

So: the actor has done all of the homework:

- thorough scene analysis (Scarecrow)
- emotional preparation (Tinman)
- and focus warm ups (Lion)

And the actor has:

- memorized the scene flat and fully

And the actor has:

- run the rehearsal exercises in order to fall into character including R + D, ACTION AND COUNTERPOINT STATEMENTS , and EMOTIONAL RELATIONSHIP

And the actor has:

- SET THE STAGE by wiring with set, props, activities, and imagery

And now the actor has EARN THE RIGHT to run the scene.

Because the actor who has done all the rehearsal work has left no room for the insecurity to show up. The actor has closed the gap between actor and character. And now all that knowledge presses against the surrender line...against the line of forgetting...and actor becomes character. The first moment happens, and then the second, and then moment after moment, the scene happens and the actor is in the FLOW of the scene. The actor becomes story.

When all that work has done, then actors achieve the ART OF FORGETTING. The actor forgets what is about to happen, forgets that they have done any homework, forgets that they know dialogue, forget that they know where the scene is going to go...they forget that they are an actor...and become story and character. Anticipating what's to come is impossible, because the actor is in the moment to moment flow of ONE ACTION played at a time. This is SURRENDER.

One of the great moments that actors should revel in...is the beginning of the art of forgetting moment...at "action" or "places". It is even sometimes the first second after action. It's the moment when the actor goes blank slate. "What's my first line? What's my first line? Who am I? What's my first action? What am I doing here?" And the actor has a brief and powerful panic moment. That's the moment of the ego surrendering. That's the moment between falling back and being caught in the arms of the other actor. It's the moment between jumping off the diving board and hitting the pool. It's the moment where the actor's consciousness is swept clean...to remove the need to perform.

The first action will come, because the actor has done all their homework. The actor hooks on to that first action...! A 1 prime...and then the whole scene rolls right out.

The other great moment for an actor is right at the end of the scene, when an actor shakes themselves back out of the scene, and say "what happened!? Was that any good?!" And when the director says "Beautiful! Cut, print, moving on!" The actor has no idea what they did and has to trust that the director got what she needed.

Professional actors, when watching their dailies or the playback, are surprised by their performance. Because they have no idea what their performance was like...because they weren't focussed on their own performance, only on the other actor. The actor is not aware of their own behaviour, of the accidents, of how the lines are coming out.

The collapsing of time because of being in the speed of life, and the vectored-out connectivity to the partner, leads to the "what happened" un-awareness of the actor's performance. That's proof that the art of forgetting occurred.

Now the actor has run the scene. And now it's time for the director, teacher, or fellow actor to give notes.

Blocking is the FINAL RESULT of all the rehearsal work. NOT THE WORK ITSELF.

Where the actors are standing, sitting, leaning...when and where they walk to, cross the stage, enter and exit... will happen automatically if the actors have done all their preparation and removed their ego. It's not the actor's choice. The character will stand when the character needs to stand and the character will sit when the character needs to sit. It will be character driven. The blocking occurs. It happens. The actor doesn't think of it as blocking. The actor is simply alive.

The opposite approach, to get on your feet, books in hand, unmemorized, unclear of character, unclear of objectives, not even aware of themes and meaning let alone structure and arc...is to hope that somehow discoveries will occur leading you to – somehow – stand or sit in an interesting way. It's throwing your project, your production, your actors to wishful thinking. Like builders hoping the sky scraper stands up because there are no architectural plans.

The blocking is born of the story analysis, the emotional truth, and the vectored-out focus. The actors, full of knowledge of their actions, full of emotional energy, connected to their partner...have become character. And so they will stand, sit, cross where they must.

In the world of film and television, the "First Team Rehearsal" is also known as "The Blocking". When cast and crew are about to shoot a new scene, the First Team (Director, First Assistant Director, Director of photography, and actors) come to the set and rehearse the scene. The first team rehearsal is THE MOST IMPORTANT ACTING AN ACTOR WILL DO. The Close Up isn't. The blocking rehearsal is...because the rest of the day's work on the scene will be based on it.

Many actors approach First Team Rehearsal exactly backwards. Sides in hand, often a coffee in the other, they walk through a read – no emotion, no actions based on story analysis, and lost in their pages. Almost always there's a quiet thud in the room after the read...and the director says: "Okay. Well. Uhm...okay. Let's have you walk in from there...and I guess end up here-ish..." – – and proceeds to make up blocking based on only his or her interpretation of the script.

If the actor walks through the blocking, sides in hand, and they mark where he lands, where he stops...and then the actor goes away letting the crew set up all the cameras based on those marks. Then the actor goes away to his trailer and then studies the scene. Works out the story, memorizes the lines, works through the emotion...maybe even has his acting coach in the trailer to help analyze and emotionalize the scene. Then the actor comes back to set now fully prepared to work. On action, the actor as character goes for it...and misses all the marks. "CUT! Actor off his mark." The places where he is supposed to land are arbitrary marks lazily decided upon when the actor hadn't been prepared. And those marks are set...the cameras and lights are in place after along set up by the crew. Now the poor actor fights himself all day, working against the current, trying to land in places entirely foreign to where he would land as character in these circumstances. And the blocking looks pre-meditated and awkward.

Whereas the actor who "goes for it" in first team rehearsal, knows their dialogue, moments, actions, scene analysis, emotionality, and is focussed...that actor lands where they would land as character. The director's response is an instant and excited: "GREAT! Wonderful!" and then he or she tweaks performance, suggests possibilities, re-directs analysis and the actor and director play. Then the marks are set on where the actor will land naturally. This actor has a relaxing down-current day, because he never has to worry about the blocking...the blocking is inevitable. And yet it's spontaneous and exciting.

In other words: when the actor is story ready, knows their character and actions, is emotionally prepared and all vectored out...the scene should block itself. When the blocking doesn't work...is when the director steps in. Because something is blocking the natural flow.

BLOCKING is UNBLOCKING.

When the blocking doesn't look or feel right is when the director steps in saying: "let's look at this moment - it doesn't feel right" means the scene simply doesn't look like life. It looks "wrong". When the rules are broken - when a "red flag" is thrown on the play, in other words, when a tell-tale sign appears that isn't from real life - then assume that that section of the story hasn't been properly worked through, or possibly misunderstood...and go back to the analysis of that moment. The director's job is to say: that's not true to life...to this life and these circumstances. That's wrong. So let's explore the moment, this part of the script and deduce what the right action is to play.

There are certain rules of nature, of life, that need to be adhered to. When these rules are broken, acting simply doesn't look like life. The acting will look amateurish, or at best forced and odd. Un-true. This again, is the **GOLDEN RULE**: if it happens in the real world, it must happen in acting...if it doesn't happen in the real world, it can't happen in acting. This is very important point that must be made clear:

THE "RULES" OF ACTING AREN'T "RULES" ...THEY ARE THE TRUTH OF LIFE
WHEN THOSE TRUTHS AREN'T BEING FOLLOWED IN ACTING
THEN THE SCENE IS BLOCKED FROM ITS FLOW

The dynamics of a scene are the result that occurs because the actor is inside of the scene...like blocking, its a part of the scene that will happen naturally if the actor is fully immersed in the scene. In acting, the terminology for Dynamics have been borrowed from music terminology. Terms like:

- sotto voce: to speak in a very quiet voice, not quite a whisper
- staccato: to hit the words of the dialogue in short, crisp bursts
- legato: to speak the words in a languid, liquid way
- crescendo: to grow louder and louder as you speak
- decrescendo: to grow quieter and quieter as you speak
- accelerando: to get faster and faster in your speech

Most monologues generally crescendo and accelerando as the tension progresses, resulting in the climax.

Most sentences drive to the end of the sentence. Sentences naturally have an energy push to the last word. That's why sentences are designed the way they are. The reason why the sentence ends where the sentence ends is because it ends when we've made our point. Reading this book out loud, the reader would naturally be driving to the end of sentences with small crescendos/accelerandos.

To be, or not to be, that is the question.

It's very strange to give up energy half way through and throw away the end of a line. It is, in fact, a way to elicit a laugh in comedy because half way through the sentence the character will become aware of the fact that they don't believe in what they are saying...cue laughter.

When an actor is falling out of the natural dynamics, is an indication that the actor is falling out of the scene. An actor with training and experience will permit for the possibility of all sorts of natural dynamics. In fact, a professional and disciplined actor will also spend time listening to real people converse and notice the dynamics that exist. They will also read scripts, then watch the great actors perform on film, and listen for the beautiful and accidental dynamics that occur in acting. When the professional actor can tell that their dynamics are off, they see this as an indicator that they are out of the scene.

Melody is natural in people's speech. We as actors need to be ready to for the potential of melody that will be the accidental behaviour that will occur once we surrender to performance.

Actors need to be available for the possible melody that will occur after surrender.

Melody in life is all over the place. People speak with huge melodic variation. And that melody is a RESULT of the action...a result of the moment, the emotionality, and the reasons behind the actions. Melody is an accident that occurs because of the 99% of the Life Triangle.

I often tell actors to go out in the real world and listen to how people talk. I instruct them to listen to conversations... yes, to eavesdrop...on conversations in cafes, restaurant, on the subway platform, wherever. And memorize one piece of the conversation, how they said it.

There's a young guy on a bus on his cellphone, and he says: "What? No. Really?! Nooooo. Wow, dude, that's, that's, that's...huh. Wow." And their melody is all over the place. It's musical.

Then, take that line of real-life dialogue that you have overheard, write it out as though it is dialogue, and hand it to a fellow actor. Ask them to "act" the line. Hear how FLAT and INHUMAN the actor's delivery will be, full of down-turned endings and lacking all life. Notice how actors miss how FULL life really is.

Life is melodic. Melody is pre-linguistic. We spoke with melody before we had words. Listen to a baby communicate with their parents. It's melody in the form of questioning, demanding, connecting. That's why we adults do things as well such as: "huh...?" with a big melodic slide, or "naaaaaahhh...". Even dogs know melody. If I say to my lab: "Dexter!" He literally mumbles a question: "huuunh...?" And when I say: "Walk!" His response is: "Oooo!"

Melody is natural. BUT...melody is an accident of the preparation. The potential melody is prepared through all the work, but the actor CAN NOT KNOW YET what the melody will be. In doing all the homework, memorizing FLAT, and then surrendering to the scene...then, and only then, will the accidental melodic result happen...spontaneously, like life.

So, the irony is that actors who memorize WITH inflection and pre-meditated line-readings, are actually shutting down the surrender, are shutting down their FLOW, and then actually shut down the POSSIBILITY of real, exciting, fresh, and spontaneous melody.

As a coach, I get hired to go to set to break actor's line readings. No matter how much direction a director gives the actor, the actor is stuck in their pre meditated line melody.

The line is "do - you - see".

And the actor has memorized: "do you see: with a downward ending.

And the director says: can you make it a question?

And the actor says: "do - you - see" with a downward ending.

And the director goes, more of a question. A question...?

And the actor says: "do - you - see" with a downward ending.

And the director goes "Say this: I am...?" And the actor says correctly: "I am...?" and the director goes: that's it! Now say the line that way.

And the actor says: Oh I get it! a question! Then says "do - you - see" with a downward ending.

The melody has been connected to the memorization and can't be shook, and the potential melody can't occur. What I have to do is start from the beginning: re-build the story and emotion and focus and find the action on the line...going back to the work that should have been done initially.

Another habit of early actors is the tendency to not pick up cues. Actors need to tighten up the space between dialogue. Real people in the real world step on each other's sentences all the time. And when they don't, there's barely a breath between each other's sentences. Listen to dinner conversations or eavesdrop at any cafe. People leave no room between each other's sentences. People are smarter than how fast we speak. People know what the other person is saying, the gist of it, before they have finished their sentence...and the listener is already realizing, deciding, and responding to that sentence before it's actually done.

You know how this sentence will end, long before I...

Language is a poor means of communication...people think much faster than they talk, and people think much faster than they listen. But until we evolve into a higher means of communication, speaking is still the way to communicate. So we step all over each other.

And writers like Aaron Sorkin, Neil LaBute, and David Mamet have pushed writing for stage and film towards the naturalism of characters speaking over each other... to the point that to "Sorkin" a scene, means to have the actors speak over each other's dialogue.

So it's very strange to hear actors taking big pauses. One actor delivers their line. Pause. The other actor says their line. Pause. It's this odd polite acting idea where everyone has "their moment". Which, of course, has nothing to do with humanity.

If an actor drops in random pausing between cues, the audience will be way ahead of the actor, because they are thinking faster than the actor is speaking, the actor is getting the "cues" - that is the realization on the line - and then have to sit around waiting for the actors to catch up.

An actor willy nilly taking pauses and so kills the humanity of the character. In fact, pausing in arbitrary places in a script is very, very dangerous. A pause often means exactly the opposite of a non-pause and confuse an audience.

I say to an actor: "ask me if I think you are a good actor." The actor asks me:

STUDENT: "Matthew, do you think I am a good actor?"

MATTHEW: "Yes."

No pause in between, I answer immediately yes, and everyone knows that I think that actor has chops. BUT, if I pause:

STUDENT: "Matthew, do you think I am a good actor?"

(long pause)

MATTHEW: "Yes."

Now everyone knows I hesitated and DO NOT think the actor is a good actor. It means the exact opposite of what I said. If an actor takes pauses before their lines, they will negate the meaning of the scene itself, and confuse an already bored audience.

Now...there ARE moments when the character takes a pause. There will be moments in the script which are moments of silence. There are times where the character takes a beat answering. Those moments are written into the script! It will be scripted! Those exist for reasons. Pauses, silences, beats are UNSPOKEN DIALOGUE. They are moments full of realizations and decisions and are imperative to the story.

There are scenes of great quietness, like in a Harold Pinter play, where characters take huge pauses, long silences, and many beats...and all those are INTEGRAL to the writing. Are necessary to the story. That is dialogue, simply unspoken dialogue. In this case, the actors ARE STILL picking up their cues from each other...they are behavioural cues, not spoken ones.

So, when not scripted, the actor needs to pick up their cues.

To be clear: that does not mean speak quickly! Tightening the dialogue and speaking quickly are two different things. Sometimes the tempo of a scene will fast...sometimes it will be slow. The tempo of scene is yet another kind of dynamic. the speed at which the characters are talking will occur naturally...the scene will force you into the correct tempo IF you have down all of your homework.