

ANALYSIS OF PSYCHOPHYSICAL FACULTIES, HABITS, AND SKILLS

Physical fitness and expressive body movements have always been a part of acting profession. However, stage movement as a specific and independent subject is relatively recent development in the formal theatrical education.

Ever since the necessity of special body training for actor has been recognized, there have been numerous attempts to create a system or a method, which would serve as a universal training tool. As a result, there are now dozens of different methods and techniques that are used to prepare an actor's body for the stage, TV, or film work. Add the combinations of these methods and techniques and you'll get quite a flamboyant picture.

Obviously, there are significant differences between the known and publicized ways of movement training, which we do not intend to discuss here. Instead, we will try to establish which qualities, or faculties must be developed by **any** movement program that claims to do the job. By this, we mean the faculties that an actor of any trade or style really needs to successfully work in the theatre, TV, or film. Every profession in the world demands a certain set of qualities to be trained and developed. So does the acting profession, and movement training is just a part of the actor's education.

The exercises might be different, the methods of presenting these exercises might be different, even the philosophical manifesto of such methods might be different but a human body is constantly built of bones, muscles, ligaments, nerves, etc. So, we need to determine what exactly we want to develop. A human body has limits in developing divorced faculties so we recognize that there must be a list of faculties, or rather a list of combination of faculties, that have to be taken care of in any stage movement program. If we all can agree on this register then the next step would be to determine the ways and the methods of developing such faculties. Also, we must keep in mind that the time we possess to train these qualities is limited.

Konstantin Stanislavsky once said, " About the art, one should speak and write simply and clear. Intricate words scare a student. They excite the brain and not the heart." We will take this as our guideline. There is a lot of confusion on the subject of what precisely the actor should or should not learn and develop in a movement class. Many are not able to define skills. Others confuse skills and habits. There is also a popular notion that "Art is not Science" thus, art does not have to obey any laws or stick to any criteria. It is true, arts are not comparable to mathematics or physics, but in teaching the arts, there must be an order and a clear objective as in any other field of knowledge.

We will attempt to classify all the knowledge the actor needs to possess, and the abilities he needs to develop in a program that we will conditionally call "Stage Movement." All this knowledge and qualities we divide in the following three categories:

- **FACULTIES**
- **HABITS**
- **SKILLS**

Let us consider the **FACULTIES** as all the *inherent* qualities of the human body. Any healthy individual acquires these qualities in order to effectively function in everyday life as a result of growing. The degree of expansion of a particular faculty (or a combination of faculties) varies from one individual to another. In reality it depends on numerous factors such as: social structure of the society, family upbringing, education, climatic conditions in which the individual was raised, also sex, current fashion in closing, preference in music and in social dance, etc. By the time an individual has entered a Stage Movement program he already possesses all the Faculties, though developed to a various degrees. The higher the degree of faculties development, the closer the individual is, if you wish, to what we might call *Talent*. The distinguishing feature of a faculty is, once developed it stays with us for the rest of our life. The faculties are so stubborn and remain strong because we use them constantly and exercise them perpetually in every day's life without even knowing it.

Let us consider **HABITS** as *learned* qualities. Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary defines habit as "an acquired mode of behavior that has become nearly or completely involuntary." Most professions require particular specific habits in order for the individual to be productive. Acting is not an exception. In fact, acting requires a person to possess many special habits; in addition, every new role might call for a new specific habit or several. Thus, the capacity to learn a new habit quickly becomes the essentiality of acting profession. To make it possible actor must develop the *faculties* to a highest degree.

Compared to faculties the life span of the habits is shorter. A habit can fade away if not repeated again and again. Some of the habits that had been learnt in theatrical school can stay very long and even improve due to the professional activities. Others, if unused or neglected, would slowly become weak and finally disappear. Another distinction between the *habit* and the *faculty* is that the habit must be controlled consciously while the faculty works automatically.

SKILLS are specific qualities *learned purposely* by the individual. The dictionary description of the skill is "dexterity or coordination especially in the execution of learned physical tasks." The stage, TV, and film demand numerous skills from the actor and the list of skills is ever growing with the development of performing arts. In short, the more skills an actor possesses the bigger range of roles he can tackle. It is very common for the actor to learn new skills for every new role and so it is difficult to foresee what skills a professional actor will need in the future. Naturally, a stage movement program is able to develop only some of the skills due to the time limit. Every school determines which

skills are most important to develop. But no school or a program can honestly claim that they develop all the skills the actor needs for professional career. Fortunately, this is not essential. What is crucial for the actor is the ability to learn a new skill in a short period of time. Developing *Faculties* and *Habits* can enable the actor to do this.

There is another factor, which has an effect on learning a new skill quickly and steadily. Any physical skill is nothing else but a movement pattern. According to contemporary psychology, the more patterns our mind stores the easier it is to learn a new one.

The life of a *skill* is even shorter than that of a *habit*. It only lasts while an individual practices it and it disappears soon after the repetition stops. Fortunately, the information of this skill remains in our mind for a long time and should we decide to learn it again it won't take as long as it did the first time.

Another distinctive characteristic of the *skill* is that it is more individually colored than the *habit* or the *faculty* because the skill incorporates the unique set of the previous experiences of the individual and also his exceptional imagination.

It is important to remember that any habit is a combination of two or more faculties and any skill is a combination of different faculties and habits. Thus, an individual is quite capable of learning habits and skills without first improving his faculties. However, the process of learning will be longer and the results less spectacular. This is not what we expect from a professional actor, so the importance of developing the *faculties* first is obvious.

The following are psychophysical *Faculties*, basic *Habits*, and certain *Skills*, which in our opinion are necessary for a contemporary acting student to develop in order to begin a career.

FACULTIES:

1. Balance
2. Coordination
3. Rhythmicity
4. Stamina
5. Strength
6. Flexibility and Mobility of Joints
7. Motion memory
8. Velocity
9. Awareness
10. Correct breathing

With the exception of Strength, and Flexibility and Mobility of Joints, which are mostly physical qualities, all faculties listed above are psychophysical abilities because they in fact are the combination of mental and physical qualities. To develop these faculties we have to deal with both the mind and the body. More so, all the habits and

skills being a combination of different faculties also involve a combined effort of body and mind in order to master them. Therefore, educating one's body is in fact educating of one's mind. This statement will be illustrated to some degree in the following definition of each Faculty.

BALANCE (or *equilibrium*) is the ability to retain one's stability by means of adjusting to changing gravitational and spatial relationships. This is controlled by three interacting parts of the nervous system: the visual organs, the vestibular apparatus of the ear, and mid-brain. The importance for the actor to improve this faculty is obvious due to the necessity to perform unusual poses and movements in limited space of the stage (or TV /Movie set) and often to do so on reduced support.

COORDINATION is the ability to use more than one set of muscle movements to a single end. For the actor this means to coordinate movement patterns of different parts of the body with voice apparatus. Being responsible to perform complicated movement patterns of different epochs, various age categories, highly stylized movements, and etc. the actor has to be prepared to meet endless combinations. It appears as if the mind has to control several movement patterns or rather several sets of muscles at the same time, which is virtually impossible. But fortunately, our mind has the ability to switch its application from one subject to another almost instantly. So, developing our *coordination* means in fact increasing the speed with which our mind makes its transitions.

RHYTHMICITY is the ability to respond rhythmically. In terms of Stage Movement to be rhythmical means something more than to just have sense of rhythm. An individual who can sing or play an instrument rhythmically not necessarily can move about rhythmically. In a way, rhythmicity is the ability to respond with body movements to inner or outer rhythm.

STAMINA is the ability to withstand hardship, adversity or stress. As applied to movement it is the ability to distribute the reserve of nervous energy through a period of time, in our case through a production, a rehearsal or a class. Related to the will power *Stamina* must be developed in combination with other psychophysical faculties.

STRENGTH is a quality of having, or marked by great physical power. The actor needs *Strength* as a supplement to Stamina and Balance. Some special skills and habits demand reasonable strength. However, this faculty has to be developed by future actors only to a certain degree. We have to remember that we train an actor and not an athlete. In our case should the *Strength* be overdeveloped it can become an infliction to other abilities such as suppleness and dexterity.

FLEXIBILITY AND MOBILITY OF JOINTS is a quality of being elastic. This refers to the range of motion that is possible for a joint or a series of joints. There are certain limitations in the development of *Flexibility* determined by the structure of the skeleton. But the achievements of individual acrobats and circus performers make us assume that human body has no limits. Development of Flexibility is a slow and gradual process of

expansion of the range of motion at the joint. Any attempt to speed the process might be dangerous and cause an injury.

MOTION MEMORY (or *Kinesthetic Memory*) is the ability of reproducing or recalling movements that have been learned and retained, especially through associative mechanisms. To have a good *Motion Memory* means to be able to reproduce once learned movements with the same direction, amplitude, speed, rhythm, succession and nature. It also means the ability to duplicate movements immediately following a demonstration or even those seen long before. *Motion Memory* is closely connected with and influenced by auditory, visual and other perception.

VELOCITY is the ability to perform a movement with different speed or the rate of linear motion in a given direction. The development of this natural faculty would deal with exercising Rapidness and Slowness in performing different movement patterns. Both these qualities are important for the actor to develop, but more attention should be paid to Slowness due to the fact that the high speed of modern life and competitiveness in every aspect of social existence leaves almost no space for leisurely speed. Young people just don't have enough experience with slow movements and performing such movements becomes uncommon.

AWARENESS is the ability to consciously apply the mind to an object, sense, or thought. As a psychophysical quality, it requires purposeful and elective focusing of the mind on a particular object or subject. An aware actor is conscious of delicate variations in a performance and is able to apply considerable control over situations on stage. In terms of stage movement training, this faculty has to be specially developed on the material of selective details of movement patterns, either performed by the student himself, or observed by him.

CORRECT BREATHING is the ability to breathe rhythmically and continuously in uncommon attitudes, unusual movement situations, and through emotional stress that the acting profession requires more than often. Breathing is the natural act of supplying the body with oxygen and relieving it of carbon dioxide. By learning how to control his breathing the actor learns how to save physical energy and consequently become more productive. *Correct Breathing* is related to *Stamina* and *Velocity*.

All the Faculties described above are to a certain degree simple qualities. Some of them can be developed separately, others only complexly, i.e. in combination with other faculties. Each of the faculties will become a component of one or more Habits and Skills in stage movement training. In other words the Habits and Skill would have to be built on the basis of the developed Faculties. On the other hand, by practicing a habit or a skill one would further improve the faculties supported it. That is also, why faculties have a much longer life than habits or skills.

Compared to faculties *HABITS* are abilities that are more complex and demand certain time to be acquired. The amount of time needed is in direct relation to the level the

related faculties are developed. Also, most Habits listed below have an artistic nature and will be used by the actor as a material to create the role. The following are Habits that we believe must be developed in *any* stage movement program.

HABITS:

1. *Concentration*
2. *Courage and Decisiveness*
3. *Dexterity*
4. *Suppleness*
5. *Will-power*
6. *Muscle control*
7. *Precision of the physical act*
8. *Economy of movement*
9. *Continuous and Arrested movement*
10. *Tempo-Rhythm of the physical act*
11. *Amplitude of movement*
12. *Awareness of Space*
13. *Awareness of Time*
14. *Correct posture*
15. *Correct walk*
16. *Sculpturesqueness*

Concentration - the ability to direct attention to a single object for a desired period of time. This habit is itself a compound of *Awareness* and *Will power*. It is also the capacity to instantly switch attention from one object to another. The actor must possess this habit to the extend, when the process of switching attention must be quick, effortless and natural. It must become almost invisible for the actor himself thus creating an illusion of reality. There are many distractions during a production, the presence of audience being the strongest. By learning to concentrate his attention on the “physical actions” (Stanislavsky’s term) of the character that he portrays, the actor overcomes this problem.

Courage and Decisiveness. Courage is defined by Webster's Collegiate Dictionary as "mental and moral strength to venture, persevere, and withstand danger, fear or difficulty." Indecisive, weak individuals can easily give up in ever changing, challenging circumstances of stage performance. More so, theatre and film work sometimes demand to perform dangerous movements, such as acrobatic stunts, jumps, scenes with wild animals, scenes with dangerous weapons, etc. In situations like this courage is desirable. Even the decision to take on a difficult and uncommon role is hard to make without trained courage. Being related to *Will power*, *Courage* is a combination of many faculties. An individual who has his *Balance*, *Coordination*, *Strength*, *Flexibility* and *Stamina* developed to the degree of self-confidence would have no problem building *Courage* into his *Habit*.

Dexterity is adroitness in using the hands or body. We also consider dexterous those who move with readiness and grace. An individual becomes dexterous as a result of a highly

developed combination of the following faculties: *balance, coordination, rhythmicity, strength, mobility of joints, and velocity*. Athletes must be dexterous too, however there is a difference between dexterity of an athlete and dexterity of an actor. We define dexterity of the actor as the ability to perform desirable movements swiftly and precisely in the “given circumstances” (Stanislavsky’s term) of the role and on the basis of correct evaluation of the situation.

Suppleness is the ability to perform bending and twisting movements with ease and grace. It is related to *dexterity* and is a physical quality that is based on *flexibility* and *mobility of joints* and *rhythmicity*. Suppleness becomes an artistic habit when determined by the performance of motivated, thoroughly selected movements while creating a character.

Will Power is the most essential quality of human consciousness and is an integral part of any psychophysical act. Some of the faculties, which form *will power* are *courage and decisiveness, stamina, and concentration*. Defined as control of one's impulses and actions and developed to the level of a *habit*, will power becomes one of the most desired qualities of the professional actor.

Muscle Control is the ability to control all the voluntary movements, which form a physical action and to make them automatic or semi-automatic on stage or in front of the camera. According to Stanislavsky, these thoroughly selected and properly organized movements will bring to life involuntary actions and even emotions that would make the stage appearance vivid and realistic. To become a habit, *muscle control* has to be specially trained on the basis of vastly developed *Motion memory* and *Awareness*.

Precision of Physical act is a quality related to the *muscle control* but singled out as a specific habit due to its importance for the actor. We are convinced that any physical act on stage must be definite and clear as it represents an also definite and clear thought or intention. A physical act on stage must have all the following characteristics: the beginning, the progression, the climax, and the end. There has to be no doubt in the mind of a spectator on where one physical act ends and the next physical act begin. Developed *balance, awareness, motion memory, coordination, and rhythmicity* would serve as a good basis for training *Precision of Physical act* and to make it a steady habit.

Economy of Movement is the ability to consciously minimize the effort in performing a movement. It is known that in order to perform a certain physical act different degrees of effort can be used by various individuals. The more the effort the sooner the energy gets exhausted. The actor must acquire a habit to find the most economical way of performing a physical act. This habit can be achieved with special exercises utilizing *Balance, Motion Memory, Stamina, Strength, Awareness, and other faculties*.

Continuous and Arrested Movements are two of the abilities that represent the essence of the expressiveness of the actor's body. In real life, no human being intentionally moves either *continuous* or *arrested* for any notable length of time. On stage (film, TV set) on contrary, the actor is requested to do so regularly and for substantial periods of time. This

ability should become a habit to enable the actor to use it at will in strictly measured doses. *Coordination, Motion Memory, Rhythmicity, Balance* and *Strength* are some of the faculties, which help to form this important habit.

Tempo-Rhythm of Physical Act. This term was first introduced by K. Stanislavsky to define the intensity of the inner or emotional life of the actor in his role. He wrote, "Every human passion, or state, or emotion has its own *Tempo-Rhythm*. In fact, every minute of existence inside and outside of us there exists one or another *Tempo-Rhythm*." (translation by E.R.). *Tempo-Rhythm of Physical Act* is the ability to perform a physical action in given pace, during given time, within given space. According to Stanislavsky, precisely as any real life emotion expresses itself in a certain Tempo-Rhythm of physical behavior, the properly built Tempo-Rhythm of a physical action on stage will undeniably bring particular emotion. This habit must be trained on the basis of developed *Coordination, Rhythmicity, Velocity, and Awareness*.

Amplitude of Movement is the ability to utilize large or small movements in creating different styles of physical action. This habit is largely underdeveloped (especially large amplitudes) because the reality of contemporary life frequently forces an individual to hide his/her real emotions and feelings. The physical behavior of a modern individual is restricted by so called "good manners." As a result, young people going into acting profession are often reserved and limited in their movement expressiveness. Without developing this habit, the actor won't be able to tackle most of the historical characters and will have a problem to be expressive in any role. The *Amplitude of Movement* must be specially developed to unleash the motion possibilities of the actor's body. It is achievable with the developed *Motion Memory, Rhythmicity, Coordination, and some other faculties*.

Awareness of Space is a special habit, which consists of the ability to accommodate a physical action within a limited space without breaking the illusion of reality. This is a crucial habit for the actor, whose working space is a stage, a TV set, or a Film locality, full of subjects and objects, which continuously change positions. Also, it is common in theatre practice to perform the same play on different stages. More so, the conventions of modern theatre often put actor in the circumstances when the set is imaginary and space awareness depends solely on actor's imagination. Sheila Kogan in her book "Step by Step: A Complete Movement Education Curriculum" rightly states: "Awareness of space is actually a set of specific, somewhat mundane skills." *Sense of Space* is a unique habit for a performer and can be developed on the basis of *Motion Memory, Coordination, and Awareness*.

Awareness of Time is the ability to control stage time (which is virtually different from real life time) in terms of tempo-rhythms of psychophysical actions. Included in this habit is the ability to either, succumb to the general tempo-rhythm or to challenge the latter with ones own. Stage time depends on "given circumstances" of the play, or scene and it is reflected in the actions of performer. This Habit is strongly connected with *Rhythmicity*.

Correct Posture being an aesthetic habit is a conventional notion and is changing with the development of the tastes of the society. What is "correct posture" today was not considered as such in 16 century or 18 century. As a functional value Correct Posture is a balanced position of the body that secures the best conditions for breathing and minimal muscle tension. The aesthetic value of it is in carrying the body with poise and grace, according to the modern notion of beauty and harmony. The actor must make it a habit to position his feet, neck, spinal column, legs, and arms with ease to reflect a *Correct Posture*.

Correct Walk is similar to Correct Posture in terms of its conventionality. Considering the fact that every individual has a different background in terms of developing his walking habits and also the fact that most parents and schools are not concerned with the way young people walk, the development of *Correct Walk* becomes an extremely important part of the actor's movement education. Even though our society is over concerned with self-image, for the actor it becomes an artistic value. It is a known fact that the stage and camera "magnifies" any imperfection in a movement. Bad habits in walking might become so large on stage that it would create an obstacle for the spectator to appreciate a production as an art.

Both Correct Posture and Correct Walk must be trained continuously in Stage Movement program and this training leans on many of the above mentioned faculties and habits.

Finally, we will define *SKILLS* as the special capabilities the actor must possess during his professional training in order to be competitive in his future work. These skills can be successfully learned by a student with the arsenal of developed faculties and habits.

Compared to habits, skills have distinct *artistic characteristics* and values and include creative elements. Professional actor must have an assortment of skills to start his career. It is unreasonable to attempt to teach the student all the possible skills. First of all, the time for initial training is limited. Secondly, why teach the skills that the actors might never need? However, the actor should be able, and even eager to learn any new skill or recall a forgotten one if a particular role demands it. It is appropriate to start work on skills only after strong faculties and steady habits are developed.

We will list and define several movement skills, which in our opinion are most valuable for an employable modern actor, and which can be installed in a program of any professional acting school.

SKILLS:

1. *Period movement and period manners*
2. *Acrobatics*
3. *Stage falls*
4. *Stage carries*
5. *Unarmed stage combat*
6. *Armed stage combat*

7. Illusion Mime techniques

There are also skills in different kinds of Dance, which are equally important for the actor, but we left them aside intentionally as a subject of the dance program for actor. We would like, however, to make one comment: the dance program for the dramatic actor must be specially designed and limited in scope to preserve the sincerity and spontaneity of actor's physical behavior. Regardless of widespread opinion, just any dance class not necessarily is beneficial for a future dramatic actor.

Period movement and period manners is a whole group of skills enabling the actor to perform the physical behavior of people that lived in different epochs, in different countries. Learning the skills must be combined with basic information on habits and ways of the periods. Using this knowledge along with visual demonstration of the instructor and imagination the actor will create his own skills appropriate for a particular period of history. Nevertheless, the amount of such skills must be carefully planned and limited to only those periods and countries which are represented by a great number of dramatic and other literary works.

Acrobatics is a set of skills, which is very useful for the actor especially in the theatre, where the use of a stunt person is not an option. However, these skills must be limited to the most common techniques, such as tumbles, cartwheels, hand and shoulder stands, etc. The most important purpose of acrobatics though is that it helps to develop *Courage and Decisiveness* in students. Acrobatic skills also serve as a preparation for more complex and artistic skills such as *Stage falls* and *Stage combat*.

Stage Falls is a series of special skills to enable the actor to perform falls realistically and with high degree of safety. By employing many cultivated *faculties, habits and skills* the actor can create a truthful and emotional action of a fall. On the opposite, brave but untrained actor might easily injure himself and ruin the production created by the effort of many people. *Stage falls* can be offered only to trained students because a negative experience can reduce the courage and self-confidence to the point when the actor would never be able to perform this or similar technique. Considering the abundance of violence on modern Television and Movies as well as the popular demands of Physical Theatre, this skill becomes very important to acquire.

Stage Carries is another group of skills often used in stage and film productions. There are special techniques of carrying a "dead" body or a wounded "friend" or "enemy" in different combinations such as "two carry one", "three carry one", etc. The skill is to know how to do it with minimum of muscle effort and maximum of artistic expression. These techniques are coincidentally very good exercises in developing *coordination, awareness, tempo-rhythm of physical act, strength*, and other faculties and habits. They also are good to train simple physical interaction on stage.

Unarmed Stage Combat is a group of sophisticated skills in stage violence. It ranges from simple skills such as slap in a face, pushing, and pulling hair to a very complex

techniques creating an illusion of fistfights, kicks, and even a mass brawl. The most important quality of stage combat techniques is that being mastered they are absolutely harmless. Using acrobatics as groundwork, *Stage Combat* employs many faculties and habits developed previously in Stage Movement class.

Armed Stage Combat is another intricate group of skills, which can be learned by the students advanced in many other skills and special habits. Just like no teacher would try to teach students calculus without first introducing them to arithmetic, no teacher must attempt to teach Armed Combat to beginners. Due to extreme danger this class presents to the safety of students, these skills must be taught to a group of people prepared for it physically and psychologically. We do not use any protective or safety gear in teaching students armed combat for obvious reason that on stage or in front of the camera they won't be able to use them as well. We do use only special practicing weapons in the process, but even those might be fatal should untrained or unprepared individuals be involved. But a consistent and well-organized movement program can benefit from teaching *Armed Stage Combat* to its students because there are many elements of acting, self-control discipline and also further development of most of the *faculties, habits, and skills* involved in it.

Illusion Mime Technique is a very particular skill, which has to be presented to the dramatic actor in moderate doses due to the highly stylized movements it represents. Just like it is with dance if overdone, it might affect the physical behavior of the actor and cause some sort of mannerism in his movement. Teachers and instructors must remember that the actor should be able to create any stylized movement when the role demands it, but in no circumstances do we want Hamlet, or Cyrano de Bergerac, or Willy Lomen to look like a mime or a dancer. However, mime techniques allow the student to further develop and improve his faculties and habits using different material. Besides, mime techniques are widely used in theatre, TV, and film directly and actors who have these skills are greatly appreciated by the producers and directors. Also, nothing wrong if a future actor as a result of studying mime chooses it as an art form he wants to pursue. Having all the previous training in acting, dance, and stage movement he might be very successful in this field.

Again, the list of skills can be continued and some teachers might find other skills to be of importance to the actor. But the time limitations of any stage movement program make us reduce the list of skills to those that are vital for acting profession today.

Now that all the *faculties, habits, and skills* are defined, the next step is to decide what is the best way to develop it. In other words, we have to choose from known, or create new exercises that would do the job faster and better. There are numerous exercises created by different people, in different periods of history and with different objectives. In selecting exercises for stage movement program one should always remember that our goal is to develop an artist, a creator. Not an athlete, not a body builder, not even a dancer or mime. We are responsible for developing the actor's body and mind so that he/she will be able to take on any role and to discover that he/she equipped with all the necessary *faculties, habits and skills* to create a character.