

Michael Chekhov

June 16, 1939

SIGNIFICANCE  
TEMPO  
STACCATO AND LEGATO

Gotho

## SIGNIFICANCE:

Now, you will please, by sitting down and getting up, speak the sentence, "All right then," but try to speak it significantly - not by pressing and pushing words, but by this psychological thing which everybody has. In different tempos. Try to awaken more and more this psychological thing which we call significance. Try to go deeper and deeper each time.

Now the same thing only saying "Mm." Try to avoid all attempts to squeeze it out by stressing the voice.

Please try to do the following thing with this "Mm" - do not imagine that we are acting anything, simply as you are - you can awaken this significance without any help from the side of an imaginary theme - just sit down significantly. Discard all attempts to imagine you are acting a part - you are you. You are getting up saying, "Mm" and trying to awaken this significance which is in you as a human being.

Now in groups: Please act the following thing: You will act that you are walking in a distracted state of mind when you meet a friend - you shake hands hardly noticing your friend, and then go on. I want to awaken your artistic significance by doing this insignificant thing as though it were important. We must get the impression that it is significant.



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Significance lies in the whole being, and does not depend on the theme at all. Try to perform something which is in theme insignificant, but perform it in a very significant way. Whatever you are going to show to your audience must be significant - the nature of it must be significant.

TEMPO:

Please do the following: Two things disturb us with regard to real significance - one thing is when the theme is significant we rely upon this theme, and another is tempo - when we go from one tempo to another.

Standing with your face to the wall suddenly turn around - just as yourself, not as a character, and face the audience with significance. Do it several times in different tempos. The only aim of the exercise is to awaken the power of significance which has been given us as artists by nature. Fight the temptation to perform a situation or a character - you as you are - you must not depend upon the theme - that is where you make your mistake - you allow the theme to overcome you. The tempo also disturbs you from having this significance. These are your two mistakes.

We all know the feeling when the curtain goes up - it is a most significant moment - this state of "the curtain going up" must be there continuously on the stage - always significant.



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Now do the following exercise: Imagine the face and form of Goethe - recall the whole build of the man - see him sitting at a table writing. Imagine you are allowed to enter his room - you will feel such significance. You will feel how this significance radiates. With your developed imagination, try to have this picture of Goethe absolutely clearly. Now Goethe turns his head towards the door where you are. He gets up looking at you. He approaches you and stretches his hand out, and you shake his hand.

Again, Goethe is sitting at the table writing (only from the point of view of significance). He turns his face toward you - look at his eyes - how his neck is situated on his shoulders. He gets up, moves toward you, and you shake his hand.

Exercise:

"How do you do," in quick tempo. Do you feel that the feeling in your body changes because of significance? You are trying to get it by forcing your body.

Now run about quickly and try to be significant. When I tell you to stop, do so with significance, and when I tell you to go on, the going on must be significant. The pause must be significant. You must start your movement with significance - to start the movement significantly is more difficult. Create it from inside. Concentrate only on this ability to be significant.



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Next time I will ask you to stop slowly, then diminish and, perhaps start quickly - on these variations. Start slowly and gradually increase crescendo until you are running about. Stop significantly - the pause is significant - keep it a long time and the whole time it must be significant. Now, in this pause, will you say several times, "Dim."

Please combine two things: Feeling of ease and significance and again try to awaken the ability to be easy and significant at the same time.

Exercise:

Please take a chair and put it somewhere, at the same time having the feeling of ease and significance. The feeling of ease will be much more subtle if you will try to avoid any noise.

And now two different things: feeling of ease and quick tempo - no noise and significance. Now do it only in your imagination with terrific speed. Now lie down and get up with the feeling of ease in terrific tempo, still with significance and without any voice. Now add radiation and presence - free bodies.

Now will you come here and look at this picture, and find the significance in this figure of Moses by Michaelangelo. Gradually try to ask Moses to look this way, or turn his head, or move his finger, and you will see what significance means.

Make the effort to keep inside of you the thing you



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have seen from this picture, and with this significance will you please start the third scene from "Lower Depths."

Now the "Fishing Scene" - the drowning man. If you speak, the words must also be significant.

"Peer Gynt" only from the point of view of significance.

"Lower Depths" only from the point of view of significance.

#### STACCATO AND LEGATO:

Send out the significance first in your imagination. First staccato and significance together - to be able to send out something so that it must not be only physical. We are going to send out our being, but in the form of staccato so that it is a combination of significance and staccato. Give out everything you have - your significance flowing out. Now deep down under the earth - and high, high up - in all directions send out your significance.

We have our bodies, and from the point of view of significance our body is significant - each movement we make is significant. Lift your right hand with significance. The artist who sits in this body is significant.