

Sanford Meisner

On Acting

"Be Specific"

"An ounce of behavior is worth a pound of words."

"sturm and drang"

1. Acting comes from your heart, not your head.
2. The foundation of acting is the **reality of doing**.
3. Acting is **Living truthfully under imaginary circumstances**.
4. Good actors are impolite, reactionary, violent, and abrasive and do the exact opposite of what polite society expects.
5. If you're really doing it, and you're concentrated on the other person or activity, then you don't have the time to watch yourself doing it.
6. There's not such thing as nothing.
7. Your instincts pick up on changes in behavior, and the dialog follows.
8. Allowing **spontaneous instinct** to react without conscious thought.
9. Deeply instinctive behavior and honesty. Strip away what society has trained us to say.
10. Controlling is the opposite of the spontaneous.
11. This is NOT about thinking or controlled thoughts, its just about letting it out.
12. Respond with one moment, one note at a time. (don't explain or contrive thoughts, just respond, simple and concise)
13. Use EVERYTHING. Silence, looks, pauses, movements - what do they mean to you?
14. Whatever your partner does, you imitate it.
15. FUCK polite! You are not a gentleman.
16. Good acting comes from the HEART, there is no thinking in that.
17. Be inventive, have ideas, imagination
18. Acting isn't about you talking, it's listening and reacting off the other person.
19. Silence is ok. Don't do anything until something compels you to do it.
20. **Public Solitude** - Stanslavski - When you're alone in your room, you are so relaxed that it's very interested. You behave very freely. That is what we want to see on stage.
21. The truth of ourselves is the root of acting.
22. **Every little moment has a meaning all its own.**
23. Is the doing theatrical, for show? Or does it have an intent, a meaning that is personal behind it?
24. Allow **emotional**, heart-felt, instinctual, impulses, not logical. Thought is the enemy, just **react to the other person's behavior**.
25. Justify - Everything has a reason for being.
26. The truth of your instincts is the root of your foundation.
27. Are you acting **from your heart**?
28. One of the paradoxes of acting is that you have to let go of and lose your conscious self, that which drives you to be an actor in the first place, in order to become someone else.
29. A **particularization**, an "**as-if**" is your personal example chosen from your experiences or your imagination which emotionally clarifies the cold material of the text.
30. Ask yourself questions, details about the character and surrounding circumstances.
31. You find meaning in **what moves you**.
32. What's **your Point of View** or bias? Do you find the matter funny, sad, mournful, hysterical, etc?
33. Character is **HOW you do what you do**.

34. The actor's **fear of not being accepted** will hinder emotions and performance. The actor wants to be loved by the audience but they need to let that go so they can perform freely.
35. Don't do anything unless something happens to make you do it.
36. What you do doesn't depend on you, it depends on the other fellow.
37. Your total attention and focus is placed on the OTHER person. "You are... (blank)"
38. Your instinct takes over. "You're a professional virgin" - Judgments.

Exercise:

Chose something to do which is very difficult, if not nearly impossible to do. You MUST have a reason why you want to do that task. The difficulty strengthens your concentration. Pick something that is meaningful to you. Then the other actor approaches and talks. Don't do anything until something makes you do it.

Learning lines cold

Learn the lines cold, flat and mechanical. No tsuris (French for trouble). Run the dry lines with your partner while walking down the street, stop and get coffee. Learning the lines by rote, is neutral, meaningless, inhuman, robotic, raw, unfiltered and untouched, emotionally. So that when we are in the moment, we can add the immediate, spontaneous emotions. This is trying to get away from bad habits that we've developed of verbal sounds and expressions. To start flat and then ONLY add what feels right with the other person.

Preparation (*thoroughly justifying the beginning of a scene, the beginning of a line*)

- Use things that stimulate YOU. And only you. That are specific and personal to you and NOT general. Personal details add fullness.
- What stimulates you now may not stimulate you in the future. Our stimuli changes, which is why emotion memory doesn't work well. It's unreliable.
- Before the scene starts, what can you do to start your emotion? To rev up your engine.
- Indicating is trying to show emotion you're not feeling. But really feeling true emotion can be HUGE. It can show itself.
- Preparation is daydreaming, fantasies and imagining that changes your state of being.
- Freud says that our fantasies come from either sex or ambition
- **The fantasy of the daydream** is the most personal, most secret of the acting values.
- We use our imagination to fulfill the emotional condition before we begin the scene.
- The memories, objects, intimacies, daydreams, self made creations you use for your preparation, that put you into your correct emotional, mental, environmental, space are for you only. You needn't tell anyone what they are. If anyone asks, it's just your 'talent'.
- Self stimulation should be bigger and deeper. Don't put limits on it.
- **It is the reality of the emotion which makes the lie convincing.** (emotional behavior)
- **Justify** means to find cause or reason for an emotion to strongly affect you.

Improv Exercise

2 people live together, roommates or lovers, doesn't matter. One person has an independent activity, which they are doing intently. The other is coming in after having some great experience, either bad or good.

Exercise

Take a paragraph from Edgar Lee Spoon River anthology, take the last couple of lines. Figure out the emotional intent of ONLY those last lines and deliver the ENTIRE paragraph in that way. ie. if those lines are angry, then play the whole thing angry. If the last couple lines are happy, play the whole thing happy.

My Notes:

Absolute truth - un-arguable facts

Subjective truth - you're viewpoint, which is true to you, but may be false to someone else.

Playing a scene

improvisational/changing/fluid/dynamic/responsive/listening
vs

planning/nailing down behavior as habit/memorizing speech patterns/static.

Repetition Exercise: *(class notes)*

Lean in and be open, be vulnerable. Open your heart to them. Be prepared to be sensitive and to be hurt by them. Take what they're doing as a personal offense to you as a feeling, emotional person. We always say "don't take it personally". But this IS personal. Am I affected? By them? By their behavior? Don't be smart, no logic, simple... reactionary. What am I missing that they're doing? There are all sorts of things that I could go in on. What are they doing to me that I can't even see? What are my impulses that I get from other people?

- Take it personally! Let it come up, let the emotions bubble up!
- Verbal (emotional) triggers set off Emotional Responses (mother, mother-raper)
- **The Pinch and the Ouch** - For every pinch, there is a reactive ouch.
- How much do you care? About the other person? About the scene? About your observations?
- What do you want?
- Who are you attracted to?
- Who are you afraid of?
- Who's the LAST person you'd want to be stuck in an elevator with?
- Find a name, a label. What are they?
- Make judgments about the other person.
- Make assumptions about their behavior.
- If they were in prison, what would they be in for?
- It is emotional and impulsive, NOT intellectual.
- Make observations based on the way they look or on their behavior.
- Irrational, irresponsible, unsafe.
- Be creative! Just let it flow out, don't think.
- Pinch - affect them
- The body shows all our true emotions.
- **Subjective truth** - you're viewpoint, which is true to you, but may be false to someone else.

You are _____ and it makes me _____ .

I want to work with you because you're _____ and it makes me _____ .

Truth -- *the connection to* -- **Imagination**