

## ***Sanford Meisner on Acting***

### **THE FOUNDATION OF ACTING IS THE REALITY OF DOING.**

#### **Are you listening to me?**

- Are you REALLY listening to me?
- You're not pretending that you're listening; you're REALLY listening? Would you say so?
- That's the reality of doing.

#### **How many of you are listening to me now?**

- Now, just for yourself, listen to the cars you hear outside. Do that. (1 min)
- Ok, how many did you hear?
- Did you listen as yourself, or were you playing a character?
- As a student; part legitimate, part acting?
- Were you really puzzled or were you puzzled in character?

#### **Now, sing to yourself; not out loud. (1 min)**

- How many of you did it?
- For yourself or theatrically?
- As Hamlet, as yourself, half and half?

#### **Now, count the light bulbs.**

- Did you count in character; theatrically; or did YOU count?
- Compute in your head  $931 \times 18$ ; (= 16758)
- Did you try? You may be right or wrong; like life; you may have come to different conclusions, but it's important that you TRIED.
- It's ok to be wrong but it's not ok if you do not try.

#### **Observe a partner. (1 min)**

- Were the observations done by YOU or by a character from a play?
- Can you hold on to that?

#### **Can you hear well?**

- Can you repeat what you hear? Exactly? (Of course you can!)
- Look at your partner. What do you observe? NO THINKING OR READINGS, just repeat what you observe. (ex. You have blonde hair)
- Now I believe that you can both hear and repeat what you hear.
- This may seem silly but it is the beginning or the basis of something. A connection is established which is the basis of what eventually becomes emotional dialogue.

#### **Repetition From the Other's Point of View:**

- You have black hair. Is that true? No.
- So that's what you answer; No I do not have black hair.
- You have blonde hair.
- Yes, I have blonde hair.
- Yes, you do.
- Yes, I do
- This is contact between two humans.
- You curl your hair.

- Yes, I curl my hair.
- Yes, you do.
- Yes, I do.
- Yes, I can see that you do.
- Yes, you can see that I do.
- Comment on their comment.

### **THE BASIS OF ACTING IS THE REALITY OF DOING.**

- How does this definition compare to what we're doing?
- If you simply do it, you don't focus on yourself.
- If you simply do it, you have no time to watch yourself doing it.
- It becomes something that really, really exists specifically.
- When you do something, you really DO it rather than pretending that you're doing it. And you don't do it like a character.
- Don't play at being a character; it is right there in your doing it. It will reveal itself gradually.

### **In word repetition, don't go too far.**

- Don't do line readings.
- Silence creates a new moment.
- The verbal contact between changes is based on instinct.
- A point where one has to pick up what the repetition is doing to you must be spontaneous.
- You can comment on their behavior.
- Let the instinctive remarks come out.
- Don't think too much or try to control what you're saying; just listen.
- Two moments: can come from instinct. Do not repeat the same line again if your partner gives you silence. Use the new moment.
- Acting is not an imitation of life; don't be polite. If you're hit, retaliate, even if you would not in real life.

### **Truthfulness comes when:**

- You don't do anything unless something happens to make you do it.
- What you do doesn't depend on you; it depends on the other.
- It comes from spontaneity.
- Eliminate all the head work so you can be impulsive.
- In repetition: listen, no thinking, no intellectuality.
- Your refusal sets up an impulse in me which comes directly out of the repetition and makes you respond. (ex. Lend me \$10. Lend you \$10. I need \$10. You need \$10. I must have \$10. You must have \$10. You must give me \$10. Go ask someone else!)
- Gradually as you train, the responses come not from your head, but truthfully from your impulses.
- A practitioner is somebody who is learning to find his/her instincts, not to give a performance. Like a musician who works on repetition of scales.
- I am a nonintellectual teacher of acting. My approach is based on bringing the actor back to his/her emotional impulses and to acting that is firmly rooted in the instinctive. It is based on the fact that all good acting comes from the heart, as it were, and that there's no mentality in it.

### **Pulling the Repetition Exercise Together With an Independent Activity:**

- Look up a phone number in the phone book, of a girl who you met a party last week who has invited you to spend the night. You lost her phone # but you know her name is Sue Smith. Have your partner knock on the door in the midst of your searching and ask, “Are you looking for something?” and do the repetition exercise.
- Choose an activity that is difficult, but not impossible.
- You must have a reason to want to do it. It is the source of the concentration, which eventually leads to your emotion which comes by itself.
- Acting is not talking; it is living off the other person.
- On stage we want “public solitude” (Stan)
- Pick an activity that is truthful for you.

### **THREE KNOCKS**

- A knock has a meaning. Knock truthfully, 3 times, 10 seconds between each, with 3 different meanings. Ask another student, what did each mean?
- Knock so that it has some resemblance to life. Don’t knock theatrically.
- First moment of the exercise is the knock; the second moment is the opening of the door; your third moment is the interpretation of the knock.
- The third moment is the meaning the knock has for you, verbalized by you as you open the door. Then you go back to what you’re doing. Do whatever the third moment permits you to do and then go back to your independent activity and let the exercise continue.
- After the first two knocks, tell me what they mean to you (not the knocker, but the person in the room). After the third one, open the door. And use - verbally - what the third knock meant to you. Then go back to your independent activity and the exercise.
- You don’t have to answer the door.
- Take away the logic because repetition will induce real emotion.
- You must repeat what is said to you even if you’re doing a cancer experiment and someone comes in and says “I love spaghetti.”
- An independent activity must be urgent, truthful and DIFFICULT to do; public solitude; activity not too exaggerated or far fetched; know the reason why.
- Difficulty is most important; strengthens your concentration. Must practice like a musician. 20 years to master it. You must learn to use your instincts based on what somebody else does to you. Give yourself time to master it.
- In repetition, the continuity is important.
- Don’t act, don’t fake, don’t pretend - work!

### **BEYOND REPETITION:**

- Next time, the person who comes in has to have a reason for coming in. And the reason has to be simple and specific and not death defying in its urgency. The knock should still have meaning. Even if it’s just for oregano. If you create a study for yourself, just let it ROOT you; don’t play a character. 3 knocks then continue with the repetition.
- About Strasberg; he introverts the already introverted. Put all your attention on the other and repeat what you hear.
- An actor’s faith; they believe that the circumstances are true.
- You don’t have to worry about being logical because the script does it for you.
- Acting is all a give and take of those impulses affecting each person.
- Make the activity more important than the repetition.

- Try to tighten the repetition. Try to let it move in its organic rhythm. Avoid playing a scene.
- Say lines from a script with no meaning or reading. The mechanical approach avoids calculated results; RAW.
- Reduce you to a neutral, meaningless, inhuman object - robot; soon you will fill those words with truth of your emotional life.
- Remain neutral and relaxed; if pushed you would be responsive. If firm and tense, you can't be budged.
- Soon the emotion will come out of what your partner is giving you.
- The exercise strips you of your bad habits.

**SCENES handled improvisationally, impulse to impulse:**

- Take current repetition exercise and add an emotional circumstance to the character who is entering the room. This makes it into a scene.
- Pick up the impulse instead of the cue. When you hear the word "scotch" in the sentence, begin to impulsively respond.
- Learn the lines; THEN pick up the impulses.
- Soon add "preparation" which is the self-stimulation of your emotion.
- And don't try to "see the snow fall" outside. You will see flats! Make the audience believe; it's for them not for you.

**BEGINNING OF PREPARATION**

- Ask what they would do with \$100,000.
- If too practical and not imaginative: respond that wishful thinking is based on stimulated imagination, and is a prelude in preparation.