

Process Workbook – Improvising and devising - Chloe Fowler

Previously to starting this module, I had always avoided improv. It was never something I felt comfortable with. Saying something wrong or unfunny was a fear of mine, but through this process I have learnt that improvisation isn't about trying to make the audience laugh but it's about being in the moment as your specific character. Observing and adapting and always listening.

Putting myself forward for improvising was the hardest challenge that I faced at the start of this process. I didn't trust my creativity, always thought it wasn't going to be good enough. To combat this insecurity of mine I searched for advice in books and videos, some from the Upright Citizen's Brigade, who are an improvisational and comedy sketch group. Amy Poehler, a founder member of UCB gave advice on Improv that I continued thinking about till the end of this process. She stated that as an actor you need the 'Willingness to transform' (Rose, 2014) which I kept thinking about because the character that I was creating, Hannah, was extremely different to me, and it was clear at times it made me uncomfortable, which I think is why I created her, to see the different types of characters I can play. I decided she was going to be extroverted while I'm more reserved and made the choice that she is a party girl and likes to get drunk whereas I'm not like that. Therefore, I did struggle to find how to play Hannah but with every rehearsal I took a step further out of my comfort zone until the performance. In addition, Poehler mentioned about how in Improv you leave no man behind in a scene, you don't desert them even if the scene isn't going well. You need to commit till it finishes. I had an experience like that in class where I got up into an improv and my mind went blank, it was early in the process, and I was still learning but it did make me replay the scene thousands of times in my head, but I think every aspiring actor needs that experience.

Once we passed the introduction to Improvisation and started to move onto the devising side of things my brain switched on and I was motivated to do the best work I could do because devising for me is so engaging and hands on work. We began improvising scenes with our characters in a specific situation. We then scripted these scenes, then rehearsed and redrafted many times until they were ready to perform. We were still redrafting scenes up till the day of the performance, which was scary and exciting. As I mentioned before I have created this character called Hannah. She was created within an improv task where I was in a pair and was given the prompt 'I miss you'. My partner was Katie and we established that my character and her character had broken up from a 3-year relationship. We only knew small details about the character here but then as lessons went on and more improvising was done. It was established that there was a reunion, and my character had a drunken affair and then went home and lied to protect the relationship but then Katie's character found out. There were so many ideas flying around that they were hard to keep track of but then we did hot seating.

The hot seating allowed me to openly explore who she is and how she felt about what she did. This hot seating was also based on information given in a monologue we had to write for our characters. When I did hot seating before this process, I had always felt out of my depth but not this time which maybe proves to me that I was just more connected to this character than others because it was entirely my creation. It was an unfamiliar process to me, creating and developing a character based on my own ideas instead of text from a script. 'The actor, unlike every other artist, ultimately creates only from himself.' (Hodgson and Richard, 1974) As I was going through the process, I didn't think it was that impressive but now it's finished I feel proud of the work I achieved and the character I created.

Playing intentions during scenes helped with characterization and helped the atmosphere of the scenes. My first scene was pre drinks and for a long time it was difficult for me to get in the mindset

of the character, as she is so different from me but ultimately, I just had to release the stress of judgement and go for it. Focus on the energy and the reasons for why my character was acting that way. Techniques like given circumstances by Stanislavski were useful but were always changing (Shomit Mitter, 2015). My character feared commitment in a relationship and was scared of what people thought of her sexuality which I could relate to but trying to find moments in the script to play those intentions was interesting and at times difficult to pinpoint. The devising process was fascinating because it allowed me to think about what was implied in each scene, what can be revealed with just a look instead of words and how the performance looked as a whole. I enjoyed observing scenes and the way people were directing as it was inspiring. In addition, when building this character, I was trying to find inspiration from all around and one fiction book that helped me was *Conversations with Friends* by Sally Rooney, I haven't finished the book but within it an affair is happening between a married man and a girl which did help with my character development. (Rooney, 2017)

Reflection

Overall, this process has been a joy to work on. It has given me such motivation to continue creating and learning. I believe that my characterization during the performance was the best I have ever done and I'm very proud of the energy I brought to my scenes. I felt my movement and gestures were given clear intentions. I enjoyed playing with the different emotions of my character and feel that throughout this process I have taken direction well and have improved my own creative instinct. Personally, I struggle with projection, but I did throughout the performance try and project that bit more to reach the audience. It was a conscious issue for me which maybe at times took me away from the moment, but I just hope it was good enough. Also, for next time I do something like this I need to enjoy it more, I felt too stressed at times backstage. To conclude, this process of creating and collaborating has just been so beneficial because it feels rewarding to know the work I've done and the time I dedicated was worthy. As a class we did struggle in independent time because people sometimes weren't showing up which affected my stress levels but overall, I have learnt that you can't control what others do only what you can, but it all doesn't matter now, I'm very lucky to have been given this process as an opportunity.

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