

Michael Chekhov

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IMAGINATION
REVIEW OF POINTS OF THE METHOD
OBJECTIVES - CONDITIONS
IMPROVISATION
SIGNIFICANCE

Hamlet
Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme
An Actor Prepares

IMAGINATION:

Holiday Tasks:

The work I am going to give you for the holidays is, if I may use the term, exclusively mental - to be done entirely in your imagination. Not for your imagination, but in your imagination. I want both old and new students to understand, again and again, that the Method is only useful if you are able to manage it yourselves. If the Method remains still in the teacher's hands, it is helpless. When the pupil no longer needs the teacher, then the teacher has succeeded. When you are able to manage the Method, the school will be finished and the theatre will be started. Therefore I will do everything to persuade you to take the Method, to use it, and to apply it on your own.

The holiday task will be the following: you must take some of the sketches which we have done - you may choose any one, but naturally the sketch in which you have the most to do would be the best one for you to take. You may take the old sketches such as The Fishing Scene, or any other sketch, and concentrate on it and then act in your imagination, but only in your imagination. Your body must remain flexible, but

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the work is given for your imagination. You must imagine yourself acting on the condition that you will go through all the points in the Method we are going to use in our sketches, and apply each one to the sketch you are imagining. Don't act it - do it in your imagination; this is the aim of the exercise, which is a very useful one. I would like you to do it at least three times a day, without any break in the routine of it. If you are able to concentrate and imagine only for four minutes, do it. Don't think you have no time - do it. If you really don't have much time, then do it for one minute three times a day. The repetition, the rhythm, is important in this case, especially in mental exercises. The repetition will do more than half of the work. You can spend the same amount of effort and mental activity by doing the work un-rhythmically, and you will get less than half the result than if you will do it with the same activity, but regularly. It must be by repetition.

REVIEW OF POINTS OF THE METHOD:

Of course, you must concentrate on your own part and must try to apply the following things in your work on it. Take the scene in general, but for certain things, such as the center on the stage, you must imagine the whole thing. Remember that you must be very exact in following each point carefully, one after the other. Write them down, and go carefully through them; don't be content by thinking that you know them because you have done them before.

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Old Students and New Students:

Atmosphere
Objective (with new conditions)
Contact

Four Brothers:

Feeling of ease
Feeling of form
Feeling of beauty
Feeling of the whole
Radiation
The center of interest

Old Students only:

Character (by use of the invisible body, center, etc.)
Archetype (trying to find it by all the means)
Getting the feelings through Inspiration (technique of
preparing the ground, opening the doors, etc.)
Psychological gesture
Significance
Style

I hope that when you come back from the holidays, you will be improved in your ability to use the Method - to manage and govern it. Go through all the sketches in which you have a part. Go through each sketch many times. If you are only able to take one point to begin with, then continue the work. If your imagination is so vivid that you are able to take the sketch from the point of view of the objective, and in fifteen seconds you have accomplished one thing - this is the ideal, of course, but it will take more time - then go on to some other point.

You must not begin to incorporate; the exercise is really for your imagination. However, if you wish to move around

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during the work, that depends on you. Don't keep your body stiff. Please find objectives for each of the characters in Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme which will be used for our future improvisations.

OBJECTIVES:

The objective must be like a storm disturbing your whole being. Take into your being the conditions. For instance, in the Hamlet scene on which we have been working, the conditions are: the night, the uncle married to the wife of a dead king, suspicion in the air. Unless the objective is taken with the whole being, it becomes an illusion. Take the objective absolutely and powerfully, and carry it through with every part of your being and with your speech apparatus. If you will listen attentively, you will find that the cues come from different plays, different authors.

CONDITIONS:

This ability to take the objective by the conditions given is one of the most important things we know. In the modern theatre the conditions are already given for each play. The conditions are: to be quiet on the stage, or to speak so and so. These are the only conditions; therefore, questions about conditions are never raised. An actor of this type will never need the things which Stanislavsky speaks of in An Actor Prepares. Everything is given him by means of the already

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existing clichés. But if we want to create something which lives and vibrates and which has to grow, then we must meet this question of conditions, which is absolutely important for us.

Imagine the tower scene in Hamlet. Imagine the situation in pictures and you will get the conditions. The objective is "to penetrate into the mystery," while the ghost's objective is "I want to reveal the mystery." To do something - always to do, not to speak the content, this is most, most necessary. You must develop this fine feeling as to whether your speech does something or not.

Now try to fulfill the objective by means of movement. Take the objective with all its conditions. Everybody must be full of this storm-like activity. You are living in a stream of storm activity. By having a real objective, everything will stream through you. You will never feel your voice, your movements; they will stream through you and you will act. Compare the ideal state of having an objective which leads you, and being a private person who walks around without an objective.

Improvisation of scene from Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme:

We must try to make clear to our actor's nature what it means to have an objective as a stream, which is created by the conditions given in the scene. Improvise the scene with the Bourgeois M. Jourdain, the Dancing Master, and the Music Master.

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Criticism:

The objective really led them, and we were able to see how important it is not to be on the stage senseless and aimless, but to do something - and it was done. Perhaps there were too many words, but the objective was done. This is the aim of the objective: to do, to give the actor the possibility of doing something all the time he is on the stage. Please take this seriously, because it is something which can rescue you during the rehearsal. From this point of view, I am satisfied with today's improvisation, because something was always being done. It was a performance all the time. They did not fall into those gaps which are such torture for the audience, when the actors do not know what they are doing on the stage. It was always filled with something, which was the objective.

The second thing I was very happy to see was that they were not in any unnecessary hurry. They were in a certain way free, and this feeling of easiness is again a very important one. Perhaps it was because of the objective, or perhaps because your idea of acting, in general, is getting higher and higher.

SIGNIFICANCE:

The third thing was perhaps quite subconscious, but it was good. Almost everything was done with significance. Whether it was more or less interesting depends on other things.

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but everything was significant. They also found where the center was, and they never disturbed each other. From this point of view, I am happy about this exercise. There was also a feeling of truth in everything they did - a feeling of style and justification.

From the point of view of the school, many things were right and you must take this as a very good example. The more you will think about this and analyze it, the more encouraged you will be for your next experience.

Whether the performance was very good and inspired, whether it could have been more funny, and so on, this is quite a different question. But it was correct. There was something shown. We could follow it with interest, and it was always correct. When I say correct, I mean that the actor knows his profession and does his work quite consciously. How much God is with him depends upon God, and not upon the actor. Sometimes by taking the objective, you are really full of activity, but you do not use it. You do not do. This is a very fine thing. To have an objective means always to find a way to do things, being led by this objective. We are always in danger of having an objective and not using its power. We must do.

Another mistake is to have the objective and do things only to do something. This is not really having the objective. These two dangers are always present. Without any real necessity for having the objective, to do things quite

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separately, because you feel you must do something - this is not doing on our sense.

If I have an objective, I must do things which come out of the objective, and only out of the objective. Never confuse doing something with doing the objective. You must be brave enough not to do things in order to fill the gaps which are so frightening for an actor, before you get a suggestion from the objective. To have an objective and not to do, and to have an objective and to do something without any real relation to the objective - these are two real mistakes which we must watch out for.

Repetitions are very frequent mistakes on the stage. This comes from having an objective and not appealing to it. The objective may be there, but it is quite separate. The bad actor will repeat things instead of making a certain stop inside himself for one instant, and realizing that he has his objective, and that he has only to exercise and be quiet enough to take the next step out of the objective. This is the same mistake.

Paula sometimes tries to help, and forces things which, if she didn't force, would come of themselves. She sometimes anticipates herself. If she would leave it, her nature would never betray her. Don't anticipate things which would come immediately if you only appeal to them. Be quite quiet and they will come. You will get much richer qualities,

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because this pseudo-anticipation is not the best.

In the same way, Henry made a little mistake. He is very clever with words, and often the words occur in his mind before the actor in him is aroused. The playwright in him jumps a little bit before the actor. This does not mean that he must stop doing this, but he must know it. It is not an intellectual mistake. Intellectual things which are spoken on the stage are always very dull and cold, but this is not true of Henry. Perhaps he can let his actor run simultaneously with his wit, but he must not rely upon it only. That is Henry's danger.

Paula knows how to make certain effects on the stage which affect the audience, and in this respect she is already an actress. Sometimes the actress begins to act before Paula. It is not a bad thing, but she must know how to manage it. Her experience will always serve her, but it will serve her better if she will hold it back and let something fresh happen.

Exercise:

The Bourgeois is in the room, and we are all teachers whose objective is to get as much money as possible from him. Each one of you must enter and say, "How do you do!" Although you have not yet given him a lesson and have not yet even spoken to him, yet this simple sentence can be full of the objec-

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tive. You will be able to feel this objective everywhere before you fulfill it. It is not necessary to make your objective obvious to the audience and show the audience that you are thinking about money. The real objective will be understood by the audience even if you are doing something quite different and are simply standing there and do not give a lesson. As long as you are filled with the objective, you will be doing it inside. In this way you will be able to kill obvious and unnecessary actions. The objective is such a power that sometimes it needs nothing - to have it is already action. By merely standing quiet, it does not mean that you do not use the objective - you are doing it without movement or words.

Cleanse the objective by doing it absolutely purely. Don't add anything to it. Let it be absolutely pure. Don't do superfluous things. Don't add. Overacting spoils the objective. Too many conditions can spoil the objective, but not necessarily. Enjoy the pleasure of experiencing this pure objective without any embroidery of unnecessary things. Compared with one year ago, you have made great progress in not overacting. If you will remember yourselves in the beginning of last year, you often overacted. Now almost all our improvisations are free from overacting.

Even when you were doing Don Quixote in the theatre the other day, although the temptation was great, you did not overact. Remember the moment when the group was around John

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as Don Quixote? It was a very tempting moment to overact, but Terrence, Blair, and Henry did nothing more than glance at him, and this was as strong as Don Quixote's movement. Why? Because it was not overacted, but was in harmony, and the objective was taken quite subconsciously. It would have been much weaker had they overacted. This is the result of having a pure objective and being brave enough to carry it through without underlining and imitation and repetition.

To be able to do things clearly and correctly on the stage is the most beautiful thing for the actor, and much more convincing than being full of temperament and trying to persuade the audience with your emotions. Then the inspiration will come, clear and correct.

When we come back to these simple exercises with the objective, you must not feel that we are repeating. We are getting a finer and more subtle understanding of the objective each time.