

The Application of the Michael Chekhov Technique to Auditions

Often times as actors we leave the stage, and unless disaster strikes and we go up on our lines, miss a cue or an entrance, we often times forget what we have performed. Perhaps it's the general rush of the moment or very likely our lack of concentration and the buoys of technique to mark our channel. Yet, when rooted in the technique, one can revisit performances from time to time and can recall each psychological gesture used, atmosphere permeated, and sensation felt. Having worked so deeply in a psychophysical technique, all the elements are present and ready to be utilized at a moment's notice.

What I find so profound about the Michael Chekhov Technique is that of the imagination. It is very fertile soil and one that is inexhaustible. The imagination is a well that one can revisit time after time and their bucket will always be pulled out, overflowing.

Last year I reflected on the use of Michael Chekhov technique for the auditioning actor. Looking back it was a very rudimentary approach primarily focusing on finding actor's ideal center, radiation, and crossing threshold. This past year I have delved further into the application of the technique to my auditioning life, and am now concentrating on character by utilizing centers, imaginary body, and qualities of movement (both physical and vocal.) I have had the good fortune of being called in for projects quite frequently in these last few months, and have relied on the technique as a way to build a character, define objectives and actions for these characters in a very short amount of time, and foster a feeling of ease while in the audition room. During the course of my paper I will highlight two roles, discussing my application of the Michael Chekhov technique during my process.

August 2016-*Last Gas*, by John Cariani for The Public Theatre of Maine

Tracy Pulicfer is described by the casting notice as "Troy's mother, 41. Stoic, opinionated and straightforward to the point of blunt, she is rigid, stubborn and overly literal.

Possessing a dry wit, she is a substantial presence of a woman who enjoys wielding the power and status of being a forest ranger. She follows every "rule" in the book, and writes summons to people when her life feels out of control and she needs to feel more powerful. Never the popular girl in high school, she's had her heart broken and has learned to emotionally armor herself from having it happen again. She still loves Nat, but he doesn't want her back."

I had two sides to prepare for this audition: One was for the initial read, and the second was to be prepared in case of a callback. In the first side Tracy interrogates her son's father and former lover, Nat, and his friend. She is trying to uncover something peculiar that occurred between the two men the previous night that led to Nat's arrest for drunk driving. She does this in a very circuitous manner, and this scene serves more as exposition regarding the three characters than it is about the interrogation. In the second side, Tracy confronts Nat again about what happened the previous night. She also confronts him about their son, and reaches out to him about getting romantically back together.

In my initial exploration of Tracy's character I perceived her to be a person who constantly functions from her thinking center. She is the type of person who sees things as being very black and white. She relies on her job as a forest ranger and the power of giving out summons as a way to re-establish strength and order in her life.

Regarding the incorporation of an image into Tracy's center I worked with the basic image of a stick. Tracy is very blunt, sharp, and rigid. *Last Gas* is set in the wilds of northern Maine and Tracy herself is a forest ranger, so I further distilled my image of Tracy to be that of a dried out pine tree that is missing many needles due to decay.

Regarding imaginary body I found a kinship with Tracy as we are both sturdy and solid women. The divergence between us was an interesting polarity to play with. I imagined Tracy to be much more tomboyish, sans makeup, with a ruddy complexion, and short blonde

hair. She is a large presence and likes to take up space in a room. She is also one not to sit for too long, and likes to lean on walls for support when she is in repose. The direct and blunt personality of Tracy also infused her quality of movement both physical and vocal. I played with the quality of molding with Tracy and this evoked the earthy, practical, and unsophisticated qualities that complimented the life body I had imagined.

While working on the two sides I established a main psychological gesture for Tracy. To me that psychological gesture was PUSH because Tracy is always trying to get to the root of problems as well as trying to get Nat to grow up and to step up for their son's sake. As for Tracy's archetypal action I experimented with "I hold my ground" because she is constantly trying establish order and construct a better life for herself and her son. I did find in my sides that there were moments, especially in her confrontation scene with Nat, that I was having a hard time grasping intellectually. Damn intellect! It was only when I worked PG's into my work that the scene became much more active, and alive. I needed to fantasize, radiate, do and then think later,

February 2017-*The Skin of Our Teeth* by Thornton Wilder for Voice Theatre

Mrs. Antrobus is described by the casting notice as "Martha Antrobus, 30-45. Mrs. Antrobus, (wife of George). Strong, passionate woman who is always thinking of her children first. She is totally dedicated to the concept of family. Patient, understanding, full of courage. She is a capable American wife from the 1940's and at times breaks out of this period."

If there was any play that was more appropriate to the application of the Michael Chekhov Technique it would be Thornton Wilder's *The Skin of Our Teeth*. While re-reading the play I was instantly overwhelmed and intimidated. The play is about the Antrobus Family who survives the Ice Age, The Great Flood, and a war and comes out through these trials intact as a nuclear family. This is merely touching on the play which also features a dinosaur, a mammoth, and a son who is the biblical "Cain". I think I was intimidated by the scope and

absurdity of the piece, but underneath it all is the simple story of a family trying to survive at all costs.

In preparation for the audition, I had to put aside the notion of style or scope, and simply focus on the actions of Mrs. Antrobus; Quite simply what did she want? What was she doing to get what she wanted? How did she do what she was doing to get what she wanted? The first scene was between her and Sabina the maid. Sabina has let the fire go out in the fireplace, there is an ice age going on, and Mrs. Antrobus is trying to establish order and quite simply, protect her children. Further complicating matters is the knowledge that Sabina, now the maid, is also the former mistress of Mrs. Antrobus' husband. The second side was much clearer to me. Mr. Antrobus has been tempted by Sabina to leave this wife and family for her and Mrs. Antrobus is quite literally fighting to keep her family together.

Working with an image for Mrs. Antrobus Sabina says in the play "She lives only for her children; and if it would be any benefit to her children she'd see the rest of us stretched out dead at her feet without turning a hair- that's the truth. If you want to know anything more about Mrs. Antrobus, just go and look at a tigress, and look hard." Wilder has given the actor the image in which to work from; that of a lioness. Mrs. Antrobus' center was more difficult to decipher. Generally speaking, I think of the archetype of MOTHER as being a feeling center person, but in the case of Mrs. Antrobus with the stakes being so high, she is very much a willing center person and that is where I placed her center, in her pelvis.

Regarding an overall psychological gesture for Mrs. Antrobus, if I followed the archetype of MOTHER, it would be very easy to assume EMBRACE would suffice. I, through my process of working on these audition sides, found that LIFT was much more fitting. She is trying to lift her family above the abject circumstances that they find themselves in. This psychological gesture especially worked in the second scene in which she is trying to stop her husband from leaving her, and thus breaking apart their family. I also worked with the archetypal action of I GIVE in this later scene.

I had a lot of fun imagining and playing with Mrs. Antrobus' life body. I found her to not be a substantial person in regards to physical size, but her passion and energy make her a large presence. Physically I saw her as a trim, sinewy, unadorned woman who possessed very strong and rough hands. I found her hands to be a defining attribute that I could explore the character through. This image of her hands coarse from washing dishes and cleaning house was something that really gave me the essence of the character.

Mrs. Antrobus is such a passionate and strong willed person that I found myself gravitating to radiation as her quality of movement. She is the home fire in the hearth, the blaze of sunlight in the dark, a warm candle in the window. It was a joy playing with all these facets of the element of fire. I also found while I was working with the image of the lioness that the image would undulated between the lioness' mane, which is interesting because female lions don't possess mane like males, and that of the blazing rays of the sun. It was a happy discovery that was only brought forth by continued concentration on the image.

These are only two examples of the many roles I have had the good fortune of being invited to audition for. I have also experimented with applying psychological gestures and qualities of movement to monologues I have auditioned with. I have found that I can reinvigorate a monologue that has formerly felt flat by applying the technique.

Lastly I leave you with what has been most beneficial and freeing for me: Before every audition I find actor's ideal center and I cross the threshold. But now, I have added a new step: I fantasize, radiate, and do the psychological gesture of OPEN. I can't begin to tell you how joyful it makes me to enter the audition room time after time. If one can always approach the art of acting and teaching by practicing OPENESS therein we will find the JOY.

"That is what you must give from the stage. Your life. No less. That is art: To give all you have." Michael Chekhov

