

Michael Chekhov

June 9, 1939

PRESENCE
PSYCHOLOGICAL PRESENCE
RADIATION
SIGNIFICANCE
LEGATO AND STACCATO MOVEMENTS

Ruth Draper

PRESENCE:

Take it purely psychologically - drop it, and then try really to understand with your whole nature what it means "to be present" or "not to be present" - spiritually - psychological presence. Do not imitate with your body this presence on the stage - it is very wrong and kills our inner life when the body tries to substitute the functions of our spirit. Do not try to express it - simply you are present or you are not present.

Now, will you move about being present, and try to keep your whole body absolutely free from tension during the whole exercise. At first not too quickly.

PSYCHOLOGICAL PRESENCE:

Now, increase this presence as much as you can without using your body - it is purely psychological, which has nothing to do with the body. Still more presence with your will, but without body tension. The more presence, the freer the body will be on the stage.

Please run about, keeping the presence, and although the body will move quickly and entice you to use it as a substitute for psychological presence, do not heed it. Do not

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allow your bodies to entice you or lead you astray.

Exercise:

Presence.....drop it. Again, and so on many times - sometimes very quickly.

Try to get it immediately so that your soul will be obedient to your intentions. It is important in all psychological technique, whatever it is, to be able to change your psychological state as quickly as possible. The difficulty for us is that our psychological processes are going on so slowly that we are unable to help ourselves - we need to develop this technique. We, as actors, are showing on the stage not only our bodies, but we are actually showing our psychology by means of our bodies and voices. If we have not developed our psychology, we are compelled to show only our bodies, our make-up, costumes, etc., which are not important.

RADIATION:

Now, will you please, being present as strongly as possible, try to combine two exercises which we have done before - radiation (again a psychological one) - try to find the way from being present to the ability to radiate - you will find that it is one thing. You cannot radiate without being present, and you cannot be present without radiating. Combine this in your psychology so that it will become one thing - presence and radiation.

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Try to walk being present and radiating, and fight any stiffness in your body.

When I ask you to run about, will you please fight with the body, which will try to substitute for the psychological self. Immediately compare in your own inner experience: "Now I am not present" with "I am present." Do not think of it, simply try to experience it.

Will you please combine presence and radiation again and increase it more and more so that you are sure to give everything you can. Presence and radiation as one thing - free bodies.

SIGNIFICANCE

Now, will you please add the third thing which is organically bound with these two abilities - significance. If we are present on the stage, if we are radiating, we are significant without trying to persuade the audience that we are significant. The whole exercise is a very simple attempt to pay attention to the natural facts, to the natural abilities we have. Each gifted person knows from his nature what it means to be present, to be radiating, and to be significant. Pay attention to these three abilities. Will you walk being present, radiating, and significant.

Now take a position and concentrate only on these three abilities, which are actually one spiritual ability to be able to exercise them together, and to separate them

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individually, but actually it is one act and purely psychological. Do not confuse it with our bodily exercises.

Do all these movements in quicker tempo, which is much more difficult. Speaking with each other on the stage must become significant.

Will you sit down in a half circle on the floor, and try to be present and radiate and be aware of your significance in doing the smallest movements, I will suggest to you. Try to realize that, being in this psychological state, you can be absolutely significant, radiating, and present.

Please put your hands together with significance. Concentrate on this movement first being present, then radiating and then with significance. When you unclasp your hands, also do it with these three qualities. Try to avoid any stiffness in your heads or bodies when you detect this tendency to be tense. If you will exercise sufficiently, you will gradually get a new feeling of your own actor's art, which will prevent you from making unnecessary movements on the stage. We feel that because we are on the stage, we have to add something. If we have the ability of significance and radiation, we will hate these unnecessary things.

It is necessary to go through this hell to hate something in your own acting and the acting of your colleagues, and you will get the desire to do on the stage only things which are psychologically needed, and not to flounder with your

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hands and arms because you are on the stage. You will then begin to hate this unnecessary "dancing" business on the stage.

Who has seen, for instance, Ruth Draper - she does only necessary movements, and she is always present, radiating, and significant. This is because of her genius and brilliance. If you will look at your colleagues on the stage from different points of view, you will find many interesting things. You will see the examples of our Method. For instance, really good acting will be ninety-nine percent interpretation or realization of our Method. It is very interesting to see that nobody has invented these things or tried to impose them on others.

It is the nature which we are going to study, but we have to study the nature of genius, and this is the ideal of the school. Nothing artificial and nothing brought from the intellect. We have to pay attention to our "Ruth Draperism." We have to find out where we are "Ruth Drapers." As I have told you many times, everybody is much more gifted even than he thinks he is, but by paying humble and modest attention to our "Ruth Draper" business we will develop it and, therefore, such simple exercises can awaken in us our own talents.

Try to look up, then down, and then to the side with significance, radiation, and so on; but try to avoid this effort to be significant for the audience...be significant for

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yourselves and thus the audience will follow you. Do these exercises for yourselves and not for us.

We will now try to be present and radiating in the pause. Will you please take the moment in one of your sketches - three groups - Thieves [The Robbers] - dull atmosphere at the beginning, then pause - pay attention to the radiation and presence, and keep the pause as long as possible. We will combine one purely bodily exercise with this psychological effect.

LEGATO AND STACCATO MOVEMENTS:

We shall do our legato and staccato movements. Try to use your presence, significance, and radiation, and this time you will have to use your body fully. Combine body exercises and psychology. When you start the exercise, try to overcome this bodily substitution for psychology, but use your body consciously and try to use it as a means of radiating, and as the form which you will fill with your presence.

We have had these exercises before only from the psychological point of view - now I want you to combine them with the body movements. I accept my body just as my psychological "I am" - a complete being. I have a definite psychological state which I have chosen to be in, and I have my body as a means of expressing your psychological state which is, "I am present" - "I am significant" - "I am radiating" -

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and, "I have at my disposal my body which I use freely and fully."

Sometimes actors on the stage feel disharmony between their bodies and intentions, and, therefore, the audience cannot follow them because they are inharmonious, and the body does not obey the psychology, and the psychology does not obey the body. To get this marvelous experience of harmony between our body and our psychology is essentially important. We must believe without any conceit - simply believe that our bodies are able to fulfill, to express, to be filled with our inner desires, then the psychology will become freer and freer because the instrument for conveying these things is at our disposal.

Another kind of development is to believe that the body will obey. This is again purely psychological. "I must not allow myself to doubt that I will be able to do it." This belief makes the body freer, and you will see that you have developed your body from the inside - psychologically developed it. Now it is full harmony, and the body is your instrument, and is in your power without conceit.

When you will get the pleasure which arises from within, then it is right. We can observe dogs and other animals or children running about. This is the pleasure of the harmony between their inner and outer state. Try to pay attention to this pleasure which also is there.

We will now do the same thing without muscles:

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We are present
We are radiating
We are significant
We believe our body

Staccato but with free muscles - the legs and foot must be just as flexible as the arms - more life in them - quicker.

Always with the quicker tempo something in our body becomes contracted, and we have, as actors, to overcome this difficulty. When we run slowly, it is with a long step, and when we run fast, we use short staccato steps.

Now do it fully with significance, presence, and full confidence in your body. Fight or wrestle without muscles.