

Michael Chekhov

February 9, 1939

OBJECTIVE
USE OF THE WHOLE BEING

Stanislavsky

OBJECTIVE:

The first point of the Method which we have touched was imagination. The realm of the imagination is so vast and profound that we have not begun to exhaust it, but our problem is to understand it through exercising it. Now that we are about to pass on to another point in our Method, but I will insist that you continue to work with the problem of imagination.

Our next step is what Stanislavsky called the objective - his most brilliant discovery. To understand what the objective is is very easy, but to use it is difficult until you understand with which part of our body we have to take the objective. Being with Stanislavsky during the years he tried to find out what the objective was, I have made all the mistakes possible by trying to get it in the wrong way. So what I tell you is not only theoretical, but the result of my twenty years with Stanislavsky, and the result of this experience I bring to you. What the objective is Stanislavsky has told us, but how to use it I will tell you.

Try to imagine what is going on on the stage when the ideal actor is acting. If you will analyze his presence on the stage, you will see that there is a certain continuous

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desire which this actor performs. Why is he interesting to look at? Because he leads us the whole time to the point he is aiming at. He leads us by the means of being able to express his desires on the stage. Now recall another actor who is not interesting. What is he lacking? The desire, the objective, the aim.

The actor who is able to cry with real tears, to tremble, to make a great noise, to crush chairs and tables - sometimes makes no impression on us, while another actor, who simply stands on the stage and actually does nothing, takes our attention and we are with him. Why? Because activity without any aim is not interesting on the stage, whereas if the actor has an aim, an objective, he is more attractive to the audience than if he has a great deal of outer business, without the aim.

Even things which are very attractive for our eyes - showy and attractive things - if they are on the stage without any aim, we are tired of them after five minutes. It is not enough for us just to be amused - humanity wants to be lead or to follow of its own free will, but the aim must be there. On the stage it is sometimes even more so than in our everyday life - we see that there is nothing on the stage, only floundering under the guise of noise, or "as if" character, or the words of the author. It is the guise or disguise for certain floundering.

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As actors, we must always have a certain definite aim on the stage, and by fulfilling this aim or desire, we will lead the audience with us. This is point one.

The second point - where lies this will, this objective? With which part of our body do we have to fulfill the objective? We made many mistakes with Stanislavsky because we did not discover that the objective must not be understood with the intellect only. At our present stage of human development, if we understand something clearly at this moment the will dies to a certain extent. We will take for granted that a certain kind of intellectual understanding makes our will weak, and will not discuss this psychological problem, but will accept it.

Imagine, for instance, an instinctively gifted actor of the old school, who acts on the stage out of his wild temperament. He does not know what he does, why when he rushes on the stage and makes a noise the audience is fascinated by him. What does he actually do? He continuously fulfills his objective without knowing anything about it. His gifted nature simply requires that one objective follows another, and he feels he lives on the stage and the audience is happy.

Now imagine that we will go to this actor and ask him to analyze why he has rushed to the window, cried and fallen down. He will answer that he does not know why. If

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you ask him what his objective was at this or that moment, this old actor will tell you to go away because he does not want to know - he has his objectives and he is able to follow them - he will tell you he does not want his art to be spoiled. Instinctively he feels that the moment he understands his objective with his brain, he will lose something.

What does this mean for us? We are not able to do things instinctively - our present life and culture have actually done such things that the powers of our whole being, whether it is will, or feelings or whatever it is have been taken by these "devils" of the present day - by the noise of the streets, by the newspapers, and our life in general - and have drawn our powers and put them in our heads. We are head people. We can't enjoy the stage like the actors of the old school with their marvelously rich natures like waterfalls - our life does not allow it. The present life which has made this dreadful operation of turning everything to our brains and compressed everything, has made us prematurely clever. It has made us clever before we are actually so as human beings.

USE OF THE WHOLE BEING:

How to cure this? Here is the old actor full of emotions - he does not think at all and that is his power - and here are we. We cannot do what he does - we can only understand everything and each other. What shall we do? Shall

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we say we are not actors? No, we have to accept this disease of our times. We are head people, but what shall we do? We have to tell these devils that we know some tricks against them - we must use our heads so that we will come again to this waterfall power of the old actor - we will get these former powers and the head power and then we will have won. What does this mean? We have to understand the objective with our whole being - this is the trick we must show these devils.

If you will analyse it, you will find that it is not possible to have a real desire only in your head - you will find that your desires and objectives are living in your arms and hands; in your legs, and in your chest and back; in your neck and everywhere.

We can understand the objective because these devils have given us the power of understanding, but we can also pour this understanding into our whole body, definitely into our body, just as the old actor had it in his body. If I have an objective and I don't want to confine myself to understanding it, I have to open my whole being and put there the objective which I have understood. I know what it is and this what I have to pour into my whole being. Realize the difference between the objective which is only taken with the head, and that which permeates the whole body. If I do this with my head, ^{with} my objective being, "I want to comfort someone" - it will be a very primitive thing. But if I have the

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desire to comfort someone in my hand and arm, or in any part of my body, or in my whole being, it is a very different thing. My whole being filled with the desire to comfort will suggest quite different things. Perhaps I will even run away from him. To understand the objective, and to pour it immediately into our whole being and body, and let the body have this desire.

To find the objective is very easy, to understand it is easy, but to experience it in our body after it is understood, that is what we have to exercise in the school. Imagine that you are in love with someone, and you have the objective to kiss the other person, or even to bind your whole life with them - it is the same thing - now ask yourself whether you want to get married with your head? Of course, with your whole being you want this thing. If you hate someone, and want to kill or punish them you will see that you hate with your whole being never with your head. This is what we call the objective on the stage - to get the desire after it is understood and to pour it into our body, this is the whole procedure. The only thing we have to exercise is to awaken our body. We will exercise how we have to use our whole body and being in fulfilling the objective, and how we have to use our heads to understand the objective.

Exercise: A Piece of Art:

Try to find the objectives in this first scene -

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not by thinking about them but by doing them by acting the characters and trying to understand what is the objective that the character needs. It is very important to phrase or formulate the objective in a certain way - don't make it too words - try to find a word or a sentence which will be short and expressive. This effort to find such a form, this effort is the way to awaken our will. The effort to compress the desire or the objective so that you are able to express it in a very short and condensed form - this is important. By this means you will clarify the objective, but the same danger is there, your head will try to find it in a few minutes but try to find it by inner or outer acting. While you are acting listen to your whole being and ask it what it is doing. Then you will understand the objective because by listening to your whole being you will find what it needs. Then you will find something which is more sincere which comes from your living artistic being. By trying to find the artistic form you are not aiming at the real words - the important thing is to force or entice your artist's soul to be active and to compress the desire somehow. Then the desire will lead us and we will lead the audience by it. For us the body is the actor and the head the critic. If your imagination is developed enough to substitute the reality, you can do this work in your imagination. Try to see not only the outer life, but try to see through the outer appearance to the inner life.

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Let us take the objective for the son as, "I want to show my gratitude." This would not be quite correct for the actor. If he wants to show his gratitude, the danger is that he might show off in some way - if he is really grateful, it would not be showing it. From this example we see how important it is not to appeal to the brain, because the brain collects different things and tries to put the same label on them. It is a very bad thing for actors to put labels on things by means of the intellect. This fine feeling of discrimination which lies in our whole being, in our heart, disappears with the years...labels, labels, labels.

For instance, why does the youth of the world today have only one dilemma - Fascism or Communism? Why can't they find a second, a third, or a hundredth solution for our human problems? Such a poor feeling for life will make shameful history. And this is what we call labels. Two big labels cover the whole world - Fascism and Communism - nothing more. This is a brain production - there are hundreds of ways out, which have nothing to do with these two labels but there is no creative spirit because of these two labels.

When we try to find an objective with our brain, we put a label on things which can be felt in the most subtle and varied way. All our parts, and our lessons, and our life here as a group which aims at certain things more or less consciously - this is like a rainbow and sparkling things

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come from this rainbow, but we don't see them because we have naturally labelled it "Chekhov Theatre Studio, Ridgofield." It is not that at all - what is it really? It is Jeanno, with her crimson lips and her full skirt, and many other things which we will see if we take away the label "Chekhov Theatre Studio, Ridgofield."

Just the same with the objective, if we will take away this intellectual thing, we will hear arising from our whole being what the objective really is. "I want to show my gratitude." It is all right for the intellect, but for the artistic nature, we require some vibrations. Listen to the objective with your whole being, and it will react on it. The ability to listen - try to feel from where it arises - with which part of your body you have to take the objective.

If you are an artist, you will see that there is a great difference between "I want to thank the doctor," and "I want to show my gratitude." For an intellectual person it is the same. The real ability to take the objective immediately can only be had by the actor who has really used his school time. Whether you want to hate someone, to admire someone, or to serve someone - you will feel your body quite differently. It is necessary to go through a long and patient training, then you will enjoy this ability to do everything inwardly. Then you will have a real pleasure to be an actor. If you are not trained in this way, you will lose your time and ours, and it will take us months to rehearse, or just four weeks,

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which is nothing and has nothing to do with art. Don't confuse the explanation about the objective and actually taking the objective - it is much shorter to take the objective because it is really very pleasant.

Exercise:

Imagine that someone is sitting on a chair and you want to comfort them. Take the objective "I want to comfort him," and try to pour your whole objective into your right hand and arm, and fulfill your objective by this means. Actually all objectives must be fulfilled by the whole body, but we will exercise it in this way. Take the objective, "I want to see who is skating," with your legs and feet - if you have the objective to see with your limbs, you don't need to use your eyes. The whole secret of acting is to use your whole body, your whole being.