

Michael Chekhov

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FIRE - FEELINGS

Criticism of Scenes:

It was not a performance, and it was not even a show, as we shall do sometimes, as a result of a long period of work. It was only goodbye before the summer holidays. I wanted to see your work, not to criticize these first seeds of our future plants, but to give some suggestion:

FIRE:

I have actually only one suggestion, because I do not want to speak about details, but rather about a very important basic thing which is only a repetition of many things...where is the Fire? This is the only thing which can justify our presence on the stage. Otherwise it is something which can be done or not done. We have spoken about this fire, and Mrs. Elmhirst has suggested another definition of this quality which I call "fire" - the "necessity" to move, to speak, to glance, to be on the stage...the necessity.

If this necessity, which can be called fire, is not there then nothing is there, it is empty and dead, and lower than our private life. Then arises a great contradiction and disharmony between the actor on the stage, and the audience in their seats. The actor has no right to be there; it is not necessary for him to be there. We have our Method. To what have we to apply this Method? To the fire, to the necessity to be on the stage. Otherwise the Method is here and the actor, who has no necessity to be on the stage, is there.

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Who will connect these two things? Nobody. Without this fire, - it is not just my whim - which is an objective thing, without fire there is nothing to look at, nothing to listen to. It is a basic thing, without which nothing is justified on the stage, in the sense that there is no necessity to be on the stage, no sense to be on the stage.

Because of this lack of fire, the necessity to move, to radiate, to be, everything seems to be lying, very shallow and empty pathos. Or it seems to be under-naturalism - still more naturalistic than life itself. What does this mean? If I have a very small picture, like a stamp, which you cannot see - naturalism on the stage without fire is only a spot, more or less dark. It is less than everyday life. So we have no hope to go on the stage, whatever style we will take, without this fire. If we try to find salvation in naturalism, we will be a little stamp from far far away. If we try to find big words, movements, and situations we will be shallow, empty, false.

I repeat these things because without this understanding we are living in a great illusion. Without this everything is in vain. Therefore, I give you the task to imagine yourself rehearsing or acting big or little scenes in a state of fire, so that you imagine yourself and are sure that you have the real necessity to speak, to move, to express, to radiate, to die, to live, and to do everything on the stage. It must be definitely understood, because without

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this the whole school is something which runs in vain.

I would like to mention just one or two instances. In Sam's problems I have seen some new qualities for him which are very, very pleasant. Sam has shaped his words, his sentences, his inner life, and he has really sent out these things which he had in his actor's soul. Sam has never done this before - I have never seen it. This new quality, is it accidental or is it something you have done consciously? This is something you must know. It is good and you must develop it more and more. You must say to yourself, "I will never allow myself to do anything in a vague, shapeless form as I have very often done." It is for you like a poison, like a death. Having such a height you must be a man on the stage.

The only person who has shown real fire today was Beatrice. She has this fire inside in her nature, and we can see it in her movements, hear it in her voice, and see it in her radiation. The whole image was something which came out of fire. The first, second and third thing was something which was born out of the imagination. But it is only the first spark of the fire which she can and must develop. As Sam must know form and shape, so Beatrice must know that she has fire.

Please do not drop this fire, Beatrice, or think that it is enough. Go on developing this fire. It is worthwhile to develop it. It is worthwhile to think of each image

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on the basis of the fire which has been given you by God, and you must answer Him with the elaboration of this faculty.

There are many ways to elaborate it - all the means of our Method are leading if the fire is discovered. Try to find many, many colors and qualities in whatever you are doing. Your danger is that you find something and you go on with the same quality. You feel yourself to be all right and, therefore, you are not brave enough to demand new qualities. This is your danger - to put blinkers on. You must be quite aware of the space and time around you, in your tempo, in your qualities, in your voice. You are so afraid to lose this small path which you have made, and which you feel is right. The same is true of your character as Liza. Try to imagine Liza by trying to find as many qualities and colors as possible. This will develop you more than anything.

I will confine myself to these suggestions - one in general to everyone, and to Sam and Beatrice to develop the fire which is there and not to be content with it as it is. Try to find many colors. The voices are much better. My impression is that the voices are developing well. From my point of view I think they are better, because I remember our first attempts with The Golden Steed! You must develop these scenes through the summer holidays, and it is possible then that I will criticize them, but without fire I don't want to see anything on the stage. There must be fire there.