**Lecture:** *ANALYZING A SCENE***(30 - 45 min)**

Now that we have discussed what a good action is and what it’s made up of we will now look at choosing the best action for a scene.

There is a simple formula that can be applied consistently and will always lead to a performable action that is in line with the intentions of the script. Look to answer the following questions:

1. What is the character literally doing?

1. What is the essential action of what the character is doing in this scene?

1. What is that action like to me? As if…

EXPLANATION:

1. What is the character literally doing?

Be as literal as possible, that is the key to answering this question with honesty. Do not embellish what is happening on the printed page. A character may do or say a lot of things in a scene and some might seem to contradict others. You have to find out the one specific thing that they are doing that encompasses *every line*. You want to be able to phrase what the character is doing in a single, precise sentence, and pay attention and include *every line* no matter how out of place it may seem.

EXAMPLE: A man enters a room, reaches for the candle, searches for his matches, takes his matches from the desk drawer. What the character is literally doing is preparing to light his candle. Even if we add that the character sits in his favorite chair and sets the candle into a holder, what the character is doing remains the same.

As mundane as this may seem, correctly analyzing what the character is doing is vital to finding a good action in a scene. Also defining what the character is doing will help you stay in line with the scripts intentions. What the character is literally doing does not have to be exciting to the actor because this will never be your action on camera. It is simply your answer to QUESTION 1 and it must be accurate (The guidelines or ACTION MUSTS do not come in to play yet). You should remember that for the purpose of analysis the character only exists on the page. So make sure you are putting your answers in third person.

1. What is the essential action of what the character is doing in this scene?

This is the actual PHYSICAL ACTION you will be performing in the scene. The action is the essential aspect of what the character is doing.

EXAMPLE: Jim is getting Lori to dump Bill and become his girl.

      The essential action of that is: Making a loved one take a big risk.

By getting to the Essential action of what the character is doing, the actor has stripped away the emotional connotations that might be suggested by the given circumstances of the script.

EXAMPLE: Jim is in love with Lori but the essential action is getting her to take the chance. By concentrating on getting her to do something and not trying to be in love for the duration of the scene the actor will be in a world of the concretely doable not the nebulous world of creating feelings. You will be allowing the action to inform you of the feelings that happen because you are trying to complete your action.  The essential action, then, is what’s left after you eliminate all ideas about what you THINK the author is saying or what you THINK the director wants you to feel at any given moment.

The idea of Lori dumping Bill for Jim involves all the emotions of a love triangle, but what is essential as an end result is one person trying to get another to take a chance.

The scene should have an emotional life that is born out of the actor’s experience of trying to accomplish something, the degree to which he succeeds or fails, and his reactions to the other person while trying to fulfill the action.

Where Step 1 you said “What is the character doing?” For the Essential Action you must maintain the ACTION MUSTS guidelines and say “What am *I* going to do?”

No single Essential Action is ingrained in stone for each scene. You have to decide for yourself the best action for the scene with in the guidelines of the ACTION MUSTS.

You can only perform one action at a time, so the one you choose must make sense for the entire scene. If you can’t break it down to one action then either do more analysis or the scene must be broken down into BEATS. A BEAT is a single unit of action. A beat can only occur when a new piece of information occurs or an event takes place that the character has no control over so the character has no choice but to change what they are doing.

THIS DOES NOT INCLUDE TRYING TO EXECUTE THE SAME ACTION IN A DIFFERENT WAY.

The characters relationships may have to be defined more clearly. For instance A husband and wife may be pals, adversaries, best friends, lovers or rivals. You should clearly define your characters relationships if they are not already so in the script. Sometimes the script has already clearly defined the relationship so there is no need to include it in your analysis.

Make sure your Essential action is not just a restating of the first question. Unless you are dangerously psychotic you cannot BELIEVE that you are your character.  At some point your intellect will likely interrupt your performance. If you depend on the lines to get you through the scene eventually they will fail you. You will try to get the lines out rather than react in the moment and live truthfully while moving towards your goal.

Finding and sticking to a good action is the most important tool you have as an actor.

1. What is that action like to me? As if…

Imagination. Every actor has it and should exercise it regularly. Imagination helps the actor gain a fuller understanding of the action they have chosen for a given scene. It also gives the actor a clear sense of the consequences of NOT completing the action. It sets the stakes of the scene. It also reinforces the actors sense of play, which is vital to the actors work.

You want to use your imagination by creating a tangible, personal stake in the action you have chosen.  AS IF is a mnemonic device, a suggestion by means to remind yourself of what the action means to you in personal terms. It should be simple and compelling fantasy that you can readily accept.

EXAMPLE: Stanley Kowalsky from Streetcar

1. What is the character literally doing? Screaming for Stella to come home to him.
2. Essential Action? To beg for a loved one’s forgiveness.
3. As if? It’s as if I broke my mothers prized family heirloom and she threw me out of the house to be allowed back into my house I must beg for forgiveness.

This AS IF is good because it  is something that could happen. It is simple and direct and it does not complicate the action. It is in libe with the intentions of the script because the stakes are high.  AS IF should be a couple sentences max and enough to spark your imagination but not to form a substitution for the scene.

ASK FOR EXAMPLES OF ACTION AND AS IF FROM THE CLASS help them as necessary.

*EXAMPLE:*

*Action: to retrieve what is rightfully mine.*

*As If: I am demanding that my stepmother turn over to my sister and me property left to us after our father’s death that she is trying to cheat us out of.*

*You can guide them using the Essential actions from last week.*

The Great debate in acting is whether the actor must FEEL what the character is feeling at any given moment.  Bottom line: What does it look like on Camera? What does your audience see? You should remember that an actor is there to help tell a story not necessarily to expose themselves to the audience. You do not need to try and trick yourself into believing things that are fiction but just apply the tools you have developed and are developing to create the illusion.

*Further Advice*

Be wary of AS Ifs that are:

too close to your personal life.

Try to find an as if that is based on the desire to aid someone else (they seem to be very effective)

Avoid drudgery in your daily life. Anything that makes you say “ugh!” or “Not this again!”

Choose things that peak your imagination.

Make it something you care about.

The principles used in analyzing an entire script are the same as those used in analyzing a scene. The only additional concept is *Through-action* and *through-line.* By this I mean a single overriding action that all the individual actions of each scene and beat serve. Think of this as being similar to “Super Objective”. You have to decide what your ultimate goal is an then make sure each action constructed bring you closer to your goal. That single idea is the through line of the role you are playing.

Remember that an actor should concentrate on the unit that is the scene. Your job is to accomplish one action at a time. The through-action is an analysis tool only.