

Michael Chekhov

April 27, 1937

OBJECTIVE & SUPER-OBJECTIVE
 EXERCISE FOR THINKING - FEELING OF TRUTH
 THE PAUSE
 PSYCHOLOGICAL GESTURE
 DESIGNERS - IDEAL SETTING - MAKE-UP

Stanislavsky
 Dr. Rudolf Steiner
Hamlet - Gordon Craig & Moscow Art Theatre

Balladina:

It is a great pleasure for the actor to find a psychological gesture which means so much to him - but he must always apply the test of time, space, quality, and activity to every gesture.

OBJECTIVES:

As an actor I have to reach something, and I know what I have to reach. So, if I have to reach something, and I know what it is, what remains? Only to do this objective. The most complicated psychological objective is simple for an actor who has found the technique of knowing what he has to do.

Although objectives on the stage are, to a certain extent, always ones of fantasy, for the present we will take these objectives as if they were the same as in real life. For example: I must shut the window which is open. What does this mean in reality? It means that I have somewhere in my mind the picture of the closed window. If you go to the window and cannot remember why, it means that your objective is broken because your mind has lost some of the picture. At the moment when you see the picture again, you know what you have to do. This is not only a picture which I have to reach, but it is at the same time

the power which carries me to the window.

Let us take another extreme example: You see a child who is falling down from his chair, and you see that the floor is stone, and you know that the child will be killed. Try to realize what you see in reality - the child who has not yet fallen, or the child already fallen? The last one, your fantastic picture, is the one you see. You see the final tragic moment in your imagination. This is the psychology of the artistic objective. If your imagination is so vivid that you are able to see the final result, then you are doing your objective in the same organic way as the action of running to the child. Therefore, by doing the objective it does not mean doing it with the head, "I must shut the window" That means nothing to the actor, but if the actor sees himself shutting the window, then it is an objective. We know that we see these pictures not quite clearly sometimes, and it does not make us want to do anything with it. We must develop these pictures of the moment which we want to reach; develop them so that first of all it is with great effort, and then it will become more and more organic, so that finally having a picture, we will have at once the will to do it. These things we have to train ourselves to do gradually.

We must try to reach this through simple exercises. It is over twenty five years since I began to work with Stanislavsky, whose invention the objective is. We must have gone through a similar period when Stanislavsky was creating the objective. He gave us objectives in the form of thoughts, and

M. Chekhov

April 27, 1937

we, his pupils, took all these objectives and understood them clearly but we could do nothing with them. We were so unhappy, and so was Stanislavsky. How to make the bridge between the understanding of the objective, and the doing or fulfilling of it? It was because our wills and our feelings were sleeping. But we could do it by awakening the whole body, because in our body lies the possibility of carrying through the objective.

Therefore, if my objective is to shut the window, I must have a picture of it and must do the objective in my body without moving, and as an actor I am already shutting the window, then I know what I have to do and my body is full of activity. The idea that I have to shut the window is very simple - I am already doing something as soon as I know what I have to do, and being full of this invisible going, I am approaching the window and my hand is subconsciously alive because the action is already there. A wrong example would be to approach the window with the idea as an intellectual one only. I can do this but it is not an objective, it is something which is intellectual and, therefore, many habits have done it for me - it is not an objective.

I have found that the only way to carry out an objective is by doing it invisibly. For example: if I have to persuade John to leave the room, I am already doing this. Perhaps I will not pay attention to him, but will apparently be interested in the flowers in the room. I may ask him about the composition of the colors - I will use everything in a very cunning way, if

I am really doing the objective. The same thing is true with the window - it is a very simple thing, but the technique is the same. Before you start to actually do a thing, you are already doing it.

The question is to get the technique, which is to have the final picture, and to have already done the thing which you have to do, then do it. Let the understanding of this penetrate your heart and your whole body, and imagine that you are doing the objective. Try to exercise in your imagination, and if possible in reality, small things until you will really get the technique.

EXERCISE FOR THINKING:

There is something very interesting and very beautiful in Dr. Steiner's books. He gives the exercise for thinking - how to get the real technique of thinking. He says that if you think about a very difficult situation in the world, you will never be able to know that your ideas are right, because the subject is so complicated. This is the source of the majority of differences of opinion in the world. Why are there so many opinions? Because we are not trained in thinking. How can we reach this? The exercise is to take the most simple thing, a pencil for instance, and think it. What does that mean? I think the pencil is so many inches long, it has six sides, it is yellow, there are small letters and signs on it, and it seems to be composed of two pieces, etc., etc.

FEELING OF TRUTH:

By doing this, what are you developing? You are de-

veloping a feeling of truth, because by thinking about the yellow pencil you have the feeling that it is true. You link the different things together with the feeling of truth. You will never do this by thinking on such subjects as, "Is a human being free?" - it is your opinion, not knowledge. By saying that the pencil is yellow, you are sure that it is the truth. By training your thoughts with objects which are simple enough, you will get another kind of thinking, which will always be in connection with the feeling of truth. It is both thinking and observation at the same time. Observation you can break, but thinking you must follow through to the result. If you will put questions to yourself, you will awaken a kind of conscience. If you start to do objectives by means of the picture and by doing, then you will get a kind of conscience inside you.

The Golden Steed:

The two themes in the play, which are constantly being interwoven, are the theme of the spirit and the theme of the body. This play also gives such possibilities for developing the actor's body in many ways, for developing the feeling of rhythm and music, for developing tragic, romantic and heroic moments. The moments are so rich. If every possibility is elaborated, then you will have to do so many things in this one small play, so many things which you will not get in other plays. In twenty minutes you can show a whole world. So now we must think about elaboration, not about good or bad acting, which

M. Chekhov

April 27, 1937

does not help at all. As good workers we must elaborate each moment, each theme, and then we will get a beautiful performance. Today it was more sketching than acting. At present it is not clear enough for you - many things are not clear. We must elaborate this. The director must explain every moment absolutely fully and clearly.

THE PAUSE:

One kind of pause is the result of something, the other is the reason for something. For example: you enter a cathedral and take in some impression, as a result of which comes the pause. Without breaking, you must realize that the pause is the result of something that was before. Then inside, turn the problem, and the pause will become the beginning of some result, and then it can be expressed perhaps by speaking the words, "How beautiful!" I will say something to you, and you will say something as a result, and then you will pause. Then do the same thing, but turn it, and prepare yourself for a big speech, starting with the words, "I wish..." The pause is the result of something. The pause is the beginning of some result.

Why are we studying such things? Because the pause is a very important thing on the stage. If the actor does not know why he has a pause, he then falls into the moment when he is doing nothing inside. By doing nothing, the audience will get nothing, as we know. To be sure that you are doing something in the pause, you must know whether you are collecting

A. Chekhov

April 27, 1907

something, or preparing to give something out. When you have this approach to the pause, you are able to govern it as action, and it must be, of course, your instinct. In the very beginning you must ask yourself what kind of pause it is, but later on when you are on the stage, you will do many pauses at once.

There will be, of course, important pauses which you must hold on the stage, but you will do many other pauses out of your instinct and inspiration. Your audience will always be in your hands, and you will be able to hold your pause as long as possible. Very good actors have the ability to hold the pause, and very bad actors hold the pause in an empty way, but the actors who are not quite geniuses, but yet not very bad, are always fearful before the pause. Every actor must be the master of the pause. For example: I will make a small noise, and you must pause and then turn it and make your own noise as an answer. A person who is not an actor will never be able to understand the pause.

M. Chekhov

(afternoon) April 27, 1937

PSYCHOLOGICAL GESTURES:

The psychological gesture must occupy the whole body. It must not be descriptive, and you must be able to apply the four qualities and all the things which will lead you away from the descriptive gesture, which is too small. Activity: there are two parts. 1. the tension of the activity. 2. the direction of the activity.

All these suggestions may be the longest way, but they will bring as the result a character which is really something - the character will be very rich.

CONNECTIVES:

The approach to the objective is the same as before. This time your objective is to take the handle of the door. Now take the objective. This means to do it inside as if it were already done. Now realize that this picture, and this action which is going on in your soul, is the only impulse for you to do this. Now add the reality. Now do it without any objective. Compare the two.

DESIGNING: THE IDEAL SETTING - MAKE-UP:

Carnival:

Suggestions for designers. Two bursts of color must be shown at the beginning, and after the climax you may find three bursts. Confetti and colored paper might remain on the stage at the end, but at the beginning, perhaps there should be no indication of the carnival to come. Perhaps, because of the

human nature of the play, it should be more related to them in the way of the street, the sun, the lights, etc.

What should you really draw as designers for settings and make-up? You should draw your ideal - what you really want to see on the stage, without paying attention to the lights, etc. First of all you must draw the ideal, and then the next step will be to find out how to reach it.

MAKE-UP:

It is desirable that our designers will draw sketches for the make-up during the rehearsals - looking at the actor who is going to play. This will give you more possibilities to find really what the plastic of it is. It is very important to deal with the question of color during the actual make-up, but it is not necessary to do this when giving designs and sketches.

PSYCHOLOGICAL GESTURE:

Calladina:

The designer must ask himself what is the texture of the performance. For instance, total for Calladina - so cold, so strong, so powerful - old metal.

The director must realize that four impulses or accents drive Calladina down the spiral - 1. "Why is your face so white?" 2. Alina's laugh - the knife. 3. Ferris. 4. Death. With each accent Calladina increases in her desire to kill Alina, while Alina becomes weaker and weaker.

At each meeting between Calladina and Alina it must be elaborated what they are doing. The director must elaborate

the psychological gesture more carefully for each moment. In their walk together you must find out how much time and space - when they are walking slowly it seems that the climax is far off, and when they increase their walking it seems they are nearer the tragedy, nearer the climax. The actual walk they use on the stage must grow out of the walk which is done in the psychological gesture. The director must bring the psychological gesture and the actual moment of the play closer together.

The playing can change the psychological gesture. If the gesture remains vague it will give you nothing - it is only an illusion that you have worked with it. As the text must be learned by heart, so must the psychological gesture, by means of time, space, activity and quality.

Each moment of contact between Calladina and Alina must be absolutely clear - what is the time, space, quality and activity? Then the gesture will inspire you later on. The director gives the gesture with these various elements, and absolutely elaborated. So far our directors have understood only one half of the gesture - that the gesture can elaborate the part. But the gesture itself must be elaborated.

Question: Does it help with the psychological gesture to find the basic objective of your character?

Answer: The objective is the activity, but it is not necessary to know the objective before you find the psychological gesture. They are like twins. Therefore we have the psychological gesture, and the objective, and imagination - all the beads are one.

THE SUPER-OBJECTIVE:

The objective is what, and how you will do it depends upon what you create. Then you can climb to the super-objective, which is something which is leading throughout the whole play. The objective must embrace more and more things, and it will be more powerful and nearer to the idea of the play. You can start with smaller objectives, then discard them and find more important ones.

In the Moscow Art Theatre production of Larlet (with Gordon Craig), they found the objective for the whole play - which was Larlet's objective to understand everything he sees. I don't think it is the right objective, but let us suppose it is. Larlet walks and does everything, with the objective that he must understand everything around him. His father's death, his mother, his uncle, etc. But before they came to this, they had many other objectives which remained in no contradiction to the big one, but the big one - the super-objective - was the important one.

The objective must motivate the actor. It must not

M. Chekhov

April 27, 1937

be "in general." It must have a connection to the scene. Let us imagine that your objective is to close the door. Do this inside with all your activity, but add to it the condition that you cannot move. You must realize very, very clearly when the objective is fulfilled. We must get this technique.

CONDITIONS:

Let us take another objective - to leave the room and go into the next room. Then add the next step - to leave the room in good order. The same objective, but with some conditions. Everything on the way to fulfillment of your objective will be a condition. If you have one objective which is very difficult to find - the one line for Larlet, for instance, the same principle will apply.