The Dynamic Actor Workshop: Week Five

“He who lives without folly is not as wise as he thinks.”

- Rochefoucault

“ . . . you must be able to repeat in the light what you felt happening in an invisible light since earliest childhood – you must become transparency personified.”

- Actress (character in Peter Handke’s play, Voyage to the Sonorous Land)

There are pitfalls to thinking too much about acting. It can become an intellectual exercise, focusing on dramaturgy more than action, or it can become all about you – how do I feel? How can things be set up to serve me? Or it simply becomes a too-earnest effort to be *good*. The recurring theme of all of these problems is the same: turning inward, focusing on your thought and feelings. But the camera wants to see us alive and focused outside of ourselves, just as we are in our everyday interactions and storytelling. So this week we slow down and pay attention to the idea that everything we’ve learned should be about getting your attention off of yourself and out into the world of the scene.

The driving action asks what you are doing to get what you want from the *other person*, and every way you implement it should be in reaching out to that other. Laban’s Effort Shapes ask how you move through and relate to the space *around you*. Reading script out loud every time valiantly fights against you ever being in your head. If a technique is making you think too much, we must find a way out.

Concepts explored:

Resisting and Containing

Big emotions can be intimidating if we feel like we have to manufacture those emotional states. We are rightly concerned that it will appear melodramatic and false. So go the other direction – resist those emotions, try to contain them. For example, if a scene is deeply sad, get in a safe place, alone, and let yourself feel deeply sorrowful. Now, pay attention to how that feels; does it start in your stomach, or in your throat? Does your chest constrict, does your heartrate change? Where do your tears seem to come from?

Then, when you play the scene, rather than trying to play that emotion, fight it back. Try *not to* cry. When you feel the tickle in your jaw that might lead to a sob, fight it back. And on like that. You’ll often find the resistance to be a better way to plug you into a moment, and that containment can communicate volumes to a camera without overwhelming the audience or holding its hand.

Playing the resistance can work for any heightened emotion: rage, panic, fear, joy. It’s a fairly simple way to introduce complexity as you play and explore.

Suggested reading: [*How to Stop Acting*](https://www.amazon.com/How-Stop-Acting-Harold-Guskin-ebook/dp/B005OR08NI?ie=UTF8&btkr=1&redirect=true&ref_=dp-kindle-redirect)by Howard Guskin

Guskin’s book is full of good stories and solid advice, but I warn to not be lured by the seeming declaration of simply ignoring technique and just following your instincts. Guskin seems to reject technique, but outlines his own exercises, and he advocates wild exploration, but tells stories where that exploration is driven by creative instincts that have been honed over time. Keep in mind that Guskin himself studied many techniques to give him some context for the way he plays; simply playing at random may offer inconsistent results, based on your natural instincts. What he’s arguing against, to my mind, is not technique, but rigidity: sticking to a rule set, working intellectually, letting that technique show through. I believe that the techniques we study, when practiced properly, only strengthen your ability to play and explore in the ways Guskin describes.