

AUTHENTICITY GLOWS IN THE DARK

Actors who channel their characters from the inside out project an aura on stage — something invisible to the physical eye but discernible to the psychic eye.

The acclaimed movie director, John Frankenheimer, once said of Gene Hackman: “Gene is incapable of doing anything untruthful.” Mr Frankenheimer wasn’t wrong. Watch any Gene Hackman film, even the stinkers, and the one thing you are guaranteed from a Hackman performance is authenticity. You get the consummate Gene Hackman, no matter how great or flawed the film.

Hackman is always Hackman, but the audience is treated to something else: characters that are unfailingly genuine. Sharing a body and soul with a master actor, they

BADASS ACTING

are characters that integrate seamlessly with their host. You may be seeing Gene Hackman on the screen, but you're also swimming in the rich, fictional presences of Lex Luther and Popeye Doyle and Buck Barrow and, my favorite Hackman role, the Blind Man in *Young Frankenstein*. Put in the simplest of terms, Gene Hackman's characters are real, they come from the soul.

When you allow your own characters to be drawn organically from the wellspring of the within, rather than being lathered up with a mixed bag of gimmicks, your characters will always render authentic in front of an audience. Actors who channel their characters from the inside out project an aura on stage — something invisible to the physical eye but discernible to what I like to call the psychic eye.

Authenticity radiates on stage. The faintest of emotions, if faithfully drawn from the heart (instead of being contrived by the intellect), can be perceived from the furthest back-row seats in the theater, it doesn't matter how large the auditorium. In other words, when your character's actions are authentic, people don't necessarily have to see you up close to feel their effects. I like to say, authenticity glows in the dark.

There's a story about the actress Julie Harris I once heard told by an acting teacher. The time was the early 70s, and Ms Harris was performing on Broadway. At some point in the play, her character peacefully slips away in a rocking

chair; she closes her eyes and dies. The acting teacher who recounted the story was a young, aspiring actor at the time. He had enough cash in his pocket to afford a seat near the back of the theater. He remembered Julie Harris' performance as being exquisitely genuine throughout and was especially moved by how truthful was her act of passing. "You couldn't see much sitting in the back," he said. "but you just *knew* something happened, you could tell she died."

Always strive towards the goal of authenticity — it's an integral part of what is known in all theater circles as the Actor-Audience Contract. The audience discerns authenticity on multiple levels, including what I recognize as the psychic level. Authenticity figuratively imparts a front row theater experience to every person, no matter where one is seated. As an actor, your unwavering commitment to revealing the shape of authenticity in your characters guarantees everyone in the audience a seat close to the stage, in a manner of speaking. If you are authentic, you exude reality. It doesn't matter where someone is seated, they will sense it.