A DIRECTORIAL CHEATSHEET FOR TROUBLESHOOTING SCENES

by Brendan Hughes

	Symptom	Concept	Direction
Issues of energy callibration	There is too much undirected energy flying all over the place.	The Virtue of Stillness	• "Don't just DO something, STAND there!" • Relax your asshole • Blink like a dog, that is, not much.
	There is excessive sighing or over-voicing.	Get on your Breath: the first half of every line is the breath in to say it	• Find the words in your scene partners lines that make you breathe in to speak
	The actors seem lost in the empty space of the room and have no relationship to their surroundings.	Make your surroundings radioactive	• Add destinations and activities • Endow props with emotional meaning
	The scene feels rushed	Use Silence	• Activate pauses as weaponry. • Create a complicated inner life.
	The scene feels over-exerted	You are the artist AND the work of art. The captain stays calm as the ship heaves. Remain directable.	• Pursue a lack of actor strain. Apply constraints, such as nearby strangers or awkward social environments (elevators, funerals).
	The performances are too big, too underlined.	Truth has no size The Camera Reads Your Mind	• Slow and low, that is the tempo. Be boring. • Add a score
Issues of Authenticity	The lines don't seem like the actors' words.	Let the language work on you	• Repeat the important words 4 times
	The actors are indicating and telegraphing, rather than actually feeling, the emotions.	Trust the language, trust the camera. Just be a person.	• Breathe in and out before each line. • Do the scene blindfolded. Deprive the senses.
	The actors seem to be handling their scene partner with tongs.	Stop being polite	• Shove each other on the lines • Permission to be ferocious with each other
	The performances don't feel spontaneous.	Emphasize Discovery	• Elaborate on the Prior Moment, tee them up to hit the brick wall of the scene's circumstances.
	There seems to be a lack of relationship, or spark between the scene partners.	Explore status	• What is the worst case scenario? • Who's in charge? Does that switch? (Probably)
Issues of Emotional Depth	The scene comes off as one note.	Learning & Decision Making (editors look for these moments in coverage)	• What is the Black Swan? That is, an emotional discovery in the middle of the scene: "Suddenly, it's a world where [blank] is possible or true."
	The actors are not listening to each other, pre-occupied with their own ordeals.	Playing Actions	• Encouragement to MAKE your scene partner feel an emotion for your benefit
	The characters are too nasty, unlikable.	Play the Positive Seek your better vision of the world	• The Reverse Ghandi — make your scene partner be the change you want to see in the world.
	There is low emotional impact, a lack of intimacy.	Listen with the dog brain	• Picture the images that are coming out of your scene partners mouth • Sit back to back on the floor and do the scene
	The actors emerge unscathed; going through the scene seems too easy for them.	Establish Cost	• Assign an emotional cost to saying certain lines. What part of your relationship are you sacrificing by saying [blank]? • Consider what you are NOT saying
	The actors are too comfortable with each other and it's eroding the conflict.	Work the obstacle, get on top Play to win	• Have them tick check boxes when they score a point, enjoying the one-up-manship
	The scene is dull, too on-the-nose, too pretty.	Make it Icky Dwell in the Joli-Laid	• Encourage the actors to emphasize the more unsavory aspects of the characters, and to relish the ability to do so.
	Everything is perfect, yet not satisfying, earth shattering.	Terrify yourself	• Add something unusual, something that doesn't make sense, go past the safe place, ruin it all