

Michael Chekhov

February 11, 1938

STUDENT'S LESSON
CONTACT
STUDENT'S LESSON
THE ARCHETYPE
CENTER

Moscow Art Theatre
Stanislavsky
Nemirovich-Danchenko

Life leads us and teaches us in a professional way. We must increase and revive our understanding of contact because I have noticed that during our recent rehearsals the contact has been very weak. We shall start again with a very simple exercise, purposely simple, because from this simplicity we are able to get the meaning of it, and we must get it.

Standing as a group, try to establish the contact by doing inwardly the gesture of opening your soul, first to everyone in general, and then to everyone individually. Overcome the certain quality of stiffness which comes with this exercise - be quite free. Use the simplicity of the exercise to really get the seed, the germ, the nucleus. The more business-like we do it, and without sentiment, the better. Use the simplicity of the exercises to get the joyousness of this idea.

Will you listen to me and keep the contact. This stiffness which comes, especially in this exercise, shows us that the body and bodily movement disturb us in establishing the real contact. We are trying instinctively to keep the body quiet, and therefore we are getting stiff. Try to over-

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come this difficulty which arises. By dancing and moving we shall consciously overcome this bodily stiffness. Keep the contact only spiritually, inwardly. Bodies free - keep the contact.

I want you to develop the feeling of real contact; it embraces everything. Here is my psychology: I am giving or taking a lesson. The contact is much bigger, like a tent which covers everything, and you will understand this if you are able only once to awaken this real experience. Real contact cannot be disturbed by anything. This is the moment when we will perhaps awaken this feeling of contact. This point must be reached, and this is what I want to call to your attention when you say you are able to speak everything, do everything. Try to get this point, and then you will get the feeling of absolutely free action. Not only bodily stiffness, but spiritual stiffness will disappear.

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STUDENT'S LESSON:

Gavin will give a lesson. Through the whole lesson keep this contact. (Lesson on the Actor's March given as if to new students.)

As actors, our bodies are our instruments, and to use them we must become conscious of them. Imagine for one moment that you have just got your body - something new -

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something you have never possessed before. Feel your bodies. In imagination, go down your legs, right down them, and into your feet, and feel that your body is balanced on your feet. Now come from your legs, feel your torsos - strong, powerful, and up into your heads, and down into your hands.

Now, imagine that you are sitting inside yourselves, and for the first time you are going to make a great discovery, the discovery that you are going to use your right arm, that you can raise your right arm, and do it all the time experiencing this new discovery that you can move your arm. You can move it up quickly, and you can drop it very gracefully. Explore this movement for yourselves. Sometimes you can move it quickly and stop it, or very, very slowly. Explore what you can do with your arm. Realizing that this is part of your instrument, you are becoming conscious of it.

Now, walk forward two steps and realize that you are walking. Then back again. Feel, as your legs move, that your whole body moves. Again, forward two or three steps and then back, sometimes slower, sometimes quicker. Now move quite freely in the room, exploring how you can move your body, how you can move your instrument - spring, jump, run, twist, sit, lie down, get up. You are using your bodies - you are using your instrument.

Come back to your same circle again. Realize what

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we have been doing, we have been awakening the consciousness of our bodies, of our instruments.

We are going to listen to music which Mr. Harvey will play, and in imagination see yourselves walking to this music and following the rhythm, but quite in the imagination.

Now, realize what we have been doing through our imagination. We have been awakening the consciousness of our bodies which, as actors, we use as instruments.

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CONTACT:

The only thing that will disturb you will be when you lose your activity. Do not lose your activity toward this contact. This feeling of contact is a great psychological gesture which is continuously there.

Now, about this embracing different things at once - music and the lesson. I think it is only the question of the moment of understanding once what it is. Perhaps one example can help us in our search: You enter the School, this School, under the condition that you have to be here three years, and this is the feeling of contact you have with the future three years. Nothing else than contact with the invisible future things which shall happen during three years. This is very near, and not only near, but real contact with something in the future, not here. If I tell you

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for instance, that we have changed our plan to a year and a half, you have to change the contact with something you do not know what. But through this you can feel you have a contact with three years, which is quite different from one and a half years.

If I ask you to establish contact with Terry's home. We do not know Terry's Australia, but that is enough to establish the contact with Terry's home. Now, be quite free in your bodies and in your minds. I want you very much to do this exercise with as little intellect as possible, because it is not an intellectual function to establish the contact, but perhaps quite the opposite - to annihilate contact. Again, you must say quite completely to establish the contact with Terry's home, we have to use absolutely our whole body, otherwise we cannot establish the contact. Again the expression "the whole being." Imagine Terry's psychology. He came here - he is with us. He does not think of his home only at certain times when he is longing for his home. Perhaps he forgets his home, but he never loses the contact.

When you will find altogether that the moment has come, sit down. This is another example of "Terry's home."

Now a third example. We are expecting somebody who will come in a few minutes, or a few weeks, but this person will be met. This is contact with someone.

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I remind you of all these things because I want you to awaken this special feeling which is above everything, including everything, and this is a part of our life which we really and completely use every day. Again, the example of my wife and this living together through twenty-one years. It is a big experience in contact. Her existence has become part of my existence, and vice versa. She is not aware of it, and I am not aware because it is part of my life. And this is what we want through our exercises, to awaken this point which is by no means a new thing for us. We are permeated through and through with different mosaics of contacts. This is only the exercise for awakening what we already have. Terry with his home, you with your three-year course in the future, and I, with my wife. Did you understand when I asked you to sit down as a group? It is like our contact with John. This is a very good approach to the contact, simply to remember that we are always and continuously living certain contacts.

I have another example of contact which is near to us. I have known only one theatre with a really good contact, not only on the stage but in the theatre life - the first Moscow Art Theatre. They have always sought for this contact on the stage, in Chekhov plays, atmosphere, mood, etc., and they developed this feeling of contact and what was the result in their life? They have never had any intrigues

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among themselves. It is very strange. There were no rules but it came into their life, and they have not had conflict. Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko, they are very different personalities, and they had many opportunities to come into conflict, but they never did because of this feeling of contact.

It is a very important thing to realize there are such things around us in life. You will see that the real contact belongs to the art as well as to life, and it is not possible for instance, that there would be jealousy or quarrels inside of the theatre. If I hate somebody, and then to come on to the stage and try to establish the contact, it will not be possible because we are permeated with different kinds of contact in our life. We have a contact, now we shall bring it to the stage, and if we shall establish some intrigue, that is quite opposite work.

Now I want you to do the following exercises: Be quite free; whether you want to walk or not, I want you to create certain atmosphere, and what kind of atmosphere must be established through contact and what you will do it from the moment when I tell you to start.

Now will you please do a more complicated exercise: I want one of you to give a lesson or lead certain exercises, who it will be I do not know.

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STUDENT'S LESSON:

Deirdre:

I want to do this morning the exercises for Staccato and Legato. We will begin with the staccato exercise. First of all, be conscious of the power of the staccato - strong, straight, positive direction, like a stone in your hands. You can send your power out, radiating this strong, positive form. Speak to your bodies. Mr. Harvey will give us music. Listen to the tempo, an added quality, when Mr. Harvey begins. Staccato quality, form, direction, like a stone. Realize the power you have generated; what you are able to do as an artist. It lies in your hands and in your bodies. Repeat exercises. Ask yourselves: Have I fully expanded my being - have I explored this quality to the last degree? Am I full, absolutely full of this dynamic power of the staccato? My body is singing with staccato. The whole world is singing with staccato. Realize that you have created around you a staccato world full of this quality.

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CONTACT:

Now establish the simple contact exercise again. Make a circle, then open more and more your whole being toward everybody and each of us individually, and keep it consciously, and enjoy this exercise, and awaken this power

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which is given us by nature. We have enough to be conscious of it, and it will be at our disposal any time. Now increase the contact by means of taking your hands, a very business-like contact. Now, when you drop your hands, increase the contact. Physical contact. Take one step back and increase the contact. Another step back. Keep the contact as a continuous melody, a continuous current of life. Now try to overcome this stiffness and keep the contact. Understand this is the ground work for our everyday life, today and tomorrow, and in the future. Contact must be in us.

Now we will rehearse our rehearsal for our rehearsal. There is no power to break the contact in normal life.

THE ARCHETYPE:

I want you to rehearse the scene which we have never yet really touched. The scene when the beggar girl is sitting in the drawing room of the mother, and I want you to improvise the situation. The girl is sitting in the middle part of the room and all the people are around her, standing and waiting for the answer to the riddle. Now imagine the following picture which may open in a small way, the archetype of this scene. Imagine a small rabbit sitting in the center of a big crowd of rude people who are standing around looking at this innocent creature, making fun of it, and the servant is looking and then moving some parts of his body unnecessarily, and finally someone in this group realizes

that there is actually nothing to look at or laugh at? He takes the rabbit and protects it. This is not a concrete psychology at all, but a certain touch on the archetype of this situation can be given by this description.

Will you please establish your feeling of contact with this group, so that it can be really created during our rehearsal. The audience must see this group and feel the atmosphere. We must feel when the curtain rises, then start the pause out of which the whole picture will develop. Whether you are a spectator or an actor, you have to find the contact with our work. Will you please lift your hands when you feel the curtain is lifted.

The bride doesn't know who the beggar girl is, therefore, you have no reason to be suspicious of her. You guess somewhere or somehow that it is a dangerous situation, but you do not know yet that at the end of this scene the son will lead her away.

Second group repeat the scene. I want you to prepare this scene and lift the curtain when really the atmosphere and everything is there, and you are sure the audience may look into your creative minds on the stage. You have to lift the curtain at the moment when you are sure the performance is ready to be shown.

Exercise: Shut your eyes and do not open them until you will find the answer. Where is Sam sitting? If you do

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not know, you lack contact with each member of the class.

CENTER:

Do you feel that there is a center on the stage? Blair is the center. The beggar girl must be the center. The whole studio is exercising the group contact, finding the center.

In this I felt that the center was not so much a person as the fact that there was a strong contact between the mother and the beggar girl. The real scene is always psychological and physical.

The outer expression and the inner expression build something together. Of course, in our theatre the emphasis must be on the inner creative power, and the outer will only be more or less form for the inner content.

Another new scene for the play: This is the scene between the governor and his assistant or secretary. (I want you to follow me in your imagination as it is a new scene, but the exercise is on contact.) The governor is a fairly old man, but he is awakened to all new ideas about the youth. He is inwardly seeing himself as a leader of youth from the left, although he is governor of the right standing. But there is always such playing with facts. If there is a war, some people play with this war. If somebody has died in the family, there is one percent playing death. A certain part

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of human nature never takes the events absolutely seriously, as there is always certain illusion. For example: Somebody dies and we are sorry because the person was near to us, but somewhere sits a person who says "I am acting this thing."

The governor is playing and acting his governor part in a very naive way. It is a little exaggerated in the play, which gives a certain humor. But we must not act it funny. He thinks that he thinks about the youth. He is quite sure that he knows the modern situation, and he is in a constant state of flux. This is his mask - certain psychological mask. He feels that he is over everybody around him and he is like a father, or teacher, or brother who has to protect and show the others, to teach, to give them all activity, to lead them. This governor, is standing before his secretary who reports to him about every important thing concerning the spy, because the spy has been discovered by the police, and now the moment when the police have him, the governor will not take steps against him. He thinks he is much cleverer than his secretary and explains to him, "You are too rude in all these things. You are not able to see the youth in the life around us. There is no danger. I will tell you the danger." I want you to incorporate the moment when this continuously-thinking governor is listening to his secretary and preparing his speech.

Did you get the impression that it is possible to

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live in this contact sphere continuously by doing everything?