

Michael Chekhov

(afternoon) February 1, 1938

STYLE  
IMAGINATION  
IMPROVISATION

STYLE:

Today we are going to try to work again with the preparation of the style for Henry's play [Spanish Evening], and this is again a rehearsal for the rehearsal.

As we have prepared more or less the style in which we want to act this funny play, I want you to imagine this is a rehearsal, not an exercise. Imagine the "butterfly" movement - frothy, wine, music inside. The effort must be done in your imagination, not only on the stage. I will give you some simple tasks to imagine in this style.

IMAGINATION:

There are three small houses on the stage, with dirty, gay streets running between them. In one house lives an old man with his young wife and young maid. Opposite this house lives an old man of seventy five - the bride groom. He lives alone - he has no servants, no relations or kin because he collects money and is a miser. In the third house lives an old woman who tries to be very young. She has two daughters, and one of these girls is to be the bride of the old miser. The mother wants to marry her daughter to the old man because he has so much money, or at least she thinks so. The population of the town consists of two kinds of people - young and old. Try to imagine powerfully in the style of this thing.

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The moment we are taking is when the mother is preparing and clothing the bridegroom for the wedding, which will take place immediately. She is very busy with this work of dressing him for the ceremony. The old man is getting more excited at the prospect of the event and the preparation of his clothes, and is overcome and faints. The mother attempts to revive him and rushes to the window to tell everybody that he is not well. There is a large crowd waiting in the street. The bride is standing already dressed in white, at the door of her house waiting for the moment when the bridegroom will take her to the church. Great expectation.

After trying to revive the old man the mother thinks it is necessary to call a physician. The bride is surrounded by the young people, and the old people are standing in front of the mother's house waiting for the bridegroom. The old people are very happy and excited until the news comes to them that the bridegroom has fainted. Then the mood changes. The young people become active and hopeful and the old people are unhappy.

This is the moment I want you to take. Will you try to go through this in your imagination. Now sit down and imagine in the style of the "butterfly". Please imagine by taking the style of this future performance first and then imagine. This is a new thing I give you - to imagine in a certain style. You must have this style in your imagination. This is a re-

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hearsal, not an exercise. I want you to have this feeling immediately, without preparation exercises.

The old people are waiting outside the house for the event and they are very happy. The young people are around the bride and full of sympathy. Great expectation for the appearance of the bride and bridegroom. I want you full of expectation, in the style I have given you, nothing more. Now we can start the rehearsal.

IMPROVISATION:

I must appeal to your feeling of truth more because it is getting too intellectual, too many unnecessary words and gestures. Actors must not follow words. The words must be the outcome of thought-out action. Prepare the ground for improvisation and commence again.

The events are now real instead of a series of intellectual things - it grew as a whole. You must work in this inner way. Don't forget that you cannot deceive the audience.

Certain Additions: The group of old people are dressed up so that they are hardly able to move, but they are happy because of the event. Everybody is dressed beautifully.

This time I want you to develop it more and more with the feeling of truth in the style. Be very conscious of what you are doing in this preparation.

Certain Additions: The bridegroom must appear at

the window and say "I am half ready." The old people have brought branches of trees and flowers to spread along the way to the church. If you will prepare the ground, the humor will come. If you force it it will never come.

Now rehearsal of young people: You are waiting with the condition that the bridegroom will appear in the door at any moment. You do not notice even the time - such tension. Then change in tension when it is announced that he has fainted, and it grows and grows. Repeat.

The tragedy: You are ready to meet him and give him the bride. Then the excitement is increased when he appears at the window and says he is half ready. Then, when the mother announces he has fainted, there is great hope among the young people (but they do not believe it because he has only fainted). The young people dance with joy. Develop this inside, this joy.

Now old people, separate rehearsal: You are filled with expectation that you are going to meet your old and dear friend the bridegroom. The old people are stiff because they are old, but inside they are burning. When he appears at the window they show him the flowers, and make a great effort to be young and gay. Then they signal to the musicians to start the wedding music, in preparation for the procession to the church. They are in the rhythm of their victory - joyous. Then they are told the bridegroom has fainted - they are as-

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tonished and crushed and don't know what to do.

There is nothing more beautiful than imaginary psychology in a truthful way. I want you to remember one thing which will help you in your work. You must follow the truthful inner life, whether it is comedy or drama. First, we want to get the style, then gradually the humor will come. To force humor is not possible. You must prepare the ground first. It must be creative and truthful and then you will get your full humor. When you are free you will get humor. You cannot substitute anything for humor. Too much impatience - it is better to be correct in your objective even though you are not funny or humorous.

I want you now, without omitting certain psychological steps, to do the scene in a very quick comedy tempo. With these inner steps which are the most interesting thing for the audience.

Another addition: To the family of the mother and girls who have come from a provincial town, relations from a still smaller provincial town come to see them, dressed in gorgeous clothes, with a small chair for the daughter, and a mattress for the father who always sleeps on this same mattress. They have things for every occasion in a big hamper. Much food in a basket, and medicine for the father who is not well. They have many changes of dress for every occasion. The dancing of the young people must be very lively but kept

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hidden.

Woody (husband of the young wife in the second house) must get the doctor. He uses the carriage that was to have been used for the wedding. His young wife and her young maid are expecting their respective lovers.

Addition: When the mother asks for somebody to go for the doctor they all find an excuse for refusing to go. The mother must show terrible despair because if the bridegroom dies she will lose her chance of getting the money. No unnecessary words. The words must come from a strong inward feeling of form. Woody is a mystic - he is interested in magic and spells - everything is significant to him. His right leg is deficient.

The groups must be quite separate and complete in themselves, but still part of the whole group.

When Woody finally gets into the carriage he collapses, and at this point the musicians play the funeral march. The young people dance gaily to the funeral march as the carriage moves off.

Addition: During this strange dance a man appears. He is a showman and does magic tricks for the crowd. He is very tired, travelling from town to town. The crowd tells him about the bridegroom. The old people, thinking he is the doctor, describe the bridegroom's symptoms, and the showman gets the idea that he could impersonate the doctor, so he

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says he is the doctor. The mother hears that the doctor has arrived and she is very happy.

Again, I want to see the style of the "butterfly" and truthful psychology, and no humor at all. Do the same thing only in your imagination from beginning to end, but your imagination must be on the ground of the style this time. The whole play will be successful only if we get this feeling - half exclamations, half words; small and big explosions, sparkly, and not long sentences.

You see how badly you need the Method, and how little you have the ability to manage it. You keep yourselves back. Think of it. Without this we will be tortured - we will torture each other. The school is built on the Method and therefore the exercises must be taken in by you.