

Feeling, faking and actors' methodology

Watching **Lee Strasberg: The Method Man**, the latest in BBC2's *Reputations* series, you couldn't help wondering if there weren't any other lessons we non-actors could learn from the man who created screen giants such as Marlon Brando and Paul Newman — apart from the basic Aristotelean rule of never letting Marlon Brando sit on your lap, now that he has the manly build of a chest freezer. If you don't already know the gist of "The Method", let Ellen Burstyn, who studied at Strasberg's Actors' Studio in New York, explain: "What Lee's training was, was to learn how *not* to lie. To *really* tell the truth. How not to act. That's what he taught. How not to pretend. To not act as *though* I feel bad, but to feel bad."

Okay, so many people thought the guy was some kind of nut — and a heartless one, at that, according to Ben Gazzara, who

called him "occasionally very kind; too often a bit cruel" — but he did manage to attract (or produce?) some of the world's greatest movie stars: Robert De Niro, Jack Nicholson, James Dean, Steve McQueen, Dustin Hoffman, Al Pacino, Anne Bancroft, Jane Fonda, Harvey Keitel, Eli Wallach, Sally Field, Kenneth Williams, Hattie Jacques. Okay, not Williams and Jacques, but they put into perspective the startling acting calibre of the rest of this list.

Between them, Strasberg's pupils have been nominated for more than 100 Oscars. That's probably why Al Pacino says (now, everybody take five while we dig deep into our past so that we can summon up raw emotion of what it actually *feels* like to listen to what Al has to say... Ready? Okay, let's take it from the top...) That's probably why Pacino says: "I believe that acting as we know it today — in film, American acting

— is, and has been, influenced by Lee Strasberg. No doubt about it."

But it's not as straightforward as it sounds. Strasberg felt: "Emotion couldn't be faked, it had to be felt." So what acting methodology would he have advised for the coffee-shop scene in *When Harry Met Sally*, when Meg Ryan fakes an orgasm to prove a point to Billy Crystal? Does she summon up her experience of real orgasm to perform the scene with verisimilitude? Or must she dredge up the raw emotion of an occasion when she *faked* an orgasm to reproduce the effect authentically? And if the latter, would the scene look *more* realistic or *less* realistic than if she had actually tried to relive a true orgasm? No wonder Ryan howled.

In 1955, Strasberg pulled off his greatest coup when Marilyn Monroe, then Hollywood's biggest star, joined his troupe. He became her constant companion;

REVIEW



Joe Joseph

some say a Svengali-type figure who exploited her vulnerability. She even moved into the Strasberg family's apartment. Like many men of the time, Strasberg might well have wanted to experience the raw emotion of having Monroe live under the same roof as him (although not in the same bed) and might have realised that the smartest way of achieving this was to become a famous acting coach. In

that sense, there was method in his madness.

Clare Beavan's film was compelling, beautifully put together, and she culled some big stars eager to pay tribute to their late mentor: it was a nice touch to shoot the interviews in Katz's Lower East Side deli in black and white, creating an effect that was two parts *Broadway Danny Rose* and one part *Manhattan*. But we all knew Strasberg was a monster: he was famous for it, so there was no sense of stripping away a walnut veneer to reveal the chipboard man underneath. Could be that *Reputations* is running out of subjects: may be their researchers will strike lucky and find that Himmler ached only to spend his life selling Mr Whippy ice cream to Jewish schoolkids in Berlin, or that Sylvester Stallone has spent his life making profitable movies but really wants to be an actor.

If Al Pacino ever finds himself

cast as a nerve transplant surgeon, he'll have no option but to scrub up and spend time in the operating theatre with Susan MacKinnon at Washington University's School of Medicine. The subject of BBC1's **QED**, Dr MacKinnon is the first surgeon to have carried out a successful nerve transplant, reviving once-paralysed limbs by stitching in nerves from a dead donor.

Sadly, Brad Zapalowski, the 16-year-old whose 14-hour operation provides the core of the programme, is one of her operating-table failures: he had severed his left arm in a boating accident. It was a film that made the spirits soar, but the stomach heave — unless you are the type that doesn't get squeamish at the sight of a bowl of spaghetti-style nerve fibres being scalpel-trimmed and sewn into an arm sliced open to receive them. Luckily for fainthearts, the programme went

out at 10pm: not so much post-watershed as post-supper.

Surely Oliver James could use a spell at Strasberg's Actors' Studio to bone up on what it is like to interview somebody on television, whether you are a psychiatrist or not. Julian Clary was the latest victim of **The Chair** (BBC2). Once more, James shed as much illumination as a glow-worm in the Albert Hall. He was shocked to hear that Clary had slept with women. "If you actually sleep with a woman, is it the sort of actual body that you're just not turned on by? Is that how it works?" Crikey! He sounded like Eric Idle in Monty Python's "nudge-nudge" sketch.

Clary just looked quietly pitying at James, wondering if maybe he were the first homosexual that James has ever run across. Lord knows, that Anthony Clare can be a big ham. But compared to him, Oliver James is a pork scratching.

BBC1

- 6.00am **Business Breakfast** (97095)
- 7.00 **BBC Breakfast News** (T) (92453)
- 9.00 **Breakfast News Extra** (T) (3124434)
- 9.20 **Ready, Steady, Cook** (r) (T) (1548540)
- 9.50 **Kilroy** (T) (5227908)
- 10.30 **Gloria's Time Off With Jim Davidson** (2937163)
- 10.45 **News** (T) Regional News and weather (9614188)
- 10.50 **Cricket: Fourth Test — England v Australia**. Tony Lewis introduces ball-by-ball coverage of the first session at Headingley. Continues on BBC2 (31051095)
- 12.35pm **Neighbours** Catherine begins to wonder if she will ever get rid of her L-plates (T) (8621786)
- 1.00 **One O'Clock News** (T) (95540)
- 1.30 **Regional News** (T) (42206057)
- 1.40 **Cricket: Fourth Test — England v Australia**. All the action from the first afternoon at Headingley (60019279)

BBC2

- 6.00am **O U: Listening in the Dark** (7708908) 6.25 **Flying in Birds** (7787415)
- 6.50 **Natural Navigators** (6918569) 7.15 **See Hear Breakfast News** (T) (6663724)
- 7.30 **Teletubbies** (7782182) 7.55 **Brum** (6376540) 8.10 **Raccoons** (6726279)
- 8.35 **Bright Sparks** (T) (3110540) 9.05 **Spiderman** (5309724) 9.35 **Glad Rags** (2204960)
- 10.00 **The Moomins** (7061417) 10.25 **Oakie Doke** (7428569) 10.40 **Spider** (6769417)
- 10.45 **Teletubbies** (555298) 11.15 **The Record** (8071366) 11.40 **Moon Over Miami** (r) (T) (9946502) 12.30pm **For the Love of It** (81422415)
- 12.35 **Cricket: Fourth Test England v Australia** (8629328)
- 1.00 **A to Z of Food** (25835927) 1.10 **Beechgrove Garden: the First Season** (70357845) 1.40 **Blockbusters** (59205960) 2.05 **The Natural World** (r) (T) (5518415) 3.00 **News** (T) (1758618) 3.05 **Westminster with Nick Ross** (T) (6606182) 3.55 **News** (T) (2197908)

CARLTON

- 6.00am **GMTV** (3659940) 9.25 **Win, Lose or Draw** (r) (T) (1549279) 9.55 **Judge Judy: See Monday** (T) (4252908) 10.20 **News** (T) (8047705) 10.25 **Regional News** (T) (8046076)
- 10.30 **Going in Style** (1979) with George Burns, Art Carney and Lee Strasberg. Three old-timers grow tired of retirement and decide to plan a bank robbery. Directed by Martin Brest (94739328)
- 12.20pm **Your Shout** (8294811)
- 12.25 **Regional News** (T) (8293182)
- 12.30 **ITN News** (T) (8640811)
- 12.55 **Regional News** (8625502)
- 1.25 **Home and Away** (T) (37337347)
- 1.50 **Cat Crazy** (59212250)
- 2.20 **Contract for Murder** (5522618)
- 3.20 **News** (T) (1765908) 3.25 **Regional News** (T) (1764279) 3.30 **Potamus Park** (r) (4064453) 3.40 **Wizards** (r) (1355076)
- 3.50 **Rupert** (r) (6940347) 4.15 **Transylvania Pet Shop** (T) (4077076) 4.40 **Reboot** (8292998)

MERIDIAN

- As Carlton except:
- 10.30am **Cartoon Time** (2948279)
- 10.40 **David the Gnome** (3332182)
- 11.05 **Cartoon Time** (8055328)
- 11.25 **Bravestarr** (8064076)
- 11.50 **Dinosaurs** (3253366)
- 12.55pm-1.25 **Shortland Street** (8625502)
- 6.00 **Meridian Tonight** (415)
- 6.30-7.00 **Grass Roots** (845)
- 10.30 **Meridian News and Weather** (321569)
- 10.45 **Film: The Killing Mind** (13182417)
- 12.35am **The LADS** (5769477)
- 1.10 **Funny Business** (2055038)
- 1.40 **Planet Rock Profile** (4036496)
- 2.10 **Late and Loud** (8141767)
- 3.05 **3-D** (66227212)
- 3.35 **The Good Sex Guide Late** (5039564)
- 4.35 **The Time, the Place** (22691019)

CENTRAL

CHANNEL 4

- 6.00am **Sesame Street** (r) (80705)
- 7.00 **The Bigger Breakfast** Incorporates 9.05 **Saved By the Bell: The New Class** (r) (T) (4639521) 1.25 **Making Money. A New Zealand comedy short** (25823182)
- 1.40 **Stanley and Livingstone** (1939, b/w) Biopic starring Spencer Tracy, Nancy Kelly and Cedric Hardwicke. Directed by Henry King (T) (45425989)
- 3.30 **Here's One I Made Earlier** Beef and tempura jumble; chicken and tomato roulade; brandy snap baskets (T) (873)
- 4.00 **Bewitched** (r) (T) (908) 4.30 **Countdown** (T) (8762415) 4.55 **Ricki Lake** (r) (T) (2622298) 5.30 **Pet Rescue** (r) (T) (144)
- 6.00 **Tour De France** Colmar to Montbeliard: a distance of 175km (647)
- 6.30 **Hollyoaks** Teen soap. Kurt and Ruth

CHANNEL 5

CHANNEL 5 ON SATELLITE

Channel 5 is now broadcasting on transponder No 63 on the Astra Satellite. Viewers with a **Videocrypt** decoder will be able to receive the channel free of charge. Frequencies for transponder No 63 are picture: 10.92075 GHz; sound: 7.02 and 7.20 MHz

- 6.00am **5 News Early** (9196960)
- 7.30 **Havakazoo** (7939347) 8.00 **The Enid Blyton Adventure Series** (7829144) 8.30 **WideWorld** (7828415)
- 9.00 **Espresso** (3529705) 10.00 **Exclusive!** (r) (5508415) 10.30 **Instant Gardens** (r) (7848279)
- 11.00 **Leeza** (6480095) 11.50 **Double Espresso** (19231453) 12.00 **The Bold and the Beautiful** (T) (7822231)
- 12.30pm **Family Affairs** (r) (T) (4403989)
- 1.00 **5 News Update** (T) (97166665) 1.05 **Sunset Beach** (T) (8446076) 2.00 **5's Company** (6419231)