



## Theory of Teaching

When I teach the foundation of Michael Chekhov's technique, I follow a structure that is based on this logic:

The Actor's objective in seeking training is to develop the highest quality consistency of performance. This singular aspect distinguishes a professional from an amateur. Any amateur may slip into a peak performance, the state of inspiration, quite accidentally while the great actors appear to be in it regularly.

Michael Chekhov observed these great performances through self-reflection and study of others, arriving at a means to identify the energy patterns present. He then developed terms for these elements and exercises to train us to access and express these energies upon command.

Each human body grows to reflect or mask the psychological conditions we wish to reveal or hide. Consequently, when the actor is inspired with images of the character, the actor's body is not prepared to reveal or mask according to the character's psychology. This results in a most painful condition for the actor- one of having a knowingness of the desired performance and failing to convey it in its fullness to the audience. So- sometimes the performance "clicks" and other times it "dis-clicks".

Each being is born with the potential to reveal all that he/she is inspired to reveal and builds over her/his first five years a limitation of these potentials. So my first steps in the training are designed to restore the body's potential to express the full physical range of motion available at birth. While doing so, I introduce the three basic Laws of Composition-Triplicity, Polarity and Transformation, and the Ideal Artistic center- the point from which the expansion and contraction begin and end.

I begin with teaching Expansion/Contraction as the most basic pattern of movement.

It is the grand archetype of all motion, the black and white of the artistic palette of movement. All movements of a character can be described by their degree of expansion or contraction. A simple 10 scale, using 0 as the most contracted and 10 and the most expanded creates a simple system by which to identify the extent of the opening or closing. I love to use Scrooge as an example of a character that might use contraction or expansion, demonstrating the application of a 10-scale for the evolution of the character. Most people know the basic story quite well so it is easily communicated.

I then teach the "qualities of movement"- molding, flowing, flying and radiating. These use the elements of earth, water, air and light to express the full potential "how" of the expansion/contraction. The quality of the movement is related to the amount or degree of resistance the movement meets. These are the medium of the artist- the clay or the water color. All movements can be described as being more like earth, water, air or light.

A note here might be helpful to add: A movement can refer to a physiological motion, as well as to a psychological movement. Our thoughts, feelings and desires can be expanding, contracting, molding, flowing, flying and radiating.

Now I am ready to move to the "why" of the movement, introducing the Archetypal Gestures, which express the pure will. These gestures meet a number of basic guidelines: BBEEP.

1. Body-full use, especially heels of hands and feet and groin
2. Breath – one full inhale/exhale
- 3 Extreme polarity
4. Effort or 100 % strength
5. PASS-(Prepare, Action, Sustain, Stop-using Triplicity/entirety- beginning, middle, sustained ending)

Our next phase of the training addresses the emotional life of the character.

**The Three Sister Sensations of Equilibrium** - balancing, falling, and floating weightlessly. These correspond to the Human relationship to the law of gravity. Falling is being consumed by the gravity, balancing or the state of imbalance is the struggle



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**Association**

to achieve or maintain balance and floating weightlessly is levity-free of the gravitational pull. Each person could be said to be mentally, physically, emotionally and spiritually in one of these states at all times.

Moving with **sensations and qualities** is next on my syllabus. Allow the whole body to move “as if it is” or to move the body, breath, and sound with a quality that can be an emotional quality, color, object, texture, etc. Notice each primal emotion has its own breathing pattern which when consciously invoked makes it sound, look and feel like the actor is actually having this feeling. It is exciting to be free of being required to feel what the character is feeling. It is significant to note that no animation would exist if it were absolutely necessary to have the actor feel “it” in order to affect the audience. I like to have the primal sensations of fear, anger, grief and joy/silliness in that order. We always end up on a positive note. The sensations affect the actor from within and are one half of Micha’s alternative to affective memory recall.

The other half is **atmosphere** and is akin to sensorial recall. Atmosphere is the energy in the space that is a consequence of the elements of the space as affected by the events occurring within the space. With Chekhov’s concept of the objective atmosphere, the actor needs only to focus on one image that synthesizes all of the sensorial factors into that single image. This is a much simpler and more powerful task for the actor.

There are overall or general atmospheres that affect everyone and everything in the space and there are personal atmospheres that usually relate to a social status or essence of the character. -like the bubble that Glinda the Good Witch appears in or the cloud over Pig Pen from the Peanuts cartoon strip. These personal atmospheres, like an aura, belong to the character and go everywhere the character goes. In cases where the role is of atmospheric nature rather than directly affecting the plot, it is often more relevant to find the personal atmosphere or essence of the archetype of the character than any other single element of the technique. The personal atmosphere gives the audience an immediate feeling of who the character is. It is a separate aspect from the sensation or mood of the character. Sensations and moods are often mercurial and immediately responsive to the accomplishment or failure of the character’s objective, while personal atmospheres operate in a different manner. They may not change at all, or they may change when a character is purposefully deceptive, or perhaps as the character evolves in the arc of the storyline.

Having trained the body to be able to move in all of the basic possible ways to move, to express objective and then having developed emotional flexibility, we now can attend to characterization. Moveable, imaginary character centers are a favorite characterization tool often used by actors who know no other Chekhov Techniques. It is relatively easy to grasp and apply and lots of fun. Imaginary Body is the other frequently used tool for characterization. I like to be sure the actor is aware of a multitude of sources for inspiration for the imaginary body: pure imagination, photos, architecture, art, abstract images, animal and plant life. Etc.

I then teach the “Trinity of the Psychology” thinking, feeling, and willing.



## Teaching Lesson Plan

By \_\_\_\_\_

General Atmosphere: \_\_\_\_\_

Objective: \_\_\_\_\_

Time Allowed: \_\_\_\_\_

Class Composition: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Warm-ups

1<sup>st</sup> Technique - \_\_\_\_\_

2<sup>nd</sup> Technique - \_\_\_\_\_

3<sup>rd</sup> Technique - \_\_\_\_\_

Synthesis