

Michael Chekhov

(afternoon) January 28, 1938

OBJECTIVE
CONDITIONS
IMPROVISATION
STYLE

OBJECTIVE:

I have noticed something - we have forgotten the real approach to what we call our objective, and therefore so often when we have an objective to fulfill it is only partially done, and this is the result when the head does it instead of the whole being. What does it really mean to have an objective? Try to realize your whole body. Keep this experience, develop it and make it stronger and stronger and do not forget this feeling of the whole body, which must be continuously there during the whole of our rehearsal.

Now, take the simplest objective which is "I want to ask some questions," and try to experience it really as we have done it before: I, my whole being, wants to ask a question with each part of my being. It is the whole being that wants to ask the question. Now, by having this objective in your whole being, will you please say, "Mr. Chekhov, may I ask you a question?", but by saying it try to overcome the dangerous moment which is when we are speaking on the stage. We are speaking from here (the throat) as it were, and we think that this is enough. Not at all, we have to speak with our legs, backs, and everything.

Keep the objective with your whole being. Now, I want you to say the same words but by taking two or three steps

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forward, and be very much aware of whether you are really embracing your whole being for this simple objective. Keep this and develop the ability to keep it as long as you want to.

CONDITIONS:

Now, another way, the same objective: "I want to ask Mr. Chekhov something. Will you please take the condition that before you are able to ask you have to wait by walking in to the other room. This is the whole wisdom and the whole truth of this exercise - What does it mean to have an objective? It means to have something to do with the objective, and nothing more.

Will you please take the condition that although your desire to ask me something is a very strong one, and consumes your whole being, you have to pretend that it is not very important. This is the condition. You will come to me and your speech must express "It is not important." Please keep this continuous electric power in your bodies, as it were. Now, leave the objective, but be quite aware what it really means to have the objective and to leave it. It is as important to know when to leave it as to know you have it.

I want you to take quite a different objective, which is an inward one and which is very much in connection with the head, but you must overcome this objective of the

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head. When you have to remember something, it is natural for the hand to want to be in front of the head, but in spite of this tendency you have to experience it in your whole being. Do not really try to remember something, but, as actors, pretend "I wish to remember something." To make it more difficult I recommend you to use your hands and have them near your head. By these difficult conditions, try to keep the objective everywhere. Be sure that your whole being is occupied with this objective. When you do like that, then your whole body is expressing. You know, of course, that this kind of having the objective is very near to another thing we need which we call "radiation", because radiation comes out of the whole being.

Leave the objective and be aware of the difference. Now, take the objective again. Try not to be too slow, but if possible try to take it quickly, which will give you much more energy and pleasure, because an objective which is dragged is not a beautiful experience for the artist.

Another objective which is to a certain extent localized: "I want to have a cup of tea." Take it. My whole being is filled with this activity because I want to have it happen. Now, will you please ask me what time it is. Do not make it obvious to me. Find some justification for this question, so that I won't get the real idea that you want to finish the lesson and have tea. Leave the objective and make

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the difference quite clear.

If you really have the objective in your whole body, you will only have to obey it - you will not have to add anything, but if you have it in the head or in the intellect, you will find yourself exaggerating. We must deny such exaggeration once and for all by taking some point in the method and refusing the temptation to exaggerate.

Scene at Church Entrance: The lady comes out of the church and her objective is "I want to go home." Please take it and everybody will do it. Keep the same objective whether you are sitting or standing.

Now, some conditions: The mother has the same objective the whole time, but here is one of the beggars, and, having the objective "I want to go home", she must stop and say, "How is your nephew?" and give the beggar some money. Take this objective and keep it and do it in turn. We could take another objective, but in this case we have to do many things. This is very important. In a play there are often many objectives in connection with the main objective. Each play has one main objective.

Criticism:

Instead of carrying through the objective, some of you have confused two things: either to hurry, or to fulfill your objective. If it is hurried, it is not the objective. If you want to especially make an impression of hurrying, the

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objective must be put in the words, but without this special condition or special interpretation of the objective, you must not hurry. We, as all actors, know this mistake very well. If we allow this rush we are beaten, we are quite without real results. Try to remember this very important thing.

Now, I want you to take the objective which we have here: The beggar girl is sitting here and everybody who is here in the room wants to know who she is, why she calls the general's widow "Mother," and her connection with the son. We must know everything about her. That is your objective.

First cast: I want you to look at them with professional eyes and see whether they really have an objective. By sitting here try to fulfill your objective as fully as possible. Keep the objective.

IMPROVISATION:

Now I come to a very important point which I want to mention to you. When we are going to improvise, whether for the play or in simple improvisations, we always make a big mistake. We speak words without having inner life for these words. If we say, "Who are you?" without having the ground for it, at once we are caught by our interrogation. This is a very bad thing for our intellect and killing for our art. There are some things which give us the right to

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speak. When creating words in improvisation, these words can be based on the different grounds of atmosphere, psychological gesture, the objective, etc. Therefore, first of all before we speak our words in our improvisation, we have to have certain grounds and it is, therefore, absolutely necessary to have our method in our power, our will, and be able to manage it skilfully.

Mr. Shdanoff's Play.

Scene between mother and beggar girl: Now as the mother you have the objective to know everything about the beggar girl. Will you please put questions to her, but be absolutely sure that you put these questions because your objective leads you to the question.

Convict scene: We shall take the examples with two different objectives. 1. Woody: "I want to force him to give me the order to do something." Take this objective. On the basis of this objective he will speak his words. Hurd's objective is: "I wish to exterminate him." Paul's objective is: "I want to dominate."

Take the objective. Keeping the same objective, act the Convict scene. Follow the interplay of three objectives. Repeat Convict scene with spy included.

Criticism:

Lack of certain ground. Do not believe that we are

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ever able to dispense with or deceive the audience - we are not able to. The audience is much cleverer if we do not have an objective. On the other hand, we are much cleverer than the audience, if we have the objective.

Again, quite a different objective, a very deep one. I want to see the scene of the son's nightmare, when the mother comes to him with the candle. The objective this time is to be expressed by a gesture. Now you see how psychological gesture can be everything - the idea, the atmosphere, the objective, etc. Try to speak your words on the basis of this objective - gesture. The objective must be taken at once.

Think of the two mistakes we always do. One mistake is made when speaking in our improvisations - we lose our ability to speak as from the stage, and our speech becomes lower and less interesting than it is naturally. Even allowing for improvisation, we must have enough strength to speak. Second, by concentrating on some things in our method like the objective, we are getting more and more stiff and slow.

There are two reasons for this. One reason is that by concentrating on the study of that part of the lesson we lose certain actor's activity and we become mere investigators. We must know that we must never lose our activity by doing exercises and by too much studying. The activity must always

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be there. This is not everything, however. Another thing is that we are getting slower and slower because we are not yet able to manage the objective. When we are able to do so we will never get stiff - quite the opposite - it will give us much more activity because it is increased life for an artist. It gives him much more interest to live, to be. This is a very important proof of how important it is to know the method, and to be able to manage it.

Here is the threshold. Here, before the threshold, the Method consumes us and we are the slaves of this Method; then the Method means nothing because we must have it in us. Thus, "I am the slave of the Method" will not be good - you must be masters of the Method.

STYLE:

Spanish Evening:

Try, as you are, to remember and accumulate the "butterfly" movement. Take objects and do jugglers' tricks. Keep the "butterfly" feeling. "I am an actor." Try to overcome this certain stiffness.

Run to Miss Crowther and back. Try to get in your bodies all the qualities we have spoken of. Try, through the feeling of truth, to do all these things in certain harmony with each other. I want you now to wait for the purpose in this spirit.

Bring all the costumes we have here and organize

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the scene in the style of the "butterfly". They must be brought in disorder, then made orderly. Not only keep this "butterfly" thing but increase it.

Take the objective: "I want to act." Blair is the manager and will give orders to choose garments and you must put them on so that in a certain way they will be beautiful. Appear before Miss Crowther carrying out the character of your costume. Move with music. You are being presented to the audience this time naively and naturally. Keeping the same feeling, fold your costumes and finish.

Improvisation on the same plane. This is the development of the scene we have tried to do with a person who has to hypnotize. Young people and old people - masks. The old people want the old man to be revived because he is to be married in spite of old age. The young people are very much afraid of the destiny of their young friend. The tramp is mistaken for a doctor, and tries to revive the old man and forces him to walk. You must observe this and find some ground for yourselves. One group tries to hinder the other. I want the tramp to start with this objective, "I am walking through the whole world without any aim." The tramp is asked whether he is a doctor - he attends to the patient and revives him by hypnotism. The young people bewitch him and he falls down again.

You have made the same mistake we see on the stage

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so often from old actors. You have exaggerated. Therefore, say to yourselves that through our Method we have other means. You must not think that today or tomorrow we can get this ground, but you must be brave and try and refuse to exaggerate. If you have the quality of this play inside you, then each event must be measured as it were with the same measurement. The whole process of the reviving was as long as for a Greek tragedy. In this play it must be like a flash.

With your costumes you did ninety percent well - ten percent exaggerated. You must get form into your being. Remember all the little points one by one. "I am presenting myself," - "We want to act." Now do the whole act. Don't exaggerate - this is the only thing that will hold us up. Once you realize how bad it is to exaggerate you will be free. Rely on your artistic nature. When one part of our rehearsal is not too successful never feel badly - that will hold you back.