



“Making Your Point” *Communicating Through Pantomime*

Introduction

Pantomime in communication is both an art and a craft. It's a way of expressing oneself with the use of only the body. The whole body is used to create an illusion and to make a statement for the audience to interpret. If you hold an imaginary glass in your hand, it must become visible to the audience and to you. The imaginary is made visible and tangible. You must make your mind aware of the glass to the point that you can actually “feel” it in your hand with your mind.

Claude Kipnis, in his book on pantomime, says that pantomime is “the art of creating the illusion of reality”. The good pantomime must make an outer world seem to exist, and at the same time express an inner world of imagination. Kipnis says that the art of pantomime begins where and when these two worlds meet.

The author explains for instance: “I imagine an apple. For me, it is real, but at the moment, only for me. I look at this apple, a look that establishes my desire and creates the image of something out there beyond me. You who watch cannot see yet, but it begins to exist. There is now a fixed point in space, a vanishing point that should lead somewhere from something. In time, I will grab the apple, then bite into it. Now you will see the apple, my apple, completely”. Now pantomime is present. The two worlds of inner and outer space have met.

A common error is made when the motions are too fast for the audience to really see that you're doing something you want them to take notice of. The audience also needs time to translate your movement into meaning, not just to see what's going on. If the movements are too rapid, the observer's mind simply doesn't have time to absorb what's happening and make sense out of it. Practicing in front of a mirror is one way to tell if the movements really look like they feel.

Marcel Marceau was among the most popular pantomime artists in the world, and widely acknowledged to be without peer. His silent exercises and satires on everything from sculptors to matadors were described as works of genius. One critic remarked, "He accomplishes in less than two minutes what most novelists cannot do in volumes."

Practicing for Pantomime

Talking isn't allowed in true pantomime. For example, to pantomime playing golf, you could pretend you are taking a golf club out of the bag, putting a tee into the ground, placing a ball on the tee, swinging the golf club, and watching the ball fly through the air. All of this would be done without ever really touching a golf club, tee, or ball!

To make these actions believable for the audience, the pantomimist must use facial expressions. Without animated facial expressions, the movements become boring and ineffective. The following are five basic facial expressions and instructions for practicing them. These exercises will help to increase your flexibility and control of your facial muscles. Each expression uses a particular group or combination of facial muscles, and all involve exaggerations or approximations of the true expressions. For the best results, practice in front of a mirror.

Happy: Every muscle of your face should be uplifted in an expression of joy. Raise the eyebrows and cheek muscles. Your eyes will squint and your mouth should form a large, open smile.

Sad: Pull the muscles of the face downward. Form your mouth into a frown. Pull up the inner corners of your eyebrows.

Surprised: Draw up the muscles of your face and raise your eyebrows. Form your mouth into an exaggerated “ooh”.

Angry: Draw or bunch up your facial muscles toward your nose. Wrinkle your nose, squint your eyes, and furrow your eyebrows. Your mouth should form somewhat of a frown, almost a pucker. This one is the most difficult of the facial expressions.

Fearful: For this one, combine the upper half of the “sad” face with the lower half of the “happy” face. Open your eyes as wide as possible.

Practice each of the expressions slowly. Begin with happy and overlap into the next one. Then repeat in reverse order starting with fearful. When this becomes easy, go through each expression rapidly, returning to the normal facial expression between each.

Try practicing these clown pantomimes, to enrich and sharpen your act:

- *Running:* Run in place, bringing your knees up to your chest and moving your arms like pistons. Pause to show you are out of breath.
- *Odors:* Screw up your face and hold your nose.
- *Food:* Rub your stomach.
- *Pleasure:* Click your heels together while jumping in the air. Clap your hands.
- *Pride:* Puff out your chest. Put your thumbs in your imaginary suspenders, palms out and spreading your hands.
- *Fear:* Shake and tremble. Hide behind another person or object. Cover your head with your arm.