

Monday, March 21, 2005

### Benicio on Method

Thank goodness! Someone finally said it! Benicio Del Toro says in the current issue of Esquire (April 2005), "Researching a role isn't Method acting; it's common sense."

Ever since I learned what Method acting really is (which is not so long ago, I'll admit; maybe a little over a year), I've noticed the complete lack of understanding in the press and even, perhaps, among actors, of what Method acting actually entails.

When Viggo Mortensen wandered around New Zealand with a sword strapped on his hip, that wasn't Method; that was getting himself into a physical mode where he could convincingly play the character of Aragorn. When Nicole Kidman interviewed abused women for her role in *The Human Stain*, that wasn't Method; it was, as Del Toro alludes to, research that she would have been stupid not to conduct.

Russell Crowe was quoted telling a story in the March 2005 issue of GQ: Also, until I was 25, I had one tooth missing. When George Ogilvie cast me, he asked me about it, and I told him the story and that I thought it was very false of me to go and get a tooth cap. He was very nice about it, listened to it all, and said, "All right, well, let me put it this way, Russell. You're playing the lead character in my film, right? The character of Johnny has two front teeth ..." Chris Heath, the interviewer, responds, "He Methoded you into it!" No, he didn't! Method acting isn't looking the part, and that's all Ogilvie said: I want you to get your tooth capped so that you can look like the character I wrote. That's got nothing whatsoever to do with Method.

From the website of the Stella Adler Studio of Acting comes this excerpt from the mini-bio of Konstantin Stanislavski, the creator of Method acting: To reach this "believable truth," after years of research with actors of the Moscow Art Theatre, Stanislavski began employing new and original methods, such as "emotional memory." He felt at that time that to work on a particular emotion in a role that involved fear, the actor might remember something that frightened him from his own life.

Stanislavski believed that an actor needed to take his or her own personality onto the stage when he or she began to play a character. This innovation was a clear break from previous modes of acting that held that the actor's job was to become the character and leave his or her own emotions behind. Later, Stanislavski concerned himself with the creation of physical entries into these emotional states, believing that the repetition of certain acts and exercises could bridge the gap between life on and off the stage.

Certainly, the people who've taken Stanislavski's Method and taught it, including Adler and those who followed her, have added their own twists, changed things, and otherwise put their own stamp on the original idea. Indeed, Lee Siegel wrote in *Slate* in March, 2004, that there were two antagonistic versions of the Method: Strasberg's emphasis on how actors should draw from their own experience to inhabit a character; and Stella Adler's insistence that actors must pay closer attention to the play's circumstances than to their own memories and emotions.

I recently had a discussion with a "mainstream media" journalist (editor) whose main criticism of the blogosphere (with emphasis on political blogs) is that far too many bloggers are lazy and uninterested in doing the groundwork necessary to have a relevant and believable opinion. He's right, of course, but I might haul out this seeming industry-wide lack of understanding of an easily-researched issue as evidence that mainstream journalists aren't much better these days (or were they ever?).

Posted by jason in Movies, Reading at 17:46