up there. Not very practical.

The solution to this is simple, though the beginner may not anticipate it. If I can't place the cameras to the axis, then I arrange the axis to the limitations of the camera - by building up the level of the bed. Oddly, this is very seldom obvious on the screen, even when furniture is built up as much as eighteen inches or more.

These are practical matters. You may find that they are things to consider at quite an early stage in the process because they can handicap you badly if the problems are not anticipated, but we are concerned here with issues very much more complex and subtle.



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(21A)



INSERTS
DRAWN TO
MATCH THE
LIVE SHOTS

INSTRUCTOR
(continuing)

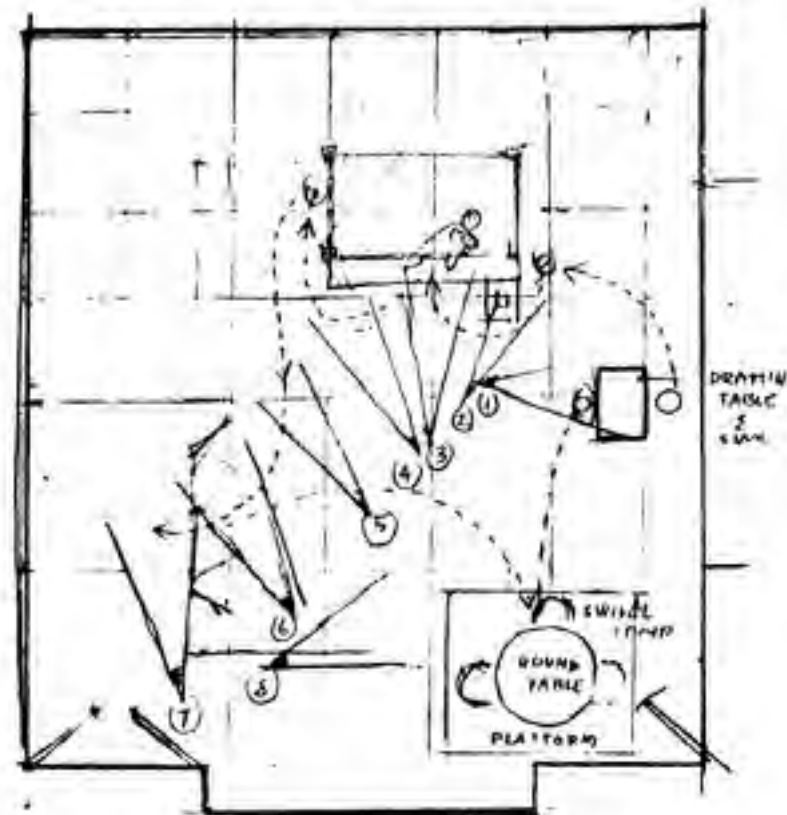
A while ago a Film student asked me, "how do you get actors to do what you want?" This way of putting it took me by surprise so that, for the moment, I couldn't think of an answer and tried to describe the process in other terms. But the student persisted and kept repeating the question. Irritably, I found myself saying, "you don't! You get actors to want what you need them to do!"

I think this is a better way of describing the process because it hints at the real answer; the director ought to be - to some extent - 'something of an actor himself'. By that I don't mean that you, as a director, have to be any good as an actor or have all the skills that a true actor should have. Only that, by one means or another, you should have personal and first-hand experience of acting from the actors point of view.

You have to have the instincts of the actor. When - and only when you understand these then you will know how to communicate with the actor in his or her terms - not yours.

There is much lively argument of whether actors are - or need to be - 'intelligent'. Jean Renoir, a great director of actors, said what I think is the last word when he said that many actors are very intelligent - 'but it is not with their intelligences that they act.' The actor may or may not have intellectual abilities. What he must have is intense imagination.

Imagination is not quite the same thing as the capacity for clear thinking since that is apt to be a verbal and critical gift. Imagination, is what the word itself implies - the capacity to create images. Indeed, not only to conjure up in your mind's eye the most vivid picture of how things appear to the eye, but also the sounds, the smells, the touch and taste of things remembered and then recreated in make believe. What the actor does is just that 'make beliefs' - make them in his mind's eye and ear in order to help us see and hear them as well.



- SUGGEST A MOOD CHANGE HERE
- AT (1) INSTRUCTOR SWITCHES OFF THE ANGLE LIGHT
 - AT (2) HE LIGHTS SMALL CANDLES
 - (3) HE STALKING ON THE BEH
 - (4) HE CIRCLES IT TO OTHER SIDE
 - (5)(6)(7) CAMERA TRACKS HIM TO WINDOW
 - (6) IT PANS AS HE WALKS OFF INTO A LONGEST, COLLECTS LONGER, FROM THE ROUND TABLE, RETURNS TO THE FRONT OF DRAWING TABLE TO SOLIDIFY THE WHOLE SET.

INSTRUCTOR
(continuing)

So, for me, the first step in the staging is to 'walk' the scene all alone, I do it in private because it is really rather a private piece of business. I explore this area - a bare stage at the moment - because here is where I have to build not just a set with walls and windows, doors, furniture... What I have to build is the whole world that lies beyond the walls...

('Subjective', voice over?)

'That's the East out there, believe it or not. That's where the sun will soon be coming up... How did I get here? I climbed up on the balcony, using those creepers. I had to cross the orchard there. That's the pomegranate tree... that damn bird...'

(Synch again)

You should note that I'm not really the first to explore this wholly fictitious geography. Another man was here before me - the one who wrote the words, because that's where all this is coming from...

(Subjective again)

"Up there above it's still quite dark. You can still see the stars ... though you can't see the bird..."

(Synch again)

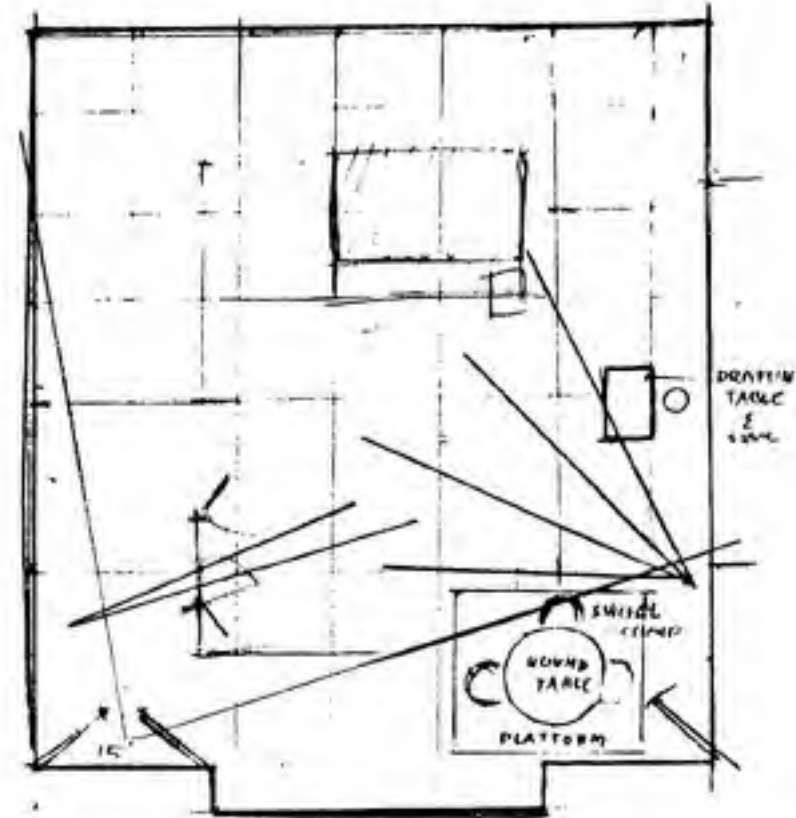
Now something occurs to me. This is the point of what I was saying earlier, about not jumping to quickly to the first meaning of the text as you read it on the page. Because, now that I have begun to inhabit this space in ways that are palpable, that I can feel, I realise abruptly that Romeo isn't looking at the beauty of the scenery out there. He's watching for something else entirely.

(Subjective)

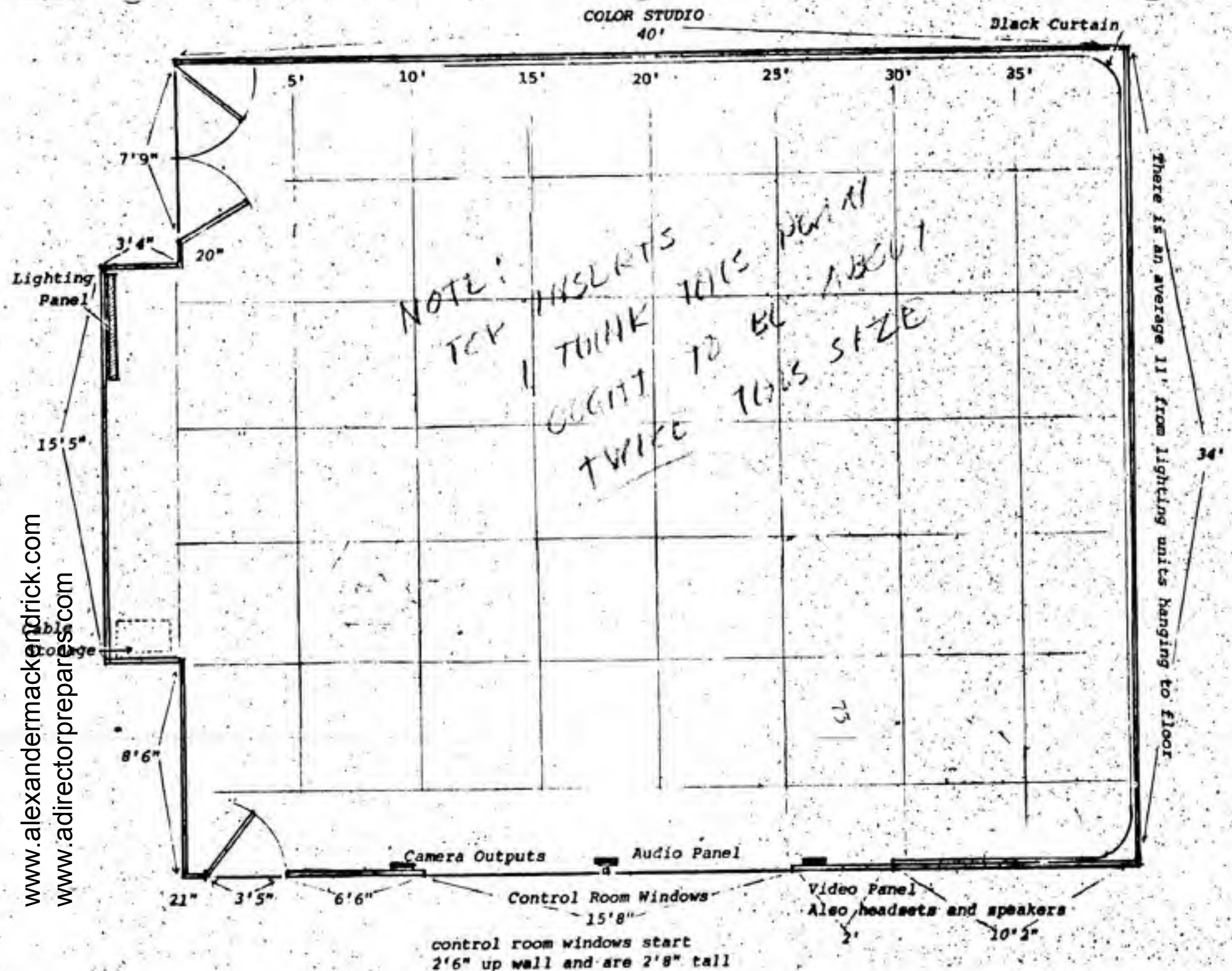
"The stables are over there. That's where I heard a dog a little while ago. Capulets. Man, if I'm caught here, right in her bed... She's still asleep. Look at her..."

(Synch)

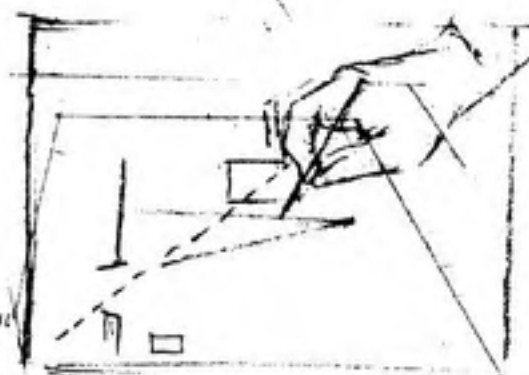
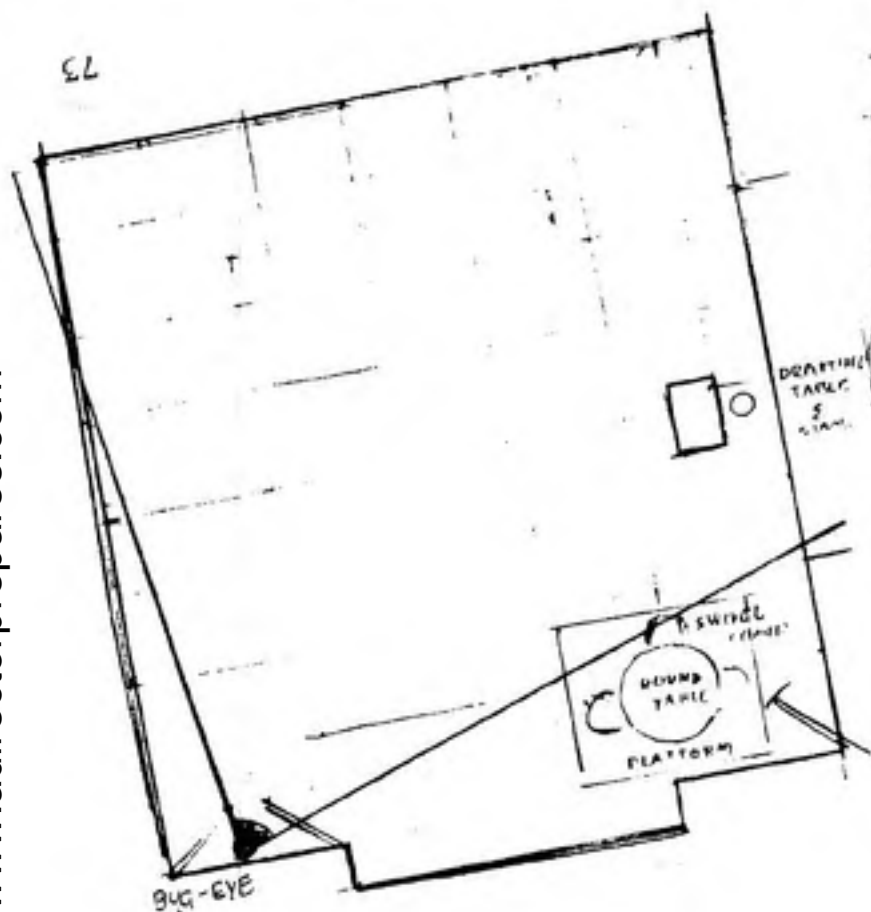
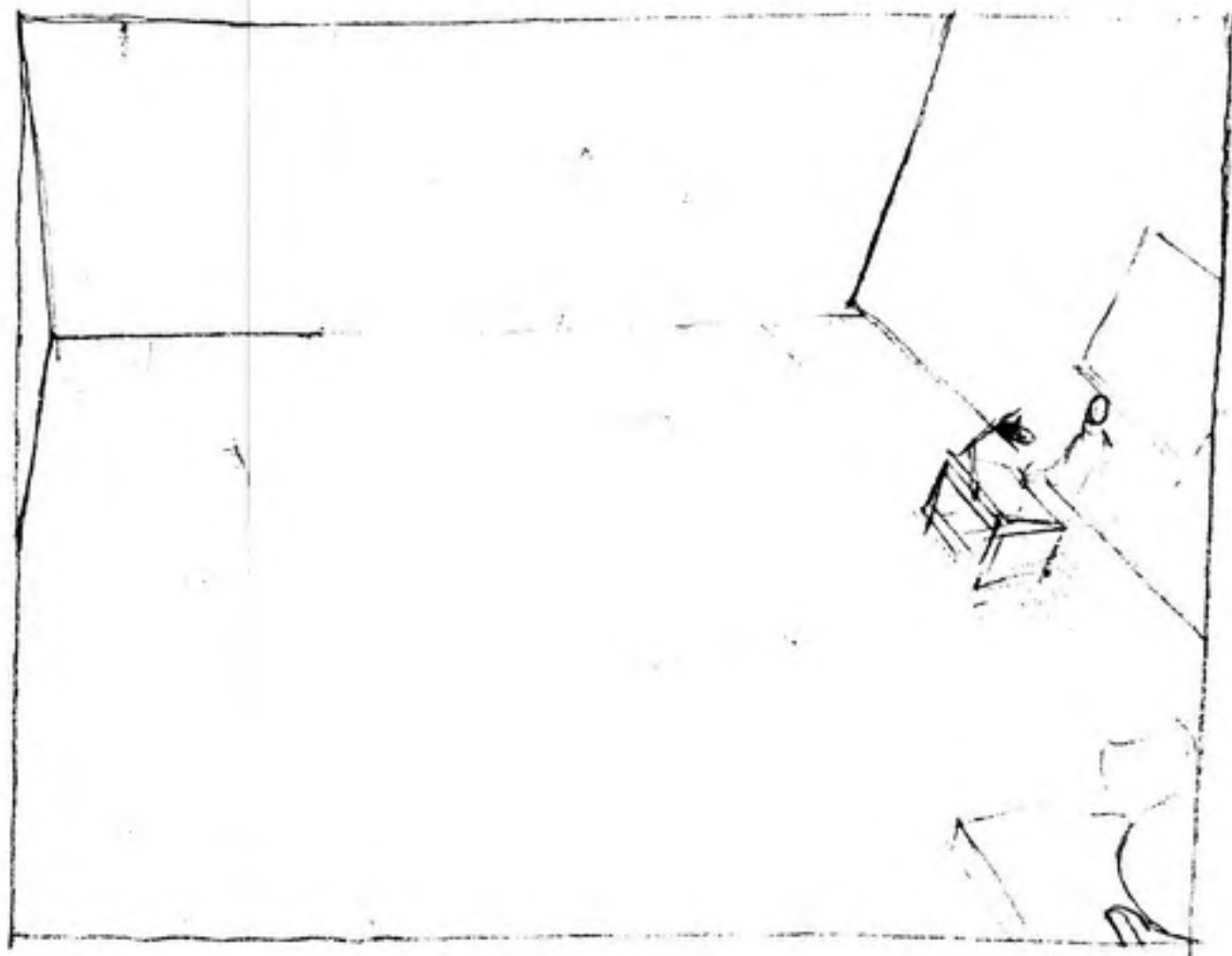
This 'axis' that I was talking about has taken



www.alexandermackendrick.com
www.adirectorprepares.com



control room windows start
2'6" up wall and are 2'8" tall

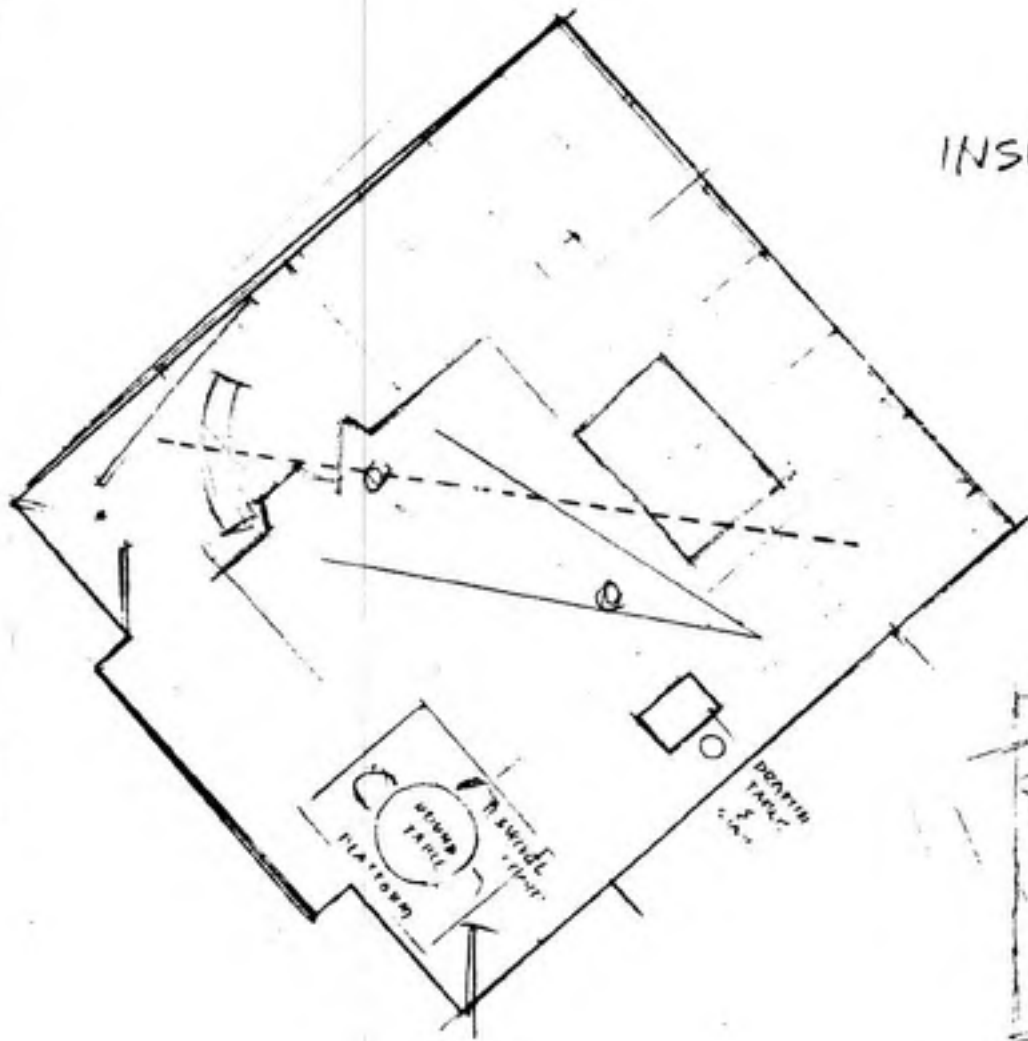


NOTE ;

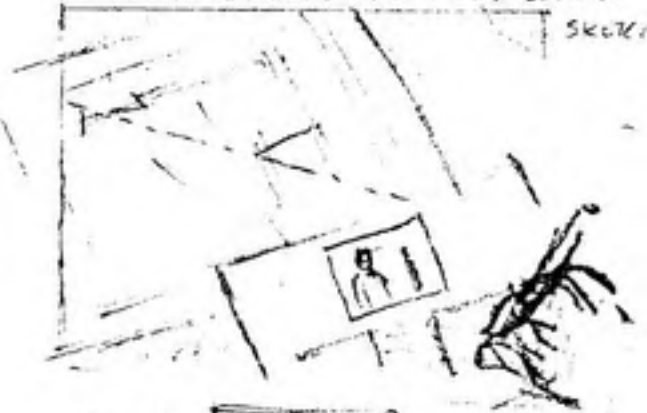
IF WE CAN SHOOT THE SHOT FROM THE GANTRY WITH THE BUG-EYE, I'D LIKE TO TRY TO SHOOT THE INSERTS OF THE INSTRUCTOR'S HANDS WITH AS NEAR TO AN ACCURATE MATCH AS OPTICALLY POSSIBLE.

THE IDEAL (WHICH MAY NOT BE OPTICALLY POSSIBLE) WOULD BE THAT YOU COULD SUPER THE INSERT OVER THE TOPSHOT SO THAT A HUGE 'GOD-LIKE' PENCIL SEEMS TO DRAW ON THE FLOOR OF THE STUDIO.

INSERTS



INSERT SET PLAN PLUS STORY BOARD SKETCH



STORY BOARD SKETCHES



ANOTHER ANGLE OF THE SET PLAN



BUG EYE TO MATRAN

17

INSTRUCTOR
(continuing)

on some tension of a very specific kind. Romeo is in a bind - pulled between this and that. That over there is the girl that he has been sleeping with - while out there are sharp knives waiting for him. The warmth and softness of her body and the love that he has found; the deadly challenge of men out there who will certainly kill him...

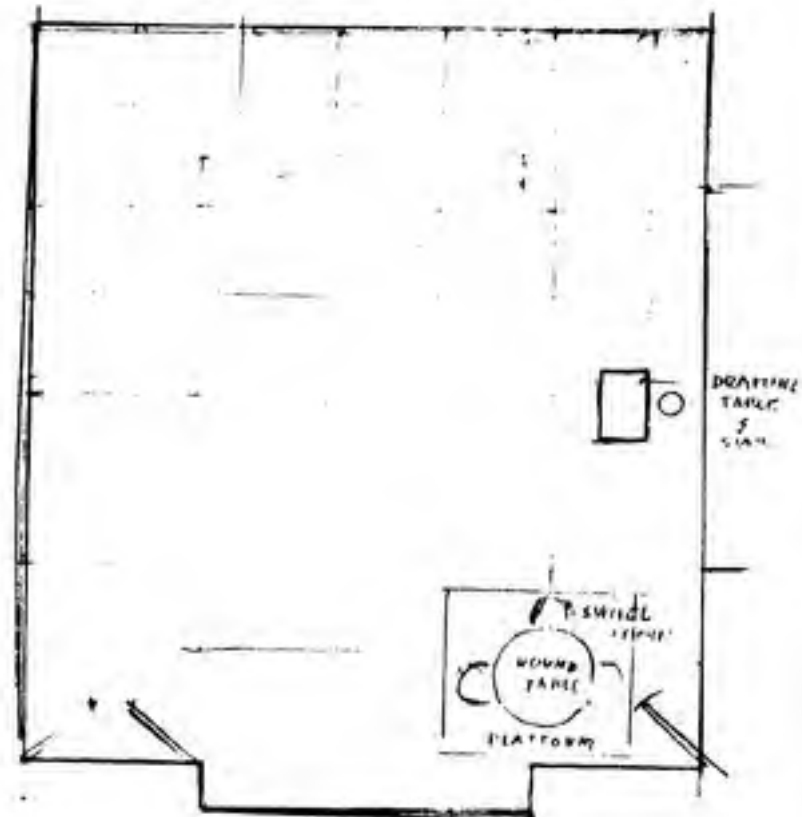
What about the girl? Heaven help me, I have to try and feel like her as well. Not easy, you'll have to admit for a fat and wheezy old man. But I suppose that's what acting is.

What's she thinking? Well, she's not. She can't be. Because if she realised what she was saying some of these lines would be impossible to utter. Has she forgotten who she is - and where they are...?

Probably yes. That's the clue. It's not just that she's only half awake. She's very young - only fifteen, in fact. And she is literally stupified with the feelings of love. That's the only thing that excuses her failure to recognise the Boys' dilemma - and makes sense out of her ecstatic response to the beauty of a morning that makes a new world for her...

Trying to feel and think like one and then the other, I now get a real gut sense of where the tension of the scene lies - and I know grasp where the crisis in it comes. Every good scene has a crisis. This language is so miraculous that it's too easy to be so dazzled with the words that you miss the hard and harsh reality underneath. Romeo loves the girl. If he stays with her he's a dead man - but she's still prattling on about the sun exhaling meteor's and such. What do you do? You make fun of her - to bring her to her senses. You 'put on an act for her' and imitate her hopelessly girlish attitude. You 'call her bluff' in a way that has just a touch of masculine cruelty.

All that's theoretical. But the physical expression



INSTRUCTOR
(continuing)

emerges as I work out the mechanics of the movement in which it is Romeo that makes the move that pulls her back onto the bed on top of him. He's underneath, the woman's position. She's on top. But it's at this moment when...when what? It needs a cue. Yes, maybe the distant bark of that dog again. When he hears it, she can feel the sudden alertness in his body - and it's she who panics! He even holds on to her for a second, amused by her terror even while he is touched by it.

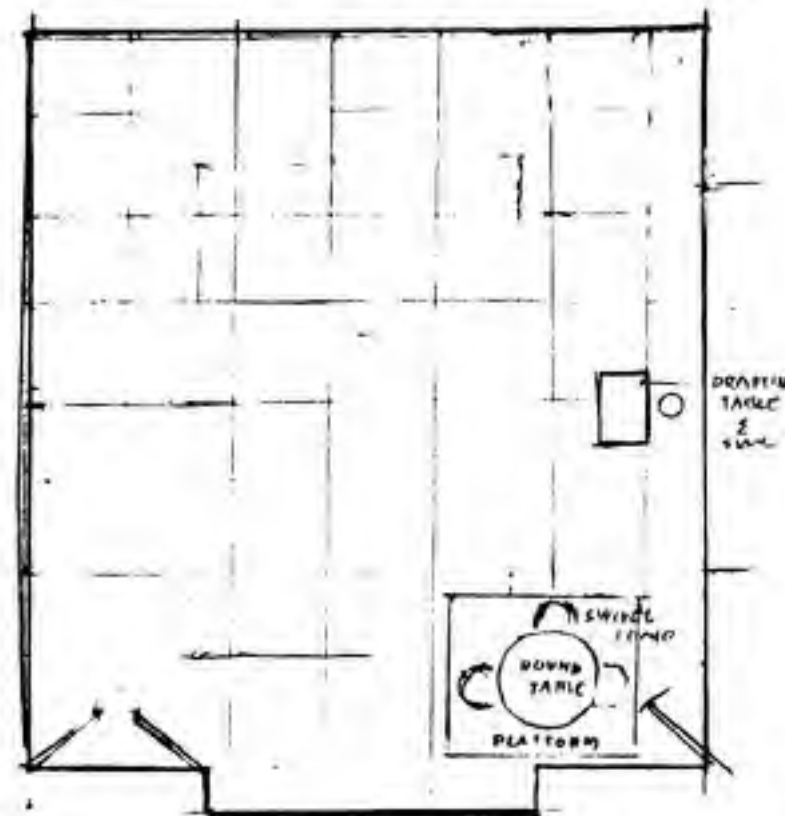
Okay. Now just how much of all this exploration do I explain to the actors?

Answer: none. I do all this only so that I have myself been investigating impulses that the actors must find all over again for themselves. My task, as director, is never, never to show an actor what to do, because then he or she will either be put off by my inadequate performance and assert himself or herself by trying it in some other way or will - which is very much worse - try to imitate me. No, my feeble attempts at the acting process are only so that, as I stand by, listening, watching and understanding, I can better appreciate the actor's contribution.

I have, however, one powerful way of influencing the actor's behaviour. It's not often noticed.

Props! If, as Benedetti was suggesting, this layout of the set and the design of the 'axis' resulted in a situation where the action 'directs itself', then the invention of props is the same kind of thing. 'Props' are objects which the actor can use - things, objects, items of everyday activity which can be the casual 'preoccupations' of the performers behaviour.

What do I have? Not a lot in this case. But there are Romeo's clothes, his shirt, his weapons. But these are enough. Where has he been sleeping? On which side of the bed? The inside, I think, because, though it means she is nearer to the



PETER BROOK'S NOTE ON THE ROMEO AND JULIET SCENE

In his book, 'The Empty Space', the English director, Peter Brook, writes about a scene in Shakespeare's 'Romeo and Juliet'.

Shakespeare, as we know, wrote his plays to be performed in daylight and on a stage where there was no scenery. He used the language of the text to create visual imagery. If you read the playscripts carefully, you will find that the playwright's imagination is astonishingly fertile in its invention of the settings, the time of day, the weather and the circumstances of the scene.

Brook's analysis of this particular scene invites the reader to consider how, if it had been written as a screenplay, the dramatist might have replaced a large proportion of the lines with cinematographic images, drastically cutting the dialogue.

As I see it this is to great extent what every movie director has to do in any event. Read and re-read the text. Build in your mind's eye not just the sets as they may be constructed for the camera: create as vividly as you can the entire environment that is offstage, all of the exteriors as well as the interiors.

The task of both the actors and the director as he or she works with the actors and designer is to make the action palpable - using light, color, as well as sound effects, together with props (props are particularly important) to give physical reality to the situation.

In doing so, the director and his team of collaborators will be working backwards from the text, retracing the work that every writer has to do before the lines of dialogue will spring to mind. Though screenwriters are apt to declare "In the Beginning is the Word", the

truth is that in all dramatic writing, the first step is visual. The literal sense of 'imagining' is creating images in your head and out of these mental pictures comes the impulse for the speeches.

As early as the days of Aristotle, this was understood. Aristotle urged the 'poet', which is Greek for 'maker', to act the lines as they come to mind. The gesture, the so-called body language of the character, is a stimulant to the discovery of the words.

Dramatic Structure and Staging.

Having studied the text of the scene, try your hand at 'blocking' the actor's moves. Here, for instance, were questions that I found I had to explore.

How does the scene start? Even before either of the characters speak, what is the event?

Romeo and Juliet are in bed. Where is the bed? Who wakens first? I decide that it must be Romeo. On which side of the bed is he lying?

Immediately, I realise the most important fact of the scene: this is the room of the daughter of the Capulet family, mortal enemies of the Montagues who are Romeo's kin. This young man is in a situation where, if he is discovered, he will be instantly killed. So I decide that not only is it he who is first awake, but that he sleeps on the inside so that he can be aware of the light from the window.

At once, this establishes for us the key to the staging. The 'axis' has to be the line between Juliet's bed and the window that opens on the exterior. It is Romeo's route of escape if he is in trouble.

In fact, Shakespeare himself has seen it this way. The first lines establish that the light coming from the window is warning of danger for the young man. Plainly, Romeo has to get away from this place before the sun is up and before the Capulet household is up and about.

How is he dressed? (In his superb film of the scene, the Italian director, Franco Zeffereilli, played the scene of the two adolescent lovers so that, while avoiding censorable camera angles, both were clearly in the nude.) It has to be this way, if the point about the danger is to be made. But it prompts me to ask the next question: what has Romeo done with his weapons? And his footwear? I decide that he has his boots at the bottom of the bed and that, as soon as he has recovered his tights, put on his boots, his first move is towards the window where he has left his sword and belt - and where he goes first to take a very careful and cautious look out at the orchard which is under the balcony and across which he must escape. Romeo certainly in love with the girl, but at this moment his more urgent concern is for his own life.

What has wakened him? The increasing light from the window? The birdsong? Or the breeze blowing from the window as signal of the dawn that has not yet risen? I decide that it could be any of these and perhaps all of them. The birdsong, whether it is lark or nightingale, is romantic. But I also imagine other offstage sounds. At what time of day does the Capulet household stir. Probably even before daylight as far as the servants are concerned - and it is from the servants that Romeo is likely to be first in danger. So I begin to invent other sounds: dogs barking is a standard sign of activity, or sounds of cattle.

These can be more than just the incidental noises that help bring alive the time of day and the surroundings, they are useful because, properly punctuated, they help create the tension in the scene. They are the 'business' which provide for the actor the reality of the scene, an immense help in avoiding the staginess in delivery of self-consciously poetic lines.

In fact, it is out of this that I quickly discover how the action of the scene must be blocked. I find 'the moves'.

First move: Romeo wakes. Juliet is still asleep. Without rousing her, he gets out of the bed, recovers his clothes, his weapon and moves to the window.

Second move: Juliet wakes. She is still half-asleep. Finding herself alone, she sees Romeo at the window. She recovers some clothes, moves to him, embraces him. Does she really expect him to stay with her? Of course not. Her appeal to him not to leave just yet is hardly serious, only a gesture of love...

Third move: but Romeo, in similar romantic affection, teases her - pretending to take her at her word. So he embraces her and brings her back again to the bed as if to resume their love-making.

What stops them? It occurs to me that this is the moment to use again the sounds from the exterior. Maybe the barking of the dogs. Now it is Juliet's turn to panic. Mischievously, Romeo threatens that he will indeed risk his life for a few more minutes with her - forcing her to drag him back again towards the window.

The formula I use is an old one: in order to explore the 'non-verbal' - or is it 'preverbal' cinematic aspects of the text,

I try to imagine how it could play without dialogue. Paradoxically, the result is that when staged like this, the action that is an anticipation of the meanings becomes more effective. The staging is rooted in what we call 'subtext'; the impulses which are 'unspoken

The Set.

The Color Studio - empty. On Right of screen, in front of the Control Room windows, a group of students to whom the Instructor addresses his remarks when he is not talking to the camera. On Left of screen, three video cameras (non-functioning at this moment) pointed off Left towards the vacant stage. In background, 'upstage', is a drafting table with drawings, set plans, sketches (a model?). Beside it some furniture and some props.

INSTRUCTOR

(to camera)

John Houseman, when he came here to talk to students in Cal Arts School of Theater, was asked if he thought there was a difference between acting for the stage and acting for the screen.

John said, yes. It is different - but not very. 'Acting is acting - period', he said. 'It's best learned in the training for acting before a live audience. But if you're a good actor, you should be able to adjust your technique to the camera in a few weeks.

But then John went on to say something more. Directing, he said, is another matter entirely. Though there are many who have both skills, the craft involved in directing a play for the stage, and the craft of directing a movie are quite different.

I believe Houseman is right. Moreover, I think it applies to writing also. Writing a stage play and writing a screenplay are different - even though there are indeed writers who can do both.

What is the difference?

Well I've just been re-reading a small book by another old friend of mine.

INSTRUCTOR
(continuing)

This is 'The Empty Space' - by Peter Brook who, like John Houseman, has worked successfully both in cinema and theater. This is a book about the theater. But in it Peter describes an experiment - an exercise - that he tried with actors, exploring the difference between a scene written for stage performance and film acting.

(At this point, the Instructor should exit frame on the Left, the book in his Left hand. We cut to existing material. Entering frame Right, the Instructor takes a seat at the table where there are two other empty chairs. The clip board is on the table already)

INSTRUCTOR
(continuing)

The exercise that Peter Brook developped was from Shakespeare -

(he is seated)

- It's Romeo's farewell to Juliet, a fairly well known scene.

(turns away from camera.

The light is dimming)

We've got two actors here to help us.

(Actors enter from the

Right of screen and take

their seats at the table)

This is Murphy Cross - Matt Landers.

Let's go through and read the thing quite straight - as in a first reading. So let's hear it.

JULIET

Wilt thou be gone? It is not yet near day.
It was the nightingale and not the lark
That pierced the fearful hollow of thine ear.
Nightly she sings on yonder pomegranate tree.
Believe me, love it was the nightingale.

(Note: For intercutting, we should shoot a direct reverse of the Instructor who holds the clipboard with the text, glancing down at it occasionally)

INSTRUCTOR
(continuing)

A couple of points:-

First, you'll notice that I invited these actors to read the scene 'quite straight' - and to 'read it as in a first reading'.

What I meant was read it without a lot of expression - without 'too much acting.'

This is standard procedure. Indeed, there are directors and actors who believe that one should go even further' read with absolutely no expression at all! Read the lines as 'flat' and 'meaninglessly' as possible - which can be extremely difficult to do, unless you have had practice at it.

The aim, they say, is deliberately to avoid the natural tendency to adopt the most obvious way of saying the line. To prevent you as an actor from falling back on the kind of mannerisms that have become a habit to you.

'Meaning', they say, ought to emerge more slowly and at a later stage of the rehearsal process. When it does, it may come in ways that are very much more interesting, less obvious and more truly felt.

More on that later.

But I'm concerned with a similar point as it applies to the director. The inexperienced student director is quite often impatient at the early stages - impatient to 'start in on the directing'

This can be a huge mistake!

The directing has already started! Because one of the first and most important tasks of the director is to LISTEN. To listen - and to watch. Watch very closely and listen with absolutely no preconceptions!

This is indeed difficult. If the actors tend to jump too soon to the obvious interpretation of the line, it's even easier for the director.

INSTRUCTOR
(continuing)

As director, you will obviously already have read the text supplied to you by the writer and you cannot help but 'hear how the speeches sound - inside your head.' The result is very apt to be that when you hear the actor read with another intonation, a different phrasing, it sounds 'wrong'.

This is what you must work at during the first reading; as a director, you too must discipline yourself to avoid making up your mind too soon. You may be almost literally 'deaf' to the actor's voices if, because you have 'heard the lines' another way, you cannot listen to the way they can sound as they come from the actor. So listen.

But now let me get back to Peter Brooks experiment - the one he describes in his book.

(Note: as the Instructor continues, he turns in the direction of the students. On this move, cut to the existing material which shows the actors at the table in background as the Instructor elaborates to the students)

INSTRUCTOR
(continuing)

Now that's the text - as written. The spoken word.

Peter's exercise was to ask the actors to select only those words that they could play in a realistic situation, the kind of words that could be used unselfconsciously in film. So what I'm going to ask them to do is read the lines - the active lines - and then be silent and inside their heads be listening to the sustained silence of the unspoken lines.

(He turns to the actors.
The light on him dims again)

JULIET
Wilt thou be gone?

(A LONG PAUSE)

I MUST be gone and live - or stay
and die.

(ANOTHER LONG PAUSE)

JULIET
Therefore stay a while. Thou shalt
not go so soon.

(PAUSE)

ROMEO
Let me stay here -
(PAUSE)
'Tis not yet day.

(ANOTHER PAUSE)

JULIET
It is - it is!

(PAUSE)

More light and light it grows.

(Note: Cut to the direct reverse on to the Instructor.)

INSTRUCTOR
(continuing)
So much for poor old Will Shakespeare.
We've thrown him away. The poetry -
the marvellous language - is all gone.
And it was Peter Brook, a great director
of Shakespeare, who suggested this exercise.
Yet this is indeed the point.

(The Instructor starts back
moving towards the drafting
table in the background)

INSTRUCTOR
(continuing)

We've been asking, what is the basic difference between theater and cinema. It's simple. The play is the art of the spoken word: cinema is story-telling in images that move.

You can trace it back to their beginnings. Seven centuries BC, they tell us that the theater, as we know it in the West, was born out of two earlier forms. One was the recitation of the great epic poems of Homer: the other was the ritual and ceremonial dances by performers in costume and masks. The narrator told the story, the actors performed a mime that illustrated the words. But the words, the text, came first.

Cinema is younger - by several thousand years. It's not yet a hundred years old.

Movies began with images that moved. For the first thirty years of its history, it was dumb - silent. There were title cards. But the marvel of the Silent Cinema was that - at its best - these were words added to the mime that was to a greater or lesser degree comprehensible through the visible action and reactions of the players. It was D.W.Griffiths who made the point: the camera can photograph thought.

Writers - both playwrights and screenwriters - are fond of the Biblical saying 'In the Beginning Was the Word'. Well, there is a sense in which that is not true. Writing is 'acting inside your head' and before the words comes the impulse - the act of makebelieve that happens in the imagination of the dramatist.

Consider the derivation of the word: 'imagination' is the capacity to create images, to visualise people, places and activities - events that you can see and feel as well as hear in your mind's eye and ear.

INSTRUCTOR
(continuing)

Where does the director begin?

(at the drafting table now)

Bob Benedetti, who teaches directing at Cal Arts School of Theater, wrote an article a year or so ago about stage design. Bob said that the director's work with the Production Designer was so important that he found that when they had really worked out the plan of the set - the layout of the 'performing areas' within the setting - then the play began 'to direct itself'.

What he meant, I believe, was that when the director, with the help of the designer, had thought through all of the spatial relationships, the geography of entrances and exits, the 'sight-lines', the positioning of furniture, places to stand, sit, areas in which stage 'business' might or might not take place, then the actors, as they arrive in this environment would naturally and 'of their own accord' rediscover what the director had in mind for them.

If this is true of directing for theater, it's ten time more so of directing movies.

Let me demonstrate. And, in passing, suggest a few things that may be 'mistakes' - or, if not exactly mistakes, at least missed opportunities.

(At this stage, we might begin to make use of the very high angle which shows the whole of the studio floor while the instructor walks about the floor plan. Coverage should provide the opportunity to intercut between this topshot of the floor of the Studio and details of the diagrams and sketches made at the drafting table. Jump cuts can move the furniture and flats around the layout of the set)

When a student first walks on to a sound stage, or indeed into a location, he or she is apt to
~~take~~

INSTRUCTOR
(continuing)

for granted some things that should be questioned. Typical example. Here are cameras. For this exercise, we are going to be thinking in the terms of the multiple camera coverage that used to be standard in television - rather than the single camera, 'iso' videotape coverage that is more like movie-making and is now becoming more general in video as well.

Where do you put the actors? Where do you position the cameras?

One way is obvious enough. Three cameras here, all facing in more or less the same direction. Opposite them, the set that consists of the elements plainly required for the scene: Juliet's bed, the window opening on to those misty mountain tops and the dawn. Actors will do their stuff over there, between the bed and the window.

But wait a minute. If this is the layout, what kind of images do these cameras get? If Romeo is at the window, Juliet in the bed, an angle that holds them both has to be right back here - with both figures full length and quite small in the frame. And, if these are the cameras meant to provide closer coverage, when the actors are looking at each other they will be in profile.

Is this really what I want. It may be so. It's not 'wrong' - if that's the most effective staging. But you should consider some other alternatives.

Another way is to think in terms of what we call 'the axis'. This is an imaginary line that can be drawn - at any given moment - between two characters involved in dramatic exchange. Often, it is also the imaginary line which connects their eyelines, the line of 'eye-contact' if and when they do

INSTRUCTOR
(continuing)

make eye contact, though it is still theoretically present at the times when they are not looking at each other at all.

The axis can be significant in the sense that it is a line of 'tension' in the space of performance.

So I have another suggestion. Instead of accepting the positions of the cameras, instead of lining up the bed, window and the actors over there, I look for the longest axis - like the diagonal of the studio, for instance, and place these two most obvious elements of the set, the bed and the window in 'opposition' to each other and along this axis. Then I look this way and that along the line of the axis to see where I can best place the camera angles - to look towards the window from the bed - or back towards the bed from the window.

This has some advantages. It means, for instance that while one of the actors is quite large in the foreground, the other can be full length beyond and the framing is 'tighter' - that is with less space around the figures, more visual information within the frame. It means that the closer coverage, because the setups are close to the axis, will see the actors more full face - getting much more impact of the expression in their faces because we see them frontally and see both eyes - with their 'eyelines' narrowly past the lens.

All this is no more than common sense - though, to be candid, I sometimes think that just because it is so obvious, it's what nobody bothers to explain to the beginner and what is instantly forgotten by all those to whom it has been explained in the first place. Indeed, I don't think it's any good until it's the sort of thing that you do without giving it a thought, doing it as a matter of habit.

I also remember that old problem of 'crossing

ROMEO AND JULIET EXERCISE

In his book on theater, 'The Empty Space', Peter Brook suggests an acting exercise which makes use of a passage from Shakespeare's 'Romeo and Juliet':

- JULIET:** Wilt thou be gone? It is not yet near day.
It was the nightingale, and not the lark that pierced the fearful hollow of thine ear.
Nightly she sing on yond pomegranate tree.
Believe me, love, it was the nightingale.
- ROMEO:** It was the lark, the herald of the morn: no nightingale.
Look, love, what on yond streaks, No laces the severing clouds in yonder East.
Nights' candles are burnt out, and jocund day stands tiptoe on the misty mountain tops.
I must be gone and live, or stay and die.
- JULIET:** Yond light is not daylight: I know it, I.
It is some meteor that the sun exhales to be thee this night a torch-bearer
and light thee on thy way to Mantua.
Therefore stay yet. Thou needst not to be gone.
- ROMEO:** Let me be ta'en, Let me be put to death.
I am content, so thou wilt have it so.
I'll say yon grey is not the morning's eye;
tis but the pale reflex of Cynthia's brow.
Nor that is not the lark whose notes
do beat the vaulty heaven so high above our heads.
I'll have more care to stay
than to go.
Come, death, and welcome! Juliet wills it so.
How is't my soul? Let's talk. It is not day.

Peter Brook's theater exercise was that:

"The actors then were asked to select only those words that they could play in a realistic situation, the words they could use unselfconsciously in a film.

The actors played this as a genuine scene from a modern play full of living pauses - speaking the selected words out loud, but repeating the missing words silently to themselves to find the uneven lengths of the silences. The fragment of the scene would have made good cinema, for the moments of dialogue linked by a rhythm of silences of unequal duration in a film would be sustained by close shots and other silent, related images."

Lawrence Olivier, when he acted in and directed his film version of Hamlet, photographed the scene of the "To be or not to be . . ." in extreme Close-up. For most of the speech, the sound-track was 'voice-over', whispering aloud the private thoughts - but with some of the key lines (the more 'extroverted' thoughts) spoken in lip-synch.

Using Peter Brook's exercise, it might be interesting to make three versions: -

- 1) The Shakespearean dialogue played as in a 'theatrical' movie.
- 2) A compromise version - as in the Olivier treatment: the 'thoughts' would be a whispered 'voice-over'.

Romeo and Juliet Exercise (cont'd.)

- 3) Peter Brook's version. Only the few 'activating' lines spoken but the scene filmed so that the actors silent pauses, the performance - with support of music and sound effects - substitutes for the Shakespearean poetry.

Interior Juliet's Bedroom. Dawn.

ROMEO moves from the bed where JULIET still sleeps, approaching the window. Outside the distant sound of birdsong before sunrise, and a soft wind blowing. JULIET, waking, turns towards her lover at the window where he stands in the soft light that comes before the dawn.

JULIET

Wilt thou be gone?

(she rises from the bed and crosses to join him at the window)

JULIET'S THOUGHTS

It was the nightingale that pierced the fearful hollow of thine ear. Nightly she sings on yonder pomegranite tree. Believe me love it was the nightingale.

ROMEO'S THOUGHTS

It was the lark . . . no nightingale . . .
Look, love, what envious streaks do lace the severing clouds on yonder East. Night's candles are burned out and jocund day stands tiptoe on the misty mountain top.

ROMEO

I must be gone and leave, or stay and die.

JULIET'S THOUGHTS

Yond light is no daylight. I know it, I. It is some meteor that the sun exhales to be with thee this night a torch bearer and light thee on my way to Mantua.

JULIET

Stay yet. Thou needst not be gone.

ROMEO

Let me be ta'en - let me put to death. I am content. So thou will have it so.
(he embraces her)

ROMEO'S THOUGHTS

I'll say yon grey is not the morning's eye. 'Tis but the pale reflex of Cynthia's brow. I'll say it is the nightingale that beats the vaulted heaven so high above our heads, and not the lark, the messenger of morn. I have more care to stay than will to go. Come, death and welcome! Juliet wills it so.
What says my love? Let's talk: -

Romeo and Juliet Exercise (cont'd.)

ROMEO

Tis not yet day.

JULIET

(pathetic)

It is, it is; be gone . . .

JULIET'S THOUGHTS

Fly hence, away to the lark that sings so out of tune.
Straining harsh discords and unpleasant sharps.
Some say the lark makes sweet division; this doth
not so, for this divided us; some say the lark and
loathed toad changed eyes; I would now they had
changed voices too! Since arm from arm her voice
does not affray, hunting thee hence with hunts-
up to the day. So now be gone, more light and
light it grows.

ROMEO'S THOUGHTS

(watching the horizon as he holds
her)

More light and light; more dark and dark our woes!