

Michael Chekhov

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CONTACT - GROUP FEELING - INDIVIDUALITY
THE ACTOR'S INDIVIDUALITY
THE PAUSE

New Students:

CONTACT - GROUP FEELING - INDIVIDUALITY:

This is an important thing which grows logically out of all the exercises you have done; the sequence. One thing calls up another. I mentioned once that our art is in a certain way very practical inasmuch as we must create things before each other. All the stages of "not yet being ready" must be shown to our friends in the group. When a playwright is writing, he will not show his play before he is ready; but we have to show, and this is one of the most difficult sides of our work. We have to show all our mistakes before each other, and this is one side of our work. On the other side, we have to create together. One depends upon the other entirely. That means that when we are going to show our unfinished work, we must appeal to the group feeling - to the feeling of contact - to the more human side of this contact because of I am not yet ready, the human part of my nature is suffering, more perhaps than the artist. As if I show you an untidy room. We must appeal to the contact in more than a professional sense. We must create a human group if we want to get more from the theatre of the future - not the feeling of enmity that exists today.

On the second side, when we are creating together and showing the audience our work, we must appeal to the audience as artists. If we know these two sides, we will

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never be astonished that someone despises me because I have not yet found my voice, for instance. I can suffer many days because of the dreadful sounds I make, and if I know others are despising me, then I am not able to go on, or I can despise them in return. I can annihilate my friends in this way, but this is not the theatre we want. It is an evil caricature. Let us now do an exercise in contact with the human approach as the most important part of it.

Exercise:

Sitting as you are, being quite free, try to find each other. Try to open your hearts. That is why we speak of our hearts because we must appeal to ourselves as human beings. I have told you very often that we must open our hearts without any sentimentality. Instead of sentimentality we must have another gesture, that of serious acceptance. Each one of you must accept things, you must accept your partners, and this preserves us from sentimentality, which is the wrong kind of acceptance. Open your hearts and accept each other in a serious way, but don't allow this to bind you and make you stiff. Be quite free, and then you will have real contact. When you are bound, you are not free. We must establish simple human contact by this exercise, and then we will be able to work together and show our unfinished work to each other. There are two ways of exercising - to carry one exercise on for a long time unbroken, or to consciously

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break the exercise many times and, by so doing, exercise this muscle which makes it possible for us to pick up the exercise where we have left it.

Now we will add to the contact exercise the artist's point of view. That means that we not only have to accept each other, but we have a task in common. We have to create something together - the task. Each of you will accept this task by having everyone inside you. In that way we are receiving the task. Build a group without any preparation on the basis of the theme. Find the composition without any preparation.

This is one of the doors without which we will choke in loneliness in our profession. As an actor, I have no right to need to be alone. This is tragic, but we must accept this fact, face it, and find the answer to this difficult necessity. The answer is - we must find the contact. A painter may need to be alone at times, but this is not allowed the actor.

Repeat the exercise of finding contact first as human beings, and then quite consciously, add to this the ability of artists who are ready and able to create something together. Out of this contact build a group on the theme of "Triumph of the Hero."

THE ACTOR'S INDIVIDUALITY:

We have spoken about sentiment. Each drop of sentiment

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in the group makes the person without individuality. Sentiment kills the individuality and creates an illusion of contact. Real contact is conscious, serious acceptance of other members of the group. But the danger is still there. We must build a group which consists not of weak personalities, but of strong personalities. The stronger the personality of the person, the more sure that person is in the group as a member who has an absolutely open heart. Therefore, to have the right to open the heart means to be strong enough to let everyone enter the heart. Otherwise it can be an illusion of the losing of the "I Am," which makes the human being an individual.

For this aim we have to appeal, not to our hearts, but to another function in our spiritual life which we blame so often in our work - the intellect. The intellectual power is something which keeps us as individual persons in the group. Therefore, if we are going to create something, we must create with our hearts and less and less with our brains and intellects. But if we want to be useful, strong members of a group, we must appeal to our intellects. We have to think, and the process of thinking gives us back what we pay for the pleasure of being members of a group. When we are members of a group, we give something from ourselves, but to be able to give we must have something to give, and this is our individuality. The person who has no individuality has

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nothing to give. Therefore, if, as members of a group, we are doing together the exercise of thinking, it gives us a certain ground on which we stand firmly, and from which we have to open our hearts and give all we have. We will never lose ourselves because we have something like a sword going through our whole being, and this is our thoughts - our clear thoughts.

We will exercise this by taking one thought and thinking about it very strongly. This is purely intellectual work, and after you have done it you will feel that you are strong with the strength of the individual existence because of the thought you have thought through. Such thinking gives us the right to be a member of the group. The thought is, "To offer something for a human being is only allowed when the human being has something to offer." Turn this thought without breaking it, this side and that.

Have you got some assurance as an individuality or not? Try to remember this exercise and do it sometimes. Take a thought and think of it for some moments and then realize that the thought comes from your whole being. This is the right approach - the pure approach. Only the pure thought is the means for the human being to awaken his individuality. Then you will get the feeling of this sword which goes through you, and especially the feeling around your head and through your spine which is like a very pleasant warm power. This is the result of a real process

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of thinking. We must appreciate this feeling and keep it as long as possible. This will make you stronger and stronger in your ability to be members of a group, with this clear sword which will preclude us from losing our individuality in the group. We must exercise this feeling of a sword and the strength in our heads.

Take another thought, "The weaker the individual the more fear he has - the stronger the individual the more courage he possesses." The second part of the thought is, "To be able to open our hearts we must possess courage." Realize the power of this sword. If it is very weak in the beginning it does not matter. You need only be aware that it is here. By having this sword, try to open your hearts as human beings to one another, and then add the ability of the artist. By opening your hearts you lose nothing because you have this sword of the personality which keeps you sound, strong, clear, and fresh through all these experiments. Try to compare this state of individuality with the wrong kind of contact in which sentimental individuals try to find one another as blind persons without any individuality. By comparing these two states you will see a great and absolute difference.

Establish contact with one another. Now be quite free in every sense, being in this state of contact. Now add to this the moment when you are going to work together - our constant feeling of belonging to one creative group. To this

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we must add another feeling, - we are going to create together. This is another nuance of the contact. Add this feeling of being able to create together - building a group by members who are in real serious contact. Be so aware of everything and each other that the group will be creating without any preparation, at once. The theme is "Victory."

Establish contact with one another and then add the moment when you are going to work together. To this we must add another nuance. We are going to create together. Now build a group without any preparation but being very aware of everything and of each other. The theme is that of victory.

~~These efforts will gradually become quite natural,~~ and it will become part of your actor's nature and will serve you forever as capital on which you will be able to live for your whole life. The three stages must be realized - first, the sword of the individual; second, the contact of members of a working group; finally, the special professional contact for this particular task. Actually it is one thing - to be an individual and to have artistic contact is one thing but for the purpose of exercising we must do this in order to make it clearer.

Keep the contact as strong individuals and as a group - no longer as artists - and begin to move and dance by trying to overcome all the difficulties and disturbances which arise when

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we are in this fine work which we are now doing inside, trying to use our bodies too much. At once our bodies become sleepy, but we must overcome this.

Go through the three stages as quickly as possible, in order to catch the different aspects of this same thing. Now we shall start from the other side, by creating the strength and power of the individual, by concentrated thinking. The theme is, "For a human being to act out of freedom or to fulfill something freely means to act out of the world of ideas and not out of the world of facts." To think and out of thought to get strength - acting as human beings, not as actors I mean. Now try to realize how much you were able to experience the strength in your head and in your spine - perhaps you have felt the whole sword. Keep it as your individuality. Add to this the contact of artists. Then add to it the toleration which will forgive the mistakes of others. Intolerance means that the doors are closed - toleration means to be open. Now Gretel will give us a sentence on the piano. Move with the phrase, then sustain the pause, and then move again. The period of sustaining must be different in length. Then find the contact with the music and start again. The music and the group must be one and must move simultaneously out of a common desire. This contact is like a very fine thread between you and must be sensed.

THE PAUSE:

Now we will experience the pause into which the action

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disappears, or out of which the action grows. Build a half circle and sit down with one person in the center. We will explore the pause out of which will grow the action. The conditions are simple. Ask the person in the center a question. Out of the pause which follows the person must say "yes" or "no." Now comes the pause out of which the person must decide whether to stay or go away. Out of this pause must come the decision for him and for us. In this way we will explore the difference between the two pauses - the pause out of which something happens and the pause into which something disappears. Out of the pause will come the action, and after the action we must experience another pause - the action, or the answer, must give birth to the pause into which the action will disappear. Be very conscious of the two different natures of the pause, and of the moment when the whole group turns the pause. Out of this pause you must turn the pause again into the action of rising and leaving each other forever.

The Four Brothers:

We will try to combine them in one exercise. First take the feeling of ease, psychologically, and add to it the feeling of form as a psychological ability, then add the feeling of beauty, then the feeling of the whole must be when you take the structures and put them away.