

# Translating The Inner Event To An Outer Expression

## ***Article on Working with Michael Chekhov's Acting Technique by Lenard Petit***

FOR AN ACTOR to have any effect on the audience the first prerequisite is that this actor be alive. This is a simple fact, a dead actor has absolutely no effect. What makes an actor alive? The first part of being alive is to really be alive, to have life within. If one were to compare a living body to a dead body one would become immediately aware of one thing. The living body is animated. Implicit in movement is a kind of life. Within the living body there appears to be a vital force which is clearly absent from the dead body. We could call this vital force an energy, a life energy which maintains the life in the living body, it allows all movements, voluntary and involuntary, to occur. The quality of the energy is a guide to its health. It is possible to look at a living body and see the quality of the energy within, and then to say quite simply that this organism is strong or weak. This energy exists, but until I can recognize it it has no form only force, a vital and unmistakable force. Without its influence the physical body has no support, it falls in fact, and immediately begins to decay. The second part about being alive as an actor is to be able to appear fresh and spontaneous, completely involved in the circumstances of the character as if for the first time, responding with fullness and truth. This, of course, is the aim of every acting technique. Michael Chekhov's technique says we will create the second part by working with the first part.

With a small amount of imagination applied we can begin to give this vital energy, spoken of in the first part, a form. Let us suppose that the form it takes is a kind of inner replica of the physical body.

The human being, has a body, and this body has a form, inside

this form one can imagine is another finer body composed of life energy. The physical body is capable of movement, this is the actor's means of expression, she moves in response to the world, she moves towards things, or away from them, with them, or against them. Sympathy and antipathy are the causes for her movements, also desire or will.

It is possible to imagine a movement and have an experience of this movement simultaneously. As soon as we have an experience then so much can be understood. It is very simple to do this. If I can say that I have a mirror of my body inside my physical body then it should follow that I can move it. Here we have to use our imagination and our will together. If I tell myself to move my arm up and down, and I do it, this is really a simple thing which requires nothing more than desire. It is an ordinary movement possessing nothing special nor unique, something all of us can do, something we do everyday. This is where we can begin, with the very ordinary. I can continue to practice this movement so that I am very familiar with it, then I can stop the movement all together and begin to imagine that I am simply moving my arm up and down. This particular imagination is not merely a visualization, it is a movement imagination, I intend to have the experience of this particular movement without moving my muscles. This inner movement is as much an event as the actual movement. But it belongs to the actor as a means to excite within him the evocative and provocative expressions required of good acting.

We can begin to work with ordinary movements devoid of psychological or emotional impact in order to exercise our ability to have a movement experience without moving the visible body, the purpose being to feel as if we are moving. Once this is understood, it becomes quite a pleasurable and free place to work, fanciful, limited only by the images the actor is able to find and put to use. This way of working is best suited to



Glad Day – Albion, William Blake

talented actors because the principal involved is a direct appeal to, and an enriching of the talent within the actor, giving rise to complex performances. By appealing to the talent and not the psychological history of the actor the technique opens possibilities that the limited historical organism has never experienced. It enables the actor to have a real-time inner experience right now. This we could call the inner event. What the audience perceives is the response to this inner event, they do not know the actual cause of the response, they believe it to be the circumstances surrounding the character. The talent of the actor allows a connection between two different occurrences (inner and outer) to take place because the talent of the actor is in a state of giving to the audience. It is incumbent upon the actor to know the outer circumstances surrounding the character very well, during the rehearsal process different inner movements are being experimented with and laid down as sign posts or anchors for the performance. In performance the concentration is heightened, the actor really appears to be living freshly, spontaneously, completely involved in the circumstances of the character as if for the first time, responding with fullness and truth. Yet it is the image that is moving the actor night after night. The inner event, generated by the image, causes certain impulses to pass through the body of the actor. Following and/or resisting these impulses creates the behavior of the character, the outer expression of the actor.

This basic operating principle, the inner event translated to the outer expression is the key to understanding the technique of Michael Chekhov. The training is always pointing to this ability of making an identification with an image, and it continually confirms that movement is essential to living things. What is alive is never fixed in space, feelings, will, and thoughts are human functions that are in motion. Movement in space is subject to laws and principals, and all of Chekhov's exercises concern themselves with moving the body in space in order to absorb psychological content from the movement itself. In the training one receives direct knowledge into the body by practicing psycho-physical movements which then are used quite consciously at a later time, during rehearsal and if need be in performance as well.

This work requires good listening skills. One works to become reacquainted with natural physical movements which correspond to psychological conditions, movements which we use everyday, but we are not conscious of them. We remain unconscious of them because they are not perceptible to the eye, but they can be felt if we listen for them with different ears. These are movements of the inner body which are followed by reactions of the outer body. It is a natural process made clear and easy to reproduce through practice. Speaking to a group of actors in New York in 1941 Michael Chekhov said, " The actor in the future must not only find another attitude towards his physical body and voice. The actor must enlarge himself in a very concrete way even to having a very different feeling in space. His kind of thinking must be different, his feelings must be of a different kind, his feeling of his body and voice all must be enlarged."

Through psycho-physical exercise we seek to illuminate the human experience for ourselves. We also come to understand movement in an objective way, free from the personality. It is the individual within the human body we work to wake up, and this is where the actor's talent resides, it does not live in the personality. Something as powerful and unique as talent lives in a larger place within the talented artist. It is with the individuality that we uniquely express ourselves as artists. We are able to transcend the personal for the universal, and from the universal make our way back to the particular of the character. What we are able to draw upon comes from both human experience and the creative imagination.

It is essentially transpersonal and draws from a collective archetypal source. By working with movement we very quickly begin to distinguish real and useful differences between movements whose directions are up or down, forward or backward, expanding or contracting because these directions are governed by laws and the human organism which is alive and consequently in motion is subject to these basic laws. It is not mysterious, it is simple and experiential. To learn the technique requires the actor to have an experience. If there is no experience then what to work for becomes clear, and if there is an experience then it must become a repeatable one so that it can be stored and called upon when needed. This is what is meant by the term psycho-physical acting technique. This is a practical approach when we can remember that the inner event is translated to the outer expression. •2002

# The Archetype is the Will Force of the Character

*Article on Working with Michael Chekhov's Acting Technique by Lenard Petit*



Restless Spirit, William Blake

The dictionary defines archetype as the prototype, the type from which all types derive. One could say that it is the biggest possible picture of something which contains smaller ideas revolving within it. A clear example would be the idea of the cat as archetype. It is very easy to see that a lion, a tiger, a leopard, and a lynx are each different animals, but there is no denying that all are cats. The archetype of cat is able to hold all of them collectively while not diminishing the fact that each is at the same time individual. If we were studying these animals it would make our work a bit easier to view them first as cats then as lions, tigers, leopards, and lynxes.

The pioneering psychologist Carl Jung had very much to say about the impact that archetypes as collective images have on the human psyche. His work and the work of his followers is dense and illuminating. Suffice it to say that these specific images have found their way into the lives of human beings across different

cultures. The images reside within us in a place Jung has named the collective unconscious. Cultural history has poured itself into this collective unconscious, it is a region within the human psyche that is active, yet hardly in our conscious control.

The ideas about acting developed by Michael Chekhov rely very heavily on this idea of collective energies. We find, through exercise and practice, that we can expect specific responses to certain images. If a room full of actors is asked to create a large movement of the physical body that could express the archetype of the hero clearly and succinctly, we would see that virtually everyone in the room will move more or less in the same way. Heroes are everywhere in history, in all the great literature, from David slaying Goliath, to Luke Skywalker defeating the evil Empire. This image lives in us, and we do respond to it by moving the body. The direction that the body is compelled to move in is of particular importance to us. In the room of actors moving we will see that the actual gestures created by the actors will differ from each other, this having very much to do with the individual making the movement, but all of these movements will be in a forward and upward direction because this is a collective response to the energy of this archetype. The direction the movement wants to go in holds the useful information for the actor, because he can rely on it as a living truth. If I move in this direction there is information for me to take and use, and also, if I witness the movement as a spectator I understand something about what is going on. This understanding is not conscious, it is felt.

When looking at Michael Chekhov's system one is struck by its simplicity, its lack of intellectual or analytical substance. We see a few simple multifunctional tools supported by clear principles. This is so because he teaches us to use larger trans-personal ideas as source material to build our work upon. When we address the archetypes, they lead us to what is called the Psychological Gesture.

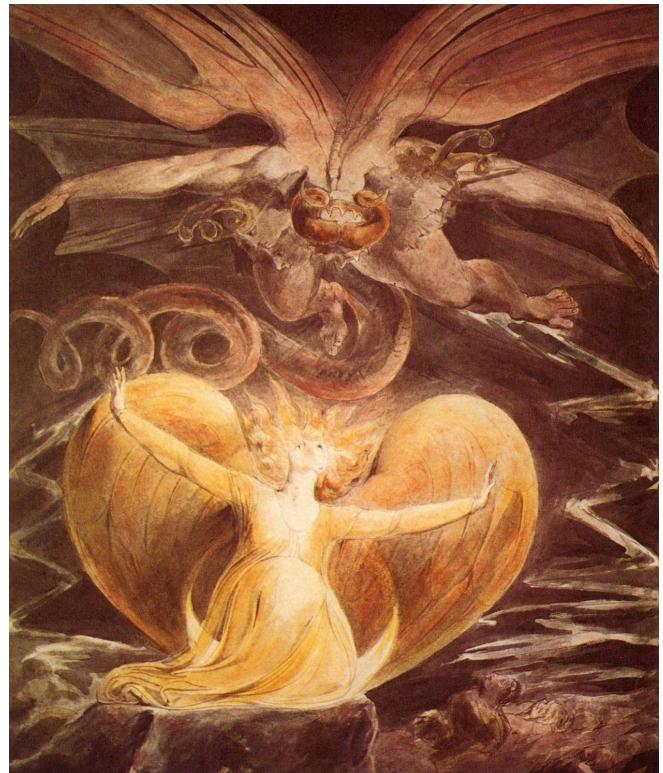
The technique is not a linear A to B process. We do not have to start at the beginning because the beginning and the end are the same, namely, inspired acting. This is what he was seeking in developing it. Everything in it adds up to One, each piece of it stands alone, and at that same time touches all the other pieces. When it is taken up by a talented actor, one particular tool begins to make connections with other tools that have been engaged during rehearsals. It's a matter of applied energy traveling on different circuits, each vibrating in sympathy with one source. Using archetypes as dynamic vibrating energies, our task is to set up a condition within ourselves so that we can have sympathetic vibrations to them. These are honestly felt things by the actor, real food for artistic self expression.

In Chekhov's own words: "All you experience in the course of your life, all you observe and think, all that makes you happy or unhappy, all your regrets or satisfactions, all your love or hate, all you long for or avoid, all your achievements and failures, all you brought with you into this life at birth, your temperament, abilities, inclinations etc., all are part of the region of your so called subconscious depths. There being forgotten by you, or never known to you they undergo the process of being purified of all egotism. They become feelings per se. Thus purged and transformed, they become part of the material from which your Individuality creates the psychology, the illusory "soul" of the character." (To The Actor)

The archetypes are how the unconscious can communicate to the conscious, and the body is the medium of this communication. We can also take the process in reverse; by making a psychological gesture that corresponds to an archetype we can touch the vibration within the unconscious resulting in an excitation of the conscious. This is essentially Michael Chekhov acting technique.

To work on movement in this way has a few benefits: It leads the actor towards making very defined and delineated movements which are aesthetically pleasing to watch and to execute, it also encourages a feeling for form, but most importantly it trains us to move what Chekhov calls the inner gesture which is the ultimate aim of the technique. The psychological gesture must in the end become an inner gesture. It is found with the physical body, it corresponds to the archetype and is archetypal in its form, but this gesture is never shown to the public. It must become an inner gesture, an archetypal image that is in Chekhov's words, "a crystallization of the will forces of the character."

To find the correct archetype as a model for the character is very simple, it requires neither analysis nor speculation. We must read the play and make a list of the deeds done by the character in the course of the play. It is through what has been accomplished that we can understand an individual. Aristotle said that a man is the sum total of his actions. When we speak of actions here we must not confuse them with Stanislavsky's objective, or the actions played by the actor to achieve the objective, nor his idea of physical actions; we must stick to the facts given by the author within the finite world of the play. We can call them deeds done. If we make a list of these deeds we will be able to draw a defining conclusion about the character, it is a thread connecting these deeds one to the other, and this thread is the archetype.



Great Red Dragon and Woman Clothed with the Sun, W. Blake

Using this approach let us now find Romeo's archetype from Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet. The immediate response to the question of Romeo's archetype invariably produces the image of the lover. This could perhaps work; it is after all a play about two young lovers, and young actors who see both Romeo and Juliet as the quintessential lovers more often than not play it that way. A gathering of the facts will easily illuminate some different choices. Here is the chronology of Romeo's deeds:

He speaks of his special love for Rosalind.  
He crashes a party at the Capulets, knowing it could be trouble.  
He sees a girl there whom he must have. (So much for the love of Rosalind)  
He finds out that this girl is a Capulet.  
He climbs over the wall of a house where he should not be.  
He sneaks up to the balcony to propose love to her, knowing it could be trouble.  
He falls desperately in love.  
He receives Juliet's nurse and reassures her that his intentions are honorable.  
He arranges a secret wedding.  
He makes love to her.  
He marries her.  
He rashly kills Tybalt as a result of Mercutio's fatal wound.  
He runs away.  
He makes attempts to communicate to his wife.  
He sneaks back to Verona, a place he has been banished from.  
He discovers the apparently dead Juliet in her grave.  
He kills himself.

With this list of deeds it is easy to see that the dominant quality of Romeo's actions is impetuosity. He acts first and thinks later. We must now begin the simple line of questioning which is "what kind of person does these things" or who does these things? The answer is not Romeo. We are looking for an archetype, this image should appear at the end of the search, it must be at the top of the ladder, so to speak, and every smaller answer must be asked the same question. Who is impetuous? A child could be considered impetuous, but the archetypal child is altogether too general here, it does not create a spark. One would have to qualify that answer with something like the only child, or the spoiled child, the orphan child, the lost child, the prince or princess etc., but none of these does those deeds. Clearly this line goes nowhere for Romeo so we leave it and return to the basic question. Who is impetuous? A fool is also impetuous, a fool is someone who would do the deeds in the list, and a fool is indeed an archetype, it is an image that vibrates within all of us, and it can create a spark for Romeo. This is enough to begin, a little spark that can be brought to a flame.

Chekhov did not recommend that the actor present the archetype of the fool and call that Romeo. The archetype has too much power as an image and is not a clearly defined character, in fact actors presenting only archetypes in their performance appear strong but blurry, general, and quickly lose interest for us because nothing can unfold, it is merely force thrown out. It can be astonishing for a short duration, and can perhaps be useful in a stylistic or formalistic fashion. It is not the thing itself that interests us, but the type of will force it has. This is what we use to build Shakespeare's Romeo upon because it is the energy behind the sum total of his deeds. These are the things that a fool does and they are also the things that Romeo does. The fool is the thread one can draw through all the deeds. This approach to seizing the essence of the character is quick and direct; it is, as Chekhov says, "the first clear bell we ring for the character". This image must be seen as a vital food for the actor to feed upon during rehearsals. The actor does not enter the stage screaming the archetype, rather he feeds upon it and easily reflects it in all his behavior. It could also be called the spine of the character. Through rehearsal it becomes known directly into the body because the body creates the psychological

gesture for the archetype thereby experiencing directly the vibration of this energy. The impulses that are stirred up in the actor are now connected to the will of the fool, and this is the foundation on which the character of Romeo is built.

The work of the actor and the director is an interpretive art; suggesting the fool as Romeo's archetype in no way absolutely defines him for every production of this play. This is only one actor's choice, one possibility. As was said above he could be played as a lover, he could also be played as a gambler or even a rebel. I have merely tried to illuminate a process. The really wonderful thing about working with the archetype is that the creative individuality of the actor is given something it can sink its teeth into. Each actor will respond to his own image, and each actor will know when she has arrived at the image that will serve her. Some clear confirmation will present itself as if to say "this is the image to work with." A kind of bell will sound within. The real purpose of working with the archetype is to find a synthesis of all the disparate elements before us. Something must hold it all together, one guiding principle, one feeling of the whole that makes it possible to act.

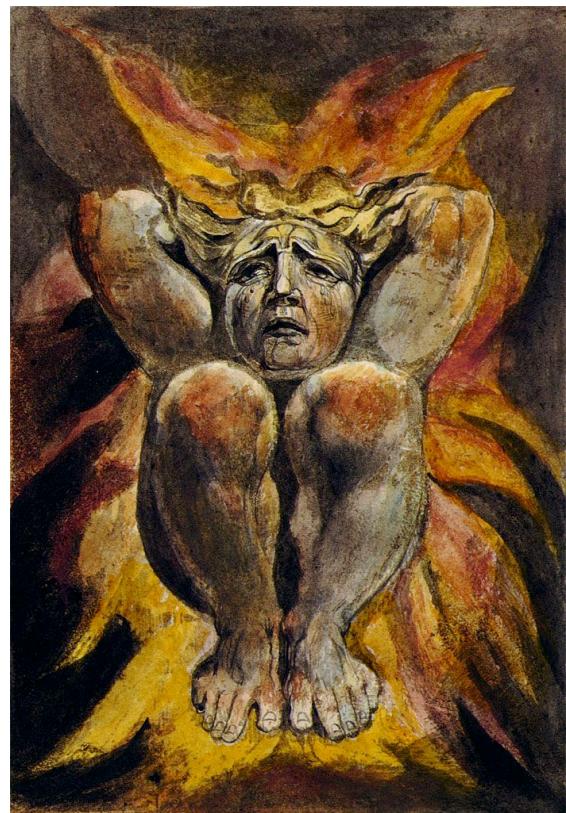
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## Sensation is the Open Door to an Actor's Feelings

### **Article on Working with Michael Chekhov's Acting Technique by Lenard Petit**

We have all touched fire before and we have been burned by it, so we do not have to think about how to behave when handling it. Every experience we have ever had has been witnessed and felt by the body. The body has reacted to it and the body has also recorded it. If we seek the experience as a sensation which is something felt by the body, as opposed to a memory of a specific event, then we begin to discover that these sensations are tied together, all of our sorrows having been forgotten by our conscious selves but never forgotten by the body are alive as sensation. The specifics of any past event need not be so important to us. What we find is that the response to the event is there and can be felt again, triggered by the inner movements we made when we first experienced this event. We also discover that all the sensations that produced a particular reaction in us live together within us. All joys, all fears, all jealousies, all regrets, all loves, all pleasures, all doubts, all sorrows and all hopes. They have accumulated each in his own house, each house living within us as archetypes. I, the actor, can summon them.

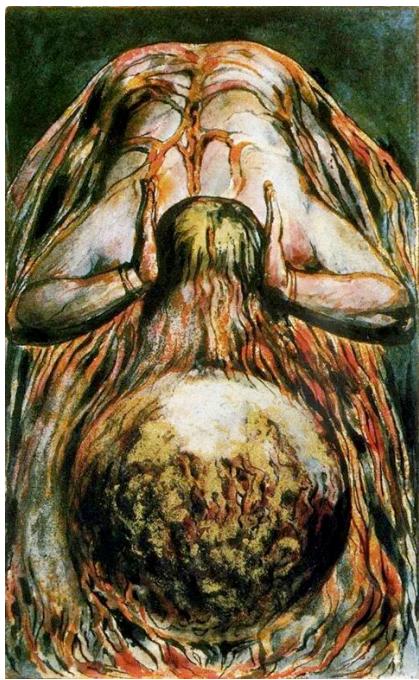
A curious thing about Michael Chekhov's investigations is that they invariably yield a limited choice of possibilities. But soon we begin to understand that with the proper application these few choices can exponentially grow into a multitude. A clear example of what I am talking about are these sensations. Soon before his death Chekhov began to experiment with sensations as archetypes. He discovered that there are three primary archetypal sensations. The first sensation, floating, holds all the positive feelings we might experience. This physical sensation is essentially our ability to move upward. It is revealed in our language in more idioms than one, but one will suffice here. We speak of our spirits being lifted etc. Sensations of joy, pride, love, freedom, hope, etc. move in an upward



The Poet Los Consumed, William Blake

direction, and we experience them as a kind of floating up. The second sensation, falling, holds all negative feelings we might experience. We speak of being down in the dumps, falling into despair etc. Sensations of sorrow, doubt, confusion, panic , despair, etc. move in a downward direction and we experience them as some kind of fall. The third archetypal sensation, balancing (or seeking the equilibrium) holds the transitory sensations of understanding and revelation which follow from the other two. These moments of balance are when we gather all of our forces to keep our feet on the ground, as it were, to not fall, to not float away. It is so easy to fall, so easy to float off, but it requires much work to stay balanced and awake and this has its accompanying sensations of calm, collected reserve, power, sobriety, etc.

Obviously we cannot literally float away we have gravity to keep us on the earth, nor are we continually falling down just to get up again, we are actually in a kind of numb physical balance. These actions of floating and falling can be looked at as purely psychological things which can be translated into physical understandings or in this case physical sensations, then they become very dynamic realities for the actor to work with. The sensations are felt by the body, within the body they correspond to inner movements, or movement impulses. Gymnasts and acrobats can learn to fall gracefully and effortlessly without any panic, this is their work and we applaud them for this ability, but any normal person who has the slightest bit of a fall or even near fall will receive an instant and definite panic that is experienced in the pit of the stomach. Just recall a time when you went to sit down and judged the chair to be a certain distance beneath you, then gave into the sitting only to discover that you had miscalculated that distance by just a few centimeters. The resulting sensation in the pit of your stomach is enough to cause you to let out a cry or a gasp of fear which always results in a little laugh once your buttocks finds the chair and your equilibrium is restored. This fall of a few centimeters is a dynamic experience, it is in fact a real event that can be useful to the actor. There is also the moment of desperation when we are awakened from a dream in which we have begun to fall. This is very primitive business, but nonetheless very human, it all ends however once the equilibrium is restored.



From the Book of Urizen, W. Blake

So the work becomes how can I sustain a psychological fall, how can I sustain a real panic that wants to resolve itself in balance? Michael Chekhov's approach always comes back to the imagination, so to speak about a sustained fall here we must look at it as an imaginative fall, a fall that begins in the imagination but is felt, and doesn't end until the actor ends it. It isn't actually the fall that interests us but the activity of falling. When the human body is falling there is an accompanying sensation. Chekhov said that the door to feelings is opened through sensation. The process is a clear one. We know as actors that we cannot appeal to the emotions because we risk coming up with nothing but tension. We hope for the best and trust in inspiration. It is through our feelings that we communicate, Chekhov said the feelings are the language of the actor.

Actors come to believe that if they think sad thoughts they will become sad. But what is in fact happening to us as humans is that we are thinking sad thoughts because we are sad. And that it is our bodies and the sensation of sadness within the body that is leading us to have sad thoughts. We fail to notice that we are sad in our hands and shoulders and legs, that our movements are heavy, and that we are having sensations that are downward moving. This is always true and we can recreate these downward movements with our imaginations. Once the sensation begins the natural flow of events comes unimpeded, so that the sensation awakens the feeling and the feelings lead us to the emotion which is the final outer thing seen by the audience.

It follows then that the opposite is true of upward movements and their accompanying sensations. In the imagination it is possible to float up, to sustain this floating up and to experience the body or parts of it moving in an upward direction. The sensations that follow are ones of pleasure, joy, victory, or freedom.

The balancing sensation is a bit more elusive because we take for granted our perpetual state of equilibrium, and only experience the sensation of seeking the equilibrium in order to prevent a fall. In training we bring ourselves to the point of falling whereupon we catch ourselves almost as if we were a tightrope walker who must use all his powers to stop himself from plunging to his death. This is a very powerful sensation, a moment of revelation and strength. With practice this sensation can be sustained and we can prolong the feeling and use it as we need it. These three primary sensations work on the vertical line.

The horizontal line, with its directions forward and back, is equally powerful. The sensation of fear is backward moving, a retreat or flight mechanism that is quite easy to engage, and produces a curious effect of doubt, timidity, apprehension, concern, etc.

The forward moving sensation is one of a very active and sure will, confident, expectant, assured, resolute etc.

The directions of purely right and purely left are subtle in their psychological meanings. If, however, we look at these directions as working simultaneously, then something very interesting begins to occur. We can experience ourselves either growing or shrinking. This expansion and contraction is full of possibilities, and is at the very bottom of Chekhov's technique. It is possible to form these principles into gestures, or to experience them as sensations ,also as inner movements.

Chekhov technique is always striving to lead the actor to an objective understanding of the human condition. These things spoken of here are universally human, they belong to all of us, and when we contact them we have an immediate affinity for them because we recognize them. But more importantly when the audience watches an actor engaged with physical sensations they experience a sympathetic response. They say they were moved by the performance because something in them was in fact moving. If they took the time to analyze what was going on they would find that the idiom they just used was simply true.

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## The Objective and the Psychological Gesture

### ***Article on Michael Chekhov's contributions to Stanislavsky's Objective by Lenard Petit***

The all important contribution Stanislavsky made to the art of acting was his idea of the objective, It is a way to form the work and this helps the actor to sustain the performance over time because it is a solid footing, clear and energetic. This dramatic action allows the actor to speak his text and interact with others in a way that is necessarily consistent with the conflict presented. Without it the text of the author would be merely written words spoken aloud. Knowing how we are active in the scene is a real concern for every actor. We can define what it is with words, verbs, strong verbs. We can have these verbs in our minds and this will give us a guide to stay on course with the intentions of the playwright.

We can also translate these verbs into archetypal statements of action which will lead us to gestures, and these gestures can become our energy source, connecting us to the objective. Being in the body these forms, Michael Chekhov called Psychological Gestures, come to the actor directly as knowledge. They are a physical understanding of the action. Impulses to satisfy this action surge through the body. The actor experiences them as a real bidding to do the necessary action, leaving the intellect out of the effort. The inner (psychological ) gesture is the spark to the fire of life on stage. When we talk about action , we are talking about the will which is centered low in the body. Student actors are often led to action by way of the intellect which is centered quite high in the body. This thinking often causes some difficulty, some faltering and

floundering. Action is not the thinking of the character, it is the will of the character taking on a form. What am I doing is a question we inevitably come to as actors, it leads us to the form. What I am doing must be very specific, the more specific the better. The gesture I seek for this action becomes alive for me when I can find what the essence of that action is. If, for example, I determine that my action in the scene is to seduce the other, then I must find a gesture that is all about seduction. In seeking it I will find that the gesture has something to do with a pulling in toward me. I am seducing so that I can have the other come to me for whatever reason is in the story. When this happens then I have (taken) the other and essentially this is what is going on, this business of taking in a very special way which is seduction. "I Take" could be called an archetypal action because it holds the smaller actions of seducing or spying or plundering or seizing or stealing etc. What do I want? This is how I find the objective. This is helpful for the intellectual pursuit of finding it. For an actor playing Richard III it might sound something like this: "I want to be king". This is okay, it has started to wake up something in the actor. In the end it will become more important to say How do I become king. Then it is not about wanting something ,but about doing something. Richard becomes king by murdering, by lying, by stealing, by seducing, and by seizing power. He is all the time taking in one form or another, with one quality or another. If the actor finds the gesture for, "I take", and works with it in many ways, it will take him far. The simplicity of the choice helps the actor to explore its various potentials and range. The exploration is through quality. To take slowly and sneakily is very different than to take explosively, which is different again from taking grandly. These qualities added to the gesture supply the specific of each moment of taking, all the while the actor is involved with one simple gesture. The gesture opens within the actor a steady stream of taking, literally streams of taking are generating impulses to fulfill the action. The body comes alive in new and unexpected ways, and the actor engages us because he becomes

fascinating. This is the real gift of the performing artist. To sustain a condition of fascination for the audience. We who work in the theater are always fascinated by the potential of Shakespeare but rarely are we fascinated by the actor. Yes, it is always our hope that we will be, but more often it is just the play that holds us, the language, the structure, the twists and turns of plot, the author's form. We are often let down by the actor because he is bogged down in text and is living in his head and not his body. When we look at action in an archetypal way we find that there are not so many actions. Everything begins with wanting and then leads to something else .Yet "I Want" is itself an archetypal statement of action. There is a lovely gesture that clearly speaks this, a primitive gesture that wakes up in us these streams of wanting. This Gesture is likely the very first gesture we make. It is a gesture made by the infant who sits alone and calls out to the mother, not with words, but with the voice and body. It says "I want comfort, I want food, I want yo". We all know this gesture , we have all made it. And if you make this gesture now you can still feel the streams of wanting moving through your body. It bids you into action.. As we develop and become more sophisticated we wrestle with words, concepts, and ideas. We easily confuse one thing with another, so many things have names now and we must remember them all. But when we look to the



From the Book of Urizen,, William Blake

archetypal then things become simpler, yet no less profound.. Our primitive needs and wishes do not disappear from us, they stay within the body and we are in a direct yet unconscious contact with them. This work has enthralled me for sometime and I have looked long and hard at it. What I have discovered is this: There are six statements of action which could be called archetypal, and all other actions or objectives we would want to play as actors are based in I Want---I Reject, I Give---I Take, I Hold My Ground---I Yield. These will suffice. Because they are archetypal they hold so many things within them. Qualities are infinite, and the quality we use in doing the gesture will always change the archetypal to the specific. Kissing and punching which seem to be opposite actions are truly both giving. One of them is tender and soft, the other is violent and hard. The specific gestures themselves may differ as well, but giving is essentially something which is coming from me and going to you. It is best to be as specific as one can be. It will not do to simply say "I Give" if what I intend to do is to cheer you up. This specific choice needs to be settled first. The next question is HOW can this happen? If I begin to talk about this out loud and really determine how this can be done, and while I am talking about it I use my hands to help me, I will find that I unconsciously begin to make gestures with my hands which are very much about giving. Now I know that this is how it is done, and I can find the Psychological Gesture of "I Give" with its light quality and upward direction which will satisfy the action of cheering you up. My mind is satisfied, so I no longer have to think about it . But better than that this gesture of Giving begins to wake up impulses in the body which help me to lift you out of your doldrums or cheer you up.

We work with five gestures as archetypes, and for training purposes these five are rich. Gestures of Pushing, Pulling, Lifting, Throwing, and Tearing are a means of realizing the six statements of action. There are six directions to exercise them in: forward, backward, up, down ,left, and right, and there is different information from each of these directions. As stated above there are an infinite number of qualities to work with. Qualities are merely adverbs., Of course, this can become tricky business. In the beginning students are cautioned to work with qualities that that can easily be imagined as a way to move. Qualities like tenderly, slowly, quickly, lightly, heavily, quietly, carefully, carelessly, sneakily, explosively, sluggishly etc.

Emotional words like angrily are less affective because actors can fool themselves into believing they are moving violently, when in fact they have become violent and start moving. The former is full of artistic potential while the latter can become a hazard for the other actors on stage.

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These essays are excerpted from a book entitled [The Michael Chekhov Handbook: For The Actor](#) published by Routledge Press on the practical application of Michael Chekhov's Acting Technique by Lenard Petit. Look for it in bookstores and online. Mr. Petit is the Artistic Director of the Michael Chekhov Acting Studio in New York City.

