THE IMPROVISATION AS A TOOL

IN DIRECTING

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by

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INTRODUCTION

Improvisation is not a new technique but often it is a misused technique. Many people, including knowledgeable theatre workers, think of an improvisation as only a Mike Nichols and Elaine May skit or, worse yet, as an exercise in which one plays out a dramatic scene without scripted dialogue. It is true that both of these are examples of improvisation but they merely skim the surface of an area that goes very deep in theatrical usefulness.

Then what is an improvisation? The Random House Dictionary of the English Language defines the word "improvise" as "to prepare or provide offhand or hastily; extemporize." This definition already goes beyond the skit and unscripted dialogue since it encompasses anything that is not rehearsed beforehand. But the dictionary definition is too broad for any study. A foundation is needed on which to build the improvisational structure. Therefore, in an attempt to build this foundation, improvisation in this paper is a game or exercise through which a person can find and express the communicative value of a feeling, idea, line, beat, scene, act, or entire play.

This paper, therefore, is concerned with the improvisation as a tool in directing. It will explore the aims of

improvisation, the techniques used in directing improvisations, general improvisations to be used with any kind of acting group and specific improvisations that can be used in directing the following plays: (1) Antigone by Sophocles, (2) Hamlet by William Shakespeare, (3) Desire Under the Elms by Eugene O'Neill and (4) The Leader by Eugene Ionesco.

It is hoped, as an end result or perhaps just a means to an end that this study will clarify and codify the improvisation and the techniques for employing it, for those who are interested in it as a tool in directing.

CHAPTER I

THE AIMS OF IMPROVISATION

Improvisation can have many aims. Generally speaking, "It attempts to mine levels never before employed."[1] Stated another way, the improvisation "aims at bringing the actor again and again to his own barriers, to the point where in place of new-found truth he normally substitutes a lie."[2] The improvisation, then, is a soul-searcher, a finder of truth, a teacher, a means by which an actor "extends his range . . . and also . . . extends his technique."[3]

More specifically, though, the improvisation can achieve five basic aims. First of all, the improvisation releases tension by the development of a person's powers of concentration. By concentrating on a specific problem, the actor loses the tension which stifles his creative drive and makes him appear awkward and false in the stage reality. This aim is especially important to the inhibited actor. "A breakthrough for the inhibited actor cannot be hoped for except in improvisation. If the emotionally bound up actor merely rehearses and performs, almost inevitably he will merely continue his pattern of inexpressiveness."[4]

Secondly, the improvisation can sharpen the actor's power of observation. Improvisational exercises rely a

great deal on a person's relationship to his environment. An awareness of the senses and their full capabilities is a key to successful improvising. Observation of the daily happenings are put to use and explored in the improvisational scheme. Stated another way, "The actor is surrounded by a circle of characteristics--voice, mannerisms, physical movement--all of which are given life by his energy and full contact with his stage environment."[5]

Thirdly, the improvisation can train a person to think within the situation. Inherent in the improvisational structure is the idea of the extemporaneous. A problem or exercise is presented and it must be solved without any preconceived solution or planned-out strategy. A person must grasp the situation and all of its ramifications and work within that situation to solve the problem. The improvisation, if presented in the correct framework and spirit, "exists not just in the imagination, but is lived and moved physically alongside other human beings, in time and space."[6]

Fourthly, the improvisation can develop and train the emotions. Lee Strasberg states: "The purpose of improvisation in working on a role is to explore what makes a human being behave in this particular way. Otherwise it has no value."[7] Improvisation deals with human responses. To be able to work with these responses, a person must know them. Hate, for example, is not a planned emotion. It manifests itself in many ways because it is caused by many circumstances. An improvisation designed to work around the

theme of hate could explore the ways in which hate is shown and, also, the circumstances surrounding that hate. This produces more far-reaching results than the mere direction "You hate him." It is true that many actors can respond to such direction and come up with a plausible solution of how to hate. But it seems that an in-depth exploration would both force the actor to go beyond hate's surface and, also, teach the actor what hate really is.

The fifth aim of improvisation is to develop an understanding of one's self and other people. Improvisation demands truth. It demands a careful and complete evaluation of ourselves and the people with whom we work. Deficiencies, as well as extraordinary capabilities, are quickly spotted and dealt with. It is easy, in non-improvisational rehearsals, to forget a deficiency or laud an outstanding trait, but in an improvisational situation, this is practically impossible. Each person must work with the deficiencies, whether they are his own or someone else's. Each person must work with the extraordinary. In working with these traits a deeper understanding between people develops and blossoms into a meaningful environment which, eventually, can result in the improvement of the entire group, both as people and as actors.

Many times the question arises, "How do you achieve the aims just cited?" Basically it can be done by utilizing "two elements from everyday life: first, the spontaneous response to the unfolding of an unexpected situation; and

secondly employing this in controlled conditions to gain insight into problems presented."[8]

The first element to work with is the "spontaneous response to . . . an unexpected situation." The idea of spontaneity can be best phrased in the following way:

> Through spontaneity we are reformed into ourselves. It creates an explosion that for the moment frees us from handed-down frames of reference, memory choked with old facts and information and undigested theories and techniques of other peoples' findings. Spontaneity is the moment of personal freedom when we are faced with a reality and see it, explore it and act accordingly. In this reality the bits and pieces of ourselves function as an organic whole. It is the time of discovery, of experiencing, of creative expression.[9]

A problem seems to arise here, though, because many people feel that spontaneity works against and is detrimental to the discipline that is required in acting and performance-oriented work. The contrary is true because "spontaneity and discipline, far from weakening each other, mutually reinforce themselves; that what is elementary feeds what is constructed and vice versa, to become the real source of a kind of acting that glows."[10] The spontaneous response gives new life to the disciplined--the known--quantities while the disciplined quantities act as checks to make certain that the spontaneous does not get extraneous.

Viola Spolin, in her book Improvisation for the Theatre, discusses seven aspects of spontaneity that should be considered here. They are as follows:

(1) Games

(2) Approval/Disapproval

(3) Group Expression

(4) Audience

(5) Theatre Techniques

(6) Carrying the Learning Process into Daily Life

(7) Physicalization

These aspects are important to the understanding of the spontaneous response and improvisation in general since they provide the focal point from which the director must work. The following, therefore, will consist of a brief discussion of these seven aspects.

(1) Games--"The game is a natural group form providing the involvement and personal freedom necessary for experiencing."[11] Games, to Spolin, is another word for the exercises she has devised and used in her work with improvisations. Games release the player by involving him in a non-theatrical activity which will have a direct or indirect relationship to the performance or production. Another aspect of games is: "Playing is a communion . . . Play is freedom. Play is also mutual. You can't play alone."[12] The importance here lies in the mutualness of games. A player must play with someone if he is to solve the problem presented.

(2) Approval/Disapproval--Spolin states, and this is an extremely important point, "<u>there is no absolutely right or wrong way to solve a problem</u>."[13] In other words the

director and other actors must refrain from passing a right-or-wrong judgment about another actor's handling of a problem. There may be other solutions, but no right or wrong one.

(3) Group Expression--

> A healthy group relationship demands a number of individuals working interdependently to complete a given project with full individual participation and personal contribution. If one person dominates, the other members have little growth or pleasure in the activity; a true group relationship does not exist.[14]

Although this aspect may seem to be idealistic, it is possible to achieve the goal of group expression. Peter Maloney, an actor in Joseph Chaikin's Open Theatre, stated his views on group expression when he said, "As part of a group, an actor gives up a lot, especially the motivation of attention. But he's rewarded with a continuity, a chance to develop trust in the other actors and a sense of being part of a something larger than otherwise might be possible."[15] In many acting companies one or two members dominate the group. In the improvisational company no one member can be allowed this privilege. This requires some sublimation of the human need for attention. The necessity of this sublimation is usually offset by the satisfaction provided in a healthy group relationship with its continuity of relationships, a mutual feeling of trust between actors, and the possibility of accomplishing something beyond the individual's capabilities.

(4) Audience--Spolin states, "The role of the audience must become a concrete part of theatre training."[16] The audience has often been a neglected part of the theatre framework. In improvisations players not involved in the actual exercise are expected to participate by their attention and critical comments. A great deal can be learned by this method and a heightened awareness of the audience's role is also achieved.

(5) Theatre Techniques--Very simply these are "the techniques of communicating."[17] A simple rule to follow is "a player on stage either communicates or he does not."[18] This is both the start and finish of the theatrical experience. What is being communicated and how it is to communicate are the elements provided during the rehearsal period. The communication of something is what must be achieved if theatre is to be successful.

(6) Carrying the Learning Process into Daily Life--

> Because of the nature of the acting problem, it is imperative to sharpen one's whole sensory equipment, shake loose and free one's self of all preconceptions, interpretations, and assumptions (if one is to solve the problem) so as to be able to make direct and fresh contact with the created environment and the objects and the people within it. . . . Thus, experiencing is the only actual homework and, once begun, like ripples on water is endless and penetrating in its variations.[19]

(7) Physicalization--This is simply "the means by which material is presented to the student on a physical, non-verbal level as opposed to an intellectual, or psycho-

logical approach."[20] In exploring a problem, physical or mental action is stressed. Terminology, intellectualizing, and psychological manifestations are avoided so that the physicalization can provide "the student with a personal, concrete experience (which he can grasp) on which his further development depends."[21]

These seven aspects, then, are the focal points in developing spontaneity.

The second element to be utilized in the improvisation is that of "employing this [the spontaneous response] in controlled conditions to gain insight into problems presented." The major problem presented to the actor in preparing for a performance must be, in the final analysis, creating a believable character in terms of the stage reality. In this process of creation the improvisation can (1) "lubricate the imagination thereby enabling it to become creative";[22] (2) "train the actor to perceive possibilities of thought and meaning";[23] and (3) "induce first character creation and then the association that comes from character relationship."[24]

It should be pointed out here that all of these aims are predicated on one very important point: none of these aims can be carried out unless the working environment is conducive to good improvisational techniques. In other words, it cannot be built without a strong foundation.

Footnotes

[1]Robert H. Hethmon (ed.), *Strasberg at the Actor's Studio*, p. 252.

[2]Peter Brook, *The Empty Space*, p. 212.

[3]Hethmon, *loc. cit.*

[4]*Ibid.*, p. 226.

[5]Viola Spolin, *Improvisation for the Theatre*, p. 256.

[6]John Hodgson and Earnest Richard, *Improvisation: Discovery and Creativity in Drama*, p. 21.

[7]Hethmon, *op. cit.*, p. 303.

[8]Hodgson and Richard, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

[9]Spolin, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

[10]Jerzy Grotowski, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p. 121.

[11]Spolin, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

[12]Julius Novich, "The Improvisation Bit," *Nation*, December 5, 1966, p. 614.

[13]Spolin, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

[14]*Ibid.*, p. 9.

[15]"The Serpent," *Newsweek*, May 26, 1969, p. 133.

[16]Spolin, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

[17]*Ibid.*, p. 14.

[18]*Ibid.*, p. 28.

[19]*Ibid.*, p. 15.

[20]*Ibid.*

[21]*Ibid.*

[22]Robert C. Newton, *A Creative Approach to Amateur Theatre*, p. 8.

[23]Hethmon, op. cit., p. 107.

[24]Newton, op. cit., p. 47.

CHAPTER II

THE TECHNIQUES IN DIRECTING IMPROVISATIONS

The techniques used in directing the improvisation are not difficult to learn and apply. Any competent stage director can also become a competent director of improvisations. The techniques of improvisation, though, require a different approach than those of normal stage direction. These techniques will be explored in detail in this chapter but, generally speaking, the essential qualities for the director of improvisation are freedom and imagination. Freedom means that one allows the aims of improvisation to be foremost in one's plans and that the scheme of "block, lines, and polish" are not the overriding factors guiding rehearsals. Imagination means that one must constantly search for the correct exercise to use in solving problems and, most importantly, know when and how to use it.

More specifically, the director is the teacher and leader of the group. On him rests the responsibility of achieving the aims of the group, whether they be actor training or preparation for a production. The director, though, "should regard himself as one of the group rather than seeing himself and the group as separate entities."[1] This, besides meaning that the director should be involved

in the interplay of the group, also means that the director should not be a dictator. Nothing can destroy a group response quicker than a dictatorial director. The director is a leader but he is also a participant in the evolving process of learning that is taking place. Perhaps the best way for a director to be part of the group is for him to join in the exercises, especially the general improvisations and warm-ups. Through this the group can respond to the director as one of them but still recognize his authority as a leader. Although this split in roles may seem a bit complicated, it is not difficult to carry out.

A more difficult schism the director constantly faces concerns the dual point of view that he must constantly have towards himself and his students. This point of view consists of "(1) observation of the handling of the material presented in its obvious or outward use as training for the stage; (2) constant close scrutiny of whether or not the material is penetrating and reaching a deeper level of response--the intuitive."[2] The director must watch himself as well as the group. He must constantly question his improvisations, both in their relevance to training the actor and in the effect they achieve in reaching the inner sensibilities that are vital to successful improvising.

> The need to improvise in order to explore is usually clear to the actor, but frequently he attempts--consciously or unconsciously--'just to improvise, just to see what will happen.' Successful exploration demands that there be some concrete element to focus and clarify what that actor is doing.[3]

The "concrete element" in this case is the director and his constant evaluation of himself in his dual role.

Side coaching is a technique used by the director to aid the actor in the problem-solving framework of an exercise. Side coaching consists of the director speaking in a low tone, devoid of feeling, giving the actor directions on what he could be doing, or focusing on, next. Used properly, side coaching is a means of extending the actor's resources since it can almost become an inner voice, prompting and encouraging him toward deeper exploration. Side coaching also works in focusing the actor's concentration on the problem since the director, many times, can see when the actor has strayed from the solution-finding path. Side coaching is generally used extensively with the actor unaccustomed to improvising. The more the actor knows what he wants to do, the less the need for side coaching.

Environment in the improvisational situation is extremely important. "Environment in workshop training refers to both the physical set-up and the atmosphere existing within the set-up."[4] It seems that the latter is much more important than the former since, although a well-equipped stage is nice in carrying out extensive improvisations, all that is necessary for most exercises is space, preferably a great deal, although this is, again, not essential. Some excellent additions to this space are practical squares and rectangular boxes which can serve as furniture. This is all that is really essential to the physical environment.

Atmosphere, though, is much more difficult to achieve. The director's attitude toward the group is extremely important. The approval/disapproval aspect of spontaneity is the key to successful environmental attitude since an absence of right or wrong in solving a problem removes a great deal of tension from the situation. Attitudes concerning discipline also stem from the director and it is up to the director to enforce these attitudes. If the improvisations are to be treated strictly as play, then a play attitude should be adopted and rules set up accordingly. If the improvisations aim at a certain goal, such as actor training or preparation for a performance, then a more rigid attitude is adopted. The important point to remember, as far as atmosphere goes, is that there is a right or wrong way within the set-up and this should be strictly followed. Discipline, in other words, is necessary.

Generally speaking, the problem solving technique is the framework around which the improvisation revolves. "In its simplest terms, it is giving problems to solve problems."[5] This technique is usually taken in steps in order to be most effective since it is difficult, if not impossible, for an actor to solve an improvisation that deals directly with the problem unless other improvisations have led up to the solution. For example, Actor A has the problem of excessive body tension. It would be foolish for a director to say: "Okay, go up and concentrate on relaxing." This is exactly what is done, but only not in so many words. How many times

during rehearsal does a director say to his actors, "Relax! You look too stiff!" And how many times does the actor, then, immediately tense up? Improvisations could be devised starting from complete relaxation in a non-acting situation to tensing and relaxing at will to spontaneous relaxation when evidence of tensing is apparent. It is true this does take longer to work out than a single command, but the results are much more effective than when the actor is told to "Relax!"

> Problem solving performs the same function in creating organic unity and freedom of action as does the game and generates great excitement by constantly provoking the question of procedures at the moment of crisis, thus keeping all participating members open for experiencing.[6]

In any exercise a player must "focus on a changing, moving single point . . . within the acting problem."[7] This focus is called the Point of Concentration (POC) by Viola Spolin. POC achieves four main objectives:

> (1) It helps to isolate segments of complex and overlapping theatre techniques (necessary to performance) so as to thoroughly explore them.
> (2) It gives the control, the artistic discipline in improvisation, where otherwise unchanneled creativity might become a destructive rather than a stabilizing force.
> (3) It acts as a catalyst between player and player and between player and problem.
> (4) It makes perceiving rather than preconception possible and acts as a springboard into the intuitive.[8]

The POC complements the problem-solving technique. A problem is given that must be solved. The POC keeps the focus on the solution and not on extraneous influences. It aids

the actor by showing him which way to go and keeping him going that way.

Improvising is a process of exploration. The technique for exploration "has three essential elements: to take time, to keep going, and to improvise on a theme."[9]

Taking time is, perhaps, one of the most difficult things for any theatre person to do. The pressures of the production schedule are often so great that there is little time for anything essential, let alone "taking time." But, if this element is utilized, very often a quicker and more satisfying solution can be found to the problem. This is, of course, true in nearly anything one does and the improvisation is no exception.

> There is also the problem of creative passivity. It's difficult to express but the actor must begin by doing nothing. Silence. Full silence. This includes his thoughts. External silence works as a stimulus. If there is absolute silence, and if, for several moments, the actor does absolutely nothing, the internal silence begins and it turns his entire nature toward its sources.[10]

After an improvisation the director's main task is evaluation and deciding on where to go next. Concerning evaluation, Lee Strasberg states:

> I can only try to see what the intention of the actor is, to see whether that intention derives from something sound, from a definite need, whether it seems to solve some definite problem that he has set for himself.[11]

Although Strasberg is not speaking from a strictly improvisational framework, his views point up the major goal in evaluation--to see if the problem has been solved.

Viola Spolin states that the evaluation "is the time to establish objective vocabulary and direct communication made possible through non-judgmental attitudes, group assistance in solving a problem, and clarification of the Point of Concentration."[12] The evaluation, then, is a time for teaching and learning and not a time when judgment is passed on how good or how bad the actor was. The question to be asked is "Did he solve the problem?" A discussion on how the problem was solved as well as other ways to solve it, as long as the discussion does not presume to judge right or wrong, is also valuable at this time.

The techniques of directing improvisations are fairly easy to learn. Following the few basic ideas cited will help insure success. The important factor, of course, is that the director, himself, must believe that the general scheme of improvisation is the best way to achieve the desired results. With this belief and a desire to teach and learn, the improvisational director can achieve results that are useful as well as satisfying to him and his actors.

Footnotes

[1]Spolin, op. cit., p. 35.

[2]Ibid., p. 19.

[3]Hethmon, op. cit., p. 269.

[4]Spolin, op. cit., p. 31.

[5]Ibid., p. 20.

[6]Ibid.

[7]Ibid., p. 22.

[8]Ibid.

[9]Hethmon, op. cit., p. 10.

[10]Grotowski, op. cit., p. 251.

[11]Hethmon, op. cit., p. 51.

[12]Spolin, op. cit., p. 26.

CHAPTER III

GENERAL IMPROVISATIONS

In rehearsing a play there are basically three major time periods to the total rehearsal period. Although these blocks of time may be known by many different labels, they generally break down as follows. The first section is the "exploration and interpretation"[1] phase and "is for warming up the actors and director, for laying the groundwork in relationship and attitude to the play and to each other."[2] This section is devoted to solving the problems brought about by the initial contact between actors, director, and script. It is an extremely important phase of rehearsals because the initial response by everyone to everything can, and most likely will, set the tone for the entire rehearsal period.

The second section of rehearsal "is the spontaneous, creative period--the digging sessions, where all energies are channeled toward full, artistic potential."[3] Putting it more succinctly, it is the "excavation and evocation"[4] period of rehearsal. This section would be devoted to solving the particular problems detected in the initial phase of rehearsal and exploring in great depth the total direction in which the play must go.

The third section is "for polishing and integrating all productions facets into a unity";[5] or "co-ordination and consolidation."[6] This phase of rehearsal is, more or less, the tying together of the total package, smoothing out the wrinkles and bulges and making sure that everything is neatly together (in the context of the play) before presentation.

Of course, each section of rehearsal will have many variables in it, depending on the play, the director, actors, and all the aspects that come into being during a rehearsal period. No set formula can be given for any play, but certain guidelines are possible.

In the initial rehearsal period general improvisations, which may or may not relate to the play being rehearsed, should be employed exclusively; general improvisations are exercises which do not directly deal with the specific problems found in the script. These specific problems are memorizations of lines, character development, specific blocking and business, and working on the structure of the play. The first section, therefore, should be devoted to loosening up the physical, emotional, and vocal qualities possessed by the actors and not to blocking and lines. It should be pointed out here that, very often, a director will find himself pressed for time and feel the need to rehearse the script immediately. Experience has proven that a few hours spent on some judiciously chosen improvisations will save many needless hours of explanation and working to "get

it right." Even if it is felt that improvisations cannot be used to any great extent, the fact of their availability should be in the director's mind. Often, the five or ten minutes taken to explain something intellectually can be better used by graphically and physically showing through an improvisation. The director can see that the problem is solved and not merely hope that the idea has come through to his listener. Furthermore, the improvisation may involve many people, some of whom the director will work with in other productions. The little extra time taken in the improvisation at this point will serve not only for the immediate production, but also in building for any future productions as well.

The first rehearsal, after the initial reading of the play by the entire cast, should be an educational and exciting few hours for everyone. The time should be educational because it should allow everyone to see what potential the group has by the use of improvisations. It should be exciting because the psychological factor of having something interesting and stimulating early in the rehearsal period can often carry a group through many difficult times. The first rehearsal, then, is one in which the actors and the director honestly get involved in themselves and start re-learning the joys of the power of their five senses.

The first problem faced by the director in productions involving casts that have not worked together previously would

be the problem of initial shyness and reserve that is natural to a heterogeneous group of this nature. One game which has worked well in breaking the ice with both children and adults is the "Chair Game" which is somewhat similar to "Musical Chairs." This game can be played by as few as six people, works best with between ten to twenty people, but has been played successfully with as many as forty people. The game, very simply, requires a chair for all but one of the participants. The chairs are arranged in a circle, backs facing in, with approximately three or four feet separating each chair. The players each stand inside the circle of chairs with either hand holding the back of the chair nearest them. The player without a chair stands in the middle of the circle. Without any spoken directions, players switch chairs at random with other players. The person left without a chair goes in the middle and play continues. This game is effective because, immediately, people are in contact, either through glances or physical encounter, and very quickly forget their shyness and reserve in an effort to change and, often, not to change, chairs with the rest of the group. It is suggested that the director be involved in this game and as many others as possible in this initial rehearsal period since the group has as much right to know him as he does them. All the while, though, the director should be observing the group since it is his responsibility to guide them and a thorough knowledge of the individual's strong and weak points will definitely aid in this guidance. It is amazing how much

can be learned by watching the action and interaction during a game. Participation also tends to lessen the feeling of being watched and evaluated and, therefore, frees the group even more to enjoy the game.

After the "Chair Game," or whatever game is used first, the director can obviously go in many directions. "As a rule, it helps to take something which is as near the everyday experience of the group as possible, in order that they can find themselves on familiar ground at the outset."[7] One exercise, or actually a group of exercises, which works particularly well now are the "Sensory Awareness"[8] group of exercises. One of these, "Listening to the Environment," which involves quietly sitting with eyes closed and merely listening to what is going on around you, changes the group feeling brought about by the "Chair Game" into an individual feeling and is the initial step in making each person aware of his surroundings and himself. As a follow-up to "Listening to the Environment," "Feeling Self with Self"[10] is excellent for delving deeper into the individual and his relationship to himself. Instead of sitting, though, as suggested by Viola Spolin, it has proved better for the group to lie down on the floor, keeping far enough away from each other so that each person is more or less isolated from the group. In this exercise the group is to lie on the floor, and then, "beginning with the bottoms of their feet, they are to feel what is against their bodies at each point."[11] The director can

side coach up the body and back down again, making sure everyone understands that the Point of Concentration is "Feeling Self with Self."

This exercise brings up the point that for all rehearsals, appropriate rehearsal clothes should be worn. Everyone should feel comfortable and free to move in any way they wish; therefore, clothes that may not be particularly flattering, but are definitely functional, are indispensable. If a person has a fear of getting his clothes dirty or feels that a skirt is too short for bending over, the whole purpose of most exercises is defeated before it has had a chance. Sensible work clothes are a must for everyone.

Another exercise which is good for the initial rehearsal is the "Mirror Exercise"[12] in which the group is subdivided into teams of two with one member of the team being the mirror and the other member initiating action which the "mirror" must mirror. The Point of Concentration (POC) here is to exactly mirror the actions of the partner. Going fast and playing tricks is a sign that the POC is being avoided and side coaching should be employed to correct this misunderstanding. Going beyond large body movements, facial movements can also be mirrored. Soon, in the course of this rehearsal, feelings and ideas that have been kept hidden, emerge and surprise each group member into a closer realization of himself.

"Name Six Game"[13] is a game which can put the group

back together briefly. All the players sit in a circle. The player who is "It" stands in the center of the circle with his eyes closed while the others pass around some object that is not to be concealed. When the center player claps his hands, the player caught with the object in his hand must name six objects which begin with the letter given by the player in the middle before the others can pass the object around the circle. If the player fails to "name six," he takes his turn in the middle and play starts over again. The number of objects named can be more or less, depending on the number of people playing. "Name Six" is a very enjoyable game and can be played strictly for the fun involved. The game, though, does exercise one's powers of concentration and thinking, and could prove to be a valuable experience for an actor in an ad-lib situation.

One final game which could be played during the first rehearsal is "Charades." This is the popular party game which has individuals working in teams, trying to guess words or titles of books, plays, television shows, or just about anything decided on by the group, by using body movement and gestures without dialogue. It is suggested that if the group is unfamiliar with "Charades," the first few games be limited to simple multiple word games. More complex play can be initiated as the group becomes more proficient with the mechanics of the game. "Charades" is a good game to close the first session with because it brings into play all the qualities--physical, emotional, and vocal--that the group has worked on.

"Charades" also leaves the group with the feeling of excitement and will generate more interest in the next rehearsal. More importantly, "Charades" leaves the group feeling like a group and not individuals working by themselves for themselves.

The preceding has been a suggested outline for the first rehearsal. Obviously, other games can be substituted and/or the games mentioned can be deleted altogether. The games and exercises described, though, have proved to be particularly effective ways for both adults and children to enter into the improvisational scheme of rehearsal, enjoy what they are doing, and want to continue doing it.

The following will be a naming and description of other games and exercises that can be used during the subsequent rehearsals in the "groundwork" section of rehearsal. During this section the improvisational director should rely mainly on general improvisations because, before trying to discover the meaning and purpose of particular sections, lines, or words in context, the group needs to have grasped something of the overall mood of the play.

> Very often the preliminary work done in improvising to arrive at some understanding of the unity of the piece will have given a clue to its tone, especially if the actors have grown sensitive to working with each other and can imaginatively respond to the author's script.[14]

Of major importance here is the idea of the actors growing sensitive to each other since an awareness will make them more eager to work through the entire rehearsal period.

One exercise, used by Charles Marowitz in his Theatre of Cruelty, is the "Introduction to Sounds" which would be excellent for starting the second rehearsal. The individual group member is given two objects and is told to explore the range of sounds possible with this instrument. Once the range has been explored the actor naturally moves into the idea of rhythm with the instruments. "Eventually, rhythm, a generalized and overused word in the theatre [gets] redefined in exact physical terms."[15] The actor, allowed to explore the area of sound, very soon becomes intimately involved with his own, very real meaning of rhythm which will be of great value in the coming rehearsals. In working with this exercise the players develop a pattern very quickly. Two or more instruments together create a mood or feeling and through side coaching loud or soft sounds, a definite relationship between instruments is established. Careful listening and control of the instruments is gained and a very simplified ensemble is achieved. Furthermore, "the same attitude the actors had taken to their objects was applied to their voices and bodies."[16]

Lee Strasberg, discussing his work with the Group Theatre, tells of the "One-Word Improvisation" which relates to "Charades" and would also be excellent to use in starting the second rehearsal.

> It is an exercise for an immediate impression rather than a sequence. You give the actor a word and a minute of time. At the end of the minute he is supposed to act out the word in

> pantomime, not naturally, but sharply, vividly and theatrically. Sounds can be permitted, but not words. The idea is to encourage the actor's body somehow to develop a clear idea of things.[17]

The idea is not to break the word down into syllables and sounds but to get the overall meaning across by pantomime. The exercise has the player working alone, trying to communicate a totality to his audience. Practice in getting the simple idea across should definitely carry over into the more complex problems faced in working with the script.

> The one word improvisation trains the actor's imagination to perceive possibilities of thought and meaning and to be stimulated to immediate behavior. The exercise forces the actor in this direction, because it can only be carried out by behavior.[18]

The following games and exercises are grouped according to the three broad categories the group should be exploring; in other words, the physical, vocal, and emotional sides of an actor's overall make-up. The games and exercises described can be used anywhere in the first rehearsal period but care should be taken not to push the group too quickly into problems they are not prepared to handle. The games and exercises may, at any time, be repeated if clarification and/or further work is needed on particular points. Also, many other exercises can be used, depending on the particular director's background and imagination. It must be stressed that all the improvisations written about are merely examples drawn from various sources and are not to be regarded as a definitive list to follow. It is the writer's

intent, though, that a catholic foundation for improvisation will be achieved through a careful study of the material presented.

The first group of exercises to be discussed deals primarily with the physical qualities an actor should be working on. These exercises are designed to free and exercise the entire body. They can be used with the inexperienced as well as the experienced actor since they form a foundation and furthermore, build onto what many actors know, or at least are dimly aware of.

"Tug of War"[19] is a good game to get the group working together and to start an awareness of what "give and take" means. The group is divided into two sub-groups and each group is positioned on opposite sides of an imaginary line. The object is to pull the opposite team across the line. The difficulty is that an imaginary rope is used. The POC is to concentrate on feeling the rope and give the rope reality. Side coaching to individuals and to entire teams helps the group achieve the POC. If the group finds the game too difficult, a real rope may be used first and then discarded.

Another game is the "Observation Game."[20] Although this game is not as physical as "Tug of War," it does require mental action and, therefore, is included in this section. The "Observation Game" consists of placing ten to fifteen objects on a tray or table and giving the group fifteen

seconds to observe the collection. When time is up the objects are covered and each individual is to write down as many of the objects as he can remember. This game is excellent in starting the group to work on the powers of concentration and memory.

"Play Ball"[21] is a game that, although difficult to start, can be rewarding to the players because it becomes possible, through the game, to visualize and feel that which is not there. The game offers a chance for individual achievement within the group and, also, gives practice in making real the unreal. Very simply the game consists of the players throwing an imaginary ball back and forth between them. The director may, at any time, change the size and weight of the ball by side coaching. The POC is to make each different ball become real. Intense concentration is necessary but pays off by a satisfying and rewarding experience for everyone.

"Part of a Whole"[22] is an exercise that thoroughly involves the group and gets close interaction from the participants. One player starts the exercise by becoming a moving part of an animate or inanimate object. As soon as another player sees how he can fit into the movement, he goes up to initiate his idea. The POC is to work closely with the other person, being constantly aware of the action between the individuals and the group as a whole. Appropriate sounds can be added by the players after they have worked into the rhythm and timing of the moving parts. Intricate machines

have been worked out which involve a close interaction between participating players. Physical timing is also explored in this exercise.

"Orientation Games"[23] are the best way, perhaps, for the group to start thinking of the idea of definite characters and how people interact with one another. One person starts the game by assuming the identity of someone through a specific action: i.e., a teacher lecturing, a housewife cleaning. As soon as a player realizes what the first player is doing, he joins the game by being a specific character with a specific action. The actions and characters, needless to say, should relate in some way. The game can be stopped when two characters are playing but it is better to let as many characters as possible get into the game. Dialogue is permissible and should be used when the situation warrants it. Care should be taken not to have characters constantly going in and out of the scene, since the POC is involved with the interaction between the group members but this time as people and not inanimate objects. A "no exit unless side coached to do so" rule may be instigated if players have difficulty staying in the scene. This game can be used over and over again and is good for developing character, clarifying relationships between characters, and solving specific problems that may come up concerning characterization. It would be possible to build a complete series of orientation games once the groundwork for improvisation had been set. This is definitely one of the best games for a group to be

involved in.

"Playing an Animal" is a game that has been used quite often. This exercise, which is exactly what the title says, has the following objective:

> The actor . . . is . . . forced to use observation to single out the qualities of a particular animal, and to find out how he, the actor, can accomplish them. Thus he learns that he can and must accomplish much more as an actor than what he initially conceives as the simple embodiment of feelings and responses.[24]

Observation and selectivity come into play and lead to another basic step in characterization.

> Because he has to choose definite elements in order to create the animal, he finds that the exercise becomes an entrance into the problem of physical characterization. He varies his normal being, takes on characteristics he does not normally have--in walk or rhythm or behavior or attitude.[25]

Going a step further, after the animal characteristics are totally assimilated, a scene can be quickly set up and played out in which these characteristics are transferred to humans. Interesting developments can take place in this exercise if it is allowed to progress naturally, and greater insight into individuals can be gained by the director and the actor himself.

"Space Substance"[26] is an excellent exercise for the first rehearsal section and can also be used as a specific improvisation in rehearsing any play that requires something other than realistic movement. The exercise consists of having the group move through the rehearsal area, giving the air around it a definite weight and feel. Many varia-

tions can be worked into this exercise and objects can be molded from the substance. The POC is to make the substance real and to work with whatever variation the director may decide on in the exercise. Movement is explored in depth in this exercise and, with practice, the reality of the substance allows a freedom of movement that would be difficult, if not impossible, to achieve otherwise. Going beyond the benefits of gaining an awareness of movements, this exercise promotes ideal situations for scene exploration. After a substance is made real, a scene can be side coached into being by the director. The naturalness of transition between "Space Substance" and the scene allows a warm-up period while not giving the entire exercise the feeling of being a scene.

"Feet and Legs Alone"[27] is an exercise used to develop expression in the feet and legs. A cloth is hung to conceal the player's upper body, leaving only legs and feet exposed. The player is to show who he is, what he is doing, or what he is feeling through his feet and legs. This exercise can be employed with other parts of the body, especially the hands. Many actors suffer from the "What do I do with my hands?" problem and, therefore, could benefit by expressing different qualities with the "Hands Alone."[28]

Verbal games and exercises deal primarily with freeing the actor's voice and exploring the actor's vocal range that is too often allowed to remain merely adequate.

"Gibberish"[29] is an exercise which can release the

actor from set word patterns and cause him to use his total body to communicate with "no-symbol" speech. Combining non-meaningful sounds into word patterns and, eventually, sentence patterns, is the object behind "Gibberish." Communication through this "language" is the POC. The exercise should be started with simple commands and then extended to "Demonstration," "Relating a Past Incident," "Teaching,"[30] and, finally, into total improvisation with the group joining in the scene, speaking only in gibberish.

"Permissiveness" is another improvisation discussed by Lee Strasberg.

> The actor chooses any speech or monologue. He says to himself 'I'm going to sit and work with these words.' He does not prepare how he is going to say the words. He does not worry whether or not he will get emotional. The purpose is to see whether or not the actor will permit whatever he is really thinking to come into the words. The exercise is designed to make the instrument completely free to respond to whatever impulses are fed into it. And since the impulses in the exercises are spontaneous, they may go in any direction.[31]

By allowing his mind to work on the words, the actor may find a newness and reality which could otherwise not be realized. Often the original and, perhaps, unimaginative response to the initial contact with the script is the final response also. It would definitely be better to explore possibilities and then choose one instead of being satisfied with the first thing that comes along. Even if the initial response is the one decided on, the actor has had an opportunity to explore his instrument and, perhaps, come

across some idea that could be useful later in rehearsal.

An exercise that requires two players' co-operation is "Relating an Incident."[32] One player relates a story to his partner who then repeats the same story, this time adding specific colors to the nouns mentioned. The POC is to see the story in specific colors as it is being told. Eye contact is important here and a definite development in relationships between players can evolve from the game.

A follow-up to the possible problem of eye contact, which can be a difficult task for any player, is the exercise, "Eye Contact."[33] A player goes in front of the group and must sell, teach, or demonstrate something with the POC being to make eye contact with each member of the audience. The use of direct eye contact will later serve to strengthen scenes and make players less inhibited in developing proper stage relationships.

"Singing Dialogue"[34] is another useful exercise in freeing word patterns and also getting the actor to explore his range of sounds capabilities. One, two, or more players are to sing the dialogue instead of speaking it. It is not necessary to have a good singing voice but merely to want to explore all aspects of voice production possibilities.

The "Three Word Improvisation" is another improvisation described by Lee Strasberg.

> The three word improvisation is usually done with two people. They are given three words and a minute of time. They go off, and in that minute, not only must they choose a basic situation but they must also give to

> the three words interesting and unusual meanings which are totally different from their ordinary ones. Then they come back on the stage and act out the situation. . . The whole point is to learn to see behind words, to learn not to think of words as a safeguard, but always to look for imaginative comprehension which will extend the actor's own avenue of thinking.[35]

Imaginative comprehension is important in getting across to the often placid audience the reality and importance of the spoken words. Stock characterizations coming from stock comprehension are too often seen in performance. It is the imaginative development of a role and an entire play that is needed to bring about a strength in the acting company as well as a new strength in theatre.

"Story Building"[36] involves four or more players. The first player starts a story and another player must pick up the story as the leader signals for the preceding player to stop and the next player to start. The story continues until it reaches a natural end or the leader signals a stop. Players must listen to each other and be ready to step in at anytime with the story. Interesting variations can be worked out with this improvisation which might relate directly to the play being rehearsed. This exercise is beneficial to use if the cast is having difficulty working together and also provides practice in building from another person's ideas.

The following exercises are used for eliciting and freeing the emotions. Careful thought should be used before attempting some of these. They definitely should be reserved

for some of the later rehearsals in the first rehearsal period.

"Silent Scream"[37] involves the entire group and is used to get the players to feel emotion physically. The group is told to scream without making a sound, that is, to scream with their entire body. When they are totally involved in the scream, side coach to "scream out loud." The response will be deafening and serves to give the players a strong and direct experience to recall.

"Feeling of Death"[38] is an exercise which can really reach into the players and get them involved in an unfamiliar state. The POC is to discard the feeling of being alive and accept death. This is achieved by the director side coaching, in steps, to discard (1) the one needed person or persons, (2) one living faculty of the body, (3) one living point of the body, (4) a room with all their possessions, and (5) the world and why it matters. This exercise can be reversed to explore the "Feeling of Living" and probably should be done after the "Feeling of Death," unless the director wants this state of mind to continue into the rehearsal. Although this exercise can be useful in a specific situation, it is also extremely useful in the process of refining feeling and awareness.

"Inability to Move"[39] explores the player's emotions as he finds himself in a situation where it is impossible to move and he is being threatened by an outside force. One player, or an entire group, can do this exercise which

will prove to be effective in getting across the idea that action does not necessarily mean overt movement, but can also mean the inner feelings that are physicalized by the players. This exercise provides the possibility for delving into a theatre truth that is difficult to put into practice; that is, that the inner feelings are as important as the outer action as long as the feelings can be communicated to an audience. This exercise, as well as other related ones, might be useful in bringing to the surface the inner feelings of the individual actor.

The "Emotion Game"[40] is similar to the "Orientation Game" but centers on a specific emotion. One player starts the game by becoming involved in a disaster, an accident, hysteria, or some emotion-filled moment. The other players may join in as definite characters and play the scene. This exercise is useful for working with crowd scenes since it gets everyone involved and actively participating.

The "Conflict Game"[41] is similar to the "Emotion Game" but starts with two players who agree on a conflict and then present it, allowing other players to join in as definite characters. The same benefits derive as from the two preceding exercises and, therefore, are useful both in general improvisations as well as the improvisations incorporated for specific scenes.

Two other games that deal with emotions are the "Crying Game" and the "Laughing Game." In the "Crying Game" the group merely sits around, thinking of a sad experience or

happening in their lives. The POC is on crying. A great deal of side coaching will be needed in this exercise since recall is essential to the game. In the "Laughing Game" the group lies on the floor with the first person's head on the next person's stomach, continuing with the entire group. Laughter will begin fairly quickly and will continue into an uncontrollable situation. Both exercises are useful for exercising the capacity to laugh and cry and are a frame of reference for situations which may later arise requiring these two feelings.

The following games and exercises should be used toward the end of the first rehearsal period since they can serve as specific work concerning the play being rehearsed. Their use, though, should not be limited to specific problems since their flexibility will make them appropriate in many situations.

The "Where Game"[42] is similar to the "Orientation Game," only now the player who starts sets up a specific place by pantomiming the use of objects and the other players join him in this place by relating to the environment in some way. At first glance this seems to be a very limited game if the play only requires one "Where." Further examination, though, will show that a wealth of background material can be gained by the actor's exploring the "Where's" that surround the character's life. Work on quick character sketches can also be accomplished in the "Where Game" and can be explored more fully in the "Who Game."[43]

The "Who Game" involves two players. The first player is seated on stage when the second player enters with a definite pre-planned character relationship in mind. The first player must discover who the second player is by the way the second player relates to the first player. The POC is to "communicate relationship (Who) without telling a story."[44] Quick thinking and exploration of relationships can be examined in this exercise as well as having the players gain insight into the many faceted world of character building. The instantaneous response can often provide an understanding that a great deal of intellectualizing may fail to accomplish.

"Exploration of Larger Environment"[45] involves two or more players and starts by the director suggesting the environment around which a definite "Where" is to be used. The environment may be specific or general and the POC is to relate directly to the larger environment. The players should see what is around them and use this environment as specific "Who's" in a situation. A general use of the environment that would involve all players would probably be useful as a start if the players have difficulty with the problem. This game could help the players establish a feeling for what is around them by allowing them to become familiar with the environment. The lessons learned may carry over into filling their stage environment and not allowing any dead space around them.

"What's Beyond"[46] works on the problem of establish-

ing where the actor is coming from before he goes on stage and where he is going after he leaves the stage. The single player is to walk across the stage with no other action than is necessary to communicate where he was or where he is going. As an aid, the director can suggest that the stage is the hallway leading to and from rooms. Reference to this exercise may be useful later if difficulties arise concerning establishing the reality of what is beyond the acting area. Often actors look as if they are coming from and going to the wings on entrances and exits. This exercise may show a need for establishing a reality beyond the playing area and help by giving the actor practice in what is beyond that area.

"Excursion into the Intuitive"[47] is described as "an experiment in dramatic tension without benefit of content."[48]

> Students sit on chairs. Instruct them to sit as if their legs grew straight down from their buttocks. This will give a released, straight line to the spine. Their shoulders should be free of tension, and their hands should rest on their thighs. Everyone is to concentrate on a slight hissing sound on the exhalation. Eyes open, they sit looking on the stage. They are to force nothing and to think of nothing. When and if anyone feels the urge to go up on stage and do something, he is to do so.[49]

It should be clear that the exercise does not need to develop into a scene, but that players should do what they feel like doing. After a playing, a literal thread may be woven into the exercise and the story can be repeated without the preliminary preparation. This exercise can be a worthwhile

means of exploring silence on stage as well as the power of doing what someone feels like doing.

"Seeing the Word"[50] is an exercise that develops the actor's perception of what he is talking about and helps to produce a naturalness in voice and body because the POC is on the environment being described and not the words themselves. A single actor goes on stage and describes an experience he has had. As he is talking, the director side coaches him to concentrate on the colors, sounds, his feelings, and so forth, and, at the same time, continue the narrative. This exercise is useful to the actor with a long monologue since by seeing the words, he projects a more vivid and real image to his audience.

"Hold It! A and B"[51] requires four or more players. Each player is to sit on stage and give a short statement concerning a feeling or thought. With each statement the player should work for a definite physical expression with his entire body. When all the players have this expression, the director should start a series of short scenes which would involve all the actors as definite characters. The actor's POC is to maintain the original physical expression throughout the scene. One suggestion on the series of scenes is to start with childhood and move gradually to old age in a series of five or six steps. Since attitudes toward others are often shown with physical expressions, this exercise can point up this fact with dramatic effectiveness while at the same time providing a rich source of further practice in

character relationships, practice with dialogue, and scene building.

One of the most difficult problems faced by young actors, and many older actors, is that of physical contact. The "Contact Exercise"[52] is a means of solving this problem. Two players agree on "Who," "What," and "Where." Each actor is to touch the other actor when he originates some dialogue. Non-verbal communication such as whistles, sighs, and humming can be performed without contact. If there is no contact, there cannot be any dialogue. The director side coaches by calling "Contact" when dialogue has been used and no contact has been made. The POC is "to make new direct physical contact with each new thought or phrase of dialogue."[53] Physical contact between characters often shows relationships. The effectiveness of this means of communicating relationships very often rests on the naturalness of the contact. Belief in the meaning and realness of a handshake or an embrace is as important as belief in the meaning of a spoken line. The "Contact Exercise," therefore, offers a good means of exploring this form of communication.

"Silent Tension"[54] is played by two or more actors. The problem is to communicate "Where," "Who," and "What" through silence since the tension between the players in the scene is so strong that they are unable to speak. Contact and intense involvement are necessities if the problem is to be solved. From contact and involvement the player gains insight into what is needed to fully develop character rela-

tionships. Obviously not all scenes require "Silent Tension," but many crucial scenes do and this exercise is one way to make those scenes successful.

"Two Scenes"[55] is a slightly more involved series of exercises which can lead to many benefits. "Two Scenes" requires give and take between players and, therefore, gets into the realm of learning how to hold and share scenes. In the first exercise four players are sub-divided into two teams. Each team then sets up a specific "Who" and "What" with the "Where" being mutually agreed on by both teams. Neither team ever gets involved with what the other team is saying or doing. Both teams begin at the same time and when the director calls out the name of one team, that team takes the scene and becomes the focus on stage. The other team must stop visual and vocal activity and give the scene to the other team. "Giving" does not mean freezing since the team that is giving does not discontinue its relationship but simply moves out of the focus. Using "Give" is the second exercise in the series and involves the teams giving their focus to each other when they are told and not just fading out of the picture as in "Give and Take." Using "Take" has the teams take the focus from each other. This exercise can end up as a shouting match and probably will at first. But if the director is persistent eventually a new ingenuity is devised and heightened involvement is achieved. Needless to say, these exercises are for advanced players and should not be used too early in the rehearsal period.

"Changing Places"[56] involves any number of players with the POC being to constantly observe the other players. In this exercise the actors must always be in motion since, when any actor moves, the other actors must also move. Care must be taken to keep within the framework of the general "Who--What--Where" that has been set up and the director should evaluate whether the movement was justified and imaginative. Intense concentration on the other players is necessary in this exercise and will prove to be rewarding in the fluidness and naturalness which will develop in the actor's movements. This exercise is especially good for use with large crowd scenes since it involves everyone and can help give reality to the many people on stage.

"Transformations" are perhaps the most challenging improvisations to be attempted by a group. A transformation involves the changing of one object into another object or one character into another character without any preparation. In other words, the object or the person changes on its own through the powers of concentration. A transformation of a character is "a shifting, fluid movement within a play by which actors change from role to role without transition."[57] In the "Transformation of Objects"[58] a player first creates an object through pantomime and then passes this object on to the next player. This player, then, handles the object until it changes in his hands. He then passes it on. If the object does not change, he passes it on anyway. No

scene is developed from this exercise, but it is possible for players to create a continuous flow of objects between them. Transformation of characters involves a little more work, but is fun and rewarding to experience. The easiest way to begin this exercise is for two players to start a scene, and for the director to call "Change" whenever he feels like it. Eventually changes will come spontaneously and from within the person. Although perhaps not directly useful in most plays, transformations do serve to sharpen the actor's body and mind and help explore unrealized capabilities within the actor.

The preceding games and exercises cover a wide range of situations and problems that may be encountered in the first rehearsal period. At the director's discretion, the group can move into the second and third phases of rehearsal which will require more specific improvisations to solve the problems found in the script being worked on.

It should be pointed out that the games and exercises being discussed are not necessarily the only techniques that should be employed in rehearsal. A discriminating director should choose his rehearsal material and ideas according to his needs. The games and exercises should only form part of the total rehearsal picture. Improvisations are tools in directing the play and should be thought of as possible, but not exclusive, means to reach the end--the polished, satisfying performance.

Footnotes

[1]Hodgson and Richard, op. cit., p. 193.

[2]Spolin, op. cit., p. 329.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Hodgson and Richard, loc. cit.

[5]Spolin, loc. cit.

[6]Hodgson and Richard, loc. cit.

[7]Ibid., p. 31.

[8]Spolin, op. cit., p. 53.

[9]Ibid., p. 55.

[10]Ibid., p. 56.

[11]Ibid.

[12]Ibid., p. 60.

[13]Ibid., p. 63.

[14]Hodgson and Richard, op. cit., p. 137.

[15]Charles Marowitz, "Notes on the Theatre of Cruelty," Tulane Drama Review, Winter, 1966, p. 155.

[16]Ibid.

[17]Hethmon, op. cit., pp. 105-106.

[18]Ibid., p. 106.

[19]Spolin, op. cit., p. 61.

[20]Ibid., p. 62.

[21]Ibid., p. 63.

[22]Ibid., p. 73.

[23]Ibid., pp. 62, 66, 72.

[24]Hethmon, op. cit., p. 104.

[25]Ibid.

[26]Spolin, op. cit., p. 81.

[27]Ibid., p. 147.

[28]Ibid., p. 148.

[29]Ibid., p. 122.

[30]Ibid., pp. 123-124.

[31]Hethmon, op. cit., p. 213.

[32]Spolin, op. cit., p. 170.

[33]Ibid., p. 176.

[34]Ibid., p. 225.

[35]Hethmon, op. cit., p. 107.

[36]Spolin, op. cit., p. 179.

[37]Ibid., p. 239.

[38]Playscripts US, pp. 139-140.

[39]Spolin, op. cit., pp. 239-240.

[40]Ibid., p. 245.

[41]Ibid., p. 252.

[42]Ibid., p. 101.

[43]Ibid., p. 109.

[44]Ibid.

[45]Ibid., p. 116.

[46]Ibid., pp. 102-103.

[47]Ibid., p. 191.

[48]Ibid.

[49]Ibid., pp. 191-192.

[50]Ibid., p. 232.

[51]Ibid., pp. 259-260.

[52]Ibid., p. 184.

[53]Ibid., p. 185.

[54]Ibid., p. 188.

[55]Ibid., p. 160.

[56]Ibid., p. 165.

[57]Richard Gilman, "Experiment in Theatre," Newsweek, November 21, 1966, p. 114.

[58]Spolin, op. cit., p. 83.

CHAPTER IV

FOUR PLAYS

The following section of this paper will deal with improvisations that can be employed in directing four specific plays of greatly varying natures. No attempt will be made to give an intensive and exhaustive treatment of the total directorial pattern to be followed, but suggestions will be made which should touch off sparks of recognition in the creative director and give him impetus to take off on his own exciting improvisational path. Furthermore, the improvisations used for one play can easily be used with other plays since, very often, an improvisation is not limited except by the director's imagination.

In working directly with the play's text, Hodgson and Richard feel:

> Basically, we need to approach improvisation and the text with a number of questions.
>
> I. What does the character do when he is alone?
> II. What does he do when he is with others?
> III. What does he say when he is alone?
> IV. What does he say when he is with others?
> V. What do others say about him?
> VI. How do others treat him?
> VII. How does he generally respond to others?[1]

Actually there is nothing different in this approach since this basic scheme is suggested under many different names

by many different people. What is different, and important, is the means of finding answers to these questions. The improvisational director will work with the questions, not merely by intellectualizing and verbalization, but by drawing on the physical and emotional storehouse inherent in every human being.

Going further, Hodgson and Richard explain in very clear and succinct terms a way of approaching the text through improvisation:

> Irrespective of size of character in either lines or moments of appearance, the treatment is a similar one. We, first of all, gather a fair amount of detail from the text and then work on it in improvised form in both the actual situations from the play and imagined ones. These will send groups back to the text for further understanding so that the building of characters is based on the accuracy and clarity of improvised work. The characterization will continue to grow and will remain alive while the actor keeps feeling and thinking and thinking and feeling.[2]

A director, then, after the initial phase of exploratory improvisation with his group, delves into the text and devises, with the group, exercises and improvisations that give the players a deeper understanding of what needs to be done. Spur of the moment as well as pre-planned improvisations are vital and necessary since they provide the players with the enthusiasm to return to the text for further clarification. It is important, though, that through this long process the final goal be kept in sight, that is, a satisfying and rewarding production for both audience and actor

alike. Personal whims cannot be catered to and the glorification of one person above the others cannot be allowed. The production is the thing and everything follows after that.

Antigone

Antigone by Sophocles is a play which offers a director the chance to explore the total concept of tragic drama. It is a play that poses distinct problems if a director is to follow the dictates of a "larger than life" drama. Experienced actors are familiar with the realistic play and the exaggeration of farce and high comedy. The problem lies in how to go beyond this to achieve the stature that a Greek tragedy deserves. Costuming and masks will help, but it is the acting that must carry the production. This is a major problem that the director must face and improvisations can offer, at least, a partial solution.

One difficulty, as with most poetic dramas, is in understanding the dialogue. Just what are the characters saying? One way to lessen this troublesome problem is for the cast to change what is being said into everyday speech. By putting the play on an everyday level, a better understanding of what is being said will be gained. Going a step further, a director, for rehearsal purposes, can change the entire play, in time, place, and setting. Creon is a working man, the Chorus, his clerks. Polyneices and Eteocles are two laborers who have battled over the rights to

Creon's store. Both are dead and Creon has decided that Eteocles shall be buried with full Christian rites while Polyneices shall rest in an unmarked grave without the benefit of a church service. The rest of the play can follow with minor changes. Short improvisations can be developed or an extended improvisation devised which can encompass the entire play with the idea being to get to the real meaning of the play before attempting the difficult task of speaking the lines as Sophocles intended. Although radically simplifying the play and only treating the plot on a very basic level, this improvisation could get to the heart of the play's meaning and structure and prove to be a good starting point for all that will be built onto the basic foundation provided by the exercise.

Another improvisation might be playing each episode in a realistic style with improvised dialogue and then, immediately going back over the scene, using the written text and larger than life movements. Improvisations that free the body should be employed before any intense effort is made to block and set a scene.[3]

The Chorus has an extremely important and difficult part in the playing of a Greek drama. The individuals involved must work together with movement and sound and not get in the way of the play's action while being onstage continuously. Improvisation involving exploration of the voice[4] and body would be extremely useful and, usually, necessary for

any group. Depending on the director's ideas about the Chorus' function, movement to music could be useful. The point here would be to make the Chorus a useful and dynamic tool, not merely relegating it to the sidelines of the action.

Very often in the episodes two characters have an exchange of words which requires a good sense of timing and entire control of the voice and body. Good examples of this are Creon and Antigone's argument over the burial of Polyneices and Creon and Haemon's argument concerning Creon's decision to punish Antigone. Short exercises with brief exchanges and rapidly mounting anger could be used in rehearsal for those scenes.

Teiresias poses an interesting problem for any actor who enjoys a challenge. Rehearsing with a blindfold might be one method of getting the feeling of blindness. Age, which is also a factor in this characterization, could be approached by the improvisation "How Old Am I?"[5] in which a player is to concentrate on a certain age and project this age in voice and movement. Once a player works past the normal cliches of age, many interesting ideas and workable points begin to emerge into a total characterization.

The Messenger presents a special problem since it is his speech which must capture and convey the immense terribleness of Haemon and Antigone's action. Lee Strasberg's improvisation, "Permissiveness,"[6] could prove effective for

any actor with a monologue such as the Messenger's. In this exercise, if the actor allows his feelings to work on the words, new and interesting nuances may be achieved in what could be a very dull and trying speech.

Creon goes through a series of changes during the play which are a key to his characterization. From the haughty king whom we find in the beginning of the play to "this hot-headed fool . . . who is crushed beneath . . . his fate"[7] is an enormous transition. An improvisation which depicts the change might prove valuable to the actor playing Creon. The change is a gradually speeded-up process and could be achieved through both the vocal and physical qualities. An image of a man slowly collapsing under the weight of his actions is one visualization of the improvisation which quickly comes to mind.

Each episode in a Greek tragedy further develops the inevitability of the characters' fate. Often, though, the action is described and not seen. An improvisation which realizes this action in physical terms might be important to the unification and clarification of all the action that takes place. Each action should be viewed in the actors' eyes and a good means to make it real would be to play the action out. An extended improvisation concerning the total action of the play could further serve to clarify and unify the cast's total attitude toward the production.

Hamlet

Hamlet by William Shakespeare offers a great many possibilities for improvisation. A discussion of Hamlet in the improvisational scheme brings up the point that no matter whether the cast be made up of professionals or amateurs, improvisations still have a definite place in the rehearsal schedule. True, different improvisations would be used with different casts, but there is always the need, no matter how proficient the player, to define, redefine, practice, exercise, and learn to deal with the problems presented by the script. In Hamlet, with background information so plentiful and past productions so varied, a director has a wide choice of production possibilities as a starting place for his production. Improvisations may provide more choices for deliberation or serve as means to make the production an artistic endeavor that creates instead of copying, bearing the uniqueness that a particular company brings to a particular production.

In Hamlet, as in most great plays, environment plays an important part and should be used in the rehearsal period since "very often we can come nearer to understanding an author's aim and approach if we can physically respond to his text in something akin to the conditions for which he was writing."[8] Improvisations involving court procedure and court life could easily be set up with some very basic background material. "Where" could be Claudius' court; "Who"

could be the specific characters in the play; "What" could be any situation that might arise in or outside of the play's script. The idea here would be to steep the cast in the manner of the court so that a better understanding of the play is achieved.

Taking the key sections in the play and condensing them into a short improvisation might serve to bring the powerfulness of the play quickly to the surface. Changing the play into chronological order or following one character and seeing how others affect and are affected by this character may also be useful. It is important that a cast know the characters and can respond to them inside as well as outside the play and any improvisations that can be devised to further this knowledge should be employed. Although this general improvisation does not relate directly to the text, a carry-over in attitudes, feelings, and understanding should give it enough merit to be included in rehearsals.

Madness, whether real or feigned, offers a wide field for improvisational techniques. Hamlet and Ophelia, both, are directly affected by madness, while everyone else in the play is indirectly affected. Improvisations could be set up dealing with madness, how it affects a person, and how persons react to it. Exploration is the important idea here since madness can take many forms and the more forms a director and actor have to choose from, the more satisfying the final choice for performance will be.

"Permissiveness" could be an exciting way for any player to work on a soliloquy. The important point about this improvisation is that it may be worked on anywhere and need not take up valuable rehearsal time.

The Ghost is a role that offers a great many possibilities to the director and the actor. Reality, or lack of it, would be up to the director, but it would be certainly worthwhile to experiment with the actor's voice and movements to create the desired effect.

One improvisation suggested by Peter Brook in The Empty Space would be to take two lines such as "To be or not to be / That is the question," and give ten actors one word each. The actors would say the words in sequence and attempt to produce a "living phrase"[9] out of it.

> The purpose of such exercises is to lead actors to a point where if one actor does something unexpected but true, the others can take this up and respond on the same level. This is ensemble playing: in acting terms it means ensemble creation, an awesome thought.[10]

Beyond the possibility of creating ensemble playing, as Brook says, this improvisation could also give new meaning to old phrases since many minds are working on one problem.

Hamlet's advice to the players could also offer a possibility for a group exercise. While one person says the lines, the rest of the cast could be following the advice. There is certainly a great deal of merit in what Hamlet says, and it is possible that a cast acting style could develop through this exercise.

Many changes take place in Hamlet's character during the course of the play. These changes might offer the director, and actor playing Hamlet, one means of getting to the heart of the character. An improvisation in which the changes are put in a set sequence and each part of the sequence is triggered by Hamlet meeting a particular character may be one possibility. A continuum of feeling could be established with this improvisation and expanded on during subsequent rehearsals.

One last exercise which would be beneficial toward the end of the second rehearsal period would be the "Relaxed Rehearsal."

> The actors lie on the floor, shut their eyes, and breathe slowly with strong accent on the exhale. The director walks around from time to time, lifting a foot or a hand to make sure muscular release is complete. The actors then go through the lines of the play as they lie there with their eyes closed. They are to concentrate on visualizing the stage, the persons with them, and themselves in the scene.[11]

By totally concentrating on the words and the scene without the need to move through the scene, the actor can gain a new awareness of what is happening around him and form new insight into the role he plays in the total structure of the play. The "Relaxed Rehearsal" could be used as one of the final rehearsals before the show is totally mounted and rehearsal begins on the stage set, as a warm-up a few rehearsals before the first performance, or as a "refresher" during a long run.

The importance of the "Relaxed Rehearsal" is that it does exactly what it says--relax and slow the pace down while at the same time reviewing and refreshing all that has been rehearsed. Too often, final rehearsals are so fraught with tension that little good comes from running through the paces. A "Relaxed Rehearsal" is a means of working without tension and getting thoughts and ideas together before the final polishing takes place.

Desire Under the Elms

Desire Under the Elms by Eugene O'Neill offers exciting possibilities for a director and cast willing to spend the time exploring the difficulties presented by the playwright. Reality is a keynote in this play as in most plays, and should be explored to the fullest for a satisfying performance. The play's environment is one aspect which merits a great deal of attention.

One improvisation which could prove useful would be an exploration of people trapped by their environment. Before getting into specific characterizations, the director might set up an exercise in which the players are locked in a cell or trapped in a mine. The players should explore how an individual responds and what he tries to do to get out. Following this preliminary exercise could be a specific improvisation concerning the reactions of each character in the play to the enclosing environment of the farm. What does Ephraim do? Eben? Simeon and Peter? Abbie? How do they defeat,

or how are they defeated by their environment? An important point to remember here is not to verbalize, but to physicalize the improvisation. Obviously this would entail a collapsed sense of time and should not be overextended.

In making the environment real, the director might utilize an improvisation involving a description of the farm. O'Neill gives very exact stage directions concerning what the farm is like. The players could enlarge on this description so that the farm is real to them.

The work each character does on the farm should also be explored. Perhaps a trip to a farm run without the aid of machinery would aid in the group's understanding of years upon years of rising early, plowing all day, resting, and beginning the cycle all over again. Exercises which involve the physical labor of plowing, milking, harvesting, and so forth would also be valuable. The idea here is to do what the characters always do and get a feel of what hard physical labor does to a person.

Language is another important aspect in O'Neill's play. It is quite probable that few in the group have ever been exposed to the New England dialect O'Neill set down, and the reality of this language must be ingrained in the actors. The language must become a part of the person speaking it and, therefore, normal conversation in the "foreign tongue" outside of the actual stage rehearsal should be practiced. All avenues should be explored in order to

make the language seem natural and a part of the people speaking it.

In his stage directions O'Neill uses definite animal images in describing his characters. Simeon and Peter are described as "beasts of the field"[12] and "two friendly oxen."[13] Eben at one time says he is "the prize rooster of the roost."[14] Animal images could be decided on for the rest of the characters. A physical exploration of what the playwright means, by acting out the animal images, could prove valuable.[15]

Exact physical descriptions are also a part of O'Neill's total picture. An actor could attempt to mold himself into the playwright's model if only to get to the core of what is intended. These physical qualities may be discarded, but, at the very least, they can offer a true starting place for the actor searching for his physical identity in the play. Going further, these attempts at physicalization should include not only general body position but also facial characteristics as well. It is often found that a physical detail can be a small stream which can be channeled into the main river to produce a total and real picture.

A key scene in the play is the party scene (Part III, Scene One) in which everyone is celebrating the birth of Abbie's child. A rehearsal with the entire cast could be a party with a fiddler and dancing just as O'Neill describes. Nothing looks worse in a good production than a group scene in which the characters look under-rehearsed and not quite a

part of the production. Before this improvisation, of course, work would be done with the "Neighbors" relating to group scenes. "Mob Scenes,"[16] in which each player has an individual reality, "Sight-Lines,"[17] which involves continuously changing the stage picture both through the director's commands and the individual player's decision, and "Changing Places,"[18] an improvisation in which actors are in constant reformation of groups, could all be used prior to the party improvisation. The important point in the party scene is that the party guests should really be guests invited to Ephraim's farm to celebrate and not extras used to make a pretty picture. If the director feels he does not have time to prepare the group adequately, then it is imperative that an assistant director or stage manager be given this responsibility. Many a production has fallen apart because no one has taken the time to give the minor characters sufficient preparation and rehearsal.

Most of the improvisations discussed so far have dealt with fairly general details of the script. One improvisation dealing with a specific segment of the play involves the scene in Part II, Scene One in which Ephraim and Abbie are in their bedroom talking about their needs for a son, and Eben is next door in his bedroom. Abbie and Eben are totally aware of each other although they are separated by a wall. An improvisation involving seeing each others' movements through the wall and feeling the emotions described by the playwright may be tried. Although this may not prove

successful, the aspect of trying to see, hear, and feel through the wall could carry over into the actual staging of the scene.

An improvisation involving a large portion of the play would be to decide on the one word which best described each scene and then to improvise, in character, the meaning of that word. For example, the words for Part II, Scene One to Four could be as follows: Scene One--Preparation (for the Hunt); Scene Two--Stalking; Scene Three--Killing; Scene Four--Boasting. This improvisation mainly involves Eben and Abbie, but Ephraim could also take part since he plays a dominant part in the hunt. The improvisation would condense time and, perhaps, give an overall unity to the scenes. Other words could obviously be substituted depending on the director's and actors' concept of the play.

Another improvisation which might help to unify the play would involve working on the crime and punishment idea. The entire cast could take part in this improvisation through discussion and physicalization of the idea. Setting up this exercise might be very time-consuming and prove ineffectual, but the possibility that it will clarify issues and bring into focus ideas that have not surfaced might warrant the effort. One way to develop this improvisation would be to set up a trial situation with defense and prosecuting attorney, a judge and jury. The object would be to bring Simeon, Peter, Eben, Ephraim, and Abbie to trial. Another possibility might

be to appoint someone as an all-powerful force (the environment or God) who decides what can and cannot be done by each individual character. Many other situations are possible; the director can mold the improvisations to meet his own concept of the play and solve the difficulties involved in getting a total performance from his cast.

The Leader

The Leader by Eugene Ionesco presents interesting problems to a director because many logical interpretations are possible and probable in staging this play. As in all plays, the director's decision about what he wants the play to do and say will decide just how the group will approach the script.

An initial improvisation could be to explore the word "leader." This exploration might be vocal: having the cast say the word in many different ways; or physical: by using movement to convey the thoughts and feeling brought to mind by the word; or by any combination that may prove profitable. The point is to get a definite feeling about the word so that this feeling can be conveyed in performance.

One possible problem which might arise would be making the invisible visible, since the leader does not arrive until nearly the end of the play. Describing the leader exactly without looking at him could be an exercise for the Announcer. The Two Admirers could verbally express their feeling about wanting to see the leader but not being able to. Also,

specific detail could be added to the Announcer's description of the Leader's actions.

Another problem in the play is the many exits and entrances. Improvisations involving what each character is doing off-stage before he enters might prove profitable. What each character is going to do after he leaves the stage could also be explored. The timing of exits and entrances is also important. An improvisation in which characters continually move on and off the stage could improve the sense of timing and explore the many meanings of fast, slow, and delayed entrances and exits.[19]

Switching parts might be useful to the cast since everyone sees different characters differently. A view of a different approach might spur an actor to further exploration of the possibilities of his characterization.

Miming the play could also be used since much of the play involves pronounced physical action. Questions to be answered here would be: "Does the action, with the words, convey any meaning?" "Is it the desired meaning?" "Is the action clear?"

Finally, another idea to use in approaching the play's many-faceted qualities would be to rehearse the play in different theatrical styles. This is especially ideal in view of the play's length. A brief understanding of naturalism, realism, fantasy, and so forth, would be all the cast would need in order to delve into the many possible planes of

performance. The director would probably have his own style or mixture of styles in mind, but this improvisation allows a great freedom for exploration, both of the text and of the actors themselves.

Footnotes

[1]Hodgson and Richard, op. cit., pp. 156-157.

[2]Ibid., p. 21.

[3]See Viola Spolin, Improvisation for the Theatre, "Space Substance" on pages 81 to 83; "No Motion" on pages 189 to 191; "Excursion into the Initiative" on pages 191 and 192.

[4]See Viola Spolin, Improvisation for the Theatre, "Gibberish" on pages 122 to 126; "Choral Reading" on page 195; "Whisper-Shout Exercise" on page 196; "Vocal-Sound Effects" on page 205.

[5]Spolin, op. cit., pp. 68-69.

[6]See page 36.

[7]Theodore W. Hatlen, Drama: Principles and Plays, p. 83.

[8]Hodgson and Richard, op. cit., p. 139.

[9]Brook, op. cit., p. 114.

[10]Ibid.

[11]Spolin, op. cit., p. 336.

[12]Hatlen, op. cit., p. 377.

[13]Ibid., p. 376.

[14]Ibid., p. 395.

[15]See "Playing an Animal," p. 34.

[16]Spolin, op. cit., pp. 166-167.

[17]Ibid., p. 166.

[18]Ibid., pp. 165-166.

[19]See "What's Beyond" on pages 42-43.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion it is hoped that this paper has shown some of the exceptional and, often, unique merits of improvisation, and some of the more effective ways to utilize it.

> It is no use thinking that exercises belong to school and only apply to a certain period in the actor's development. An actor like any artist, is like a garden and it is no help to pull out the weeds just once for all time. The weeds always grow, this is quite natural and they must be cleaned away, which is natural and necessary too.[1]

The improvisation can be one way to pull weeds and, also, to plant seeds for the growth of new talents.

There is another more important fact, though:

> The director will find that all the time new means are needed; he will discover that any rehearsal technique has its uses, that no technique is all-embracing. He will follow the natural principle of rotation of crops: he will see that explanation, logic, improvisation, inspiration, are methods that rapidly run dry and he will move from one to the other.[2]

The imaginative director will be able to use the improvisational scheme in many situations and will feel free to devise his own improvisations in order to explore the possibilities inherent in the particular play, cast, and production. The production's the thing and a director should use all the tools available to achieve the results of an educational and satisfying experience for everyone involved.

Improvisation is reaching a new peak in the arts today, because the true merits of the improvisational scheme are finally being realized. Movie and stage directors are discovering the true worth of improvisations and are using them to further the visual and emotional impact that their works have on audiences. Educational theatre, from the highly theatre-oriented university to many junior high schools, is finding the improvisation to be an important method for actor-training and a valuable means of achieving the desired production potential.

The renaissance of the improvisation is due in large part to Viola Spolin, but the success of this renaissance is due to the fact that the improvisational scheme is a successful scheme. Almost anyone who is willing to follow its basic tenets can achieve astonishing results in a short time. Besides exploring and expanding the actor's potential, the improvisation stimulates and enlivens, searches and finds, poses and translates theatre into an exciting and total experience that long remains in the minds of everyone whom it touches.

Footnotes

[1]Brook, op. cit., p. 114.

[2]Ibid., p. 124.

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