

REHEARSAL OF SKETCHES
PSYCHOLOGICAL GESTURE
ATMOSPHERE
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OBJECTIVE
FLYING OVER THE PLAY
Stanislavsky

Balladina:

Let us speak about the exercise with the three women around the hearth. Again I must give the same foreword - I will be very pedantic in order to be very clear. This was a very instructive instance of the use of right and wrong points from a theoretical point of view. As far as I can judge, the director, Mrs. Elmhirst, in her approach to the play has very deep ideas of how to explore and what to explore, but she does not have the right approach to discovering the ideas she has.

PSYCHOLOGICAL GESTURE:

It is very right to give Balladina the two poles - one of warmth and the other cold. These are two powers which are fighting with one another in Balladina, but the director has not used the full possibility offered by these two poles, because she has started something but has not continued it. You can use these two poles for developing a psychological gesture, or you can use the idea for atmosphere.

ATMOSPHERE:

Again you have spoken about atmosphere, and again it was left without being developed. You have not told your actors how to enter into the atmosphere - whether by imagination or movement, etc. The director wanted to use the work as a step on which to reach this warm family atmosphere, which could bind them together, but instead of giving a very simple

rhythmical movement for the work, she fell into mere naturalism. Alina did not find the right movement, and it became more and more naturalistic. The director should have given one simple movement which could have been repeated again and again. For the mother, as for Alina, she gave very vague psychological gestures. I could guess what you as the director were meaning, but it was not given, it was not a real gesture. The pulling of the chair was the most real gesture, but it was not explained what had to be reached by it, and how it was to be reached.

Then there was the possibility of Balladina near the cold pole, waiting for something from the outside. What it means to leave the warm pole - this is a whole composition of gestures. What it means to go further and further away; what it means to enter into a cold sphere; what it means to have an opening before her - it is a whole scale or gamut of psychological gestures. If you wanted Balladina to move the chair, for instance, you could have given her the gesture to be on the edge of the warm atmosphere, then have her make a gesture of refusal and a gesture to go into the cold atmosphere and be contracted, and before the opening she is waiting. It is possible to open oneself in a warm atmosphere, and quite another thing to open in a contracted state. This is a very interesting possibility. But the director has not given such a composition of gestures. If the chair is only a naturalistic chair which has been taken from the family circle, this will

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give the actor nothing. But if, for instance, she had been given the gesture to cling to material things - she could have been bound to material things - then this would give her something.

The director has used the term "symbol" very often. You do not need to say that this is a symbol - it is reality for your exercise. It is a real series of warm, hot rays. But when you have given this conditional reality, then you may tell them that this is your family, etc., on the ground of the reality. You gave the condition of this reality. You have to build the aura and build the whole story. When you told them that the chair was a fireplace, this was a condition, not imagination. This is the same as the "abyss".

About the mother's position. Only one of the gestures you gave her was a real psychological gesture, when she had to draw back the chair. There was nothing to act. It is not possible to act by having nothing for action. What the mother should have done was only to do the movement and draw Balladina back.

MISE EN SCÈNE:

The director's ideas were right but the approach was vague. Today it was a mixture of gestures not quite clear-cut, it was a mixture with atmosphere but not quite clear, it was a mixture with mise en scène. Each mise en scène can be very speaking and revealing for the actor if it is given with a very special aim, just as with movement. If we give a very happy mise en scène and try to explore it

the same as we do with gesture, it will awaken something. By setting the fireplace and the work, the actors should have explored what it meant, but they did not. The whole exercise was a mixture of elements, none of which were led to its real end.

If you tell your actors to imagine that the chair is a fireplace, the actor must not imagine anything to do with the chair, but he must see a picture in his imagination and then he can accept the chair as his imaginary fireplace. The sewing scene was too naturalistic. This can be used as an exercise for the feeling of truth. You could have given them one rhythmical movement together.

THE OBJECTIVE:

There was a mixture with the objective. If you had given Alina the action of caressing her mother, that would have been a definite objective. If you give an objective then you only need to require a feeling of truth - you need not avoid naturalism if you ask for the feeling of truth. A caress can also be a psychological gesture. One of the main principles of our method is that each thing can be applied to another.

Let us look at a flight of steps, and see it has a gesture. Now imagine that the steps are wider - this is another gesture. Now imagine that the steps are red - this is another gesture. Therefore, it means that for us everything can be, must be, turned to another thing. We have to act so that in acting we produce colors around us, and the colors in our

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settings must create our parts. This is what we have to understand in our three year course of training, first of all we must develop our inner technique so that we will understand the thing of a flight of steps as colors, music, settings, costumes, etc. We must develop our abilities to such an extent that we will be able to see the movement in each thing in the world. If, for instance, the red color is moving towards us then we know how to act, and the same is true of each color we must wear on the stage, in order to act the gesture on the stage. Therefore, the term significance cannot be substituted for gesture.

The director must always know what is going on in his actor's soul, but the actor must also know how to reach what the director asks of him. Therefore the director must tell his actors what to do and the means by which to achieve it.

Let us go back to the idea of moving the chairs and leaving Alina without one. This was a very good idea, but it must be given in some way so that it can be done, not understood. You must know how to do your idea, and for this purpose you have at your disposal the psychological gesture, mise en scene, etc. When the director gives the psychological gesture, it must be given in a very clear form. Today there were too many and, therefore, none were clear. It would be better to give one gesture - let us say warmth and cold. If everyone had done this the whole cast would have experienced

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these two extremes. Our souls need time to explore and experience - if this is allowed, the director can give the actor a gesture and he will give back an aura. If you feel that the actor is acting without aura, you must ask him to go back to the gestures, atmospheres, etc. The actor will never get the aura from nothing - it must be prepared.

Question:

Is it necessary to go back further in the play than where it begins, i.e. to antecede?

Answer:

Not always. This depends upon the play. In "Peer Gynt" it was necessary, but in "Balladina" the lovely atmosphere of the home was not important, whereas the gesture of warm to cold was important. Warm and cold is the main theme - the cold kills the warmth and the exploration of this can give a beautiful aura.

It is very dangerous to go back further than where the play begins because there is no limit. Who can tell you where to stop? In the Moscow Art Theatre we have created our whole families, and lost ourselves. From many years of working with Stanislavsky I believe that this thing leads us to very vague fields, and we are hardly ever able to find our way back. To a certain extent it can be good, as in the case of Peer Gynt. But in the case of Balladina it is much more helpful to work with the gesture of warmth and cold which is fan-

tastically right.

Very often the gesture is modified, and the director must once again have an eye for this. Is this modification good, and does it enrich the gesture or not? The actor must feel that if he does well it will be shown to him, and if he goes wrong it will be told to him. The psychology of an actor is such that if he feels very vaguely that he is doing something, he is not able to tell whether it is right or wrong. When the actor feels that the director tells him nothing, he loses the activity for doing it. Therefore the director must not only have an idea of what the future performance will be, but he must really direct each person, each moment. Then this cooperation, which is so difficult, will gradually get a form, a shape.

FLYING OVER THE PLAY:

The Fairy Tale:

As the director, try to find in your preparatory work such gestures which will embrace the whole performance, and then try to proceed to the details. It is not good for the director to know too much, and the actors too little. The director must lead his cast through the whole performance, and then he must show one part, and then again the whole or one big section. If you keep your cast for a long time in one place you will meet difficulties later when you start your rehearsals. You will find that one section of the play which is absolutely clear to you is untouched by your actors.

For example, Alan found the whole picture for Peer Gynt, and now we wait for details. The actors are beginning to feel a need to know the whole performance, not only one moment of it.

The actors must be given the possibility to fly over the whole play. Later, when you begin to compose things on the stage you will not be so free, you will have to be concentrated on certain moments until you are satisfied.

Work:

Quiet as opposed to chaos. Explore these two worlds and let the quietness conquer the chaos.

As a director, Alan must find in his work in general more activity, more tempo. Sometimes he is too slow and his cast has too much time and he loses their interest and activity. Our principle is to work together with the playwright, musician, etc. The whole cast must be together in each moment until the collective work is shown to the audience. From the beginning to the end it must be our theatre, our performance, etc.

The Golden Steed:

Continue the work with gestures and repeat them while someone speaks the lines.

The Fishing Scene:

It is better for the director to refer to the

fisher folk as "they" rather than "you" when working with the imagination. This releases the cast, and they will be more free in their imaginations than if you refer to them as "you," which immediately makes them contract and wonder how they will do it or "act" it. It inhibits your cast to refer to them as "you". Try a gesture of drawing - with your imaginary hands and your longing, until you lay hands upon the imaginary boat and bring it safely in.

Balladina: (Director's exercise).

Alina enters, walking in a circle in a fast tempo followed by Balladina walking in a slower tempo. One goes to the right of the circle, the other to the left. They pass each other a number of times and then finally touch three times - the third time is the moment of destruction. Goplana is in the center of the circle, and when Balladina runs off into the woods, Goplana follows her and brings her back to face her crime.

Criticism:

Directors will find the way themselves, and will get better answers from their work than from me, but I will give some suggestions. As a director, Mrs. Elmhirst has a conception of the play on a very deep and good level, but she gives her cast too much all at once. In this exercise today she gave the whole scene. For instance, the psychological gesture which you gave embraces the whole play perhaps,

but in a general form. You must go gradually to such exercises as you gave today. There were too many elements, and the actors were not yet ready to experience them. Later, when we extend the whole scheme, you will find that you will be able to do sketches such as you did today.

In order to get everything as complete as possible in the form of a psychological gesture in such an exercise as you gave today, you would have to have several rehearsals and work in great detail. You must lead your actors gradually. If you clarify each gesture they will tell you very much. For instance, the gesture of touching Balladina's forehead - this can be done from above, as if Goplana were pushing her down. Goplana should explore her own world of the elemental forces which she can draw up.

You must penetrate deeper into the character of each psychological gesture, and then you will get more from them. If you give a gesture and then explain something about it, it will grow like an aura, like a germ from which the aura will grow. Dying on the stage is so interesting, and can be given in such different ways. This way of dying gradually when Alina is touched by Balladina three times is a beautiful idea, but it must be done again and again until you get the result of this experience.

In our scheme the first level means the first step we must take to approach the play as actors and directors. The second level is what we must do a little later - this

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must be found by the director himself. If you will study this scheme you will find many ways of approaching the play besides the psychological gesture. If you study the scheme you will find many possibilities. For instance, the speech formation is an independent power for approaching the play.
