

Michael Chekhov

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PHYSICAL & PSYCHOLOGICAL MEANS OF
EXPRESSION
THE OBJECTIVE
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PHYSICAL & PSYCHOLOGICAL MEANS OF EXPRESSION:

The aim of our work is to merge our body with our spirit - our physical body and our psychological means. We are always trying to get the idea that because we move our body we have a certain psychological effect, and the opposite - if we have a certain psychological experience, we have at the same time a desire to move our body, and express this psychological condition. This is one of the principles of our Method, and we shall try some exercises to develop this ability to have our psychology as bodily expression, and to have bodily expression as our psychology, so that these two waves - bodily and psychological waves - will merge together and become one wave.

THE OBJECTIVE:

This is another thing for which we must use our whole bodies. The objective must live in every part of us; we must fill our bodies with the objective. If the body is not alive on the stage, if the hands and arms and legs are not alive, why must they be shown? There are two kinds of actors, one who has so many things inside him that the audience cannot follow him, because he is too inward - the other is so outward that the audience is unsatisfied, because there is

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no content. These are two extremes, but we must take the same objective with the whole being, the whole body.

There are some enemies of the actor, and one of them is to make us stiff at the moment when we concentrate on something. We know this enemy and we must always remember to send him away. When we are concentrated on something, and we have taken the objective, the enemy tries to make us stiff, but we must be quite free. Be sure that although your whole body is longing for the action of the objective, you are quite free.

Walk about before you fulfil the objective, to be quite sure that you are free in your body, but keep the objective. It must be an unbroken line. Now dance, but have the same objective with free body. Have the objective unfulfilled but living in you. When it is fulfilled then you feel quite differently - in every sense of the word your body is quite different when you have fulfilled the objective and your psychology as well. If, for the whole day, I am waiting to meet my friend in the evening I am doing everything - speaking, walking, talking, etc., but the meeting with my friend sits really everywhere in me. I am waiting for him with every part of my body, but I am not getting stiff and when I meet my friend, then I experience a different feeling both psychologically and bodily. My body and my spirit are quite different, and this is the same on the stage.

We know that sometimes when two people meet each

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other and greet each other, there is a certain reaction in the body and in the spirit - reaction. As actors we must do consciously what in our daily lives we do subconsciously. In our school work we must consciously make this reaction after we have fulfilled the objective. Be sure when you have fulfilled your objective - there is nothing more to do.

Let us take the scene when Hamlet says: "I loved thee not;" Take the objective, a very fine psychological objective, but try to experience and apply the same technique. The objective is to let her (Ophelia) know that I do not love her; a purely psychological objective, "I do not want to hurt," and a very fine one but take it with your whole body. This is the whole secret; primitive or psychological objectives must be taken by the whole body. Speak out of your whole body when fulfilling the objective.

You must be quite sure that your whole body is filled with this kind of activity which Stanislavsky calls the objective. Your whole body must be speaking, streaming, sending out this kind of activity. Leave the objective. Drop it. Now take it again with your whole being. When you fulfil your objective, you must be aware of the great difference in your whole artistic being. To have an objective or not to have it - two different persons. When this difference becomes quite clear to us we will be able to take the objective and fulfil it, but when we are vague about it we are not actually able to fulfil it because we are floundering. Some-

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times it is possible to know which part of your body is dead.

Being inspired by the objective which fills your whole being, take the position which would be most suitable for this scene. Never move on the stage out of nothing, always move out of something - that is the most precious thing on the stage. Now drop the objective, and be quite aware of the difference.

Now go back to the first exercise of staccato and legato, trying to fill your whole body with this kind of activity which we call staccato. Out of this staccato psychology, try to move and by moving try to create the psychology of Shakespeare. Now change at once to legato.

IMPROVISATION:

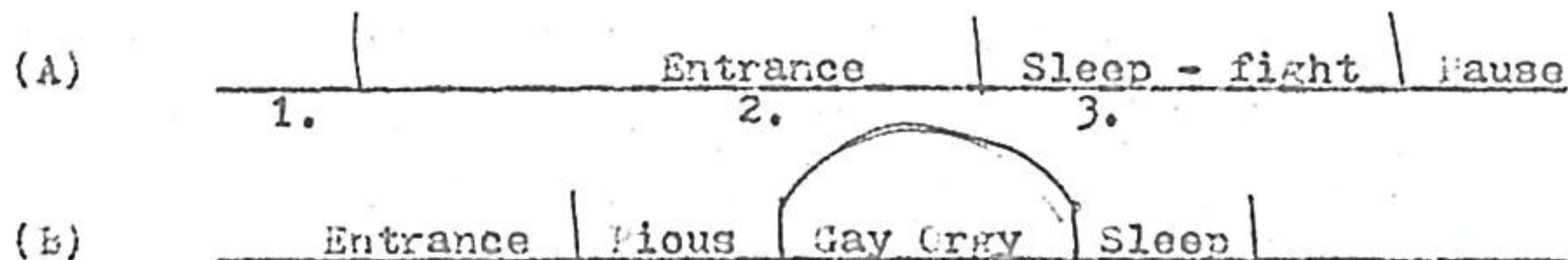
Let us improvise a scene on a certain theme which we have had before. Try to improvise on the theme, and you will get certain tasks. Improvise by trying to incorporate these tasks. The theme is that of "The Robbers." You will have certain hints, but you must be quite free; they must lead you and, therefore, the whole sketch must appear before us as one organic thing. (A) We will divide it into three parts; the first part will be a very short one - expectation, preparation, and accumulation of power for the coming action; the second part is a very big one when they receive their guests, fool them and rob them; the third part is short - it

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is the fight.

The stage must be full of radiation without your presence - the result of your action. When you leave the stage we will imagine that the curtain does not drop down, and we must imagine the empty stage and the radiation of it to the audience, because you have accumulated many powers on the stage. We will divide the second part into the entrance, then the pious atmosphere, then the transition to the gay atmosphere, and the climax with the orgy, (B).



GROUP FEELING = CONTACT:

It is important, in our method, that our body and our spirit are always merging, just so it is important for us to develop a special kind of group feeling, ensemble feeling, contact, because in our profession as actors we are compelled to create always together as a group. We cannot be like other artists who are able to sit home and write books or paint pictures, we are always together and all our mistakes, and all the stages in our creative process, are obvious to everyone.

There is only one way to escape the many difficulties which arise during improvisations when we are not able to prepare our part, but must go on and act - the only way is

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to develop a very strong group feeling. In that way everybody is helping everyone, and everyone feels the stage in which the other person is in. Everyone is inspired, we are inspiring each other, and we are one whole group, so that it must give us a certain substitution for the possibility of working alone - absolutely the whole world for ourselves as for instance the playwright, when he is writing, he is the whole world for himself. We must create and get the same feeling that the whole world is for the whole group. Let us do an exercise for contact.

Contact is again the question of the inner psychological technique; it has nothing to do with floundering or sentimentality; it is psychological; an inner technique, and quite a definite one which can be learned. For example, make some inner gestures which will help us to find each other as members of one big group. Open your hearts towards each other; without sentimentality but with a real concrete psychological gesture of opening the heart. Everyone is invited into your heart without sentimentality, without fear, simply invite each person to enter into your heart; a technical thing.

Then try to apply the feeling of the whole which we have exercises; through this feeling embrace the whole group as it is here at the present time. Try to escape a certain kind of stiffness which will come. Open your hearts, and with the feeling of the whole take the whole group - without any tension, either psychological or physical. Then try to realize

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the fact that, "I am present here", so that while having the group feeling we will not lose our individuality. Quite the opposite, we have to increase it. I am here, I am a strong person and therefore I am able to open my heart and invite everyone to enter because I am strong enough as an individual. Everyone must say to himself, I am present, I am strong enough to open my heart.

Now, without giving any sign to each other, out of this free connection as a group, please do some quite primitive things, trying to get the understanding of what the whole group wants to do, without any special signals, simply through this group feeling. First sit down and then get up, simply guessing when the group wants to sit down and when it wants to get up. Don't be afraid to open your heart because you are an individual - a group of strong "I am's". Now add to this different tempos. Now walk about, sit down, get up, and speak by whispering.

The meaning of this exercise is to develop a certain ability to be individual and to be attentive enough to each other and to develop such sensitiveness so that being on the stage we will never act without this. We will not act in our individual ways - this will never happen if we have awakened this feeling that we are creating together, we will inspire each other. The danger of course is to hypnotize or read each other's thoughts; this we deny absolutely because it has nothing to do with art. It must be developed

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in quite a sound way. Of course there are some who start the things and others follow, and this is what we are aiming at; to develop our senses so finely that each hint given by our friends must be an impulse for us to do something.

A certain sensitiveness will come and we will guess some things even before we see them. This is possible and desirable to a normal degree, but the moment it goes beyond that and becomes hypnotism, we deny it. It is not our way. The aim of our method is to take our natures and recreate them, then we will be able to act quite freely. Let us do the actor's march.