

Michael Chekhov

Evening June 28, 1938

STUDENTS' DEMONSTRATION
PRESENCE
FEELING OF EASE
FEELING OF FORM
CONTACT - GROUP FEELING
OPENING THE HEART
FEELING OF THE WHOLE
ANTICIPATION AND RETROSPECTION
IMPROVISATION

Stanislavsky
An Actor Prepares
The Flood - The Deluge

STUDENTS' DEMONSTRATION:

I am very happy to see you tonight as our guests and we shall try to demonstrate to you some of our exercises. It is impossible of course to show the whole Method that we use, but some of our exercises perhaps will tell you something about our Method.

We shall start with our simple bodily exercises, or some of them, remembering that we consider our body as an instrument for conveying to our audience our full means, our will impulses, our creative thoughts and images, and so on. So we try to use our body always with the idea that if our body is there on the stage, it must mean something to us and to our audience, and we try to avoid the mistake that the body of the actor is on the stage, and moves on the stage without any special meaning, which is very often seen on the stage today. If we are on the stage, if we move our body it must convey to our audience some psychological content.

There are a series of exercises for getting these special feelings for our body, but we cannot show you all of

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M. Chekhov

June 28, 1938

them as it would take hours and hours, but we will try to show you some of our elementary exercises.

PRESENCE:

Try to get the idea that we have our bodies - this simple idea that we have our bodies is already something which changes our attitude towards our bodies - if we simply have our body without knowing, very often the body lives its own life, and our psychology goes in a different direction. Will you concentrate on the idea: We have our body at our disposal - our body is our instrument for conveying our psychological content to our audience. If we simply lift our hand, that must mean something for us and for the audience. Will you please try simply to move your hand toward your body without special meaning, simply trying to convey to your audience your presence in your bodies. To be able to convey something to our audience we must be present in our bodies. ^{Concentrate on the idea:} To be able to convey something to our audience we must be present in our bodies.

Will you take three steps forward and try this movement in space to convey to the audience your presence. The same can be done if you are moving backwards - that can already have a certain content. For instance, "I am present in my body" and if I move backwards that can mean that I want to find a closer contact with my body. It is a great mistake with actors that they think the nearer they are to the audience the closer the contact - this is a mistake because if I come closer to my partner there is no contact at all - it is simply a bodily contact and

M. Chekhov

June 28, 1938

there is no real contact. If we draw away from each other the contact is stronger and stronger. The same as when looking at a picture-- it is not always because we are short-sighted that we try to get the distance between ourselves and the picture - it is a psychological necessity to establish the contact. Try to convey to the audience not only your presence, but the idea or the will impulse to get more and more contact with your bodies.

FEELING OF EASE:

Now we are trying to get certain qualities for our bodies which we can and must always use on the stage. It does not depend on the part or play - it belongs to our ability as actors. For instance, we must always have the ability to be easy in all things we do. If we are carrying a heavy stone it must be done artistically. It is not possible to create something without the feeling of ease because if I try realistically to carry a heavy stone on the stage, and I am not easy, it does not give an artistic impression - you will get the physiological impression of my red face which is not an artistic impression. If I want to give an artistic impression I must, as an artist, do it absolutely easily so that the audience will receive this artistic thing and not the heavy physiological impression.

We must get the ability to be always easy and for this we are trying to get what we call the feeling of ease. Try to fill you body with the feeling of ease - simply the psychological desire to get this feeling of ease which permeates our whole

M. Chekhov

June 28, 1938

body. Try to move slowly by getting this feeling of ease through your body. Try to fall down so you will feel your body is permeated with the feeling of ease - not one muscle is tense. Get up with the same feeling of ease. You must not feel the weight of your body - it is possible to exercise to the point where you feel quite a different weight in your body. Now, slowly lie down with the feeling of ease, as if your bodies were feathers, and without any noise. Now get up with the same feeling. Now, much quicker down and up with the same quality of ease.

FEELING OF FORM:

Now another quality which we must always have on the stage is the feeling of form. Whatever we do on the stage must have definite form because otherwise everything will be slurred and the psychology will be confused. If I move on the stage without a definite form, the audience cannot follow me because there is not form. I may be a genius but nobody will know. Everything must go to the audience with the feeling of form and feeling of ease. It can be a small movement but it must be a clear form.

Now, first the psychological feeling of form. We try always to permeate our body with the feeling of form or feeling of ease - we must not have it only in our psychology, but actually in our bodies. Our body must be quite different after we have filled it with the feeling of form or feeling of ease. It is a different kind of body we are trying to get.

2522
M. Chekhov

June 28, 1938

Try to experience your own body as a form which is given to you to be moved. Now, please move your hand with a definite feeling of form - up and down. You must be sure that you have a feeling of form and then when the content is given by the author or director, it will flow to the audience.

Will you now please do the following exercise. Combine the feeling of ease with relaxed bodies, and the feeling of form and try to express it by wrestling, without muscles. Be concentrated on two things: Our bodies are filled with the feeling of ease and the feeling of form. When I stop you it must be a picture - it must be beautiful. The feeling of form and the feeling of ease and other things, will always create beautiful results. Now, increase the tempo but try to be able to be easy and to have the feeling of form.

CONTACT - GROUP FEELING:

Another thing I would like to mention. We are trying to develop what we call feeling of contact. We consider our work, if I may use this word, "social" - we are never alone - we are dependent on each other in our work so we must develop certain artistic connections with each other, and if we do not develop this special kind of contact between us as a group, we will work always separately, egotistically, and it will disturb and spoil the work in general.

We must know each other, hear each other, feel each other, so that if one of us does something inspiring, all of us are

M. Chekhov

June 28, 1938

inspired by this work. If one wants to change the action, everybody must be ready to sacrifice his own individuality for a moment and follow, or if one of the members of the group feels inspired himself, he leads the group, being sure the group will follow him. To get this ability which cannot be rehearsed, as it is something which comes and goes, to get this ability to be always together in all possible situations is only possible if we develop a special kind of group feeling or contact.

OPEN THE HEART?

Will you please try to establish the contact by the means we have for achieving this aim. Try to do the psychological gesture as it were, which is: Try to open your heart to the whole group, without any sentimental feeling which will only disturb the work, simply and business-like, I open my heart because it is my business to invite everybody into my inner life, and by trying to exercise this opening of the heart without sentiment, through this simple inner gesture, we will get the ability to find always the contact with the audience so that the audience will inspire us, perhaps we shall be able to inspire the audience, but the group itself will produce the real "fresh air," when the hearts are open.

Now, by opening your hearts will you please to make another gesture, psychologically, of opening the heart and inviting the whole group. When we are doing this simple gesture, the one thing comes always upon us, a certain kind of stiffness

M. Chekhov

June 28, 1938

inevitably comes. By doing this exercise we are trying to overcome this stiffness - we are quite free in our bodies, in our spirits, in our minds - we are free enough to open our hearts. By trying to move with this inner gesture we are trying to overcome the next difficulty which comes - when we are standing still we can keep this gesture of opening our heart, but at the moment when we move it closes again. Gradually we come to the moment when we are able to keep our hearts open in the professional sense, through the whole play, through the whole rehearsal, and nothing can disturb us and stop our activity.

Now, I will give you some different tasks and will you do them at the same time, all together, without giving any signs to each other, with this open heart and group feeling. You must feel each other so strongly that if one has an idea the others must get it.

Exercise: Sit down all together, and get up all together. It must be the result of your group feeling - your contact.

Will you please take the following: Sitting down, getting up, standing still, running, walking, whispering, shouting, in different tempos but it must be with group feeling.

FEELING OF THE WHOLE:

If we have a play to rehearse, of course there are many things we have to do before we can start our rehearsal. One of the important things is to divide the play into sections, or units. In Stanislavsky's book An Actor Prepares he suggests

M. Chekhov

June 28, 1938

dividing the play into units. It is helpful in grasping the whole play as everything comes more or less in order, but it requires again development of certain abilities in us as actors - to divide the play into sections intellectually is very easy, but the task is to act these sections so that it will be an actor's production, and not only the director's intellectual suggestions.

We must get the ability to have all these sections in our souls so strongly that we are able to act without thinking of them - to act with our whole being, one section after another. To be part of the section, or to make the section part of ourselves, requires certain preparatory development and for this aim we use another exercise which we call feeling of the whole. You must get the ability to embrace with our psychology everything as a whole - one thing - in time and in space. This ability to embrace many things as one whole gives us the ability to use Stanislavsky's suggestion to divide the play into sections or units, and to act them one after another.

Try to get a feeling of the whole from very simple exercises. Move your right hand up and down and try to do it with the feeling of the whole. To develop the feeling of the whole we must know two things: What we are going to do, and secondly, after we have done the movement, or the sketch, or the whole performance we must be able to recall in our imagination what has been done - anticipation and retrospection. When you have done this movement see it in retrospect. - recall it. This

M. Chekhov

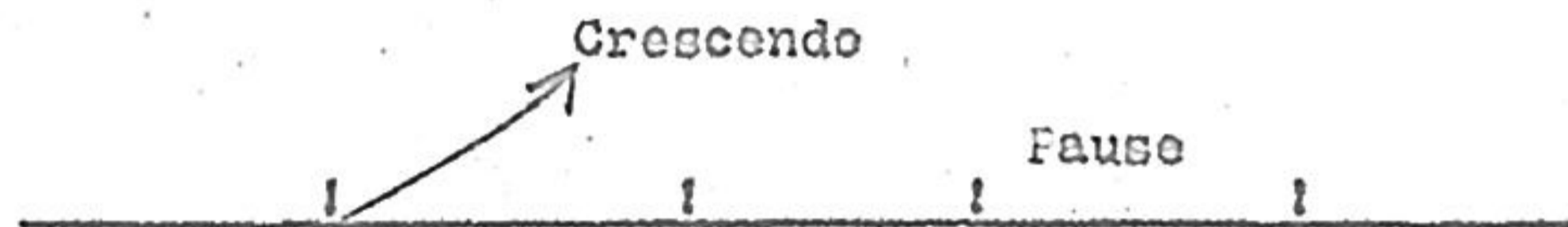
June 28, 1938

is one of the simplest exercises to develop the feeling of the whole.

Now a more complicated exercise: Lift the hands up and kneel down - drop the hands and get up. Anticipate or rehearse the movement - there are many themes together and we must try to embrace them as one. Anticipate - do it in your imagination. Keep this feeling of the whole continuously. When you have done it, recall it.

I will give you the sketch of what we have already done but I will divide it into sections and you must imagine it:

Theme: The Flood [The Deluge]



First Section: People come together - enemies - they hate each other - there is no human contact.

Second Section: Storm comes and changes their psychology because are to this very strong storm - we see these people attracted they attracted and led somewhere away from this room.

Third Section: Crescendo - disaster - dam bursts - this section is a very short one.

Fourth Section: After the disaster another section which is full absence. Pause.

Fifth Section: After this Pause when the world around is dead, people will find each other.

Enemies

Friends

M. Chekhov

June 28, 1938

IMPROVISATION:

Will you please take all these things in your imagination separately, as one whole thing, for your improvisation, and you must anticipate the whole story in general. Try to anticipate all these sections separately, then all together, and improvise. We must be able to feel each section as a whole. Try to imagine it with your whole actor's being - that means with your will, your feeling and your imagination.

Fly over the whole composition - anticipate it and then be sure that you have the feeling of the whole for each section separately, and for the whole performance.

We have used this theme for other aims but this is the first time we have done it for the feeling of the whole - it awakens more activity if it is used as an improvisation exercise.

Our bodies must be built soundly - we must be healthy - that means we must have a feeling that our bodies are healthy, so concentrate on the centre in your chests which is holding your whole body in its right proportion and by walking gives you the right figure, and everything in your body is at your disposal - you have your body in your hands, in your power.

Now, do the Actor's March with these qualities.