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MICHAEL CHEKHOV'S TWELFTH CLASS FOR PROFESSIONAL ACTORS

"THE FUTURE THEATRE"

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King Claudius
Othello

You know, of course, that during the last third of the past century science - and later art - became very materialistic, and scientists at that time made certain statements telling us that everything was matter, and materialism. Of course, the beginning of the fifteenth century saw the rise of materialism, but the last third of the past century was the climax. The result of this is with us today. This materialistic point of view is what we are now living through.

What has happened to art and to the theatre is the following thing: we have lost the whole poetry around our art, and it has become a dry business. If we truly and sincerely consider ourselves while on the stage, we must admit that we feel our bodies and voices as the physical things which carry us to the audience. The whole theatre has become so materialistic for us as actors; our attitude towards ourselves, our bodies with voices, our approach to the new play

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is whether it appeals to our nerves, and if it does not appeal, it is of no value, and so on.

The theatre now is not solving any problems. It does not consider what the ethical, religious, or human problems are, or whether actors have any foresight. We are not interested in what shall happen. Everything is condensed to the present moment, and even more to the events of the present moment, and even more to certain events. It could not be more condensed, more stony than it is now.

THE FUTURE THEATRE:

The future theatre cannot go along this way of condensing and making everything dry. There is no more space, no more themes for it. Everything is exhausted. The theatre must go the opposite way, which is to enlarge everything; the point of view, the means of expression, themes for plays, and, first of all, the kind of acting.

THE FUTURE ACTOR:

The actor in the future must not only find another attitude towards his physical body and voice, but to his whole existence on the stage in the sense that the actor, as an artist, must, more than anyone else, enlarge his own being by the means of his profession. I mean the actor must enlarge himself in a very concrete way, even to having quite a different feeling in space. His kind of thinking must be different.

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his feelings must be of a different kind, his feeling of his body and voice, his attitude to the settings - all must be enlarged. The air around the theatre must be air. Let me formulate it in a few words.

"WHAT" AND "WHY"; "HOW" IS THE MYSTERY OF ART!

There is always a certain "what" - the play is "what," we have to deal with our parts as "what." In science everything is "what." There are two ways in this "what." One is leading to "why," and that is pure science. When we take a play and try to discover "why" the author has done this or that, we will never be able to act it. The other way is "how," and that is our way as actors.

For instance, if we know how to become jealous on the stage without knowing why, then we are artists. Under the heading of "How I believe the theatre of the future will develop," I would say that the more the materialistically-minded world forces us to go the way of "why," the less we are able to develop our abilities and talents. This "why" is very widespread in art in our present life. If you ask how can I know "how" if I don't know "why," I would say that it is a very materialistic question, because "how" is the mystery of art; it is the secret of the artist who always know "how" without any explanation, any proof, any analysis or psychological abilities. Quite simply the actor knows Hamlet, or Joan of Arc. Why? Because I am an actor. If we are unwilling to

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accept this point of view about "how" - because that is our life - then all the "whys" will never help us.

As an example, let us imagine we are talking with a brilliant actor about these things. He may say that he is not interested. Just let him express himself, his own "how," because he does not need our justifications. On the other hand, let us ask an absolutely ungifted actor about "why" and "how." Do you think it will help him? No, because he has no "how" in his soul. In both these extreme examples "why" is the materialistic approach to art which flamed in the last third of the past century, and from which we are suffering the results. We must make all possible mistakes in order to break all these boundaries to our professional work. "How" is our business, and "why" is the business of the scientists.

OUR METHOD:

Now let us look at our Method. Everything in it has the tendency to break the boundaries of our bodies, our voices, and other abilities leading to this "how." For instance, the atmosphere, if correctly expressed, is nothing other than expanding our own being in the space around us, so that we become bodily less significant. With atmosphere something happens around me and in me, and my body becomes the instrument which receives suggestions from these things, and begins to obey these influences coming from the outside. So

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if we experience the atmosphere properly, it enlarges our being.

Let us look at the objective. The objective is my aim, my desire, it is what I want. Imagine it fulfilled. I am already out of my skin, as it were, out of my outer part of my being. I am somehow flying somewhere.

Or let us look at radiation, which means to give out everything I have inside. Again my body becomes larger and more artistic.

Preparation and sustaining is also something which precedes my hard bodily way, then follows it and goes on. It is again a way to enlarge the actor's nature.

The psychological gesture is purely a psychological thing, which leads us to ourselves as actors. Actually the psychological gesture is above theatre, and goes on further. Each gesture is the way to enlarge ourselves, and to break all these hard boundaries and obstacles which we have in our materialistic approach to ourselves.

THE ACTOR WILL DISCOVER THE SPIRITUAL THEATRE:

When I try to imagine what the theatre can be and will be in the future, (I speak neither in the mystical or religious sense at the moment) it will be a purely spiritual business in which the spirit of the human being will be re-discovered by artists. We artists and actors will write the psychology of a human being. The spirit will be concretely

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studied. It will not be a spirit "in general," but it will be a concrete tool, or means, which we will have to manage just as easily as any other means. The actor must know what it is, and how to take it and use it. This will happen to the spirit, and it will become again a very honorable thing when we know how to manage it, and understand how concrete and objective it can be for us. It can be much more expressive to our fellow man. // I believe in the spiritual theatre, in the sense of concrete investigation of the spirit of the human being, but the investigation must be done by artists and actors, but not by scientists.

It is interesting to know that what we are speaking about here, some scientists are beginning to do. Already in many countries this new science grows gradually. Even in the field of mathematics, which seems to be absolutely stiff, there are new, flexible things which they are discovering and leading the culture, and other things become real art. Not long ago I visited a farm near Philadelphia based on this new approach.¹ (SEE INSERTION)

CHARACTERIZATION:

Today I want to approach the question of characterization, and explore it more carefully. First of all, let me say that it seems to me that all parts are characteristic ones. However, modern actors, in all countries, always try to act as

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much as possible as they would in everyday life, to kill every possibility of characterization in the part, and to adjust the part to themselves. Very often, we see an actor or actress acting themselves in all parts, without even trying to find out how one part can be different from another, which is quite the opposite approach. Modern actors, generally speaking, try to kill the characterization and make it so that the part is just as they are. This deprives us of the possibility of developing and showing to ourselves, and to each other, our "hows."

So it is a big mistake in the modern theatre to exclude characterization. Characters can be very fine, and very delicate, or very obvious, but it is only a question of dimension. Still, there are always certain possibilities for characterization. But how to approach it? Let us again start by looking at the wrong way first. If we accept characterization, or try to accept it, we may, first of all, rely on our physical body, just as it is, and try to contort it according to the idea which we have got from the part. Secondly, we may rely upon the costume and make-up. Or if the character is a fat person, we rely upon the padding, or if it is a tramp, we rely upon the torn clothes, etc. Everything from the outside. I exaggerate, of course, but only to make my point clear.

THE CENTER:

Fortunately there is another way which is much better and much more appealing to our actor's nature, and much

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more satisfying to our instinct to create something out of it and then to see how the body, as a secondary thing, can adjust itself to this first, spiritual, imaginatively-created characterization. We have spoken about the imaginary center in our chest from which, if it is really experienced, we have got accustomed to the idea that we have a movable center from which everything is depending. We consider the normal person (without characterization) having the center in the chest, and everything is centered there.

Let us walk around with this center in our chest. It is the power which leads us forward. The only thing that is needed is that we pay a little attention to it, and gradually it will prompt us more and more to understand that we are sound, healthy, and well-formed - still without any characterization, in the sense of the theatre. Let us sit down, paying a little attention to this center, and you will see how it supports and helps you.

One important thing must be considered. The idea of the center is imaginative but also concrete. It is artistically sound imagination to have this impulse from the center. Let us get up, being impelled by this center. Now move our hands and arms with the impulse coming from the center. Likewise, the impulse to lower the arms comes from the center - everything from the center. When we walk, our legs and feet get the impulse from this center in the most simple way, without

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any special effort. When we exercise in this way, we get the feeling that our legs are longer than we have experienced them before. The center gives the impression that our legs are longer, because they are connected with this imaginary center in our chest.

I have mentioned before that we have many locks in our bodies. For instance, our fingers can be so locked that they do not take part in our actions. All these locks can be opened by our understanding of the imaginary center, if it is developed until the whole body becomes free. This impulse from our chest will unlock all these things, and our bodies will become expressive, but if there is no source from which the streams can go through, our bad habits will eventually become so strong that we will have nothing to do but keep our hands in our pockets.

Now try to realize that the presence of the imaginary center in the chest is actually pure psychology, because having such a center makes one feel oneself differently. It is not a thing which is part of the actor's psychology. Every part of our body, our voice, reacts to these suggestions in the most subtle way. When we look at ourselves in the mirror, we become different people. We want to see ourselves as we thing we should be, but with the mirror it is not possible to avoid a certain selfishness. With the center it is quite different - we recognize the fact that there is such a thing as the psychological fact of this imaginary center.

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Now let us move the center to the stomach, and see what psychology you will get from this. Try to walk with this center in your stomach, and listen to the new things which will come from this imaginary center. Let us say, "Hello". It is already a characterization, but we have approached it not from the outer, materialistic, inflexible side, but from the purely actor's side where we are masters - from our world of imagination, from our creative abilities, not from our body. Now move the center to the right shoulder and listen to what it tells you - no one knows how your nature will respond to this suggestion, but your talent will react immediately.

Follow any suggestions which may come from this - as soon as you displace your center, you will see that there is quite a natural desire in you, as an actor, to adjust your physical body somehow to this imaginary center. Now let us try to put the center in the forehead. The center can have different qualities, hot, cold, sparkling, etc. Try to make the center in the forehead contracted and cold, and follow the suggestions which will come from it. Now put the center about two feet above your head. Move about, speak to each other, sit down, get up, etc., paying attention to this possible change in psychology. Now let us dance, having the center two feet above our heads. Now put the center in the knees, and dance again.

This work of finding the center is absolutely free

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for the actor to try. Where is the center of Desdemona, for example? It is up to the actor to find out. How can he do it? Only in this way: we have to imagine the character which we are going to perform, in different situations in the play, and observe how it acts. We have to look at the character, first in our imagination, and see how the character acts, and what it experiences.

In our imagination we are somehow artistically clairvoyant, because we can see the feelings of the character we are going to perform, when we are imagining it. We can see King Claudius when he is praying - we see him fighting with these evil powers. We can imagine this figure, and his prayer only if we are clairvoyant in our imagination, and see what he feels.

When we take Desdemona, for instance, and see her acting and living in the world of the imagination, we see her utmost inner life, and if we put the question as to where her center is - in general or in a particular scene - the suggestion will come and we will know where her center is. If you see and hear Iago, being clairvoyant in your imagination, you will see where the center is. Because if you do not find the center first, you may be lost for a very long time, trying to grasp and incorporate in your body all the complicated and sometimes absolutely incalculable richnesses of the character. Othello, for instance, is a most complicated character if it

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is really imagined. There are so many things to be digested that we may become lost. The way to overcome this, is first to find the center, and all the other things will follow more quickly afterwards. Without this we may be lost.

THE IMAGINARY BODY:

When finding, through means of the imagination, where the center is - simultaneously with developing our imagination for a particular part or character - we can also imagine, or invent, as freely as the center all other parts of the body of the character. But before we touch our physical body - which is so stiff and full of habits that it makes us very uniform on the stage - let us imagine first the invisible body of the character. Let us say that we have found the center for the character in the diaphragm. Now we can just as easily imagine the arms and hands to be longer than they are - perhaps six inches longer. If we do not force our physical arms and hands - which will only make an unhealthy and bound impression - but let our imagination live with these longer arms and hands, we will see how the arms and hands will change of themselves, not because we force them to become longer, but they will give the impression that they are longer. If we try to stretch them, it will only give the impression that the actor is torturing himself, but if we rely upon the imaginative picture of these arms and hands, they will give the impression that they are longer.

In contrast, try to imagine that your imaginary body is six inches shorter than it really is. If you imagine it, you will see that you are so far from your own psychology, and that you have already plunged into another imaginary being, and you will have a different psychology, and will speak and move differently. Your whole temperament will change. Now, in addition, imagine that your right shoulder is higher than your left one. First imagine it, then let your physical body adjust itself, as it were, instantly to this imaginary body. The actor must be brave enough to say goodbye to his own stiff body, and follow the suggestions of the imaginary body. He must enlarge his being and make his being flexible. To answer the present materialistic age means that the actor must find other flexible, spiritual but concrete things.

Now let us change the imaginary body. The center is not in the chest, the imaginary body is one foot taller and the center is in the neck. Try to move, and you will see how the physical body will gradually want to merge with the imaginary body. Be aware, too, of the different psychology which comes from this imagination. In addition, imagine the body slim and slender, and the arms and hands longer, according to the tall, imaginary figure. Don't pay any attention to your physical body - it will adjust itself to the imagination and will be more accurate. Enjoy the imaginary body, and

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everything will come of itself. Now imagine that the fingers are long and tapered.

If you wish to use this means while preparing a part, I must remind you that imagination in general about the part would be necessary and simultaneous with your efforts to find out the right place for the center of the character. The legs and arms and feet and back and everything about the character must be imagined as well. Then try to speak words from the play, or improvise them quite freely, but one thing must be held back - don't attempt to force your physical body too early to imitate the imaginary body. Let it be lacking in expression at first - have patience.

When the imaginary body lives in you strongly enough, then the physical body will obey more easily and will imitate, as it were, this imaginary body. If you force your physical body too early, then the whole thing could go to pieces, because you might rely upon your physical body only, or repeat your old clichés. After certain experience with the imaginary body and the center, you will find that almost at once your physical body will become like the imaginary one.

THE ACTOR'S BODY AND THE ACTOR'S ARTISTIC SOUL:

We have to create our imaginary body in our fantasy. On the stage today the physical body is mostly the enemy of the actor. From the point of view of the theatre

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of the future, as I try to imagine it, everything will become more and more spiritualized, in the sense of concrete spirit. If our physical body remains undeveloped, it will become more our enemy than our friend. We must make an effort to separate our physical body, with its abilities and inabilities, from our artistic soul which is so rich in everyone of us, so full of desires to create this and that. If we can separate our soul and our body for a moment in our thoughts, we will see what different worlds they are.

At the present time our creative soul is absolutely the slave of our body, and we cannot fulfill what we want to do. If we are able to incorporate, to act and fulfill one small part of our artistic dreams, we feel that we are victorious. But why not be one hundred percent victorious? It is possible, if on the one hand we overcome the materialistic conception of the theatre which sits in our whole being, and on the other hand we work upon our bodies. Even if we have been on the stage for years, the physical body is just as antagonistic to our creative spirit as it is to that of a student, or an inexperienced actor.

There is no need to be ashamed of making these exercises, because it will do much more for our culture in the future than to repeat mistakes, and remain with our stiff physical bodies because we are ashamed of being students. We have such a beautiful future in the theatre, if such groups

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as this are brave enough to come to listen to someone who has something new to say. It is already a great step towards this culture.

Our bodies must be considered as being our enemies - they must be developed not only by means of our imagination, but purely physical exercises must be made to develop the body as such. Then from being an enemy, our body may become friendly. When this happens, it will be a great revelation to us, because we will see that many beautiful creative ideas, impulses, desires, and images have been forgotten, because the voice of our stiff body - from our youth until today - has always subconsciously prompted us not to try.

This intangible suggestion which we hear from our body must be corrected by developing our body, then our imagination will become free, and we will see things in our imagination and will be able to incorporate things which we cannot even imagine now, because we are always under the pressure of this intangible prompter, our physical body.

Here we come to the point that to develop our spirit is just as important as to develop our body. That is why I have suggested these staccato and legato exercises, because they are simple, but they can overcome certain difficulties in our body. They must not be complicated. All these physical exercises must be as simple as possible. If we start with complicated exercises, our body will change them so that they will become comfortable. We must beat our body with simple,

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primitive means. One simple good blow of staccato is better than a more complicated thing.

FOUR QUALITIES OF MOVEMENT:

Let us imagine that we have four kinds of movements. One of them we may call molding - whatever we are doing we mold the air around us with this movement. Let us approach the chair, moving in a molding manner. Then take the chair and place it in another spot, molding the air all the time. Then sit down on the chair. Everything must be done with this will which is molding everything around us, as if the air fills our whole being. It must not be strenuous. It is a purely psychological thing which fills our body. We must remember that the freer our bodies are the stronger they are. The will is something which does not need our muscles at all. Actually our will is not in us but around us - it is a psychological thing. The real will on the stage takes us from the outside. It is quite a different quality of will - much stronger, much lighter, much more persuasive. Light, easy bodies in which the will permeates and awakens us. When we are in a hurry, it is not the will but a nervous hysterical thing - to do things quickly, that is the will. We must not confuse these two things.

I want to say that none of the suggestions which I have to give you have anything to do with hypnotism. When trying to hypnotize another person, one must have such a

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strong imagination that you have done it. It is like the objective but turned on the other person. The will of one person has to overwhelm the other person. No means in our Method ever lead to this. Hypnotism is old-fashioned now and it is seldom used, but psychoanalysis is used, which is still more dangerous. In our Method, for instance, radiation means that I am giving myself whether you want to accept it or not.

Another kind of movement is flying. Do the same exercise as before - take the chair, move it, sit down, etc., experiencing the psychology of flying. Again, our body will get a good result from it if we do it properly. Try to do it continuously - the physical things will stop, but our psychology will not stop - inwardly we must go on. These movements will break our psychological and physical boundaries. If flying you feel physically light and easy, and if radiating you will feel light and easy.

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(INSERTION)

There they tackle these problems - they try to attack scientifically all the forces which are around the earth, the different influences of plants, and they plant their seeds in the ground at certain times. Certain plants are enemies and cannot be planted together. For instance, if there are two enemies with nothing between them, they will put a friendly plant there which will grow much more. The difference is so great, even for the eye. The earth becomes much richer, much more powerful. If they do not have these conflicts between enemies, then the earth becomes exhausted.

In each branch of science we have this new approach where many things are taken into consideration which seem, to the present science, nonsense. I am sure that to many actors in the world, what we are speaking about as a group is just nonsense. If they have a text and costumes, what else do they need? I knew a famous French actor whom I visited several times in his dressing room when he was playing different parts. I was shocked each time because he did not do anything with make-up except to make two spots, one here and one there. So for him all these things would be mere nonsense.

Whatever points we take, each one is leading us out of ourselves. If you want to exercise these points, it would be good to remember that if it leads me out of myself, then I am on the right road.