

Michael Chekhov

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OPEN CLASS

- PHYSICAL - PSYCHOLOGICAL MOMENTS
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We shall start with the simple exercises in movement - two kinds of movement which we call staccato and legato. We think that if we exercise these two extreme kinds of movement, we will develop by this means all possible kinds of movement which lie in between.

PHYSICAL - PSYCHOLOGICAL MOVEMENTS:

Please remember that all our exercises, body exercises, are at the same time psychological exercises, so that we never do our bodily exercises without the psychology which lies under them. Will you, by making this sharp staccato exercise, first take, as it were, the psychology of the sharp staccato movement. Take it in your imagination first. Now listen to the music without doing anything. Again with music, but in your imagination only - sharp staccato. Now in reality. Keep this atmosphere of staccato and even increase it in your imagination, and do it again.

Consider your bodies only as instruments for conveying to your audience your psychology of staccato, then your body will look and seem a clever and fine instrument. If you do it only physically, then it will become immediately



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mechanical, and dry, and even dead. The psychology of staccato life.

Now consider it as a little performance whereby you are acting by such means - everything for the audience, and nothing for us. Perform this simple thing - the psychology of performance.

Change immediately in your psychology the world of staccato into legato - everything soft - nothing of staccato. Do it first in your imagination. Now do it again and please concentrate on the power which is at your disposal - the power which comes out of you by the means of your body. Imagine when you are doing this exercise that you are stretching out much further than the physical body allows. When you go down, disappear down under the earth - when up, fly out over the earth. Rely on your psychological being, not upon your body.

Our imagination ought to be developed strongly enough so that we can change again to the staccato world in your imagination - definitely another world. Try to send out your power much further than your body - strong staccato.

Now, will you consider the following: When our muscles are tightened, they disturb us because they take the power from our psychology. Our muscles must be always free on the stage - always relaxed.

Will you please do the staccato movement - strong and sharp movements and with free bodies and relaxed muscles.



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First do it in your imagination without music. Give the impression of very sharp, staccato, powerful movements but without muscles.

#### FEELING OF EASE:

We will now touch on another exercise by means of which we try to develop certain qualities. The first quality we call the feeling of ease. Everything we do we try to do with the feeling of ease.

Will you please first move freely and quietly about but with the feeling of ease. Try to lose more and more the weight of your body. Now running, almost flying. Again the psychology is the most important part of the exercises. Keep this feeling of ease, without movement, psychologically - the body has lost its weight - not only free and relaxed muscles, but the psychology of ease. Try with this feeling of ease and relaxed muscles to wrestle with each other. Give the impression that the fight is very strong, but at the same time, being artists, you must be free.

#### FEELING OF BEAUTY:

Will you please add to this another quality which we call the feeling of beauty. We want to escape artificial beauty which is always repulsive. The feeling of beauty - you must get the desire for beauty - for psychological beauty and not for body beauty. Try to get this desire psychologically, then



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your bodies will become beautiful in the right way, in the real sense of this word. At the moment we are apt to confuse two things: psychological and outward expression.

Now, if you have this feeling of beauty, whenever I stop you, your groups will inevitably be beautiful. We must get the impression of beautiful sculpture. Now, in tremendous tempo, the same thing.

Will you please add another quality - what we call feeling of form - where we try to feel that everything has a form. Now do the exercise which I will suggest to you - feeling of ease - relaxed muscles - feeling of form - feeling of beauty.

Try, please, to feel the quality of this thing and be very much in connection with the weight and texture. Beauty - form - nothing on the ground - breathe properly - move and run about.

#### THE OBJECTIVE:

Another exercise, which we call the exercise in objectives. The objective on the stage was invented by Stanislavsky. It means that the will of the character on the stage must have certain and definite directions. To be able to direct the will of the character to certain aims requires training, and we shall show you one very simple exercise:

Will you please take the objective: To pick up this thing lying here - or to touch it. The secret is how to take



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the objective. The objective can be taken with our intellect - we can understand the problem immediately as it is very simple - but to be able to fulfill it we need something more, and this is what happens when a really gifted actor is on the stage. To fulfill such a simple objective as to pick up this thing, we have to permeate our whole being with this desire so that our intellect is not important in this case at all. The intellect has understood and finished with it - but how to fulfill it? This we must do with our legs, feet, hands, chest, shoulders - we must desire and wish to pick it up. To fill our body with the desire to do even such a simple thing, that means to take the objective. Try to realize whether each part of your body desires to pick it up - the arms, are they filled with this desire to pick it up? Are they different now that you have picked up this thing?

Now, please keep the objective, but relax your muscles. Keep this objective. Now walk about having this objective. Try to develop this ability to keep the objective through the whole performance if necessary. For hours we must be able to feel the presence of the objective in our bodies.

Drop it so that nothing remains in our body if you don't want it. To be able to take the objective needs certain training, but to drop the objective also requires technique. We know there have been certain types of actors on the stage, who, if they are acting well, cannot stop acting for hours



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because they are not able to drop the objective. But the more easily we are able to drop the objective and other things, the more able we are to take things. We must not be possessed by them but must govern them.

The Fishing Scene:

A fisherman is struggling with the waves. We are here, and we want to help him - he is far, far away. Now imagine actively the picture and take the objective properly, and then improvise whatever you like - the objective sits everywhere.

ENSEMBLE - GROUP FEELING - CONTACT:

Thus, we try to develop what we call ensemble or group feeling or contact. That means that we try not only to be attentive to everybody who is serving on the stage, but to develop this constant feeling not to be lost on the stage. To include our partners in our hearts, and to give to our partners so that the contact becomes like an instinct - a certain kind of "opening our hearts" to each other, and following the suggestions which do not belong to someone else, but to us. Our presence on the stage - we are present - we are creating a performance. This is very important because then we have really one aim for the whole group - the performance and not personal interests - our interests.

Will you try to do the gesture purely psychologically,



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to open your being to everyone who is here in this circle without strengthening your muscles - simple the real and very natural human gesture to "open oneself to other beings." There is always one danger, which is to become sentimental - we know this danger, and we try to escape this unnecessary psychological, and sometimes physical, smile. It is a very strong and difficult job to invite someone into your soul. Having a very strong "I am" and because I am strong, I am able to invite guests into my soul and then we escape this sentimental feeling.

Now will you please increase this psychological contact by taking each other's hands, and take this opportunity for increasing very seriously the act of communicating. Your brain must be quite free - it is quite a different thing. You must not think about our art, but do it. When you are lacking this contact, increase psychologically this openness and know that we have ensemble and group feeling, and I will give you simple directions. You must not give any sign to each other but follow this spirit of the group and what this spirit will suggest to you, you will do - to stay quiet, to walk or run, to speak, to laugh, to lie down, etc. The spirit of the group will lead you.

Now with the same group feeling as we have used in the simple form, and using this theme, we will try to build a group out of group feeling with music. A composition must be



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created out of group feeling and music. - by sensitivity to each other - what the body of one suggests to another. Now add style.

- Tragic
- Drama - human drama
- Comedy
- Circus

**FEELING OF TRUTH:**

The "truth" on the stage does not mean naturalism. The truth is the ability to justify everything. The real clown justifies all his stupid things truthfully. We try to develop the feeling of truth in every sense, but not naturalistically.

Try to do the following exercise: With imaginary bodies imagine, please, that the rope is lying here - now we try to take this rope and lift it and put it back. Here again is the importance of group feeling. Nothing will help you except your imagination and group feeling.

Now the exercise: Tug-of-war. Play this game truthfully so that the imaginary rope does not become elastic.

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