

Emotion and Acting

Emotion: in motion, based on the Latin *emovere*

1 A natural, instinctive state of mind deriving from one's circumstances, mood, or relationships with others

2 A psychological state that arises spontaneously rather than through conscious effort and is sometimes accompanied by physiological changes

Harkening back to our two previous lectures on Senses and Emergence, emotions are a report of the immediate or distant past. They are ensuant, rather than pursuant. We don't cultivate "emotional states"- emotions are responses to sensory stimuli, real or imagined. They happen AFTER the stimulus.

Trying to create an emotion *before* the action that stimulates it will cause you to tighten between head and spine, because it is in conflict with how we're designed, and the actual sequence of events.

We are instead, creating the conditions in which we are likely to have an emotional response.

There isn't a single emotion that requires tightening.

Tightening is what we do to mask or resist emotion. If we have learned to tighten in response to the emotion, we can use the Alexander Technique to restore our coordination, and learn a new relationship with emotions.

“Just as there are quick and slow paths to emotion- one through immediate perception and the other thought reflective thought- there are also emotions which come bidden. One example is intentionally manipulated feeling, the actor's stock in trade [...] But actors are simply ore skilled than the rest of us at the international use of the second pathway to emotion, feeling via thinking.”

Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ* (2006: pps 293-94)

(Madden p. 90)

Acting is responding in a genuine way to circumstances, real or imagined, to tell a story in order to take the audience on a journey for some reason.

In order create the conditions that will create the likely conditions for emotional responses, we use our imagination. We cannot actually sense things that aren't there- we're not trying to hallucinate. We respond to our scene partners, the circumstances, and anything we choose to imagine that invites a spontaneous emotional response.

Imagining is which is something you CAN do. It is a constructive, YES plan.

Key to responding in a coordinated way:

Imagining a world and scene partner that is 3 dimensional and moving,

Asking sensory questions as you go

Feeding yourself by choosing to respond to imaginary sensory information

We can work with the piece literally, and if we do not relate to it that way, we can use our imagination to relate it to something we do understand.

If you need to change the emotion, you must change your thought, so that a different response can arise. It is a process that creates the possibility for a spontaneous response- otherwise we are likely to try to "show" an imitation of what we think an emotion “looks” like (or what we think it feels like- this is likely to be some form of tightening.)

If you need a bigger response, increase the size of the stimulus, make a stronger choice.

As performers we must have a larger range of emotional responses available to tell stories effectively. We must have sustainable ways to transition in and out of this kind of work. This ensures that you know psychophysically that it is play, and not reality. To do this you need a safe environment in which you can explore the range of emotions, and warm ups and cool downs so that you can enter and exit that arena.

Constructive, or "yes" plans: a verb you can do

(Imagine is a *verb*)

“No” plans conflict with our design because we coordinate to do something

Hidden “no”s reside in something like “try” or “as little as possible”

"I will say to you again: Remember that we are telling a story. We're not indulging ourselves in emotional journeys that are all about us and our ego. We are telling a story to our audience, and that's why we don't do it on our own in our bathrooms. See yourself, the words you say, the way you move, the costume you wear- everything must be about telling a story."

Helen Mirren

Warm ups and Experiments

1 Threshold Exercise

How do I feel?

Sensory Sweep

I like...

2 Take one piece of music and...

1 Ask to coordinate so that you can:

Wonder about how the music, harmony, melody, rhythm, motivic material etc. tell a story.

2 What does the text literally say?

What does it say indirectly?

Speak the text, simply and clearly

3 Ask to coordinate so that you can:

Sing the piece, simply and clearly, with your attention on how the elements of text

4 Ask to coordinate so that you can:

Imagine who you are singing to, as a moving, 3 - dimensional being. What do they look like, what do they smell like, how do they move?

5 Ask to coordinate so that you can:

Imagine who you are singing to, in their full dimensionality. Sing simply, as if you are speaking directly to them. As you imagine them, imagine how they are responding to what you are doing.

6 Give yourself a really juicy verb, or strong action to do in a phrase or section (to interrogate, to plead, to seduce...) See what happens when you sing to the imagined person with that strong action as your ask.

(Ask to coordinate so that you can: sing to this person so that you can seduce... etc.)

“Y’all pushin, you’re pushin. Just relax, relax. You’re pushing it. It’ll go up by itself. Don’t put nothin in it unless you feel it.”

Nina Simone

I Shall Be Released

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w-du8MDE8nk>