Foreword

Tips

JAMES FRANCO

When I played Saul in *Pineapple Express* I said, fuck it, acting should be fun. No more twisted, self-centered, James Dean demons for me, just go with the flow.

There was one thing that was important: Saul should *love* Dale. That was the secret that made Saul so much more than just another dealer in another stoner comedy. He really cared about something, and that made the audience care about *him*. In this case he cared about Seth's character, just like I care about Seth.

Then I played Scott Smith, Harvey Milk's lover. I'm still surprised by the response to that character, people love him. The secret there: minimalism.

The film is called *Milk*, not *Smith*, and that's how I played it: as a supporting lover. Thus, as a supporting *actor* to support Sean Penn, whom I also love so much.

In *Howl* I played Ginsberg, and I was all alone most of the film. My scenes were speeches given to an unseen interviewer, like Jason does in Shirley Clarke's *Portrait of Jason*.

All I did was get down Allen's cadence by listening to him read "Howl," over and over. All the versions he did, over the course of forty years, so many recordings . . .

He wrote the poem, and then the poem wrote him . . .

In *127 Hours* I knew the key would be *show, don't tell*, because the character just *does*. I knew the audience would have a real experience because I wouldn't be telling them how I feel, I'd be *feeling*.

And people passed out. The experience was *so* real, people couldn't help even their bodies from being affected.

And when the character does talk in that movie, he does it to his little video camera; I look right into the lens, ostensibly talking to my family and friends, but I'm looking right at the audience, so it's like a Shakespearean aside, without breaking the fourth wall.

And to that little video camera I talk about my feelings in the most intimate way. It's like I'm talking to the people in the theater, as if they're all my friends, and I'm telling them everything there is to know about me.

That's what movies are, the dressings we lay over our most vulnerable selves. Clothing to give artistic shape to the raw muscle and bloody bones of our essential beings.

Whether you are actor, writer, director, producer, cinematographer, costume designer, the movies you make reveal you.

You make the movies, but once they're done, you realize that the movies turn around and make you.