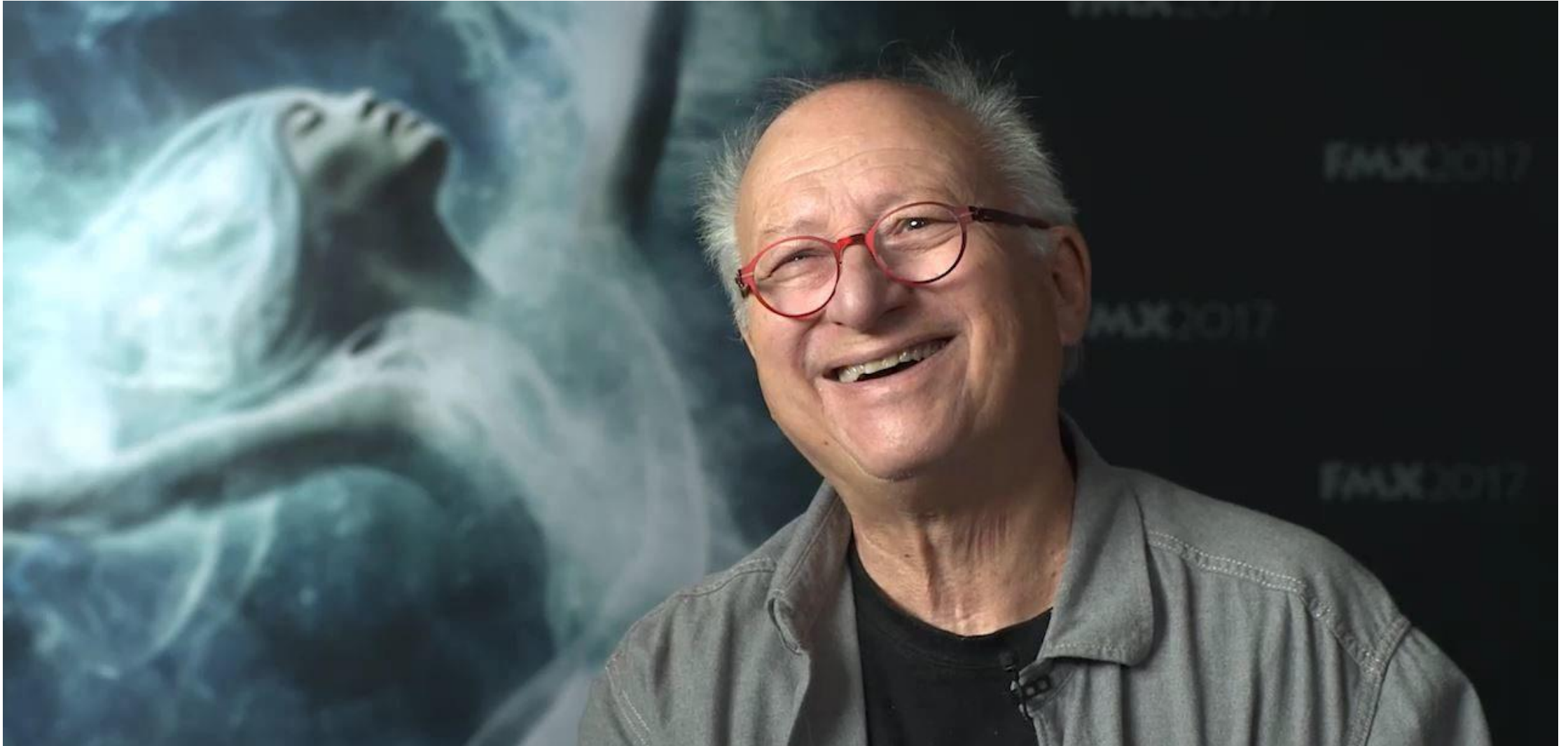


Acting in Animation

Part 2

ACTING AND PERFORMANCE CHOICES with ED HOOKS

These notes are from an *Acting for Animators* class Ed Hooks taught in San Francisco, 1999. Customizing the acting techniques and stories of actors to help animators specifically with acting, Ed combines the two art forms.



INTRODUCTION

A. DEFINITION ANIMATION

Anima:

noun 1. soul, life >Definition of Emotion: "Automatic Value Response" he got this from a psychiatrist. When he asked the psychiatrist how many emotions can "go off" at once, the Psychiatrist replied "all of them...it's called shock."

B. QUOTES:

- "The soul desires to dwell with the body because without the members of the body it can neither act nor feel." ~ Leonardo da Vinci
- "Acting begins with a tiny inner movement so slight that it is almost completely invisible." ~ The Empty Space: A Book About the Theatre: Deadly, Holy, Rough, Immediate By Peter Brook
- Peter Brook said, "Before movies, and television, there was a stage. Before stage, there was religion. Before religion was Shamanism."
- Theater's roots — and, by inclusion, animation's roots — are ancient.
- Emotion is a result of thinking; movement is a result of thinking; All physical action is a result of thinking. Walt Disney had it right: "The mind is the pilot."
- "In order to be funny, you have to touch somebody's heart." ~ Ed Hooks

C. ACTORS VS. ANIMATOR:

Movement Expresses a Thought. The Actor's job is to LEAD the audience.

ANIMATOR = Externals

ACTOR = Internals

An animator must re-motivate a scene over and over, sometimes for weeks.

The paradox for animators: Animators focus on externals in characterization and caricature — facial expressions, body movement, emotional reaction, etc. Actors, by contrast, learn specifically not to focus on these things because they are "results." You cannot act results.

An actor essentially takes two steps in performance:

- (1) Play the action (acting is doing something), allowing the resulting emotion to stimulate him and...
- (2) Follow the emotional impulse to the next action.

D. WINDOWS INTO THE CHARACTER:

The best acting allows “windows” into the character.

E. RULE:

Rule of Acting: Play an action until something happens to make you play a different action.

F. EXPECTANCY:

Do not get ahead of yourself.

Lee Strausberg method of acting: Make a fruit salad...one step at a time! You must have every single thought –“in the moment”. DO NOT get to the end of the scene until you are there.

You will notice how the character is always in the present moment, NEVER giving away the next thing that happens, reacting on to what is happening at that very time.

G. THE CONTRACT:

The actor/audience "contract" is the key to all performing arts. Interaction: A scene is a negotiation. What is being negotiated? A weak scene is one that is just there to describe what is going on.

H. OBSTACLES/CONFLICT:

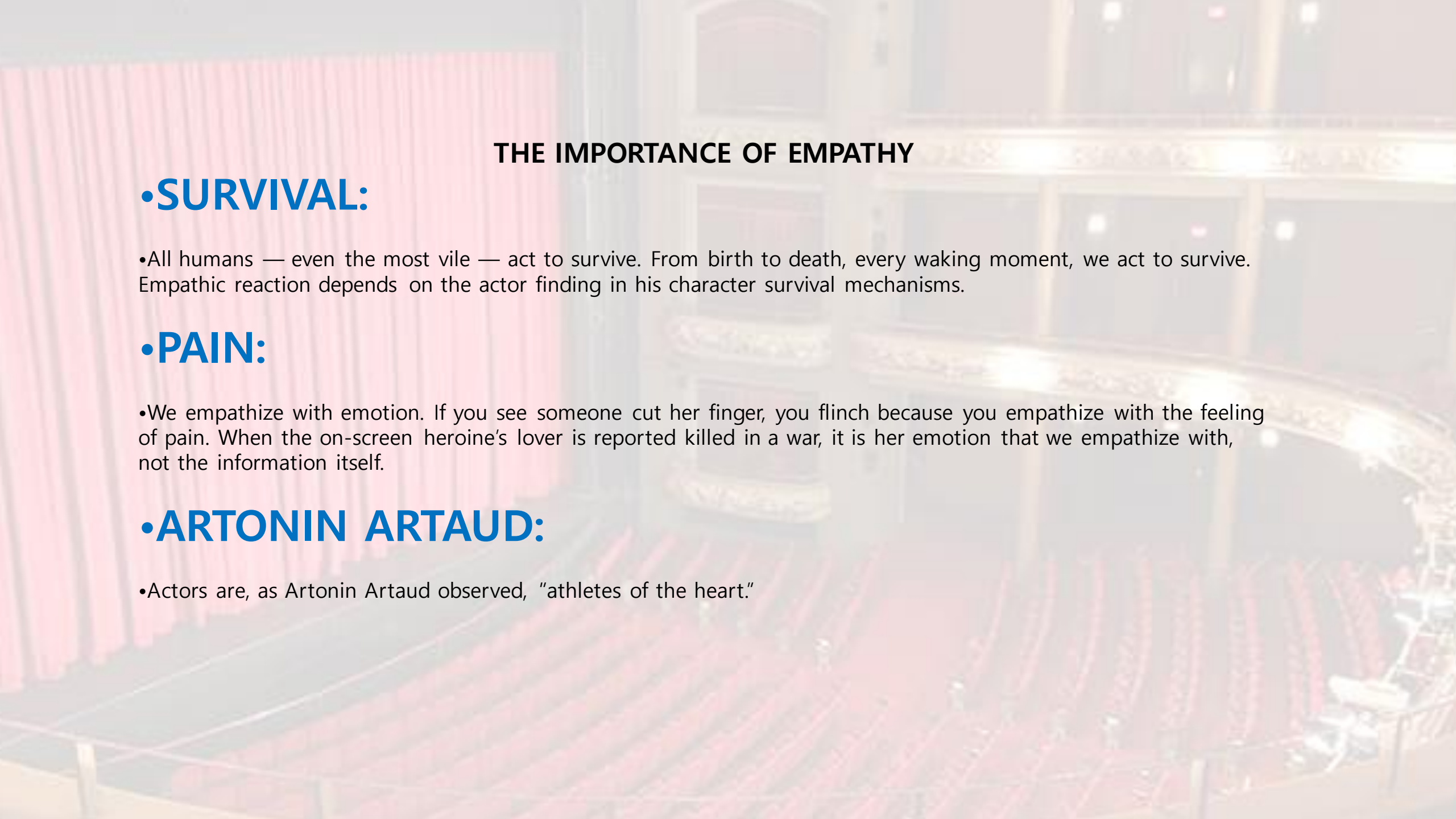
Obstacles are essential to acting and imply a negotiation. There are three kinds of conflict, conflict with self, with a situation and other characters. Those are your obstacles.

I. DIGNITY:

Try to keep dignity in embarrassing moments. The audience will identify with it more.

J. MOTIVATION:

- Working with short takes to convert the motivation from WANT to NEED. Ask why are they doing that?
- The externals are what animators are concerned with, BUT externals are a result of the internal.
- The purpose of the movement is destination. Keep the motivation in mind, always. The audience is looking for the extraordinary moment not the ordinary moment.
- When something really good or bad happens to you the mind gets bathed in adrenaline and we remember that moment — use it, these are the important moments.
- Scorsese uses storyboards but the actor doesn't see those, they use the script for motivation. If you are stuck ask for the script and read many pages before that scene to get your character's motivation.



THE IMPORTANCE OF EMPATHY

•SURVIVAL:

- All humans — even the most vile — act to survive. From birth to death, every waking moment, we act to survive. Empathic reaction depends on the actor finding in his character survival mechanisms.

•PAIN:

- We empathize with emotion. If you see someone cut her finger, you flinch because you empathize with the feeling of pain. When the on-screen heroine's lover is reported killed in a war, it is her emotion that we empathize with, not the information itself.

•ARTONIN ARTAUD:

- Actors are, as Artonin Artaud observed, "athletes of the heart."

D. JUSTIFICATION:

- Empathy is a survival mechanism. Find a depth in your character. Justify their existence.
- 1. Villain = Normal person with a fatal flaw. Show a "window" into your villain's humanity.
- 2. To find that "window" remember gestures that are shadow movements of where the character is instead of what the character is saying. Scratching nose, sniffing, etc. replace overacting with these telling gestures.
- 3. Stifled emotions can be much better than the full blown emotion.
- 4. People do not share their emotions easily = we are guarded.
- Example: If a character is cold, don't shiver...have the character try to stay warm!!
- 5. EMPATHY is the most important thing about acting. People to study, Charlie Chaplin = empathy; Buster Keaton = sympathy; Harold Lloyd, etc. People relate to emotion.

6. Chaplin Story to explain the different between sympathy and empathy.

Chaplin gets foot stuck in a bucket. Keaton would try to shake it off erratically to get the quick, cheap laugh. Chaplin would try to keep his dignity and through embarrassment and hide the bucket behind him causing an empathy with the audience for his problem. This is more clever and more funny. The laughter can be stretched too through his trying to hide the fact his foot is stuck in the bucket. After the initial erratic move by Keaton, the laugh is done, and it looked practiced in the first place.

- Act to survive, we all do it to live...what is the survival mechanism in this character? Charlie Chaplin's Autobiography- said, "conceptual is common to people regardless to country-universals are important to silent film.
- Empathy is different than Sympathy; this is why Charlie Chaplin was the bigger star.

IMPROVISATION and CHARACTER EXERCISES

A. IMPROV NOTES

- “The more obvious you are, the more original you appear” ~ Keith Johnstone (king of improv)
- 1st offer leads the scene, and the diatribe between actors has to unfold the story quickly. You can reincorporate previous events to bring about familiarity.

Improv exercise:

- What do you do as your morning ritual? Everybody is different.
- Improv improves the plasticity of the brain.
- Treat your imagination with such respect because if you do not you will get writer's block. Nurture it and do not beat yourself up over how you 1st came up with a way to act a scene out.
- Goal = To make the other actor look good.
When you support the scene and other actors, it takes away the pressure from yourself.
- Jack Lemon story from the movie Missing: Jack said he worked this character through the hat he always wore. Since he is desperately trying to find, his son and no one will help he acts like his hat is what is keeping a lid on his emotions and holding everything together. When he finally takes his hat off, he falls apart.
- Watch any scene with the sound turned off, and you will immediately see the good acting and the bad acting.

B. POWER CENTERS

•Body language encompasses your power center and politicians really understand that. When a politician speaks, you don't hear what they say you watch their body language. (Power Centers are very important in describing how a character moves.)

•POWER CENTER EXAMPLES:

- When the Power Center is in a character's hips, they move like a Supermodel on the Catwalk or Mick Jagger.
- When the Power Center is to a character's chin, they move like a Queen, Statesman or someone regal.
- When the Power Center is in a character's chest, they move like a Boxer or Superhero.
- When the Power Center is in a character's forehead, they move like an Intellectual.
- When the Power Center is in a character's belly, they move like a tubby character, think John Goodman.
- When the Power Center is in a character's knees, they move like a Home Boy with a strut.
- The list goes on and on. The power center can completely change where the character is emotionally in how it moves and intertwined with the next section "Status".

C. STATUS TRANSACTIONS

1. High Status = Very Still, make eye contact, comfortable.
2. Low Status = Looking down a lot, touching face, uncomfortable.

3. Improv Game:

Boss/workers Exercise: Two people using a stack of cards numbered 1- 10, hold the card to their forehead so the other can see what the number is. The card represents a Status– “1” being Low Status and “10” being High Status. The coworkers interact as if on lunch break together according to what they think their own Status is in relation to what Status they see the other, through the number on the card.

4. Object lesson: This exercise reveals body language changes according to status, how you can assist each other in establishing a character through reactionary acting, and how the pecking order exists no matter how low on the ladder you are.

- Description from Anthony Hopkins of how he played the butler in Remains of the Day: “The trick to playing the butler is that all of the space in the room belonged to the master. The butler only has permission to be there.” It is a negotiation of space.

D. LABAN MOVEMENT ANALYSIS

•Movement Analysis is an important part of establishing a character and how it moves quickly. Improvisational Actors use the technique often to describe a character in a quick, concise way.

E. ACTING FOR ANIMATORS LABAN MOVEMENT ANALYSIS

- a. History: Rudolf Laban (1879-1958) born in Hungary.
- b. Get the book! Laban for Actors "Putting Laban's Movement Theory into Practice" — A Step by Step Guide by Jean Newlove

•The four elements of the Dimensional Scale:

- space
 - time
 - weight
 - flow
- Space, Time and Weight create the flow/action. Use the terms Direct and Indirect for Space. Use the terms Fast and Slow for Time. Use the terms Heavy and Light for Weight. The body naturally moves in arcs. The space within our reach, our "personal" space, is called the kinesphere. It is like a large personal bubble in which we can stretch out in all directions while standing in its center, on one leg.

The Dimensional Cross: length breadth depth

- Up-down Dimension: Unlike other animals, our species, through evolution, has chosen to carry itself upright against the force of gravity. In total relaxation or exhaustion, we sink to the floor giving way to the pull of gravity.
- Reaching skywards is often associated with a feeling of high aspirations.
- Left-right Dimension: This sideways dimension moves concerned with inward and outward movements. When we open our arms wide, it seems as if we wish to communicate with someone; our intention is expressed in an expansive outward-reaching movement. Crossing the arms over the chest inhibits communication.
- Forward-backward Dimension: A sudden shock brings a quick reaction backward. When the threat is past, we can slowly advance. Movement behavior is not just "physical". We move to satisfy a need.
- Space: Our bodies displace space, move in space, and motion in space exists within us.

SPACE

DIRECT: A direct movement is similar to an arrow traveling straight to its target. Attention is on the point of arrival; the use of space is economical and restricted. **INDIRECT:** A flexible movement, curving, roundabout and plastic, allows us to look at the spatial garden and smell the flowers. The navel is the body's center. The outward journey of any movement begins there. Exercises to study space:

#1 Stand in front of a partner, sufficiently close to you both to be able to reach out and touch each other, arms held loosely by your sides. Shake hands and return to the original position. Try to remember your action and repeat it exactly. Do this several times. Analyze your movements. It may help initially, to close your eyes and try to sense the moment your body mobilizes in response to the message received, immediately prior to the action. Is the action centrally guided? Does the arm describe an arc as it moves into the forward dimension? Was your movement continuous or jerky, simultaneous or successive, bound or free flowing?

#2 Try a variety of handshakes in different dimensions (shaking the hand of the person behind you without turning around, shaking hands with a much taller person, etc.).

#3 Take any odd position you like. It can be twisted, curved, symmetrical, asymmetrical, closed, open, crouching backward, reaching forward; high, medium, low (perhaps lying on the floor); on the toes (demi-pointe) or hands! Start "locomoting" towards other members of the group accompanied by your voice emitting metrical or rhythmic sounds. Now try excitingly different ways of shaking "hands", of grasping and releasing. Your hand could reach through your legs to shake the foot of another "creature" momentarily lying in a fetal position, for instance.

TIME

FAST and SLOW: The speed with which a movement travels spatially is on a continuum from very fast to very slow. The speed with which we move to accomplish a purpose will tend to accelerate and decelerate depending on the circumstance.

Exercise to study time:

#1 Half the group stands in a long line down one side of the room facing across to the other side. They must have a little space on either side of them and all "toe the line". The rest of the class observes. The idea is to walk directly forward, as slowly as you can, and to keep moving all the time. There must be no pauses, hesitations or indirect gestures leading to the step forward. The eyes shut tight. The mover concentrates on slowness, a constant progression in a forward direction only. The line moves on the word, "Go". When the first people reach the far wall, we "stop." Everyone should halt in his tracks immediately.

Object lesson: degrees of fast and slow vary considerably among the participants along the time continuum. Voice is an extension of the movement.

A fast movement will tend to be of short duration.

WEIGHT

HEAVY and LIGHT: Our ability to stand upright depends on the tension between the upward force of our bodies and the downward pull of gravity.

When a person is drunk, there is a feeling that the three-dimensional world is constantly shifting. Attempts to remain upright will be thwarted as perception of the vertical, up/down dimension falters.

When tired, the body gives way to the pull of gravity.

Moving the body anywhere in space requires energy along a light to strong continuum.

The four motion factors: Space, Time, Weight, Flow
 $\text{Space} + \text{Time} + \text{Weight} = \text{Flow}$

Not all continuums are stressed. One can stress just one factor such as Time or two factors, Weight-Space or three factors as in Space-Time-Weight.

LABAN – EIGHT COMBINATIONS OF WEIGHT, TIME AND SPACE

DIMENSIONAL SCALE

The six fundamental directions of the Dimensional Scale also contain their dynamic qualities, giving rise to such feelings as:

- 1) Lightness, associated with upward or High direction.
- 2) Strength, associated with downward or Deep direction.
- 3) Restriction. A movement of the body, producing a straight or Direct movement.
- 4) Freedom of movement associated with the body's open side, leading to Flexibility.
- 5) Suddenness as in fear, resulting in the body's contraction Backward.
- 6) Sustainment, as tension is slowly released, leading the body in the opposite direction, i.e. Forwards.

The eight basic combinations of Weight, Space, Time:

1. Press
2. Wring
3. Glide
4. Float
5. Thrust
6. Slash
7. Dab
8. Flick

Pressing: Mafiosi, Elephant, Overweight Man DIRECT, SLOW, HEAVY — Sustained, Strong, Bound flow

Flicking: Insane Person INDIRECT, FAST, LIGHT — Flexible, Sudden, Free flow

Wringing: Hunchback of Notre Dame, Elephant Man INDIRECT, SLOW, HEAVY — Flexible, Sustained, Strong Bound flow (as if wringing out clothes) Imagine you are yourself a wet blanket, wringing yourself out.

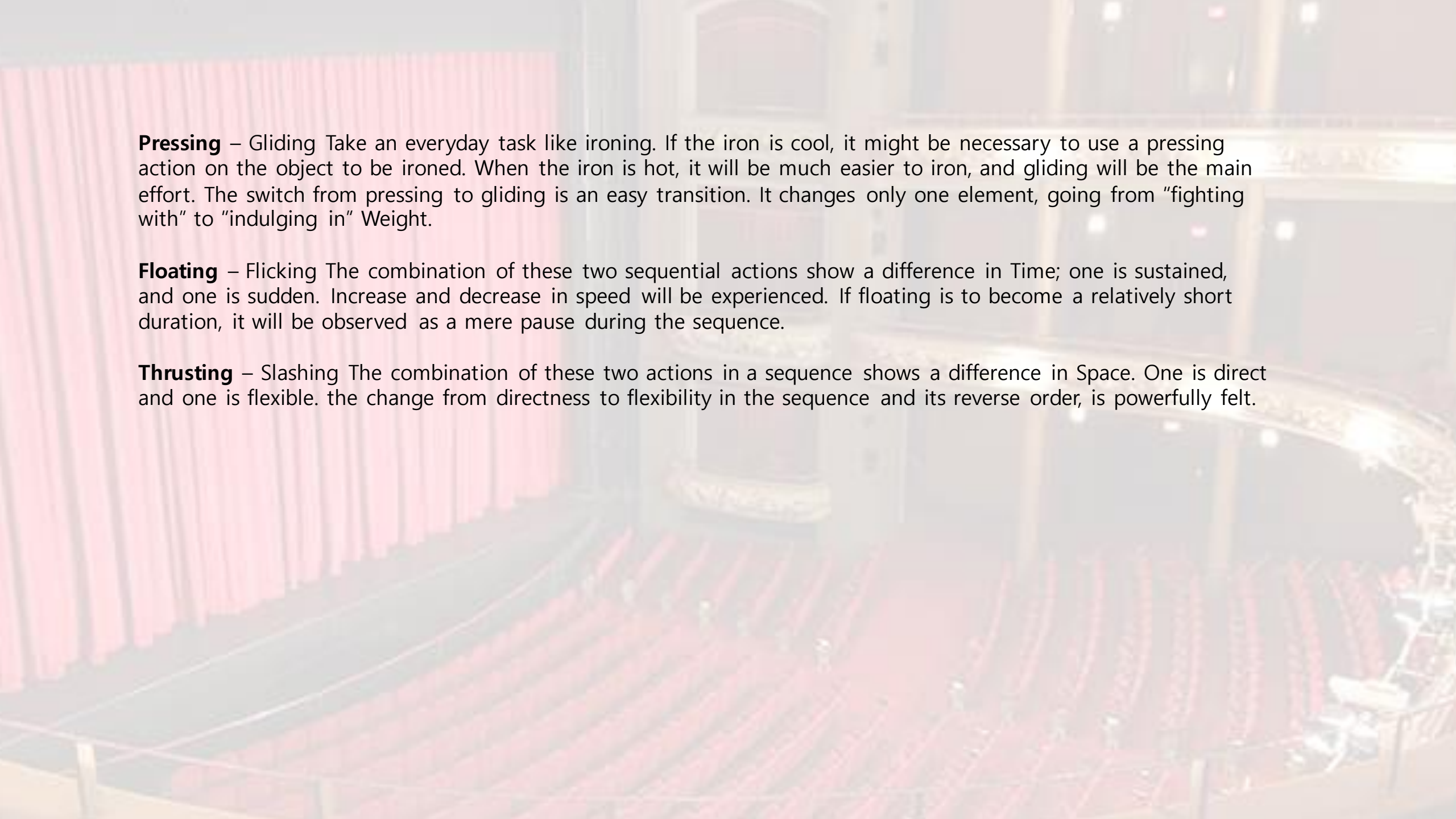
Dabbing: Pixie, Faeries, Painter, Insects DIRECT, FAST, LIGHT — Direct, Sudden, Usually performed with free flow but can also be performed with bound flow. Imagine a painter dabbing at a canvas, or a typist pecking at the keys. Try dabbing with the toes, the knees, head, shoulders. Try the action with steps. Knees can dab upwards and toes or heels downward.

Slashing: Jackie Chan INDIRECT, FAST, HEAVY — Sudden, Strong, Flexible. Karate chops. The action of slashing is one of "fighting against" Weight and Time but "indulging in Space.when the strength fades and Time slows towards the end of the action, the movement becomes floating. Other fluent actions are flicking and thrusting. When the action of thrusting fades, losing strength and slowing down, it becomes gliding. It is important to remember that slashing is performed with free flow. However, when it fades into floating, the flow can then become bound or remain free.

Gliding: Nun, Queen, Statesman DIRECT, SLOW, LIGHT — Sustained. Imagine you are smoothing something horizontally, the palms of the hands parallel with the floor or vertically with the palms facing forward. Gliding with the trunk results in a smooth swaying movement.

Thrusting or Punching: Evander Holyfield, T-REX DIRECT, FAST, HEAVY — Sudden, Strong. Make a fist and punch at something. Try punching with your head. Your elbows, your hips.

Floating: Donna Reed, Child at Amusement Park INDIRECT, SLOW, LIGHT — Flexible, Sustained. Felt momentarily when you leap. Try floating downward as well as upward.



Pressing – Gliding Take an everyday task like ironing. If the iron is cool, it might be necessary to use a pressing action on the object to be ironed. When the iron is hot, it will be much easier to iron, and gliding will be the main effort. The switch from pressing to gliding is an easy transition. It changes only one element, going from “fighting with” to “indulging in” Weight.

Floating – Flicking The combination of these two sequential actions show a difference in Time; one is sustained, and one is sudden. Increase and decrease in speed will be experienced. If floating is to become a relatively short duration, it will be observed as a mere pause during the sequence.

Thrusting – Slashing The combination of these two actions in a sequence shows a difference in Space. One is direct and one is flexible. the change from directness to flexibility in the sequence and its reverse order, is powerfully felt.

Character Analysis Iceberg —

Elements that build an iceberg, maybe never actually use it, but these elements do inform. Do not give away the store in one scene. Clues will help build the iceberg. Slowly reveal the character.

- Age Ethnic Height Weight Sex/Reproduction: How does the character propagate? Do they have sex?
- Gender Health: Handicapped? Born like that?
- Intelligence Education Evolutionary Cycle: Life span.
- Culture: Beliefs Food/Eat Nocturnal
- Family: Values? Size? \$\$\$
- Profession Body Structure: Totally effects how the character moves and how he/she is perceived by others.
- Environment:
- Flaws (Fatal):
- Idiosyncrasies:
- Atmosphere (How a church vs. car wreck influences the character
- Ambition:
- Goals:
- Dreams:
- Trauma: Something that happened that affects how character acts.
- What makes them Laugh?
- Stereotype vs. Archetype:
- Talent:
- Addictions:
- Music:

IV. THINGS ANIMATORS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT ACTING

- Eye contact between characters: 20% of the time we look into each other eyes.
- The only times we have extreme eye contact are: Intimacy Love Fight
- The look of memory (we refer to memories in general, but we remember them in specific moments) * Reference – That Summer
- Recall – That Moment
- Sense of sight vs. hearing (human sight is eight times more powerful than hearing)
- Convert “want” to “need” for more powerful characters
- “Adrenaline Moments” (moments you will remember all your life)We remember extraordinarily BAD and GOOD things. The brain is bathed in adrenalin. Movies and Plays are several adrenalin moments strung together. As an animator/Actor, you must identify with these moments and then your audience will too!
- Make yelling the last acting choice. There are more interesting ways to dominate a scene. When did you see a character in control and dominating the scene actually yell – think Dom Coraline in the Godfather – he never yelled.

- Psychological gesture (movement before words)
- Always remember where the character is coming from. Fix the moment before your scene. What profession am I? Waiting for a bus?
- Atmosphere (a room has its own atmosphere, a car wreck has its own atmosphere, a church has its own atmosphere. The atmosphere affects the character's behavior.)
- Suspension of Disbelief: Samuel Coolidge said, "Suspending disbelief that you are in the theater watching something is what good actors do."
- Peter Brook of the Royal Shakespeare Company said, "A tension line between the actor them self, a tension line between them self and other actors, and a tension line between them self and the audience are what suspend that disbelief. If those three things do not exist, the suspension of that disbelief is lost"
- Overacting: "cheap animation" = overacting, the more subtle stuff like looking busy when you are in a shocking, embarrassing situation instead of going for the overreaction of shock for a "cheap laugh." THE AUDIENCE IS SMARTER THAN YOU THINK – DO NOT OVER ANIMATE.
- We are wired to read facial expression from far away in order to make a value judgment of the other person. Just a glance, subtle motion can say soooo much — it makes the scene resonate.
- Difference between comedy and drama: Neil Simon Story: I was in a fight with my wife and she was cooking dinner in the kitchen. She reaches in the ice box for some frozen peas and slams them down on the counter. This is drama, but if she had thrown them at me (N.S.) it would have been comedy—that is how fine the line is. It becomes comedy when it is an "extension" of the moment.

Psychological gesture (movement before words)

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Comedy is much harder to do than drama because it is drama PLUS!

VILLAINS:

Hannibal Lector story from Silence of the Lambs . Anthony Hopkins in the prison and Jodi Foster is describing the death of her father. Hannibal listens and he shows he is stimulated by the images of gore and blood, but at the same time he identifies with her loss of a father making him seem just a little human too. This gives his evil character more depth and makes him less one dimensional. A good villain is a normal person with a fatal flaw...great villain Cruella De Ville — she just wanted a coat made of puppy skins. The complexity is through where she is a person — age status. A scene is a negotiation — needs conflict/obstacle

Interview with Ed Hicks



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