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Michael Chekhov

2581
(afternoon) June 27, 1938

DIMENSION
IMAGINATION
MOVEMENT, PSYCHOLOGICAL-PHYSICAL
Antony and Cleopatra - The Seagull
Criticism: Veronica's Performance of a Scene from Shakespeare's
Antony and Cleopatra

There were many positive and many negative things. The first positive thing which makes me so happy is that you move and are present on the stage with a certain assurance, and this is a very good sign and a useful thing if you are able to keep it and carry it through all your actor's activity. This quality of "to be sure" is half of the work. To get assurance is one of the most important results of a technique. Our juggler's exercise tries to develop this quality. It will help you and will help your audience to accept the things you do, but do not let it lead you astray into believing that everything else was right. You must also know what was wrong.

Your gestures could be more elaborated, more speaking, although you have a good feeling for keeping your body in the space. There was a strange quality in the voice - something was wrong.

DIMENSION:

What was wrong was the dimension, and it must be wrong because we are people who have lost these dimensions. Perhaps we will never act such parts before the audience, but in the school, as exercise, it is most important to try to approach this world of tremendous dimensions. The dimensions

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must be there so that each word, each movement, each moment of radiation must be a revelation for the people who have forgotten this world of dimension.

You, as an actor, take this part to show us something which we cannot even guess. As an actor, you stand before us and try to reveal to us something which you see, and which we do not see. And this was the weakest point... you did not reveal to us what was actually the level of these emotions. You have taken these big things - these dreams, and nightmares, and good dreams which are expressed in such things, and you have interpreted them in a way which we can do sitting here. This is your biggest mistake. You have made prose out of the words - you have diminished and lowered the world to which they belong.

You must remember that as an actor you are trying to reveal to us this kind of human nature which we have forgotten. If you only interpret these high things through our point of view, you have really done nothing - it would be better to take The Seagull, or some play of that kind. You have acted The Seagull here where it does not belong. Such a thing cannot be diminished and become so small. If you diminish such a scene, you will get a psychological disharmony - big words, big emotions, big movements, and the psychology of The Seagull! I want you to realize this disharmony, which is the disharmony of our age because we are already dead to the

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higher level. But in our school we must try to awaken these dreams about another kind of people who are strong and flaming, and cold as ice and storming. I want you to understand where you have made your mistake today - you have tried to make The Seagull out of a thunder-storm. This does not mean that you have to be like Lear on the heath, but the words are on the level of his "Blow, winds..."

At the moment when you will awaken in your soul the experience of these two different levels - although you may not be able to sit there and speak or radiate it - even the knowledge and the feeling of how far you are away from this world will awaken something in you which you can use in The Seagull. This does not mean that by trying to find these bigger dimensions you will gain nothing for The Seagull. In fact, you will never be able to awaken this other world if you confine yourself to The Seagull psychology. If you try to get this psychology, you will perform wonders in The Seagull. Therefore, I am so happy that you have chosen a play of this big scale to awaken some things which are lying there.

IMAGINATION:

How to awaken this world of things which are lying there? By the imagination. I am sure you have not imagined these figures so that you have not been able to sleep. Have you seen a strange dream which could carry you through the

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whole day with its strange feeling? It is more than a dream if it is really experienced in your imagination - it will carry you through weeks and months and perhaps through your whole life. This is the fire from which we get our actor's inspiration - from The Seagull we will not get it except in a small way. The real inspiration in the real sense of the word we will get from the level which is higher than our usual level, than our usual life. That is why it is so important for all actors to imagine the world of fairy tale and legend - not from the grownup point of view that fairy tales are for children - but if we really try to imagine all the strange things that are going on in the world of fairy tales, they will inspire us. If you read the Bible with imagination, you will see that it is a volcano, a flood of inspiration, and the same is true of poetry, fairy tale and legends. If you will imagine these great things again and again and again with great patience, there will come a moment when you will feel that something has happened to you which will take your sleep away. You will lose your apathy and will be in a certain way inspired, not only during the rehearsals and performances but in your life. You will find the fire in you which will lead you through your whole artistic life and in your everyday life as well.

It is only the present state of our life which makes us little people in comparison with the people who have created this bigger world. In order to justify our

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small dimensions we laugh at this old world of greater dimensions. This is the way you must go, trying to find in which way is the health and the life in this scene you have chosen, and I would recommend that you try to use your imagination as well as the other points in our Method.

You must imagine with will and decision - imagine for such a long time that the image of Cleopatra will come to you, and then you will see what it is. You must work patiently until you will revive her, and she will come to you, and then you will feel that you have to serve her - not to perform her because she is too big for you - you cannot perform her, you can only serve her. Then it will be a magic power through you - a magic performance.

MOVEMENT:

Then you will discover another thing; today you have moved as if everything was mathematical, each movement coming logically out of another, and everything in a strange, slow tempo. This is wrong. If you will see the character when she moves, you will see that you could not have even anticipated her movements. She is so quick, so free, so anti-mathematical that you will be astonished that it is possible to move in such a way as you have done, playing such a part. Then you will see that all your slow movements are intellectually inspired, and not there at all.

It is the power of our intellect which sits upon

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us and kills all our limbs and allows us only to move in this way or that. The soul of the character is really like lava from a volcano - it is never, never mathematical. Such a character must be anti-mathematical. Everything that can be calculated, if it is logical, it is psychologically wrong. It must be "spiritological" - fire and cold, wind and rain, and everything. You must break this slow thing. When you will get it, then you will see a new world inside of you and outside of you in all these things which we are going to perform.

Try to do it with your imagination - not for hours and hours, but try to imagine regularly three times a day, for instance, but concentrated. You can go through the scene many times, and then leave it so that you are not too tired, but don't live in the illusion that what you have done is it - it is something quite different.