

Michael Chekhov

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IMPROVISATION
OBJECTIVE
ACTION AND COUNTER-ACTION
CONSCIOUS CONTROL OF THE METHOD
STYLE
RADIATION - PSYCHOLOGICAL MOVEMENT

Hamlet
Uday Shankar

IMPROVISATION: Old Students:

Repeat the Hamlet scene - first begin by creating the powerful activity necessary for the rehearsal. We are going to improvise because we want to develop such an ability in our souls - the ability to fill all gaps on the stage during performances. However many suggestions I give you, they are only suggestions and directions, in which you must fill the gaps. If you take the director's instructions as the only thing you have to do, it is no longer improvisation. You must take all suggestions and work to fill the gaps. Take the objectives which we found yesterday, and try to speak the words out of the objectives. Fill your whole body with the objective.

OBJECTIVES: ACTION AND COUNTER-ACTION:

Whether the audience understands our objective does not concern us at all - it is better that they don't but only that they feel something. The actors must be continuously doing their objectives. Perhaps your words have nothing logically to do with the person to whom you are speaking, but psychologically it is an unbroken line - this is the real objective. This is the beginning of the understanding of action and

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counter-action. For instance, the action of Hamlet is asking the King whether he killed his father, but he has so many counter-actions that he never asks the question. This creates action and counter-action. The counter-action really increases the action. If the objective is taken with the whole body then you will be able to act your words.

Criticism:

If you change the suggestions given by the director it must be for a certain reason, not just because you have forgotten. The criticism will be only from the point of view of improvisation. You have not filled many of the gaps. The entrance of the court and the reaction of the court is quite empty. The court is able to speak - silence on the stage is very good when necessary, but when not necessary then it is a great gap.

The players' scene: The players enter in a gay manner, like jugglers. This is all part of the gay dream which Hamlet hopes to throw over the court. The awakening will come when the King and Queen of the players appear before the court dressed in costume. Then they will become aware of the world in which the crime was committed. The pantomime must be like a dance, but it must be quite clear what is going on.

All the difficulties you have met are good because we must cure them. If we don't meet such things then we will sit on the same level. Therefore, appreciate that in improv-

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isations we meet many difficulties, but we have the means to cure them.

CONSCIOUS CONTROL OF THE METHOD:

Criticism of the morning's exercises:

Everybody has a certain talent, big or small, and everybody has a lot of inhibitions. This morning it was quite clear that almost all the points of our Method were to a certain extent weak - concentration, imagination, radiation were all weak.

Therefore, before we start our improvisations we must pay more attention to all these points in as far as they are present in your minds at the moment. You have to try to force yourself, before you start, to have atmosphere, etc. That will prepare your way and take away all the inhibitions. Because of your wrong attitude towards these things, you are not able to act. We will try to do the same thing again by paying attention to each of these main points in turn. This is the only way to make your talent free and give it a wide space for creation. You must be more active yourself, for instance, if the atmosphere is weak, you must find it yourself before the director tells you. This will be the real result of our school, that you will be able to do this inside yourself. Try to get this ability to consciously control yourself.

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The weakest point this morning was that you forgot entirely that the style is that of tragedy. As a result you felt that all your words and movements were not in the style of tragedy, and you were more and more uncomfortable. If you had known at once that you were working in the style of tragedy it would have helped you to build it. We will start with this point by moving in the style of tragedy. This does not mean that you have to move slowly - the pantomime scene, for instance, can be in a very gay mood but it must still be in the mood of tragedy.

This does not mean that you are confined to certain things - everything is allowed in tragedy or comedy. To be in a certain style does not mean to be confined. When you are in the right style, at once there is atmosphere. Be more attentive to everything you do - this is the whole idea of our school. Everything we are trying to do in the studio must be flexible in your artistic hands. You are able to do it, but you perhaps lack the courage to work inside you - you are always waiting for suggestions which will come to you, but you must do it yourselves. You must find these things in every part of your being, they must be flexible and in your hands as artists.

When you really try to manage the Method, you will become more flexible, and you will not need long preparations, because your psychology will be permeated by these things.

In the grave scene when Ophelia is buried, this is

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usually done full of cliches, and the actors take a great deal of time over it. They forget that the King wishes the burial to take place quickly. This affords a great opportunity, to do this dreadful deed as quickly as possible, without having any witnesses. Let us try to do the scene.

RADIATION: Criticism:

The voices were freer, but in this freedom you must have method. There were many mistakes of course, but the one I want to draw your attention to is that it was really small, from the director's point of view. You audience will never hear or understand or be able to see you, because you are psychologically acting and moving for a very small audience. You have beautiful means of expression and you must use your beautiful radiating power. You must be able to fill tremendous rooms and space, which you will find in American theatres, not only with your voices but with your radiation - there are no other means. You can move as wide as you like, but if it is without radiation the audience will not be able to see it with opera glasses. On the other hand if you move only your eyebrows with radiation, the last person in the gallery will see and feel you.

This is not the secret of physical movement, but the secret of psychological movement - radiation. We also know another thing - significance - which fills the space. You should

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have found these two things today - radiation and significance - from your own pockets. Then you would have been masters of the situation. Why did you complicate all these things? Why didn't you try to find out during the improvisation, by asking yourself the question - "What am I lacking?" Radiation. Then improvise with radiation. Then ask yourself again - significance - atmosphere - objective. They must be lying before you at your disposal, to be picked up - this is the whole idea of our school - to be the teacher and director, each for himself. Repeat the scene.

Criticism:

When you have pleasure in the improvisation everything is right. When you lose the pleasure, you lose everything. When the pleasure is gone you must have your method and technique, otherwise you will rely upon the pleasure, thinking that you are doing it from the method. Only when you are unhappy on the stage, and yet are quite sure of what you are doing - then you are artists. Then the school is justified. If you are only living in pleasure it is not yet skilful, it is only chance, only accident.

This time the scene was better because you overcame this first negative feeling which chokes you. If you repeat it many times the pleasure will come again, but you must get technique instead of pleasure. This play is so helpful for

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curing our many difficulties. Before we try to interpret the characters and situations we will try to go through various things in our "bible", and try to manage them easily.

Radiating and moving very little - this is the secret of Uday Shankar. If you are able to see it in him you will be able to do it yourself later on. It is necessary not only to have pleasure in looking at Shankar, but to learn from him - to learn. Remember what radiation there was in the big Shiva? This is our secret - we must do the same. You must see it, and absorb it, and say to yourself that you must be able to do the same in your profession. Often actors hope to fill the gaps by words, words, words, but we must educate ourselves and later on the audience.