

Michael Chekhov

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IMAGINATION - IMPROVISATION
THE GROUP
BRIDGES AND TRANSITIONS
"WHAT" AND "HOW"

IMAGINATION:

Improvise with the conditions which the director will give you. That means that you must imagine the sketch all the time, wherever you are, but when you are in rehearsal you must accept all the conditions given by the director and rely upon your creative spirit, which has been fed by your imagination. The imagination must be everywhere - in the whole body and in the whole spirit. Be active in the work of your imagination. This is an effort to get a certain technique.

When you do not prepare your parts, you betray your own gifts and talents. Then you see all your shortcomings - not because you are not gifted, but because you have not done anything. How can you act if you are not sure of the words, and they are not sparkling in your thoughts? If you do this you will get a feeling of disgust for your profession - you will offend your own talent. I must warn you about this. If you do not fulfill the tasks which the director sets for you, you will destroy yourself. I know what results I am expecting of you. The tasks must be fulfilled immediately.

The imagination upon which we are working is something which can be vague and not useful, or it can be very

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strong and helpful. Why? When the imagination does not give good results, it is because we are floundering aimlessly in the world of our imagination. If you allow yourself to wander and flounder, it will spoil your taste for the imagination. If you imagine without any aim or without any will, this will be a step backwards. The will power is the first effort you must make, and the will must have an aim. Be pedantic about it at first, then it will come as a natural thing - will and aim.

What does this mean? Before you start to imagine your scene, you have to ask, "What am I going to see in my imagination?" You must ask yourself what you are going to see for your characterization - his body, or his inner life or certain movements or speech, how the scene develops, what the tempo of the scene can suggest - if the tempo is slow, it is one psychological picture and if it is quick, it is quite another. The tempo gives an absolutely different life.

Prepare the sketch by making an inner effort to work and not to flounder, and then put an aim before yourself. If you will imagine in this way, you will feel that you have certain ground when you enter the stage for the first rehearsal, because you have certain material in your imagination. You may have seen as many as twenty variations of one sentence in your imagination, and have pleasure in choosing one from the many. But if you enter with a vague idea of what you are

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going to do, if you are floundering, you can only say very lifeless and common things. This is not acting, and it is not working in your imagination.

For the Designer:

It is possible to find the composition of the setting from the composition of the scene. It must be somehow justified. Imagine the setting. Put before yourself some questions, and you will get certain answers from your imagination. You must be free to discard anything you want. Our actors must be free in their imaginations and in their ability to improvise. Our actors must be as free as birds.

The actor must be able to learn a new text in five minutes, by imagining the text. He must be flexible in his body and in his mind, then he will understand what it means to be an actor. To be an actor means to be able to transmute and transform oneself every day and in every way.

IMPROVISATION:

We have two grounds - one is imagination and the other is improvisation. Improvisation is something which is immediate. Your imagination is somewhere in your subconscious, and it will lead you even in improvisation.

The ability to re-imagine is something we are aiming at. The real imagination is not stiff and even likes to be re-imagined. Improvisation is something which comes spontaneously and immediately. The combination of these two things will lead us through all possible difficulties on the stage.

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Your ability to imagine develops your ability to do things which will be more and more true, and more tasteful because your imagination re-creates your whole actor's nature and being, so that nothing is lost. We will have difficulties as long as our ability to imagine is weak, because our ability to improvise will be weak also.

All our exercises develop our imagination and our ability to improvise. Our staccato and legato exercise, our group feeling exercise - all these points are one big thing. If you have difficulty in re-imagining, this means that you can overcome something which is stubborn in our nature.

Our actor's nature is potentially able to do everything, so all these problems are only steps which will help us. One thing is the theoretical question, and the other is the practical effort to solve the problem. These two things must come together. Our intellect wants to understand but our nature is not able to do this. This is only one door. By doing the thing many times you will get the answer. Try to approach each question from two sides - first the understanding, the meaning, and second by doing it to understand it. To understand through doing, and not to do through understanding.

There are things which cannot be understood by means of the intellect only. For instance, skating. You can write books about it, but you must do it. In a performance

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you must be doers, not "understanders." Of course, we do not deny our ability to understand.

You must reach the stage where you will be glad and happy to change everything, and nothing will be stiff. This you will get from imagination and improvisation.

After your work in imagination and rehearsal, the director will sometimes say to you, "Now act freely." Or he may tell you to even forget the whole Method and act freely on the basis of what you have done. Then you will see how much you have to work - what is your greatest need. Such rehearsals are very good for the actor, the author, the director, the designer, and everyone. What is wrong is to start with free acting and to finish with it.

Suggestions for The Fishing Scene: Script by Iris Tree

Martin Dooley	Warner
Hannah	Veronica - Mary La
Mary	Erica
Janie	Alonso
Kato	Mary La - Veronica
Child	Daphne
Boy	Irving

Try to get the instinct to catch or grasp, immediately after the rehearsal, what you needed most - what kind of feelings - am I out of key with the music of the scene - do I feel the development of the play as a whole thing - am I in trouble only in connection with my partners - do I realize what each one of us is going to do. There are innumerable possibilities

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to get the right thing, but they will come through the experience of this kind of rehearsal.

As a director, try to suggest immediately what would help the cast - the director must always help to create the whole composition - he must be flexible to help. Do not let the cast do wrong things today, thinking that you will help them tomorrow.

THE GROUP:

We must have a good style of intelligent workers, whose aim is afterwards to become artists. Start with the work, and after the artist will come. We cannot avoid the social responsibility of our life, whether we want to or not. We don't have to be political or diplomats but be social workers. So we must have a good style to be able to work as workers, and this is a social approach to life. To be able to work as a social group, as an organism. We must feel each other. We will all suffer if one makes a mistake. In a good sense you must be responsible and live with the life of our present suffering humanity.

One way is to be able to work and not flounder, and another way is to work with a certain definite aim. This will give us a certain "face" as a group, which will be noble, and which will fit with the social suffering of today.

You must discriminate between simple memory and

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imagination. In remembering what you have done, always add something new. In remembering you can follow faithfully the life you know, but if you will create the same thing which you remember, by creating it anew and adding something to it, it will be a step towards imagination. Always the creative spirit must be there.

Rehearsal of Lower Depths:

My impression is that although you have done many things wrong, you tried to get some things. The aim was to awaken something which your soul has forgotten.

Don Quixote scenes:

The imagination is weak. It must be worked upon until it is so vivid that it changes your whole being, both psychologically and physically. Try to discover this enemy in your body which reacts to egotistical fear, by trying to show more than you are able to. It is a simple process of growth, but we must be aware of the stage of growth in which we are. It is like a plant with two leaves. It would be stupid for the plant to try to pretend that it is a full-grown flower. So with our imagination. At the beginning stages we must not force it by pretending to have more to show than we have. Just the most simple steps are enough.

Speak from image to image, not from intellect to intellect when you are describing things. Try to feed the image with your words.

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BRIDGES AND TRANSITIONS

The under-developed imagination, or the imagination in the early stages of development, will produce one thing - it will jump psychologically over inner events. The actor is not yet able to create psychological bridges and transitions from one moment to another. The real art, whatever it is, lies just in these transitions. The real artist shows us how he walks, the bad actor shows us only the obvious things. The good actor does not pay attention to obvious things - how he does it, and from how many fine, unexpected things he comes to the moment when he does something else - this way is the real art.

To get this ability to lead the audience from one obvious point to another, through the fine way of the actor's individuality, we must first turn to our imagination. The more we are able to see all these fine things in our imagination, the more we will find still more such small details. The more we are able to see these things, the more our actor's nature acquires the ability to create bridges and transitions which lie between one obvious point and another. This is the significance of the imagination for this special case.

"WHAT" AND "HOW":

To develop this ability to create fine things between points, you must concentrate on this from the point of view of the imagination. Imagine by trying to find out

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what are the ways between two obvious points, whether they are psychological, or physical. Then you will understand that art lies not in "what" we are doing, but "how." "What" is not yet art, it is simply the ground. But the good actor will try to find out "how" he can do certain things - how he will enter the room, how he will speak - the whole meaning of the scene can lie in one of these small things. All these bridges and transitions can be called "how," and the obvious things can be called "what." This "how" is above us, and by it we will be inspired and will be artists. In the world of the imagination there are infinite possibilities to find this "how." The intellect is interested in "what," but the artist in "how."

We must make a real resolution never to do anything which does not have the feeling of truth. Make this a definite thing in our school, never to be untrue.