

## Understanding the Role of Imagination in Artistic Realism with an Emphasis on Imagination in Acting

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### **ABSTRACT:**

Imagination is a cognitive function that leverages mental images and experiences to expand its scope. This descriptive-analytical study, based on library research, investigates the influence of imagination on artistic realism. The results reveal that imagination plays a crucial role in evoking and empathizing with dramatic characters, indicating that it is not only a vital tool for acting but also an essential skill for character portrayal. In realistic performances, this becomes particularly significant as the actor's performance is rooted in their imagination, making it recognizable and assessable by the audience. Imagination materializes whatever we contemplate. Consequently, the more creative the actor's thoughts and perceptions about the form and nature of objects, the more artistically exceptional the tangible outcome will be, leading to heightened audience engagement.

**Keywords:** *Artistic Realism, Role of Imagination, Mental Images and Experiences, Empathy*

### **INTRODUCTION:**

We rely on thinking for every task we perform, drawing from two main sources: memory and imagination. Throughout our lives, we accumulate a vast amount of information, a process known as "In formation." The data that enters our brain acquires broader meanings and perceptions. A key aspect of this "In formation" is the development of a mental blueprint or map in our minds of the existence of that thing; what this mental plan looks like and how we, as humans, adapt to it. This mental formation is referred to as the "reality scheme." However, it is not actual reality but rather individual mental perceptions shaped by one's unique interpretations of experiences, observations, and knowledge. Humans can reach a mutual agreement and shared understanding of what reality is, and this practice significantly aids in comprehending various issues.

The patterns stored in our brain form our memory, but this is not what we typically refer to as recollection; rather, it is a collection of strategies employed to achieve specific goals. Imagination, the other source of thinking, provides the power and capability to mentally transcend any limitations. By organizing memory and mapping out the knowledge and perceptions we possess, we can access mental structures that surpass our existing mental assets and discoveries. In other words, humans can create mental

representations of things that do not exist or have not been perceived, which we refer to as imagination.

Upon reviewing available resources and thesis titles, no similar studies on this topic were identified. However, this research is significant for two reasons: 1) There has been no specialized and focused investigation into the impact of an actor's imagination on role-playing and related subjects. 2) The role of an actor's imagination in achieving their role, particularly in realistic performances—which can be considered the cornerstone of an actor's craft—has not been thoroughly explored, potentially introducing new dimensions to this field.

In acting, where the brain is the primary command center, actors must be well-acquainted with its functions. This is because speech, body, and movement—the core elements of acting—are all governed by the brain, which is fueled by thought, while actions and behaviors originate from human cognition. Therefore, memory and imagination are two essential sources of thought, making their examination in acting particularly crucial. This descriptive-analytical study, utilizing library resources, examines the role of imagination in artistic realism.

### **Findings**

#### **Functions of Imagination**

Throughout history, humans have leveraged their abilities to escape challenges and confront the adversities of nature. One such ability is imagination, a

product of the human mind. Humans are unique in possessing advanced imagination. Imagination serves as a soothing and stress-relieving mechanism, and it becomes particularly active when external pressures intensify. By harnessing the power of imagination, humans have managed to offset their vulnerabilities against nature. Early humans, in their efforts to control their environment and nature, and to overcome animals that were their primary food source, depicted images of these animals on cave walls. By shooting arrows at these illustrations, they envisioned themselves successfully hunting the animals. Essentially, early humans aimed to exert control over the spirit of the world through this practice and credited their imagination for every change and success they achieved. While rational thinking is also a crucial factor in overcoming the forces of nature, imagination has played a significant role in human adaptation and survival.

If rational thinking serves as our means of communication with nature, imagination is the medium through which we connect with ourselves. Imagination instructs us in the art of overcoming obstacles. Through reason and intellect, humans learn to construct shelters and fabricate tools. However, it is through imagination that they embellish these shelters and adorn themselves in various forms and styles that transcend mere functionality. It is often said that imagination is the cornerstone of creation and innovation; without it, no innovation or creation would be possible. Even scientific and industrial advancements are realized through the power of imagination. Therefore, there is a profound link between imagination and creativity. This relationship is particularly evident in the realms of art and literature, which continually seek to forge new forms and deviate from conventional norms. The most critical and fundamental aspect of imagination, especially when intertwined with creativity, is its connection to external reality.

In an essay titled "The Mythical World of Children," Northrop Frye asserts, "Science describes the world we are in, but art envisions and imagines the world we want to be in."

#### **The Distinction Between Imagination and Delusion**

An individual who employs imagination can differentiate between their imaginative thoughts and reality, recognizing that the images they create exist within their mind and that they can revert to the real world. Conversely, a person who is a daydreamer, relying on delusion, is unable to return to reality; they inhabit the imaginary world they have constructed and do not see it as a product of imagination. Freud posits that an artist, unlike a mad person, can find a way back to reality, meaning they are not confined to a rigid world of delusions. Instead, they retain a level of flexibility that enables them to modulate their connection with the real world and maintain contact with it.

Imagination, however, does not surpass reality. According to the psychoanalytic view of Gaston

Bachelard, "Imagination is not the inability, laziness, or mental withdrawal from the material world into the realm of memories and illusions. Rather, it is the mind's return to the material world and an intense, conscious engagement with things. Daydreaming is an effort and struggle, not comfort and tranquility." (Bachelard, 2021).

#### **Imagination and Creation**

When an individual engages in imagination, they can indeed alter existing phenomena and create new ones. Thus, no creation or innovation is possible without imagination. It is through imagination that humans become creative and innovative beings. For example, consider humanity's fascination with flight. The idea of flying always brought a sense of tranquility and lightness to humans and was considered a dream. Eventually, this very imagination led to the invention of the airplane, giving it practical application. Humans understood and transformed the world through their dreams, and with imagination, they were able to create a world that aligned with their desires and aspirations. By envisioning their dreams, individuals experience a joy similar to the memories and delight of childhood. Just as a child, during play, creates an imaginary world by borrowing elements from the material world and takes it more seriously than the real world, infusing it with their emotions, so too does imagination allow adults to bring their dreams into reality.

Artists also immerse themselves in artistic dreams, possessing the courage to unveil their imaginative realms. In contrast, ordinary individuals sometimes resort to their imagination to navigate life's challenges, but they seldom articulate their fantasies. It is these unique and personal dreams of the artist that render an artwork distinctive. The power of imagination allows one to transcend the limitations of time and space. While time and space typically impose constraints on individuals, imagination enables rapid travel to distant pasts and futures, envisioning scenarios that do not exist in reality. Imagination links us to moments in the past and future where we cannot be physically present. This desire to break free from temporal and spatial constraints has inspired the creation of science fiction and fantasy films, in which characters use time machines to journey to different eras. Today, humanity has partially addressed this need by inventing airplanes and jets, facilitating swift changes in location.

Overall, imagination has consistently been humanity's foremost tool for adapting to their environment. In contemporary times, the swift pace of industrialization and inflexible social norms that restrict individuals have led many to retreat into their imaginations. People aspire to construct a better environment for themselves than the one they currently inhabit and envision a more promising future. Much like children who escape into the world of play to express their emotions and find solace and joy, imagination equips the mind with scenarios and events of our creation. Without imagination, transcending the realm of tangible experiences would be impossible.

One of the most profound desires of humanity is the quest for immortality. However, in the real world, where death exists, this aspiration seems unattainable. To satisfy this deep-seated wish, humans have turned to imaginative storytelling, evident in the myths and legends of various cultures. For example, the deities of ancient Greek mythology are products of the poets' imagination, representing idealized gods who are extraordinarily beautiful, eternal, and possess absolute skill and knowledge. Imagination holds the power of life. Through it, one can transcend the force of death and often overcome life's difficulties and challenges. At times, imagination serves as a guide to the unknown, a repository of images, or a source of play and entertainment.

Imagination is an existential force that, through signs and symbols, aims to achieve the most extensive experience a human can have, thus surpassing current emotions and foreseeing future ones. Humans seek more than mere survival. This capability is intrinsic to human nature and typically signifies the highest form of biological existence, namely freedom, which can only manifest through mental imagery, allowing for innovation and creation. Imaginative creation, as a way to anticipate real experiences, involves hypothesizing what could exist, thereby speculating about the possible nature of life and the experiences of groups and individuals.

According to philosophers, imagination serves three primary functions:

1. The compensatory function, which enables us to manifest a reality in its absence.
2. The liberating function, allows us to explore and free ourselves within various possibilities.
3. The revealing function, which grants us access to the unseen dimensions of the world.

### **The Process of Imagination for an Actor in Achieving a Role**

A mental image can reflect one's self-perception, but more broadly, it is the perception manifested through action. The mind functions like a powerful and precise software within the body, continually processing internal information and receiving external data. Much of this information is stored in the subconscious, while other parts are processed by the conscious mind. In theater, the role of imagination is to educate and sustain the psyche, similar to other artistic activities that engage with the human inner world. However, the complexity of imagination in theater, particularly in acting, is unparalleled. What an actor performs on stage mirrors the daily lives of various individuals. Nonetheless, to depict a character, drama must be created, which requires the actor to possess self-awareness and develop a broad mind capable of embodying a dramatic role. (Noushin, 2008)

What frequently renders a character portrayed by an actor unconvincing to the audience is the artificiality of the actor's movements and expressions. This problem arises from an underdeveloped mind and a superficial comprehension of the assigned role. It also

leads to ineffective interactions with fellow actors, props, and the stage environment.

Imagination is a component of the mind that expands by drawing from mental images and experiences. An actor can strengthen their imagination by increasing their range of experiences and observations. The actor's imagination serves multiple functions, the most crucial being its transitional function—grasping the hypothetical events of the performance.

Through the power of imagination, an actor breathes life into the elements of a performance, transforming mundane and lifeless events into something vibrant and captivating. Imagination is crucial for evoking empathy and identification with the character, making it not only an essential tool for acting but also a vital skill for character portrayal. An artist operates along two distinct yet interconnected paths: one utilized in everyday life and the other driven by creative force, often referred to as the "higher self." For this higher self to develop and flourish, it is necessary to immerse oneself in the world of imagination, believe in mental activity, and understand the interactions among mental images. As Goethe states, "The text of the play 'Iphigenia' is singular, but its performances differ because each person perceives and expresses things based on their artistic understanding."

### **Characterization**

In acting, the most demanding aspect of creating a character, which encompasses all their actions and behaviors, is the process of characterization—essentially, defining the character's framework. The foundation of any human character's performance lies in the formation of mental imagery. Skills such as speaking, writing, remembering, dreaming, and engaging in art, as well as all existential experiences, are unattainable without a mental image of oneself (Abdi, 2020).

A person's character is shaped by their existential conditions, which arise from what is considered mentality, and mentality is derived from objectivity and imagination (Seger, 2009). Therefore, for an actor to effectively portray a character, they must possess a fertile imagination enriched with cultivated observations and fantasies. This is essential because an actor needs a reservoir of characters to draw upon for assigned roles, and achieving this is only possible for a professional actor with a fertile imagination.

### **The Realism Movement**

Victor Hugo established the foundations of realism, or the Realism Movement, with his renowned 1827 declaration: "Life, in all its diversity, is the only model for the stage. The stage must be free to present any subject and employ any form or style. Let us wield the axe against hypotheses and poetic systems, and remove the veil that obscures the face of art. There are no laws or models, except the law of nature that governs all arts."

Hugo dismissed the traditional division between comedy and tragedy, as well as the classical unities of time, place, and action. He not only set the stage for a

new approach to set design but also initiated a significant transformation in artistic creation.

In Europe, the Duke was the first to place his actors in a fully staged environment, thus moving away from the gatherings typical of French theater. He introduced staircases and platforms on stage to facilitate the actors' movements and actions. More importantly, he incorporated detailed characterization into his productions, influencing artists and even Stanislavski himself. From that point on, the concept of directing became essential, and acting embarked on a new path (Karimi, 2016).

### **Imagination in Realism**

Philosophy, when addressing the question "What is truth?" reaches two broad and opposing conclusions depending on the perspective and approach to the issue of existence. The answer varies based on whether we consider truth from the perspective of science or art. Science uncovers truth through the process of recognition, whereas art creates truth through the process of production. Traditional realists assert that realist art loses its essence and becomes artificial and ineffective if it is not grounded in observation and scientific relationships. They argue that science and art must be in harmony, holding a raw, realistic belief that truth can only be understood through observation and comparison.

Thus, the truth they present corresponds with documented reality, which they depict in their art with precision and fidelity. In other words, they define reality using evidence that would be admissible in court and then adhere to it. Since their understanding is derived from objective perception and the fundamental principles that grant identity and legitimacy to most art, they adopt a democratic approach. This group's belief is founded on the premise that if art ignores or underestimates external or tangible reality and allows itself to exist without constraints, it will fall into vulgarity. They contend that sublime art is that which submits to the real world and balances its vague and unsteady imagination with the weight of truth, sacrificing forms and conventions in favor of reality.

### **Imaginative Realism**

In imaginative realism, Gustave Flaubert does not reject the world but believes he has found a more refined and convincing integration of reality and imagination, or the objective and subjective. For Flaubert, reality serves merely as a launching pad. He acknowledges that as a writer, he embodies two distinct personas: one that is captivated by exaggeration, lyricism, ambition, the grandeur of style, and the heights of thought, and another that delves deeply in search of truth, relishing the emphasis on minor details as much as significant realities, and aiming for the reader to viscerally experience what he conveys.

It is in this context that Flaubert, with the constructive spirit of this approach and considering prior discussions, manages to harmonize imagination and the constructive power of science, turning them into a

source of strength that operates within realities and effectively reconciles imagination with science. If we accept such a reconciliation, the concept of imagination must be broadened to include realism to accommodate such an expansive theory.

The positive result of this is that the term realism is liberated from the constraints of the dogmatic and materialistic perspectives of strict realists. Under such an aesthetic condition, it can be argued that there is no inherent conflict between realism and idealism. Otherwise, realism, like naturalism, would remain perpetually ensnared in its rigid adherence to its beliefs. Naturalism, which confined itself to the tedious study of insignificant characters and the exhaustive description of rooms and landscapes, would ultimately, if approached with honesty or foresight, either achieve complete perfection or, if not, devolve into the most monotonous and futile repetition, leading to sterility.

### **The Role of Imagination in Artistic Realism**

The faculty of imagination is a blend of fantasy, imagination, and imagery. According to George Baker, reality, in whatever form it takes, is never identical to any work of art but precedes it. Realism is an artistic formula that depicts reality through a specific interpretation of it (Arjmand, 2014).

In an essay about his novel, Émile Zola argues that the faculty of imagination in realist novel writing is supplanted by other faculties. He states, "Previously, the best definition of a novelist was that they possessed imagination, but now this is a criticism, and imagination is no longer the most important faculty of the novel." This stringent view of imagination arises from a common suspicion towards it, as imagination is often associated with fabricating lies and dreaming, fitting within the romantic style. However, this narrow-mindedness and rejection of imagination lead only to imitation rather than creation.

Artistic realism derives its meaning from creation, not imitation; and creation itself is a product of imagination, free from imitation. Jonathan Mandillo asserts, "Reality, according to the artist, is something that is always created and does not exist beforehand."

## **CONCLUSION**

When we delve into the seven arts and their constituent elements, we find a common thread called imagination, which appears to be pivotal in artistic creation and innovation. However, because imagination lacks a physical form, it remains highly controversial and thought-provoking. The application of imagination in art can differ based on the art form, and in some cases, imagination is more accessible or evident, partly due to the presence of existing resources.

In the performing arts, especially in acting, imagination holds significant importance. Nevertheless, the absence of comprehensive research and investigation in this area has led to numerous questions. Moreover, when imagination is applied

within a realistic framework, it introduces additional layers of ambiguity.

In acting education and discourse, the focus is typically on three essential pillars of an actor: speech, body (movement), and emotion. Although aspects such as improvisation, creativity, imagination, concentration, and breathing are also discussed alongside these core elements, it seems that a concept like imagination plays a substantial role in the performance of a role.

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