

Michael Chekhov

July 1, 1938

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STAGES OF THE
 CREATIVE PROCESS

Moscow Art Theatre
 Stanislavsky
 Dr. Rudolf Steiner
Don Quixote
Hamlet

Our Phantoms: [The Possessed]

Will you try to go through the whole part, speaking your text but always and continuously looking at your image. It will give you great pleasure and great results. You may forget all the points of the Method, but just follow this moving picture and follow everything it suggests to you. You must be absolutely present here, and at the same time you must follow the image.

If you can see the character and incorporate it at the same time it would be better, because it would make you finer and finer. When you see your character in your imagination in each moment, you want to do the same; to see him and at the same time to act under his influence.

Suggestions for Mrs. Elmhirst: Your personal modesty disturbs you immensely. You must turn the whole scene to

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the audience. Your subconscious turning away is an effort to escape the audience. What can be done about this? One thing only - you must rely upon the ground which you have taken for this special rehearsal, nothing else. For instance, when you take imagination or the objective you only ^{half} take it, and the other half of your effort and activity goes in hiding yourself as a personality.

This is a personal decision, and not an actor's one. You must make a personal decision that if you have a ground for a rehearsal you will take it entirely, and the half of your personality which is still a modest person you must send away from the rehearsal. This is a very individual case, and you must overcome it. You have done this to a great extent, but there is still a little ^{of Mrs. Elmhirst} ghost ^{entering} the rehearsal room with you, and this you must not allow. Sometimes you tense your muscles because Mrs. Elmhirst - not the actress - is afraid of acting, and as a result the actress gets smaller because both Mrs. Elmhirst and the actress use the same body, and Mrs. Elmhirst holds the actress back. This marvelous human modesty can serve you as a very fine thing, but to radiate as an actress you must overcome it. Many things are as germs and seeds which can be developed. It is like a field which is full of seeds, and they must grow. You have so many potential things in you for this part.

THE IMAGE:

By developing the imagination, you will be hungry without the image. Try to work on this when you are alone.

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If you do not see the image quite clearly sometimes, but you feel that the image wants you to do something, then follow it. Try to get the habit of denying the wrong way, which stops you. The wrong way is always when something is purposeless and meaningless, and does not come out of the Method. When it is not based on the Method then it is wrong from our point of view; when it is without any actual aim and there is no means as to how to get it. In such rehearsals as this you can go as freely and as slowly as you like, because it is your rehearsal and you can explore as much as you want.

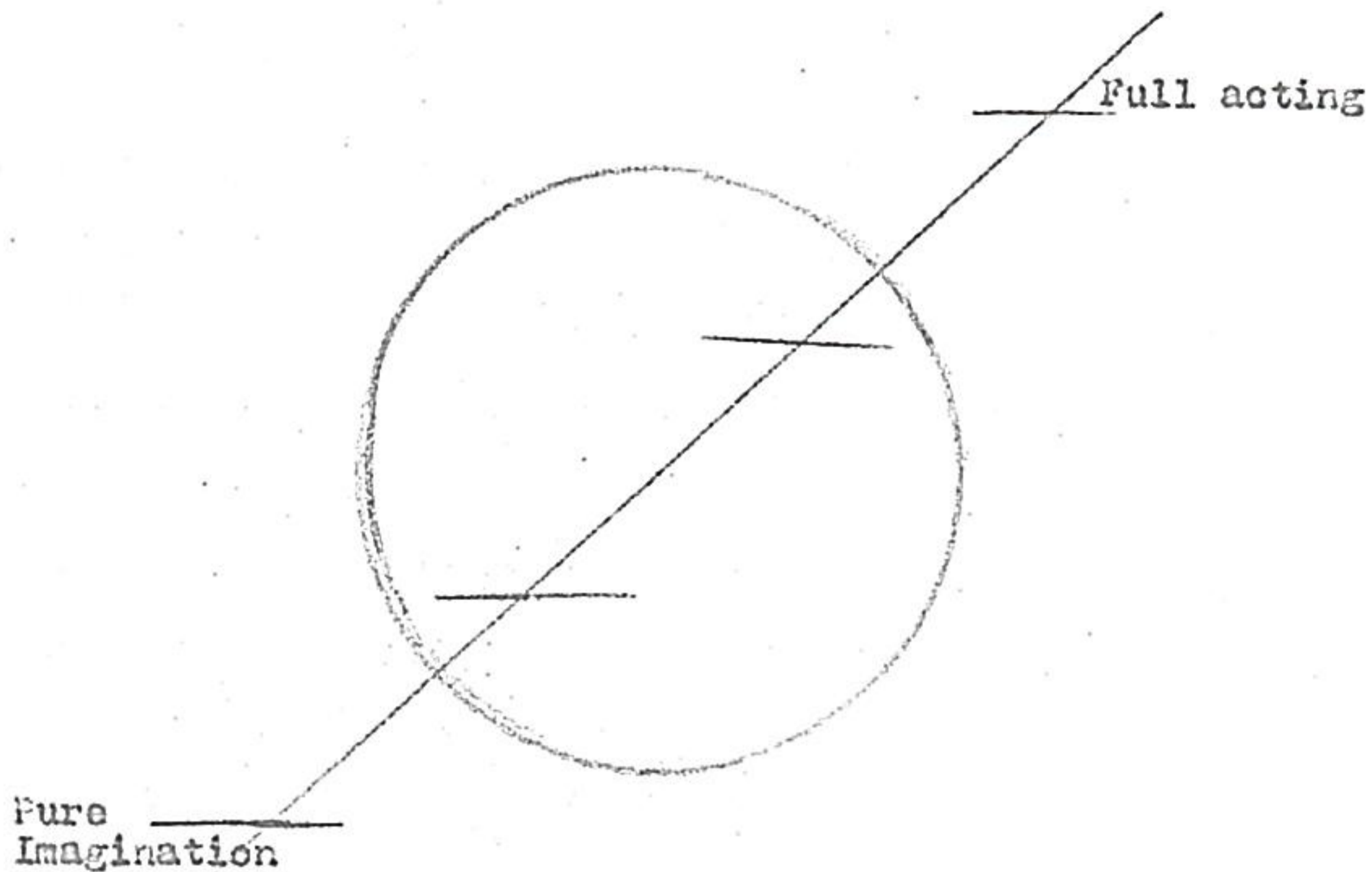
Your image is always your director; this is a very important point. The Moscow Art players always tried to absorb the ideas of the leaders, and this gave them very good results sometimes because they had good leaders. If, instead of that, they had transformed all these ideas into images, they would have been much happier. If the director suggests something intellectually, then turn it into an image.

IMAGINATION - ACTING:

There is a point where there is the pure imaginative, spiritual state, and another where there is full acting, and the line is a continuous unbroken one. What we are trying to do today is to bring these two things together to a certain extent, so that it is imagination and it is action at the same time; a certain strange thing.

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The question of not having the image at the end, in the state of full action, is impossible. Inspiration is when the image is inspired in you, and you cannot see him. At this point there is no image and, on the other hand, there is no action.

You must see your image and let it speak through you. This is the moment when we must combine darkness and light. If you give everything to the image it will be purely Luciferic, and will be weaker and weaker. You must take the Luciferic thing and put it into the real body. What is leading you through this kind of rehearsal? Ask yourself this question. Do you feel how your character feels? How can you describe your rehearsing? What is your actual basis? You must be quite aware of what you are doing, and with which means. What other things were helping you besides

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imagination? If you were not floundering, what was helping you?

When you are working alone, try sometimes to stop on the places which are ^{obviously} rough and wrong. The ideal case is that the actor or actress must sometimes be shocked by his or her own action. If you don't feel this then something is not yet born in you; you must have this discrimination. You must put leading questions to your character, and get the feeling of how to work by having a ground.

LEADING QUESTIONS:

Does your character grow by means of this exercise? Are you led by some quite unconscious things during the rehearsals, or do you get certain grounds from the Method? Or are you acting as you go - more or less accidentally? When you are working, do you see your image and his or her feelings? Are you penetrating into your character's feelings? Can you say that by following this inner line of the feelings that you are actually doing something which you can consider as a certain ground, or is it a thing which lives in you quite accidentally? After you have done this several times, do you get the desire to elaborate certain moments? How would you explain this to a new student? How would you invite them to do this exercise? How would you explain it? If it is really leading you somewhere, how can you give it as an exercise? How would you tell students to start from the

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point of view of the Method? By which means? You must ask yourself such questions, and find why you do right things. Be conscious of everything you are doing.

INNER LIFE OF THE IMAGE:

It is perhaps impossible to see the image simultaneously throughout the rehearsal, but we must have the desire to do so and see it in flashes when acting, by rehearsing at the same time. But if you are not rehearsing, you can see it continuously. When acting, it is very difficult to keep the image all the time because the physical world interferes. It is possible to see the image even to the extent that the image comes to you, and you are simply a passive onlooker. You are in connection with the image, even if you don't see it. This is absolutely right. It is also the inner line. Try to visualize the feelings of the image.

You must be aware of all this and know it consciously. You must train yourself in this way. If you don't see the image, it means that you must push this part of your actor's being and train it. But if you are in connection with the image and see the inner line or the feelings, it is enough. If it does not come, you must train this ability.

INTUITION - METHOD:

Stanislavsky in the theatre, and Dr. Steiner [in theatre, speech and Eurythmy] have both created very strong methods, and

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both have said, first of all the intuition, and then the Method. If you accept it and have lived with it, then you can come with the Method and analyze it. Sometimes these things can be wrong in our artistic imagination, but we must approach them after they have given us this thing - have given something. We must accept them as a growing plant, after which we can throw it away. If we do the opposite and take the Method and kill the imagination, then the Method is inapplicable. In each period of work, and each moment of the School's development the best point of the Method can be any one of the points. We must always be ready to adjust our approach; this flexibility must be left. I have discarded many exercises and invented new ones because of need in different circumstances, in different countries.

The image follows you as the actor. When you are looking at the image and producing and rehearsing, you must make a big effort to keep it before you, to draw it to you, to appeal to it; but when it comes to you, then it really comes - you are then passive, although very active. You are actually passive, and you receive this blessing from the image. Then it is the first step towards the real imagination, but I call it the result of all the previous preparatory work - it has happened! It is there somewhere. I know this from my own experience with the characters of Don Quixote and Hamlet.¹ This is the beginning of real imagination. It is the artistic imagination which is lower than the real imagination; but if it has happened, you know that you will get the part.

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CONSCIOUS WORK:

Try to get this simultaneous union of the imagination and the incorporation. The part will grow through this approach. Imagine that you are working alone and that you give yourself certain suggestions, and then you will try to do it again by looking at your image, and then try to incorporate the new suggestions which you will get. Consciously we can only pursue one or two means - all other things must be there in the subconscious. The important thing is to work consciously. It is important that we are able to do consciously some work which we have chosen. You can take a separate thing each time and concentrate on it. This is the way to escape floundering and wasting your time. You must not be afraid of losing ^{some} things - if they are there they will come back again. We must work consciously by knowing each time what our aim is. It is possible to take different phases of the style, such as tempo, presence, urgency, etc. They can be taken one at a time for the purpose of exercise, and then they can be combined.

CHARACTERIZATION:

This exercise will conclude a certain series of exercises which we have had. When we have become accustomed to the feeling of the center in our chest and the whole body as a harmonious thing around this center, then it is good

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to know that from this experience of our bodies as a harmonious composition of limbs, we will get the feeling of what it really means to take a characterization. Each characterization is more or less the offshoot from a certain ideal state. If we have the right feeling for this fine or rude thing, then we will get a special fine feeling for each characterization, psychologically and bodily, if we know ourselves.

When each of us knows himself as a harmonious figure with the center in the chest, then every small thing is a big characterization. This changing of the simple bodily position will speak very much, but if I neglect this ideal position of my body and my psychology and do only some tricks, it will tell me nothing, because I will always be in some contorted state. If we have this ideal experience of our own body, then all the possible characterizations will be displayed before us. It gives us a certain feeling for all kinds of characterizations.

This is what I want to give you today. We have our exercises for developing the imagination, some of which we have done, but the whole gamut of the imagination can be described as a series, or a sequence of certain inner events which are actually the product of the imagination, which grows and grows and comes to the last point. Point one is the simple ability to concentrate; if we are able to concentrate, this is the ability to imagine something. (Do all the points very quickly.)

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CONCENTRATION:

1. Concentrate on a human figure which climbs up a hill. Try to remember everything we understand about concentration. This means that your whole being is occupied by clinging on to, or embracing something.

IMAGINATION:

2. Simple imagination: That means that we concentrate on something and are able, by means of our concentration, to penetrate into this image so that not only the outer appearance is before our mind's eye, but the inner thing as well.

INCORPORATION:

3. Now take the same figure and try to imagine it. By embracing this imaginary figure with our whole inner being, try to penetrate into it. Our imagination must be able to influence us as actors - that means we must imagine with our acting abilities. This is what we call incorporation - that means that when we have this image, we fix it with our power of concentration, then we have it; we act it. We give this image our own body and emotions, and the image begins as if to move us - we incorporate the image with our own body. Rehearse it several times in your imagination.

From this you will see that there is a certain gradation: 1. Simple imagination. 2. Simple ability to penetrate into the image. 3. Incorporation.

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CONTINUOUS INCORPORATION OF THE IMAGE:

4. If our imagination is developed to a very high extent, it is possible to do the following thing, which is very difficult but very useful for rehearsing. To be able to see the image - this is the ideal case - to imagine continuously in the scene which you are acting, and continuously to rehearse by following this image which you have. Not as in the process of incorporation - where we first imagine and then we incorporate what we have imagined - but, continuously imagining the person climbing up the hill, I keep this image and incorporate it continuously. Therefore, I do all my movements because I follow him who is continuously before my mind's eye.

This is difficult, but it is a very important ability, and it will help us to rehearse without falling into the dangerous cliché world. Because if we have nothing before us and nothing inside of us, which is often so at the beginning of rehearsing a certain play or part, then we fall into clichés. But if we are able, by means of our highly developed imagination, to always follow our image, we are saved from these clichés, and we are always on the way to the inspiration because incorporating the image is the first step to the inspiration, which is in and out.

INSPIRATION:

5. Inspiration, - this is the most happy moment for all artists and actors as well. This is the best moment in the

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following sense. When you have a highly developed imagination, and when you have exercised this imagination several times in a certain special part, the moment will come when the image will not be created by you any more, but will come to you on its own. This moment cannot be forced at all. It will come as the result of all the other four points, and this is the moment when the image comes to you and pays you a visit, so that you cannot resist following it because it is here.

You have worked on the four points, and the moment comes when you see your character; you see your image because it is there, and you cannot do anything but follow it because it is strong enough to stay before your mind's eye. That will come, and must come if the imagination is trained well enough, and if you have worked upon the particular character long enough.

6. This is what we call Inspiration. We cannot force this moment either. The characteristic for this inspiration is that you cannot any longer see the image. This is the most interesting thing. You have seen the image, you have created it - let us say it is an old man. You have worked upon it in your imagination and have tried to incorporate it. Then the happy moment comes when you see it, and you enjoy - as if passively - his life, his actions, and then the next moment you cannot see him. Why? Because it is in you - you are the old man, and it is no longer you here and he there. And this is

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the real moment of inspiration when you do not actually know what you do on the stage, because the image which you have created through all these points has taken your whole nature, and now it is no longer to be seen - it is in you and leads you and acts for you. These last two points are not to be forced, and we must accept them as a great blessing. This is the reward for our long work in the four stages.

With these ^{six} points we have actually the whole psychology of imagination, and the whole school of imagination applying to our art. If you know this you will be able to manage your process of rehearsing absolutely consciously. You will know, for instance, why today it does not go well, because I am inattentive, or I don't see my image properly, or I don't incorporate it fully. The ^{fourth} point is the only thing we have not done to date - we are always expecting the fifth and sixth.

We will take the same person who climbs up the hill, but will look at him and incorporate him at the same time. Try to get the idea about this kind of following the imagination. The ideal case would be to be flexible enough to follow the tempo. Let the image be before you the whole time. One type of actor can imagine the image before him, another actor can imagine it behind him, and another above him, another can imagine the image on a big stage - it does not matter, the character itself will lead you to the right image.

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We must get the ability to keep the image in spite
 and psychological
 of all the physical difficulties. By imagining the outer
 and inner parts, the body will sometimes disappear, some-
 times the soul, but the ideal is to keep it all together, and
 the effort to keep it all together is what makes the spine
 of the exercise. Very often you will get only parts of the
 character, and then the whole thing will come. The ideal
 case is when you will get the whole character.

Take another image: this is quite a naturalistic
 exercise. You are in a hurry, packing your things, and
 going to a train. Imagine the room and the things lying there,
 and the whole process of packing. Create simultaneously the
 action with the image. Prepare only the room
 in your imagination. After doing this exercise you will
 understand how important it is to imagine with our whole
 actor's being, because if we imagine somebody, not with our
 brain, but with our whole actor's being, then it is the kind
 of image we can follow because we are actually using ^{all} our
 actor's powers and qualities to create the image. So we are
 brothers absolutely.

Sometimes we imagine it like a picture on the
 wall, and our actor's qualities are passive - we are simply
 looking at something as we do when we sit in the movies. We
 are actually doing nothing - sometimes if gangsters are there
 we are active. It is a wrong kind of imagination if we
 take this as our imagination. But at the moment when the

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gangsters take our whole activity it is the right imagination, and we must always follow with our active imagination. When we worked with the exercises on King Lear and Claudius that was actually the beginning of the right kind of imagination, with our hands and with our whole body. Then we came to the incorporation, which is the continuation of the process, and now we have come to point 4, so that psychologically it is one unbroken line.

Try to improvise The Fishing Scene, doing anything you like, being led by the image which leads you.

Question: (Paula:) Sometimes I discover that my image is myself - I am watching myself do it. Is that wrong?

Answer: No. Actually when you are preparing a part - for instance, I am Don Quixote let us say - it must be me. If you will follow the Don Quixote who is you, you will find the right things. But if you try to recall your own experience, by thinking back or recalling your own emotional memory only, then you are yourself and perhaps small in connection with the image. At the moment when you project yourself somewhere, you are no longer small. You are you in the bad sense only when you are retrospective, but at the moment when you have gone beyond that so that it is Don Quixote and you together, that is the only way and the only kind of character you can rely on.

Question: Is it right to see myself as Paula playing Don Quixote?

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Answer: Quite right - it is the most beautiful thing. If you only imagine Don Quixote, then you are powerless to incorporate it. It must have some relationship to you as a person, and at the moment when you feel that you would like to act this part, that is the moment when you bring yourself and the image together. You can imagine yourself actually as you are, doing something. It is very good, but at the same time you are trying to draw emotions from yourself by different psychological means. At the moment when you are able to project yourself into the world of the image, it is no longer you. The artist begins with this world in which he is able to project, - not in going into himself. To project is the right way.

It is better to start with the image that you see. There are obstacles, but it is not important to look upon them. It is important to know that if I cannot see my image, I must make an effort to see it. I know another type of actor who sees marvelous clear pictures, but cannot act them. It is another kind of obstacle, but our aim is to be able to see and to be able to follow the gesture, and then we will awaken everything in our souls which we are aiming at.

FOLLOW THE IMAGE:

When I was young, I admired another actor very much, and I started all the parts which I was preparing by imagining him acting them. You may ask where was I? I was actually always me, as me. It was absolutely inspiring because I loved him, and believed in him.²

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The task for us is only to follow this one thing - the image. Other points can be included for the purpose of exercising, but the ideal case is that we must always embrace, always follow the image. This would be the ideal case - the new type of actor. Therefore, if it is not necessary, do not pay attention to the other points in the Method. When we come to acting - free acting - then we expect all these things to come out of us.

By imagining this image which leads us, it is possible, of course, to imagine something very big and without details, as Alan has done. In that case, it was to a great extent, lying, because of all the details which you had not found. But, if we could find the truth at once, we would not need to rehearse! In the next rehearsal you will know what to repair.

We must start with uncomplicated things. It is possible to imagine a long story without details, and to follow it, being led by our image, and it is also possible to sit at a table and follow the smallest detail. We are able to fix our image as we like - whether we want to take small details or to act this big thing, it depends on us when we are at the fourth point. The fifth point no longer depends on us.