

The PERFECT Actor

An essay by Matthew Harrison

I just finished the latest intensive workshop and I'm buzzing with thoughts.

The theme that hung over this past weekend was: "*Getting it right*".

What a horrible phrase. What a deadly idea. "*Getting it right*." The compulsion to succeed, to get an "A" from the teacher, a sticker on the board, have all your colleagues congratulate you on succeeding...it's a powerful enemy...

We live in a world that rewards perfection. Perfect teeth. Perfect skin. Perfect waistline. Perfect couple. The perfect child. The perfect pair of jeans - the perfect holiday - the perfect gift. In every magazine, television commercial, restaurant, class room, audition room, and set...there's this lie: that there is such a thing as perfection. Your essay was marked 78%. That's 22% away from perfection. If you're not the perfect kid, your parents won't love you. If you don't do this exercise, or scene, or audition perfectly...God help you.

Well, I hate to tell you, but look around...God's not perfect either.

We need to wipe this notion from our lives. It only leads to frustration and self-destruction. Art is a reflection of life. Acting is the artform of creating real life and reflecting it back to the world. Life is not even close to being perfect. Acting shouldn't be either.

You're standing in front of class...or in front of the casting director and producers...and suddenly you're seized with a panic: "I'm not perfect!" What's the easy answer? Shut down. Escape. Hide. If I FAIL then I can't be judged as imperfect because I didn't even try.

Fuck that. Fail. Go on. Fail away.

Do it. Do your work. Break down the scene. Mine the script for details. Search yourself for understanding. Clear your mind, focus on your partner, and ACT. If you REALLY get out of your way and simply do the work, the result will be exactly what it ought to be...not perfect...not imperfect...but life itself.

Then there's the other lie...

That the artform demands that you be as perfect as possible a human being seeing as you're being watched, scrutinized, analyzed, and judged.

The truth is the opposite. We love imperfections. We love that Sean Penn is slightly insane, that Russell Crowe is angry and overly sensitive, that Meryl Streep is goofy and weepy. We love them for it because THEY'RE HUMAN. Rejoice in your imperfections. Love the fact that you're scared, anxious, passionate, childish, sensitive...stop being so hard on yourself. Stop hurting yourself. Take a good look at how imperfect you are and THANK THE STARS that you're not perfect.

Stop ascribing values to things like pain, hurt, issues, depression, events. There is no positive or negative, good or bad, perfect or imperfect.

It all JUST IS.

Life isn't perfect. But life is wonderful in all it's messed-up glory. Because it is LIFE. Embrace it.

Doesn't all that take the pressure off?

In fact...it means you can jump into your work with an un-adulterated "aw, the-hell-with-it" attitude - *seeing as I can't get it right anyway, and that I'm allowed, in fact, **encouraged** to be imperfect anyway - I may as well simply work hard, stick to the text, and tell the story the writer wants me to.* In the end, this deletes all pretentiousness, all preciousness, any and all feelings that you are adequate or inadequate. Instead, it cultivates the idea that YOU ARE YOU...and that's when real and deep work happens.

When we realize that it's not about us - not about us trying to be perfect - guess what happens? We do THE WORK. And when the work gets done, and someone watches and is moved by a little moment of real, earnest, intense humanity, you know what happens...? The world is made a slightly better place.

Not a perfect place. A better place.