

Michael Chekhov

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THE OBJECTIVE
THE AESTHETIC CONSCIENCE
THE ACTOR'S BODY
FEELING OF EASE

Hans Oppenheim

OBJECTIVE:

Mark Tobey

We will concentrate on the problem of the objective. There are many deep things in connection with the objective, which we must discover. We will take the same scene from Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme, and it must be created on the basis of the objective. We must understand the objective as an inner storm or fire; you must express something which is consciously running and boiling inside of you. We must understand the objective in this sense. Then the conditions of the play must be taken, and they must mold the objective. The objective is a flame or a storm which is molded by the conditions.

Criticism:

One secret each one of you must discover for yourselves, although some of you are nearer to it than others: our actor's nature is a great coward; and because of this cowardice we always feel, on the stage, as if we are drowning; and we do everything to save ourselves, but we go deeper and deeper. Instead of trying to be quiet and move easily, which would save us, we flounder and struggle. All the things which are not good on the stage are a result of this cowardice. Some things are given which can preclude this drowning; and they help us to move and breathe easily, but we forget them when we are

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drowning. For instance: the objective. Instead of thinking of it for one moment and relying upon it, we begin to gasp and we think we are able to swim. But in reality we were in a very frightened state, and have only done something quite weak.

The objective is something we must rely upon. We must discover it. It is so near to us and so far at the same time. For instance, let us say today that the objective was "I want to appear important." Instead of relying upon the objective, the actor became frightened and then did offensive, overacting things. After doing such things, realize how far you must go back psychologically to find the objective. You must finish with the bad effects of the bad things you have done; you must find the starting point again and remember the objective which you have forgotten.

Why must you do all this? Only because of the cowardice of your nature, which made you flounder instead of relying upon the objective. You must understand this point because it is very important. You had only an illusion of the objective because the objective was lost from the very beginning. When you entered the stage you were already wrong. You were a drowning person. You could put on yourself so many things, but they would only make you more struggling. You are aware how bad it is, and you go deeper and deeper into the thing. When you become aware of what you are doing, you must stop.

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Remember that you are in a school and that you are free to stop and say that it is wrong. Start twenty times. It is much better to do this than to go on with the feeling that you are drowning. It is obvious, but you are not brave enough to stop. For what are you hoping? A miracle? Do you expect that someone will come and act for you?

In the school we must train ourselves to say that we feel a thing is wrong. You are able to do things in the right way because yesterday, when we tried to do this scene in a simple, honest way, we were able to understand that it is possible to rely upon the objective and be honest towards it. Then you will experience more often the state when you are really inspired by the objective. Then you can say that you are free and can do whatever you like, because in an inspired state you know what you do is right, just as you know it is wrong when you are doing wrong.

AESTHETIC CONSCIENCE:

In this scene today everything was wrong. The content of the sentences was wrong, the movements were wrong, all the composition of the persons was wrong - everything! Please recall it and you will see how wrong it was. You did not take the objective. The fact that you were inside ashamed of what you were doing was a good sign, because it means that we do not speak in vain of the aesthetic conscience. You must listen to this conscience which is given to us, and it will lead you, just as it leads us on the stage. When you feel

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ashamed, it means you must either stop what you are doing, or, better still, begin to consciously manage the Method inside you without stopping. But something must be done to rely upon the points given us. Think of what you have done today and how you will avoid this same mistake in the future.

All the points in the Method, although they may seem to be different, in reality they build one thing. Therefore, if the objective is wrong and we only have the illusion that we have an objective, we are swimming in a special kind of blind nothingness and emptiness, because the objective was not there. Now imagine that you have the real objective. Everything begins to live around and in you. For instance, if I have an objective to get money from someone, then I have this person before me in my mind's eye even when I'm not looking at him. How can I come to the state where I can talk to that person and not see him? You are inclined to lose the objective in a very primitive way.

Repeat the improvisation. But just start the scene. Start again and again until you find this clear, clean thing which we call the objective, and do not be content with something which will choke you. Start without any conditions to begin with, but retain the same objective as before. To find the purest, go through the stage where you are offended and almost killed by the things you are doing, because when you come to this moment, then you will have reached the moment

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when you will understand how to apply the Method. Torture yourselves. If you have not been able to grasp the meaning of some part of the Method at once, then you must go through this long, devious way. Overacting, underlining, forcing, pressing too much - none of these will help you and no one will believe you.

"I want to appear important." Everyone knows this objective because everyone has this objective in him, absolutely, although it may have a different appearance for each one of us. For instance, my whole life through I have wanted to be important, and I do it by being modest or as if I am very, very busy with the person with whom I am speaking. I cannot overcome this and am still very full of it. I will never try to be important by any other means. Each of us has a certain way of being important; but you must penetrate to the point when you can stand before yourself and see yourself, and then you will know what it means to have an objective on the stage: when your face is pale, your heart is trembling, etc., as an artist because you have touched some point in your own life that you know. I am suffering from this very much because I am not yet able to find a real approach to the human being. But this is the same on the stage: I must suffer when I do false things on the stage.

I only want to point out that the atmosphere, objectives, etc., are as deep as life itself. Therefore, I must

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repeat what I said the other day when I said that we are going through life blindly. We must know ourselves, and the nature around us. We may know some good and bad things inside us, but may not be able to do anything about it - to know your nature and to manage it are two different things. When we are awakened in our life to such things, then we will be awakened on the stage, too. Therefore, our life and our art are together and cannot be separated.

THE ACTOR'S BODY AND EMOTIONS:

We have spoken about the objective and such things as the rhythmical gesture, psychological gesture, contact, atmosphere, etc., as the means which we are going to use for our acting. We are going to use them for elaborating our bodies and our emotions. That is the reason for our exercises. For instance, have you ever noticed Mr. Oppenheim's hands - how elaborated they are?¹ From the inside, of course, because he has music inside of him and he uses his hands for this music; and this has made his hands elaborated from inside. In his hands he always has, consciously or subconsciously, the objective. When he is playing on the piano, his hands are full of objectives. We can imagine very easily what it means for a musician to have an objective in his fingers. When he is going to play Chopin or Bach - such extremes - he must have the atmosphere in his hands. Not only the sounds which he produces from the piano, but in his hands sits the

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atmosphere very obviously. If you have observed several pianists, you will see how differently is the manner in which they prepare the hands. One may start with something invisible, and this invisible thing leaves his hands as he touches the piano. What does this mean? It means that the gesture, the atmosphere, everything is sitting in his hands.

We have to do the same thing, but not only with our hands, but with our whole body. When our bodies are responsive enough to all these things, then we will have channels, as it were, through which we have not only to produce the objective, but to understand it. Being a musician, it is necessary to have a special construction of the inner ear. That means that the spirit of the musician must be sensitive enough because the musician takes it from the cosmos. But to take it from the cosmos, it is not enough to have the spirit: the ear must be there, too.

It is not enough for a painter to feel the color and the lines, etc.: he must have such arms, hands, and chest which will enable him to make the line. Remember when Mark Tobey tried to get you to dance before the paper, what was he aiming at?² To develop the whole body for painting, and for us as actors, it is not enough to develop one part of the body only. The whole body must be made receptive for all these things. We must produce with our bodies and our spirits; and we are able to understand our spirits if our bodies are

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responsive. That is the reason why we do so many bodily exercises from the psychological point of view, rather than the gymnasium point of view - which is very good, too, but we must do this gymnasium work inside us much finer and pour it out in [through] our bodies.

Therefore, when we take our objectives with our mind, this is only doing half the work. When you are asked to take the objective with your whole body, it means you must try to awaken the feeling that your body is thinking, wishing, feeling. If this is not yet the fact, then we are like a sleeping person. The spirit is not dead - in the morning the spirit will come back and the person will be awake. But when the person sleeps, his body is like a plant lying there. We can apply this example for our own developed state. As actors our spirit wants to produce and create and say magnificent and beautiful things; but our bodies are like a plant lying before us, and everything we want to say with our spirits is in vain because the body does not understand the spirit. The spirit cannot come to realization because the body is like a heavy weight which is hanging on the spirit and stops its desires and wishes.

Therefore I would like you to do some exercises. Will you take the objective: "I want to comfort someone who is sitting there." We want to comfort this human being, and we must take the objective with our whole body; but we only have at our disposal our right hand and arm as a means for expressing

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the objective. Try to pour the whole objective into your right hand and arm. Comfort him by touching him. Through this simple exercise really try to understand what it means to have an elaborated body. You will feel how the powers which we call the objective will be working in your hand and in your arm, and how it will become more and more sensitive and flexible because your hand is a physical instrument.

Why do I give you such an exercise? Because sometimes we do the exercise "in general," and this "in general" leads us often to the illusion that we have an objective. If you want to comfort someone and your body is not yet elaborated, you may do many things - but where is the objective? In the mind. The objective is not fulfilled because your hand is dead or your body is dead. The objective has not yet elaborated your body. If you have elaborated your arms, chest, limbs, etc., then you can comfort someone with every part of your body. Every part of your body will be permeated with this desire to comfort him, and this is what we need. Then your body will be your helper, not your enemy. Often we see on the stage actors whose bodies are their enemies, and it is easy to see that although the actor wants to do something quite different, his body will not obey him.

We must acquire this ability by very careful work. Imagine how many years Yehudi Menuhin, who is a genius, has had to work with his fingers and wrists. Only then did he get

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the ability to create those sounds which the world is crazy about. Even he, who was born as a musician, has had to work on these things for many years. For us it is not enough to develop the legs or shoulders: the whole body must be elaborated. Realize how many years we must work if the problem is taken seriously. Therefore, we must not think that the problem of the objective can be solved in a few improvisations. We must work day and night in order to create the new type of actor, the whole of whom will be like Yehudi's hand. If we are able to solve only one third of this great problem, we will already have created a new type of actor. But we must really devote our whole life to the work. A real student of the theatre school must be a little bit crazy, a little bit fanatical. It is never enough to exercise in the studio. We must be doing it when we are awake, when we sleep, when we are eating, etc.; then we will get some results.

One of the exercises is to develop parts of our bodies for the objective and other things. For instance, take the objective to comfort Mr. Peters. ^[Peters Vassaroudzis] When you get up and approach him, try to be conscious of the beautiful process by which your spirit tries to elaborate one part of your body.

To have an elaborated body means to have a body which thinks, speaks, and wills. Every part of your body can become so sensitive that it can do this. Walk around Mr. Peters, with the body quiet and the legs full of the objective.

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To have an elaborated body on the stage means to respect this beautiful instrument which is your body. You must have respect for your body as an instrument. Yehudi would never strike his violin, and we must have the same feeling when we use our bodies badly. For example, when an actor has this respect for his body and has a flexible, elaborated body, he will never allow his animal passions to be aroused. For instance, in a love scene he will never confuse his emotions as an actor with those of his own nature. He will never desire to embrace and make love to the girl who is his partner in a love scene. He will never confuse the two things - the passions he is acting with his own passions.

We must consciously develop our bodies so that our hands are able to ask such a question as, "What has happened to you?" In this sense your hands are thinking. I once knew of a deaf girl who learned to think through her palms. Because of the silencing of the world around her, as if in protest, she developed the ability to hear music with her hands. During the exercise you have just done, when you were concentrated on your hands, you forgot your faces and your eyes, and I have never seen them so beautiful before. Our faces must be quite quiet on the stage, and if we have a certain content in ourselves, it will radiate. This part of our body is given only for radiating. We must do nothing with it. Our faces will show the most beautiful expressions, and make the most

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beautiful impressions if we are brave enough to be quiet and do nothing with them, but realize their power to radiate. This is very characteristic when you are concentrated on something - beautiful faces and beautiful eyes, full of radiation and expression.

Repeat the same exercise with Mr. Peters, but this time you have at your disposal the name "Peters." Sit in a circle and at first say only the word, then say it again with the word and with torso.

During these exercises we have tried to appreciate different parts of the body. But we must do this our whole life through. You must appreciate all parts of your body with the same care. Now repeat the exercise, but this time using all means. Get up, approach, and touch, and say, "Peters." Don't be lost in the many things you are doing, but try to see yourself as one big hand, or one big heart, or one big throat - one big organ for fulfilling the objective, which is "I want to comfort Mr. Peters."

Now the same objective, but with ^{the} condition, "I want to comfort him as quickly as possible." The conditions change the objective. Your whole being must do the objective; it must be one big organ, the whole "I am" must do the objective. You must appreciate the state of being entirely occupied with the objective. Every finger, etc. - your whole body as a beautiful instrument through which the spirit can speak and do.

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Repeat the objective, but add the condition that the room is dark and you don't know where Mr. Peters is.

You must not forget, when doing your imaginative exercises during the holidays, that everything in our Method is for the same aim: the elaboration of our heavy bodies so that they become beautiful instruments like Yehudi's violin. The feeling of ease, form, contact, atmosphere, etc., by all these means we must re-create our bodies. Even an old person is able to do this if he wants to. It is much easier, of course, for young people to exercise and change their bodies from the psychological point of view. Please keep this in mind: that in a few years you must get another body.

FEELING OF EASE:

Take the feeling of ease so that it re-creates each muscle, each nerve. Let the spirit of ease work inside you. If you will really take this into your beings, you will get the feeling that your bodies have become lighter, and this is right. The spirit can make the body lighter because it is much more powerful than the body and can transform it. Remember that it is easy to make the mistake of taking the feeling of ease intellectually. If your body feels different when you are doing the exercise, it is a good sign. The same is true of the feeling of form, the objective, etc. If your body does not change, then it means that you have taken the idea intellectually. It is sitting in your head. We must understand the difference between intellectually knowing, and really having it in our bodies; then we will get this ability.