

Michael Chekhov

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FEELING OF TRUTH
JUSTIFICATION

Stanislavsky

FEELING OF TRUTH:

Although my idea is to lead you slowly from one point of the Method to the next, looking at your work I realize that I must help you, by giving you another point before I had intended - this is the feeling of truth. You must develop this because when I see your sketches, I see that you are lying too much, your bodies are lying, your emotions are lying. It is done unconsciously and in disharmony, but you are in danger of becoming satisfied with things which will never satisfy the audience. This is a tragedy for an actor - he thinks he is a genius but the audience has no interest for him. We must choke this thing in our school.

One of the most dangerous things is to lie on the stage - of course, the audience can be hypnotised by the famous name of an actor, author, or scene designer, but if the audience is not hypnotised, it will never accept an actor who lies. This small snake must be killed immediately. We have a means for this which we call feeling of truth. It is a very simple thing - there are no buttons which you can press to see whether or not you are lying - it is a very fine thing which lies somewhere deeply in the soul. But we have continuously to knock on the door of our creative spirit, by asking it to instruct us regarding truth and lies.

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For instance, there is a definite means by which we can construct the will of a character on the stage, and that is the objective, but we cannot do this with the feeling of truth - we cannot use it as we can an objective by simply taking it - the approach to the feeling of truth is more like honest knocking at the door behind which our creative spirit lives, and perhaps sleeps too much. We must knock continuously and patiently, asking it to correct us and to make us more and more truthful. How can we do this? Only by paying attention to what we are doing - not so much what others are doing; but what we ourselves are doing.

There is a great difference between criticism, and the ability to do the right thing ourselves. If you understand the feeling of truth through criticizing others, you may not get the ability to be truthful yourself. We have to knock on the door behind which our feeling of truth lives, by appealing to ourselves. This feeling of truth must be exercised day by day - the objective can be taken and then dropped, but we can't say the same for the feeling of truth - it must be there continuously and forever.

There is never a moment when we can be on the stage without the feeling of truth. It is a continuous line which must never be broken - when it is broken, our bad nature immediately forces us to lie in our movements and psychology. This is the objective-----while this is the feeling

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of truth_____ . It never stops. It is important to understand the difference between the two. If your director reminds you about the feeling of truth, it will not mean now take the feeling of truth; it will mean that you have forgotten that the feeling of truth must be continuously there.

JUSTIFICATION:

Another thing goes simultaneously with the feeling of truth - the ability to justify everything you do on the stage. To justify - that means to be able to do everything truthfully. The actor must justify things, although the task may sometimes be very difficult. He has not the right to say that he cannot justify something because he does not understand it - the director's answer should be then develop your powers of justification.

To justify things and to fulfill them truthfully - these two things are essential for the actor. They are like a real birth on the stage, because when you get a feeling for these two things, you get a certain freedom. If you are lying on the stage, you will feel as if you are not actually on the stage, you are not born as an actor. You will have a feeling of shame, a feeling of being bound - you will feel that you are an actor, but an actor whose profession is not a profession but a gamble, because you are never sure what it is.

Sometimes we lie on the stage because we are not

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yet able to justify things - these two things go together absolutely - justification and feeling of truth. They are two lamps which must be kept burning continuously - other things are like buttons which we can turn on and off. If you love someone, you love them continuously - if you scold someone, you do it on and off - love goes on, hatred goes on.

So we must exercise feeling of truth and justification continuously from now on. Almost everyone knows, naturally and instinctively, what it means to be truthful or untruthful on the stage - no one can explain it - it is, or it is not. Such things as pain, for instance, cannot be explained - they must be felt. I can't make you truthful if you haven't got this feeling - if you have never experienced it, no one can explain it to you. If you do not have this feeling, you will not understand the most careful explanations and examples.

These two wonderful things - feeling of truth and justification - are the invention of Stanislavsky. We began really to appreciate these things after many years of working with him, but we made one great mistake in Moscow which we must avoid in our work. We always tortured ourselves and our friends by saying, "It was not justified." We finally came to the point where we could not move, because of this restriction. Sometimes students will torture themselves by creating

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problems which they cannot solve. We must not do this, but must realize that these two flames of feeling of truth and justification will grow of their own accord. On the other hand, we must not make the mistake of believing that they will come of themselves some day.

We must try to get these two things constantly, with full activity, and not be too lenient with ourselves. Don't criticize, but try to get. The important thing is that we do it fully, not whether it is good or bad. The director has the right to remind you, from time to time, to keep these two flames burning, otherwise they may become extinguished from neglect.

Scene from Don Quixote:

It was acted truthfully, and, therefore, it was funny. But you must appeal to your own inner desire to find out what was wrong, and how to do it right. You will develop it much more easily than if the director points out what is wrong. But one thing you must know - the point where you begin to exaggerate is the place where you lack feeling of truth, and justification. At that point you try to force your audience to believe you, when you don't believe yourself. You must again say to yourself, definitely and forever, that you will never exaggerate because it is the cheapest and most obvious thing in our profession.

Another thing from the same point of view: if we

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are going to perform funny and humorous things, we will never get the real humor without feeling of truth and justification. Human nature cannot get humor without feeling of truth and justification. Human nature cannot get humor without these two things. When actors on the stage try to perform humor by doing wrong, unjustified things, it is always painful. It is a very interesting question, why, for instance, some bad actors make "as if" funny things, which are not funny but only obvious and cheap. There is no feeling of truth or justification in what they do, only certain shallow and cheap decoys. Empty decoys.

But we see that certain people laugh at even such things. It is a very complicated psychology, but they do so because they are simple and they are doing truthfully the thing which the actor suggests. They are not actually following the actor. They get a message from the actor, and they respond fully to his primitive acting. But intelligent people, who try to follow the actor's performance, cannot laugh because it is not true or easy. At the moment when we are somehow happy and somehow like children, we accept many more funny things than if we are really intelligent. The more open and childlike we are, the more we are simple and truthful. That means that to laugh at something, or to have a feeling of humor, the first conditions are to be truthful and to be able to justify the thing.

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On the one hand, exaggeration kills truth and justification, and on the other hand, untruthful and unjustified action kills the humor. Don't be afraid to do wrong things. Accept the director's suggestions and your own, without pain. The ability can be developed in a very pleasant way, and not by torturing ourselves. It can be developed in a practical way, so it is worthwhile to concentrate on these two things.