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Reflective Essay

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I am reflecting on an acting lesson which focused on Meisner and his work. Sanford Meisner devised a technique in the 1930's that encourages actors to focus and concentrate on their other actors rather than themselves thereby creating realistic behaviours and performances. The three steps for Meisner's technique consist of emotional preparation, repetition and improvisation. During this lesson, we engaged in various exercises inspired by his method and expanded on them for example adding in given circumstances (you are family, you have just met) which you can then act authentically from an imaginary scenario.

Meisner's exercise that we practised was a word repetition game that Meisner taught to a class before expanding on it upon recognizing its effectiveness. When explaining the purpose of this exercise Meisner states it "has connection. Aren't they listening to each other? That's the connection. It's a connection which comes from listening to each other, but it has no human quality— yet." It is "a Ping-Pong game. It is the basis of what eventually becomes an emotional dialogue." (Meisner and Longwell 2012, pg. 21). Meisner's technique is used by many famous actors such as Dianne Keaton and Alex Baldwin who have had a positive experience using it. However, as noted by Esper and Dimarco "One pitfall of the Meisner Technique is that the beginning exercises are easy to learn and easy to teach." (Esper and Dimarco, 2009 pg. 10) which means that underqualified practitioners are going on to teach a variety of versions of this repetition without advancing on to more complex steps. Additionally, Meisner's technique may lack structure in character development compared to other acting methods.

This lesson commenced with a repetition exercise in pairs. This exercise comprised of observing and repeating each other's behaviour and statements to promote spontaneous and authentic reactions. This allowed me to connect with my partner and I was present in the scene, responding genuinely. We then introduced motivation where each person would have an objective for example one of my chosen objectives was to weird the other person out. Adding this to the scene I felt created effective

scenes as it gave us something to act on whilst remaining authentic. With this exercise, I worked with various partners, and each motivation led to a different scenario.

Next, we built on this exercise by performing our initial repetitions and then allowing our peers to give us a scene based on our original exercise therefore introducing given circumstances. Me and my partner were assigned the scene of two friends gossiping with the twist that a friend's partner was aware of something I had done involving her friend's boyfriend. Initially, this prompt made me anxious. However, once we began, it turned out to be much easier than I had anticipated. We were able to respond to each other and listen to create an effective scene. Other people were also added to the scene which was I which I enjoyed as it meant I had to be that much more engaged in the scene and almost take a step back at times to allow others to communicate with each other and add to the scene. I felt as if I was fully able to immerse myself in the scene and create authentic reactions to what others were saying.

Reflecting upon the lesson, I realised the importance of being present in scenes and actively listening and responding to others. I learned to overcome my tendency to overthink and hesitate before speaking, which often hinders my spontaneity. This lesson helped me set aside those concerns; I recognized that overthinking could stall a scene and limit my ability to utilize Meisner's technique. When reflecting I also feel that I have enhanced my listening skills as his technique places importance on active listening, where I had to respond authentically to my scene partners. I was also able to develop my skills with improv where I strengthened my adaptability as it requires adaptability and quick responses. Meisner's technique mean I had to remain open to change throughout and prepared for anything to happen.

In terms of improvement, I feel as if I could allow myself to be less self-aware as I did find myself focusing internally rather than externally. Although I was able to allow myself to be present in scenes there were just moments where I felt as if I thought too much about what I was doing as if I was not reacting enough or correctly. However, that is something that I just need to move past worrying about and any reaction is a good reaction. If I had the opportunity to take this lesson again, I would have voiced my opinion more by asking. More questions that were coming to mind just to better my understanding. However, I am content with the fact I was able to contribute when performing in front of my peers. Moreover, when reflecting upon this lesson I do wish that I had tried much more opposing objectives when expanding on his technique as I feel like I went with very similar ones rather than trying out something new.

In conclusion, the outcome of this lesson was positive. I felt engaged in the lesson and that allowed me to truly learn and take value from this lesson. Although, there was a struggle with Meisner using his technique has allowed me to be freer when acting. I believe I have benefited from this class, as I am beginning to grasp how Meisner's methods can enhance my acting, even though it is a long-term process. I feel as if it helped me develop a strong basis to work off and feel that it is something that although I may not be using continuously, I feel as if I can see myself coming back to in the future to help myself progress.

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