

Session Six

PINCH AND OUCH

WARM UP

Everyone do a good ten minutes of repetition, then read on.

• • • • •

MOVING FORWARD

We must move forward in the repetition. The “What’s happening” will now include not only what’s happening over there with my partner, but also, what does what’s happening over there, *do to me*? So the what’s happening is now *over there* and over here. This is what Sandy called the “Pinch and Ouch”.

As we are working with our partner, things add up. You know, saying the same thing seven times, if you are *really talking with each other*, will get monotonous or tedious or infuriating or SOMETHING! (Just imagine your mother telling you five times, “Why don’t you get a real job!”) In the exercise, you must respond to this when it happens. “This is boring,” “You keep on saying that,” “You’re on automatic” and so forth.

Your partner says to you, “You look jerky” five times. If you are really listening, this must have an impact on you. I don’t know what it would be for you, but if you didn’t like it, you’d have every right to say to your partner “Don’t say that

again!" So there's a Pinch: "You look jerky!" And an Ouch: "Don't say that again!" You see, "Don't say that again!" wasn't something you wanted to say or thought you should say, it was something you had to say because of what you got from your partner and what that did to you. There is a voice in you that wants to speak, allow it! Say it!

I must be careful here. I want to be sure that you do not limit this concept of "Pinch and Ouch" to any one connotation. Look at these examples:

The pinch might be a beautiful smile on your partner's glowing face and the ouch might be your response, "WOW, what a great smile!"

The pinch might be an encouraging, "You are so bright," from your partner and the ouch is your response, "You make me feel great!"

The pinch from your partner, "You really hurt my feelings" and the ouch is your response, "I'm so sorry."

Hey, doesn't this all sound more like real people—real people really talking with each other? Yes it does and you will! You will surprise yourself in many wonderful ways as you more closely work-off of each other, the more you live moment-to-moment, and as you continue to grow into the full expression of who you truly are. *WHO YOU TRULY ARE!* Not who others want you to be and not who you think you should be but who you *must be* because of what your partner just did and what that did to you. Then you will find that you are moving away from "repetition land" and towards "human being land!"

Careful now! Careful! Do not interpret this to mean that the repetition will now become, in any way, "conversational" or "casual." Remember, you are playing the scales and the

scales have their rules. Remember: “Don’t do anything unless something makes you do it.” I have simply said that now, the “something” is not only *over there* it is also *over here*. I have simply added to the repetition that, when you are aware of it, you must work not only from what you get from your partner but also from what that does to you!

Did you hear that? WHEN YOU ARE AWARE OF IT. The temptation will be to TRY TO DO what I have just talked about. You mustn’t! You must not try to do it. It is all about allowing it to occur. ALLOWING...

**To the Observer: In a moment we will work. As the partners repeat, watch for responses in each person that are not being expressed. Stop them at these times and ask the person, “What did that just do to you?” The partner can then grapple with, out loud, what was happening for him or her. Then they can begin the repetition with a fresh start.*

Or you might tell them what you just got from their behavior. For instance you might stop the exercise and say: “Ted, you really didn’t like when June said that you were being too loud.” Allow Ted to respond to you: “Yeah, you’re right, it made me feel small and I kept thinking that I’d like to just shut her up.” Then you can coach Ted in this way: “Well, say that to her right now and continue, let’s go!” which will put them back into the repetition. Even though you have stopped for a moment, most of the time, that response is still living and the partners can easily get right back into the exercise.

With this new information, I want you all to do fifteen minutes of repetition. Then read on...

• • • • •

We have now developed a wonderful basis for a specific kind of improvisation, haven't we! As opposed to most acting class improvisations where everyone is in their head thinking of the next clever thing to say, in this improvisation you not only must not be thinking, you are continually given what to say *by your partner*, so there is nothing to think about. GREAT!

• • • • •

HOMEWORK

Get together as often as possible and do repetition. Please don't think about doing it. Do it!

Almost anybody can learn to think or believe or know, but not a single human being can be taught to be.

Why?

Because whenever you think or you believe or you know, you are a lot of other people: but the moment you are being, you're nobody but yourself.

To be nobody but yourself—in a world which is doing its best night and day to make you everybody else—means to fight the hardest battle which any human being can fight, and never stop fighting.

*Does this sound dismal? It isn't. It's the most wonderful life
on earth.*

—e.e. cummings

Session Seven

COMING TO THE DOOR

As we established earlier, acting is living truthfully under imaginary circumstances. So far we have addressed which part of this statement? Well so far, we have been working on living truthfully. Right?

Now, I want to add a new element to the exercise. For this you will need a room with a door. If you are working at home, you might use the front door or the door to the living room. If you are working in a studio, you need some basic furniture including a couch, a table and some chairs. Having some other things such as a dresser and small bed are also useful.

The exercise will work this way:

- Partner A, you are in your room.
- Partner B, you go outside the door, close the door behind you, wait a few moments and then knock.
- Partner A, you respond to the knock.

Everything else we have been doing remains the same, in other words, you do repetition as you have been learning to do it. The difference is that now instead of being in chairs facing each other, (and I bet you thought we'd never get out of those chairs!) one person is in their room and the other person is at the door and he or she knocks. So now choose who will be in their room and who will be at the door.

Before you begin, a few questions. First of all, what have we just added to the exercise? Answer this question in your notebook and then read on.

• • • • •

Remember, acting is living truthfully under imaginary circumstances and up until this point we have been working on the “living truthfully.” Now we are adding the “imaginary circumstances” to the exercise.

So, to the person in the room—what are you doing in your room? You are not “doing” anything, you are simply in your room. Are you waiting for your partner to knock? No, you are simply in your room. Do you know that your partner or anyone else is coming to see you? No, you are simply in your room. When you hear a knock, is it your partner knocking? You don’t know who is there. All you know is that you are in your room and if you hear a knock, you respond to that knock. When you open the door, what is your relationship to the person at the door? Your relationship is whatever it actually is, no more, no less.

To the person at the door—when you knock, who do you expect to answer the door? You do not expect anyone to answer because you don’t know if anyone is home. You do know who’s door you’ve come to and that’s all you know. So, what are you coming to do? You’re not coming to do anything, you simply come to the door and knock.

Isn’t that simple? I’ll ask you one other question. Isn’t it true that, in fact, *you do know* that your partner is outside the room and that he or she is coming to the door at some point? To the person outside, isn’t it true that *you do know* that the person in the room is actually in there? Must you then believe these imaginary circumstances? Is acting

believing? No, it is accepting the imaginary circumstances and living them out as if they are true. You do know and you **MUST NOT KNOW**. You see, you must **ACCEPT** that you don't know, an actor **MUST NEVER KNOW**. We are now going to strengthen this thing called "ACTOR'S FAITH" or the ability to fully accept the imaginary circumstances.

So, what do you do? Well, when the door opens, you do repetition just as you have been doing it, the only difference is that you are not in your seats—you are at the door. The door opens and you "take the first thing" and off you go. Oh, I must tell you that in this exercise, you accept as a given that the door is always locked. Understand? The door is always locked. (Makes it impossible to sit on your couch and yell, "Come on in!" doesn't it!)

Go ahead now and do some work. Try this a few times and then read on.

• • • • •

Some thing to be aware of at this point: When you opened the door, was your first response "Hi", or "Come on in", or "Have a seat", or any other similar comments? You must give up playing the good host or hostess. (Sandy used to yell to us, "'Hi' is for taxi drivers!") What you must do is work off your partner. So when the door opens, one of you will begin the repetition immediately with whatever you get from your partner, just as you have been learning to do. I want you to know that theatre is not an imitation of life, it demands a greater truth! This is where you will begin to learn what that statement is all about.

As you opened the door, did the person outside the door ever barge right in and then once he or she was in, did you both find yourselves not knowing what to do so you quickly

headed for the chairs or the couch to sit? Listen, don't do anything unless something makes you do it, remember? Stay with your partner, it's all over there. So, for the person who knocked—did you get from your partner that you should come in? And, if you aren't welcomed in, what is the impact of being kept outside the door and what is your response to that? If you are both at the door or inside the door, where ever you are, stay with what's happening until something really makes you do something else.

You know, it is uncomfortable to stand at the door and simply *be* with each other. Almost everything in us wants to do something, to get comfortable— “Quick, I gotta go find a good seat!” You know, we got used to those two chairs and now they're gone. This work is about continually “letting go of” and being *right here, right now*. In other words, this work IS UNCOMFORTABLE. It's about living in the unknown. There you are at the door with this person, not knowing what is going to happen or where simply being with each other is going to take you—TERRIFYING!—you give up control—OH MY GOD!—and there is nothing to do. So what do you do when you are there at the door and you are feeling so uncomfortable you could scream? You scream, “THIS IS UNCOMFORTABLE!” What about the repetition? That IS the repetition! You just gave your partner something real to work-off, GREAT! Now see where that takes the two of you.

OK, I want you to do two exercises. Each of you take a turn being in the room and coming to the door. Allow the exercise to go on for some time and see where working-off each other takes you. Then, stop working today.

• • • • •

HOMEWORK

Between now and Session Eight, meet two times and at each meeting do two exercises as you have just learned to do. For Session Eight have one person in your group bring with them a wooden broom handle without the broom at the end. The best is if you have an old one or can buy a cheap one and cut it in half. Whichever it is, be certain that you have one.

The three fundamental principles are to accept your feelings, know your purpose, and do what needs doing. The doing is what is important, not the result. Behavior is what counts, not emotion. Not even the results of behavior. What I do is the only thing in life that I can control.

—From *Playing Ball on Running Water*
by David K. Reynolds, Ph.D.

Session Eight

Doing Fully

Before reading on, have each person do two exercises, one time in the room and one time coming to the door. Then continue on into the activity.

• • • • •

THE ACTIVITY

Acting is Doing. It is not talking about, it is doing something and when we are not really doing on stage we have stopped acting. Every character in every play is after something, they are trying to accomplish something and in well-written plays, every character is fighting for their life to get it, to make it happen. (Please read the plays of Clifford Odets!) The part of this process called “activities” continues the training in *really doing* something. I say continues because part of what we have strengthened in repetition is the ability to really listen and listening is a doing. (Remember this at the next play you see. Are they really listening or are they making it *look like* they are listening. Just as most salespeople are taught, many actors are trained in the “indication” of listening, “Now I make good eye contact, now I really focus on you, now I fully concentrate, and so forth.)

Acting is not about the words, the actor is given the words by the playwright. The actor’s job is to provide truthful behavior which bring the words on the page to life. Breathing life into the playwright’s words is nothing less

than the act of creation itself! And though we are working on the best first steps I know toward fulfilling this acting demand, ultimately the achievement of it is no less mysterious than the journey of giving birth to a child.

Since becoming a father, I have realized how similar the two really are. We know all of the facts; one out of millions, the sperm meets the egg and the mother begins experiencing vast swings of emotional and physical responses, (from depths of pain and fear to the heights of excitement and joy) to the new life inside her. Then, at a moment totally out of the mother's control, working from the child's own innate wisdom, he or she enters the new world. So, we know the facts, the doctors can detail every aspect of this event with formulas and theories and concepts. But not one doctor, not one specialist anywhere, can speak a word to us about the great mystery we call LIFE.

In this regard I think of my other great acting teacher, Suzanne Shepherd. When we had not quite brought a specific and personal life to the text, Suzanne would yell at us: "Words, words, musical fruit!" I heard Marianne Williamson, in a lecture she gave on spiritual laws, say something that directly links to this discussion, "Nothing occurs on the visible plane that did not first occur invisibly."

Peter Brook speaks about this aspect of acting in his book *The Empty Space* in a chapter called "The Deadly Theatre". He says, "A word does not start as a word—it is an end product which begins as an impulse, stimulated by attitude and behavior which dictate the need for expression. This process occurs inside the dramatist; it is repeated inside the actor. Both may only be conscious of the words, but both for the author and then for the actor, the word is a small visible portion of a gigantic unseen formation. Some writers attempt to nail down their meaning and intentions in stage

directions and explanations, yet we cannot help being struck by the fact that the best dramatists explain themselves the least. They recognize that further indications will most probably be useless. They recognize that the only way to find the true path to the speaking of a word is through a process that parallels the original creative one. This can neither be bypassed nor simplified.” The word is a small visible portion of a gigantic unseen formation. I love that!

The beginning of this really is “point of view.” In more advanced elements of acting such as Character Work, we must grapple with the very specific point of view of the character and through what specifically limited vision does she or he look at the world. Now, as you begin your study of the craft, it is essential that you become intimately in touch with your own point of view. As opposed to many peoples’ concept of acting as a putting on of masks to become a character, in fact, acting is a taking off of masks to reveal the character and the character is always you.

• • • • •

THE ACTIVITY

The First Step

For the first exercise with the activity, I want you to use the broom handle or long stick of some sort that you brought to today’s session.

- Now, one partner stand in the center of the room.
- The other partner, you sit in a chair facing your partner, giving your partner plenty of space to work.
- The standing part
- The standing partner, you take the broom handle and I want you to balance it on the very tip of your left

thumb. Not on the nail or the flat side, on the tip, so that your thumb is pointed to the ceiling. Put all of your concentration, everything you've got into balancing the stick. Do it to *master* balancing the stick, like your life depends on it.

- Now, when that partner gets involved in the balancing, I want you, the seated partner, to wait a few moments and then begin repetition.
- Once repetition begins do not stop, do repetition just as you know how to do it.
- To the partner balancing, where should your attention be? Put all of your attention on BALANCING THE STICK! AND REPEAT! Do not drop the repetition. And, balance the stick as if your life depends on it, do it TO MASTER BALANCING THE STICK!

**To the Observer: Your job at this point is to help the person with the activity to keep their attention, 100%, on what they are doing, as they continue to do the repetition. So, if you notice him or her take any of their attention off of balancing the stick to "work-off" the partner, you must say something like: "Master balancing the stick and repeat, KEEP BALANCING AND REPEAT!" Or if they stop repeating so that they might balance better, you can say: "DON'T DROP THE REPETITION!"*

After doing repetition for a while, switch and let the other partner balance the stick. Follow the same directions except this time, balance on the tip of your pinky finger. When the next person does the activity, you make up a specific way that you will balance the stick. Go ahead now and give it a try. Then read on.

• • • • •

OK, let me ask a question. As you worked, did you sense that most or all of the changes in the repetition came from the seated partner and that the partner who was balancing, was mostly, merely repeating back what was said? This is usually what happens in the first few exercises with the activity.

So, in a moment, I want you all to do this activity again and what I want the partner who is balancing to know is that, when you are aware of something happening, you can work-off your partner, as you know how to do. This does not mean that you may take your attention off or give up your mission which is to master balancing the stick. It means that as you put 100% of your attention on balancing the stick, when you are aware of it, you will allow yourself to be in response to what you get from your partner. (Remember, working-off does not mean “looking at.”)

So, if as you balance the stick your partner laughs and says, “You’re a klutz!” Your response might be, “You’re laughing at me” or “You’re putting me down.” If you hear your partner yawn, your response might be, “This is boring you” or “You are tired.” Of course, as always, it is not about the words, it is about being in response to what’s happening. And as you balance, you must now begin to respond to what is happening without giving up what you are doing.

Go ahead now. Each partner take a turn doing the activity with this additional information.

• • • • •

How did that go? I bet that, this time, you were more available to your partner without giving up the activity. We must, at all times, be fully doing what we are doing on

stage. Sandy told us that: “The quality of your acting depends on how fully you are doing what you are doing.”

This means a total commitment to what we are doing right now and the moment we are doing something else, we are giving 100% of ourselves to the doing of that. The exercise at this point highlights a basic truth which is that it is impossible to do two things *fully* at the same time. Of course this is somewhat new for most of us who in life are usually doing three things at one time ending up *somewhat* doing three things and *fully* doing none. So, you may ask, how then do I do my activity fully and also work-off my partner fully? GREAT QUESTION! Hold on to that one and keep working!

Again: “The quality of your acting depends on how fully you are doing what you are doing.”

For your next meeting you must each bring an activity with you. So, what are the elements which make up an activity at this point? The activity must be physically difficult, extremely difficult for you to do, the more difficult the better. For whom? FOR YOU! It doesn't matter that it's very easy for someone else to accomplish. What matters is that it is extremely difficult for *you* to do.

Also, you must know when you have accomplished what you have set out to do, when the activity is complete. This must be specific. For instance, if your activity is to take a deck of playing cards and build a house of cards, you might set it up knowing that you must use, one at a time, every card in the deck, creating a house that is four levels high. “Any house of cards” is general. A four-story house, using every card in the deck, one at a time—that's getting specific. You know what you are working to accomplish and when you've done it! If you are bouncing a ball on a paddle, how do you know when

you have mastered it? Well, maybe you set it up so that you must bounce the ball on the paddle 50 times in a row without letting the ball drop to the floor. You see, when you set it up specifically, who will know when you have accomplished what you have set out to do? YOU WILL! This is vital, *you will know*, and you will know what you are doing specifically! So, it is not any number of bounces on the paddle, it is 50 bounces. You are not doing anything, you are doing THIS, SPECIFICALLY! As Stanislavsky said, “*Anything*, is the enemy of art.”

Here’s a little quiz. Write down in your notebook why the following example is not a good activity. Ready? Here’s the activity: to write the great American novel. Go ahead now, answer this question and then come back and read on.

• • • • •

Writing the great American novel would certainly be very difficult, but is it physically difficult? No, this activity mostly requires a lot of head work, doesn’t it. Secondly, how would *you* really know when you have actually written the great American novel? (Even if it gets published, who’s to judge, some might say it is, and to others, it’s not. And even if they all say that it is, you still might not believe them!)

I used this example because it shows clearly what you must stay away from in setting up your activity. You must make sure that the activity is truly, *physically difficult*. This does not mean strenuous, although it can be, it means *not in your head*. For example, drawing a lifelike portrait with pen and ink of how you remember your sister when she was ten might be very difficult, but *how you remember her* is in your head. Now, if you do the drawing having an old photograph of your sister at ten years old, right there with you on the table to work from—well now you’re on to something! You

see, now it's not in your head, it's there in front of you. You can see it and you will know when it's lifelike and complete. The completion of your activity must not be vague or fuzzy, it must be clear and concrete.

Two last things: First, for now, I do not want you to use the element of time in the set up of your activity. What I mean is that the activity must be intrinsically difficult for you. Of course, it would make it harder to bounce the ball on the paddle 50 times if you added that you must do it *in under two minutes*. But for now, I do not want you to use a time limit to help make the activity more difficult. Got that?

Secondly, the activity must be extremely difficult to do, the closer to being impossible the better, but not actually impossible. Do you have an idea why this is vital? You see, if you know that the activity is truly impossible to do, what will you really have to work toward? But if there is even the *remotest possibility* that you can accomplish this incredibly difficult task, well, now you're in the activity arena we're talking about!

• • • • •

HOMEWORK

Now get to work on setting up your first activity. Also, between now and your next Session practice repetition at a minimum of two meetings. You can do it coming to the door as well as just sitting in chairs. (Do not do it with an activity yet.) Then, bring your activity with you to your Session Nine and we will continue moving forward in the work.

*Do you think I know what art is?
Do you think I'd think anybody knew,
even if they said they did?
Do you think I'd care what anybody thought?
Now if you ask me what we're trying to do
that's a different thing.*

—Georgia O'Keeffe