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THE ACTOR'S BODY

*The body of an actor can be
either his best friend, or
his worst enemy.*

MARCUS AURELIUS

PHYSICAL-PSYCHOLOGICAL EXERCISES

There are no purely physical exercises in our method. These would be useless, since our primary aim is to penetrate all of the parts of the body with fine psychological vibrations. This process makes the physical body more and more sensitive in its ability to receive our inner impulses and to convey them expressively to the audience from the stage. Our bodily exercises, therefore, are at the same time psychological ones, and the actor who wishes to get the right results from the suggested exercises must remember this while working on them.

*IMAGINARY CENTER IN THE CHEST***EXERCISE 22.**

Imagine a Center in your chest from which living impulses are sent out into your arms, hands, legs, and feet. Start to move, imagining that the impulse to form the movement comes from this Center. Feel the aesthetic satisfaction that arises in your body. Remember not to move your arms from the shoulders and elbows or your legs from your hips and knees. Let the impulse of the movements from the Center in your chest break through these points where they may have been arrested before. The movements in the beginning must be simple ones, for example, raising and lowering the arms, taking a few steps forward and backward, sitting and rising.

Now try to realize that your arms and legs themselves start in the center of your chest. Walk through the room. The “Center” will lead you forward so the body cannot drag itself along. In the same manner move to the right, to the left, and backward. Gradually you will find yourself more powerful and harmonious. Thus you will learn to appreciate your body anew.

Complete some simple business, such as moving some objects, cleaning the room, or packing a suitcase. Keep your attention focused on the Center until you become accustomed to it and get its impulses without thinking of it. In addition, while moving on the stage ever so slightly—perhaps only your finger moves—you will feel intense streams of power coming from your chest to your finger.

*MOLDING MOVEMENTS***EXERCISE 23.**

Make abstract movements with your hands, arms, legs, and feet, and finally, with your whole body. Your task is to fulfill all these movements with inner power and awakened activity, so that you will feel as if you mold the air, or even a thicker, heavier substance, around your body. Each movement must leave an outline in your surroundings. Muscular tension is not necessary. The meaning lies in the psychological power of Molding, of overcoming the imaginary resistance and in giving the imaginary substance a definite form. The movements must be broad, full, and clearly differentiated from one another. Vague and indefinite movements have no place in this exercise. Do the movements in different tempos, with different intensities; even in slow and Molding movements, the power and awakened activity must not slip away from your consciousness.

Drop the idea of Molding the air around you. Complete any business, as was suggested, and let the Molding character in your movements live in you inwardly by itself, without your special attention to it. Create some simple improvisations.

*FLOWING MOVEMENTS***EXERCISE 24.**

The second kind of movement is a Flowing one, in which every movement is slurred into another in an unbroken line. Although they must be well shaped, these movements must have neither a beginning nor an end, but must flow into one another organically. Here it is also necessary to have activity and a certain

power, but the character of the movement must be wavelike, growing and subsiding. Change the tempo. The element of air must be felt around you, as if it were the supporting surface of a wave. Use the same kind of simple movements as in previous exercises and then begin your improvisations.

FLYING MOVEMENTS

EXERCISE 25.

The third kind of movement we call Flying movements. While making these movements you must imagine that each of them continues in space indefinitely, flies away from you, departing from your physical body. Imagine also that your whole body has the tendency to lift itself from the ground. Such movements will arouse in you a desire to sustain them, as though to give them the time to fly away into space. Link one movement to the next continuously and freely, although not so slurred as in the Flowing exercise. Change the tempo. Your activity and inner power in this exercise will naturally take on a special character, but still they must be present to protect you from “sweetness” and sentimental enfeeblement. The element of air, in this exercise, must be experienced as one that stirs and urges. Start simple improvisations.

RADIATING MOVEMENTS

EXERCISE 26.

The last movement exercise has to do with Radiating movements. Imagine that invisible rays stream from your movements into space, in the direction of the

movement itself. Send out these rays from your chest, arms and hands, from your whole body at once, in the direction in which you have moved. The desire to radiate will teach you gradually what kind of movements are more suitable for this aim. Some of them will take on a staccato character, some will be more legato, others will follow one after the other in unbroken succession. In this exercise you will try to radiate and send out the inner activity during your movements. Avoid mistaking physical tension for radiation. Change the tempo. Air filled with radiant light is the element of this exercise.

EXERCISE 27.

After you have assumed the specific characters of these movements, proceed to a simple improvisation or sketch. Each time, you and your partners must set yourselves a definite task. You must decide which kind of movement you will use in the improvisation. Then, whatever you do must be permeated with one of the four kinds of movement. Later in the improvisation, choose spontaneously the type of movement most suitable for the situation.

The result of such exercises will be that you will gradually feel yourself inwardly richer and outwardly freer. In all of these four kinds of movements, the "Center" in the chest must be experienced as an active part of the body.

Those acquainted with Rudolf Steiner's Eurythmy and his Speech-Formation will easily recognize in the four suggested movements four elements: earth, water, air, fire, which play such an important part in Steiner's method of artistic education. A thorough knowledge of these elements, as they were described and used by Rudolf Steiner, will give the actor invaluable help.

In addition to Molding, Flowing, Flying, and Radiating, the actor should adopt three more psychological Qualities in order to make his body more artistic, flexible, and expressive on the stage. All of those Qualities can be found expressed in great pieces of art.

FEELING OF EASE

The first Quality can be characterized as one of lightness and ease. Look, for instance, at such massive creations as Rodin's "The Thinker," Michelangelo's "Moses," late Gothic architecture, or any other creation of this standard. You will see that the weight has gone, as it were, from these creations, the material has been overcome, and they are permeated with ease and lightness, which also fills us and makes us lighter. We can even say that the "weight" of such great creations is different from our usual perception of it. This is one of the elements of the so-called "uplifting" impressions of great art. Undoubtedly the artist must have this ability to express things in a light and easy way, in his psychological and physical makeup. An actor needs this perhaps more than any other artist. His material is his own body, and in accordance with his profession he uses his body all the time.

EXERCISE 28.

Remember different moments in your life when you were in a heavy, gloomy, or light and gay mood. Compare them, and you will realize that heaviness or lightness lived in your limbs as well as in your psychology at that time. Concentrate on this quality of lightness and ease, which will be the first guide as you try to obtain a Feeling of Ease.

Stand still with your feet on the floor. Realize that you are in an upright position. Make clear to yourself two different attitudes that humans can have while standing on the ground, the first of which can be

expressed as follows: "I am bound to the earth and my weight draws me down to it." The second attitude can be expressed in these words: "My upright position frees me from the earth on which I stand. My inner inclination is upward and not downward." Concentrate for a while on the second attitude of mind. Return to this simple exercise as often as you can.

Make different, simple movements, repeating them several times, trying to get them easier and lighter until you gradually awaken in yourself a complete Feeling of Ease. Do not confuse ease with weakness or passivity. Inner strength must be present even in the lightest of movements. Start with small movements, then proceed to a larger and wider expansion of them so that in the end you can run and jump around the room, filled with the Feeling of Ease.

Now choose any simple business and accompany it with a few words. Fulfill this task with the utmost inner and outer ease. You will learn, later on, to apply this quality on the stage, even when performing heavy movements, heavy moods, psychologically depressed moments, or when using heavy speech. The latter will lose its flat, blank character, it will not depress the audience, but will become art, even while expressing the heaviness required by the play. "Grace is ease in force," wrote John Ruskin.

This will prevent you from falling into banal photographic representation of so-called "real life," which can be taken only as a theme, and not as a manner of acting. When the Feeling of Ease becomes a permanent ability for you, you will use it unconsciously.

The Feeling of Ease is akin to the Flowing, Flying, and Radiating Movements. We can say that it even comprises all of them. The Feeling of Ease is the general basis on which all

four of the actor's previous abilities can grow, develop, and unite themselves in his nature. The actor will be able to produce Molding Movements in a more correct and artistic way through the general Feeling of Ease.

The Feeling of Ease is also related to humor, a crucial aspect of art. The more hearty gaiety the actor brings into all his exercises the better. The Feeling of Ease can achieve this light tone. Humor cannot be squeezed out of the actor's nature any more than can any other human feelings. It must be simply welcomed when it is there and then it will be helpful.

FEELING OF FORM

Another outstanding quality that distinguishes all great pieces of art is clearly expressed in form. Even in their unfinished works the great masters always had a strong tendency to express a complete form. Their creations would have remained volcanic but chaotic if they had not imposed a strong form upon them. Only feeble, weak creative impulses fail to impart the necessity for form, perhaps because there is nothing there worthy of form.

The actor cannot deny form, for he must always deal with the form of his own body. The human hand is constructed in such a way that it is almost a crime to abandon it to vagueness. Look at the expressiveness of the fingers when they are put in different positions. The same is true of the arms and shoulders, the neck, the back, the legs and feet—the whole body. To give a strong and harmonious impression, our Feelings and Will-impulses must be equally well shaped on the stage, together with the movable forms of our body. Now let us see how the actor can develop a strong Feeling of Form so as to make it a part of his nature.

EXERCISE 29.

As the Feeling of Ease is akin to Flowing, Flying, and Radiating movements, so the Feeling of Form is akin to Molding movements. With this kind of movement you can start your exercises on form, but now you must pay attention to the following. First, whatever you do or say must have a clear beginning and a definite end. In this exercise you must not allow yourself to start or finish your movements, business, or words in a vague, sluggish way. This does not mean that you have to become rude and abrupt in everything you do or say on the stage. You can be very soft and mild in your expression but still have a very clear experience of the beginning and the end of what you are doing. Second, the more you exercise the more you must realize that really good form can be produced only from inside you. Emphasize this inner aspect of the form you produce, and see that these forms do not become outer, dead, empty shells. Third, before you start any of your simple movements or words, you must know what you are going to do and how you are going to do it.

EXERCISE 30.

Stand still and realize that your body is a form. Then "walk," in your imagination, with your attention focused within your body, as if molding it from inside, and also from outside. Realize that each limb of your body is a peculiarly built form. Then start to move your fingers, hands, arms, and so on slightly, realizing that your body is a movable form. This means that motion itself prevents you from being formless at any moment while you are moving.

In everyday experience we are entirely bereft of any Feeling of Form while moving our body. This must not be so for the

actor if he wants to increase his expressiveness on the stage. After a certain period of cautious realization of his body as a movable form he will feel that his whole body is stronger, younger, and more obedient to the impulses coming from his inner life.

The next step forward is still more subtle and consists of assuming certain ideas concerning the body. These are extracted from Rudolf Steiner's teaching in the fields of art and Eurythmy. They are given here in a condensed form, for the actor's consideration.

Having thought over the threefold form of the human body, with its different general functions, the actor will gradually learn to appreciate and to use it in different ways. He will acquire a kind of "aesthetic consciousness" that will tell him how to use his body's various parts. An animal is bound to the earth with all four extremities, with its head bent toward the earth. The spinal column runs parallel to the surface of the earth. Man's position is upright, his head directed toward the universe. His arms and hands are free, his legs are bound to the ground but are freer than those of the animal. His head is connected with thoughts, ideas, and spiritual activity. In its round form it reflects the universe (macrocosm), becoming a kind of little world (microcosm). The head crowns the human body—it rests upon it.

The head is expressive only as a whole, through its different positions on the neck and shoulders; as a round form it cannot and should not make any "gesture"; that artificial smiling, forced frowning, imposed sorrow, and other "expressions" on the actor's face are nothing other than illegitimate attempts to make "gestures" with the head. The actor will become more and more adverse to the tendency to grimace, and will begin to prize the face as a "mirror" that freely radiates the actor's affections, moods, and so forth. The eyes will become especially expressive when the actor refuses to pull the fine muscles of his face forcibly, and real inner beauty will shine from such a free face.

The chest, arms, and hands are connected with the beating of the heart and rhythmical breathing. This is the sphere of the Feelings. The hands and arms are movable forms, permeated with feelings. As the freest of our organs, they are predestined for creative work, and are capable of expressing outwardly the inner life of man. How little we modern actors know about their expressiveness! Rhythm, which transforms and increases all the human feelings, making them into real material for art, is entirely neglected in our time. The fear of losing "naturalistic truthfulness" on the stage bars us from the real truthfulness of art. It will take a long time perhaps before we modern actors realize that naturalistic values will not suffer in the least from the fine, artistic "overtones" that envelop them in the form of rhythm. The arms and hands as movable forms, especially in connection with rhythm, have not yet been really discovered on the stage. When we hold our hands in our pockets or light one cigarette after another before the audience, we undoubtedly belittle the significance of our hands.

The Will dwells in the legs and feet. Their form expresses their function, which is to move the human body through space, according to man's ideas and feelings. See how characteristic and individual the legs and feet are when moving our bodies through space. The Will, such an impressive and expressive feature of the character on the stage, is often entirely forgotten by the actor while he is preparing a part. We sometimes get the impression, while watching a performance, that we see before us human beings deprived of Will. In any case, we often do not know what kind of will this or that character has on the stage. The legs and feet just do not take part in the acting. They pace back and forth without telling us anything about the character. But how rich and varied is the realm of the human Will!

Dr. Friedrich Rittelmeyer wrote: "There is a strong Will, which easily becomes lame, and there is a prolonged Will that grows on obstacles. There is a flexible, a stiff, a conscious Will,

a sleepy Will, a contrary Will, which always wishes things different than they are, a social Will that works in one with great power when it feels that others share it, and an isolated Will, which loses its joy when others acquiesce with it. There is a straight Will, a crooked Will, an outer, an inner, non-spiritual, materialistic, an egotistical Will.”*

I once saw an actor playing Othello. His performance as a whole was good, but what struck me most was his walk. Through it he revealed the whole mystery of Othello’s Will to his audience! Each step of his Othello was an astonishing composition of a soft, gentle, loving Will; an inexorable, strong Will; a cautious, slow, penetrating Will; and at the same time an extremely passionate Will!

I was eager to know how he had acquired such a striking achievement and how he walked in ordinary life. He told me that, having found this walk at first in his imagination, he started to elaborate it. Later he acquired a special “eye” for studying the walks of different people that somehow resembled the walk of his Othello. Once he met a person on the street—I think it was in Italy—whose walk was just that of his Othello! The actor, unnoticed, started to pursue the person for weeks until he robbed him of his “Will”!

But what of this actor’s everyday walk? Oh, it was most primitive and selfish! When he met a girl on the street his walk became humorously naive and betrayed his “Will” pitilessly! After having talked to him, I was attached to him more than ever before, because I understood that he must be a real artist if he could create such a miracle from his walk on the stage. Later on we became good friends. But the solution that this gifted actor found accidentally while working on his part, we can always put before us as a task when working on all our parts.

*Friedrich Rittelmeyer (1872–1938) was a biographer of Rudolf Steiner and a noted authority on Friedrich Nietzsche and German philosophy.

It would make a good exercise for the actor to observe the manner of walking of different people, trying to penetrate into the character of their Wills. Of course, the arms and hands are also filled with Will, but their activity is colored primarily by the Feelings.

What result can come to the actor from such meditative work upon his body as a threefold form? We realize that the body can be either "wise" or "stupid" on the stage. Neither evening dress nor Greek tunic can hide from the audience the impression the body makes from the stage. Have we not seen many times how the actor with a "stupid" body, speaking clever and even wise words from the stage, makes a pitiable impression, while the actor with a "wise" body, sometimes speaking insignificant words, still gives the impression that there is something significant going on on the stage. The actor's meditative efforts will, in time, make his body "wiser" on the stage.

FEELING OF BEAUTY

Everything has two sides, one that is right and the other, which is only a caricature of it. In human psychology, for example, if bravery is a virtue, senseless daring is not. If love is a true human feeling, sentimentality is its counterfeit. Caution is a useful quality, fear is destructive and useless. Likewise beauty, when it becomes a primitive "showing off," is an obvious caricature of itself, and is easily distinguished. But we are going to speak about genuine beauty, the finest quality the artist "lends" to his creation, if he has it within himself. Where are the roots of the right or wrong sense of Beauty? How can we distinguish them?

Let us look at manual laborers. We will see that their movements are often beautiful. When, for instance, the heavy hammer flies up and down again and again, the worker's mind is occupied exclusively with the task, without any desire

to “show off.” We may even say that true beauty must be hidden in order that others may discover it.

The Feeling of Beauty, which is deeply rooted in every artistic nature, should be found from within. It cannot be imposed from the outside because it is as individual as the artist himself.

EXERCISE 31.

Start with simple movements and “listen” attentively within you to the pleasure, the satisfaction, your limbs experience while moving. Move at first slowly, sifting away everything but the natural-born Feeling of Beauty. Avoid all weakness, sweetness, and sentimentality in your movement and do not neglect the inner strength. Do not go further in this exercise than is necessary to bring about the realization of this feeling within you. Let it grow of itself, as you continue the exercise. Resist the temptation to increase or stress the subtle vibrations of beauty. Let these vibrations radiate freely and “fill the air around with beauty,” to quote Byron.

A noble satisfaction will arise in you if you are on the right track; not the satisfaction a person may experience when he wants to please someone who is looking at him. This noble satisfaction keeps all selfish elements beyond the threshold. Selfishness on the stage kills real beauty.

From simple and slow movements proceed to quicker and more complicated ones. Use words. Then try to make simple improvisations alone and with others. Finally, use some short sketches in the exercise. Repeat the work until you get the desired result.

Now the question may arise, how are we to perform characters and situations that are shocking and ugly in themselves?

For instance, how can we perform Caliban, or Richard III, or the scene from *King Lear* in which Gloucester's eyes are torn out? Will they become sweet, sentimental, and untrue if they are performed with a feeling of beauty? Of course not. The rudeness and ugliness must and will remain, but through the Feeling of Beauty on the part of the actor and the director, such scenes will be deprived of their realistic, inartistic rudeness, which appeals only to our lower, nervous, and physical reactions. They will be uplifted into a sphere that is higher than that of mere naturalism.

We shall always find a strong support for true beauty by breaking through the surface of the situation or character and by digging deeper into it. Intensive imagining is the means to this. The more superficially we consider a thing that is beautiful, the more sentimental it appears, while ugliness where taken superficially often calls up a feeling of disgust. For instance, the shocking rudeness of the scene in which Gloucester's eyes are torn out will immediately disappear if we consider the problem from a purely psychological aspect. If we do so, we will perceive that Gloucester loses his sight, his ability to perceive life, the faces of beloved persons, light, and colors. This psychological aspect must be stressed in this and later scenes, but not the physical aspect of it.

All these physical-psychological exercises make the actor's body more flexible and receptive to all inner impulses. But purely psychological exercises such as those on Concentration, Imagination, Atmosphere, and others also make his body more responsive, more sensitive.