

DIRECTING ACTORS

Directing is an omnibus job. A director – by definition – must be familiar with many disciplines. It is not necessary for her to be the master of each of the disciplines. A director's success, however, may well depend on how well she is able to communicate with other artists and utilize the various disciplines that come together to make a work of filmed art.

Acting is one the most important of the disciplines a director is responsible for. It is also one of the most mysterious, subtle and elusive arts to “discipline”.

Acting is an impulsive, almost primitive activity. The Greeks called it *mimesis*; the act of imitating, mimicking or mirroring behavior. As an impulse, acting precedes planning, intellection and speech.

Every actor invents Acting for himself. What an Actor learns through schooling, experience and discipline is how to talk about that impulse with other Actors, and how to marshal that impulse more effectively.

The language of acting is a polyglot affair. First of all, it derives from numerous, sometimes almost oppositional schools, and teachings.

Actors in America train in array of techniques that range from the British Classical with its emphasis on speech, to the American Method with its focus on Psychology. Many are tutored in Improvisation, Game Playing, Body Work, Mime and Circus. In any production it is common for the director to find herself communicating with and among actors with widely variant work processes and the jargon that comes with each.

Much of the basic vocabulary of American acting derives from the Group Theatre's attempt to interpret the Russian director/teacher Konstantin Stanislavsky. Several members of the Group became notable teachers in their own right. Each teacher “branded” his school by coining distinct, but maddeningly similar words and phrases. Their disciples, in turn, speak to one another in a mishmash of them all. Despite this Babel, actors mostly understand one another.

It is the challenge of the director to join in on the conversation. To be able to listen to actors and then to be able to express himself with the clarity needed to guide a successful group endeavor.

If actors' training and vocabulary is so variable, how is it that they are able to understand each other? The answer is because they know *what it feels like to act*. That is why, while studying verbal concepts and phrases, it will be important for the aspiring director to attempt to act, in order to experience the feelings and needs of the performer.

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