

2222
Michael Chekhov

April 5, 1939

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ACTOR-ARTIST
VISION OF THE THEATRE OF THE FUTURE
SUGGESTIONS TO INDIVIDUAL ACTORS

DEVELOPMENT OF THE ACTOR-ARTIST:

Criticism of Scenes:

It was a real pleasure and a comfort to me today. What it is, and how it is from your point of view depends on your own ambition and your ideas of the theatre. From my point of view, it was a great success, and I feel as though I have recovered from a disease! It has always been very difficult for me in my actor's life, and as a director, to realize that although the human being - in this case the young student - can be developed, in many instances he does not understand that he can be developed, or does not want to be. This has always tortured me. On such days as today, when I see that there is development and that development is possible, then I see that it makes sense to work, to hope, and to call upon something which is much deeper in our souls than we realize ourselves. From this point of view, you have given me real joy, and pleasure, and hope.

To a certain extent, or to a great extent, you were really concentrating on the feeling of truth and the objectives. These two things which you have worked upon for such a short time give such a result. It is incomparable what you have done today and what you did before. If you can feel this, then you will be able to persuade yourselves that this is the

M. Chekhov

April 5, 1939

only way to get things which are lying, like jewels, covered with dirt. This dirt prevents actors all over the world from getting the real jewels which they all have. Today I have seen in all of you the sparkling of these jewels, and this is just the beginning. Just in the same degree as I was crushed the last time, I am today revived, because I see that there is something more than you have even thought to show.

It is possible that you may feel that it is dull and that we have demanded things and that you did not express yourselves, but to my mind you have expressed yourselves a thousand times more than when you showed your tricks, and made efforts to make the audience laugh. This is a great illusion which we must all go through, but go through it and realize that there are real things on the stage which cannot be substituted. If you once understand this, you will never again even try to do things which you have done last time. This is essentially important for you and for me.

In our Studio you will always be required to work, because this school believes in something which is precious and valuable in all of us, without exception. I will never give up my idea that only through hard work do we create something which, in time, will be appreciated by the audience. We must suffer for it - we will be scolded and the audience will laugh at us, and the critics will say unkind things about us.

M. Chekhov

April 5, 1939

All these things we have to go through until we come to the point where we can say now we are victorious, and then the real reward will come. Then you will understand that this is a very responsible work in the culture of our time. Only after you have crossed this threshold and have seen that you cannot substitute the truth, only then will you see that the theatre art is much more precious perhaps than other arts, with the exception of music and poetry and Eurhythmy, all of which come out of rhythm.

If we become real artists, we will become an organization which unites so many arts. Each of these arts is a special thing in itself - painting, sculpture, voice, movement, poetry, music - and these many special arts we will unite in our theatre art. But instead of realizing what a great responsibility we take upon us, having so many arts coming together in our art, we regard it as an easy art which does not require us to work. In this point lies the whole mistake, the whole disease, of our art today.

VISION OF THE THEATRE OF THE FUTURE:

The real future belongs to the theatre in such dimensions, in such a tremendous degree that we cannot even guess it. But we must have this vision because in our School we will always work, and through this hard work, we will get this vision. Once you have this vision, you will fight for it, and you will feel that you are standing firmly and not floundering about.

2222
M. Chekhov

April 5, 1939

I want you to understand that the first attempt to get the feeling of truth is already a marvel - the objective is another marvel. Now imagine if the atmosphere will come in the real sense, real imagination, real psychological gesture, real radiation, etc. If you will once really imagine this accumulation of miracles, you will see that it is something which is, in the best sense of the word, the magic of the culture. But without this vision we will not find the way. After today I see that you can find the way - you can and you must. Only this way and only this vision makes sense - all other things will bring you to the point where you will be disillusioned.

SUGGESTIONS TO INDIVIDUAL ACTORS:

Sam is definitely growing as an actor. I have a picture of each of you as a growing person, or as one who does not grow. In my soul, Sam lives as a plant which grows with terrific speed. I know what he has to develop still, and I must say that it is worthwhile for Sam to work, but there are two dangers for him. One is that he has not yet the vision about the theatre. You have the vision of yourself, what you want to be, but you have not the vision for what is around you, and this stops you a little. You are not serving a certain idea - I do not mean an abstract idea, I mean the idea in your heart. Things which will make you happy and unhappy about your future vision. This is what you are still lacking.

M. Chekhov

April 5, 1939

Therefore, when you are acting we see that you are almost always acting without partners, always alone psychologically, and this is the point.

You must overcome this loneliness in art. It is not yet egotism. It is like ice which must be broken, and then you will act what you have inside. Acting with your partners - never alone. Simply professionally, have your partners in your eyes and mind - group feeling in the most sincere and simple way. Get from your partners, and give them - go into this psychological intercourse with them. Appeal to the exercise for group feeling - this will help you from having this feeling of being alone on the stage.

This is the point I want to help you with. Break this ice and serve your partners on the stage, and let them serve you. Your mise en scene speaks of this loneliness - you can look at your partner and still be alone. From this work you will get the feeling for the audience which will awaken in you another thing - voice production. Not having somewhere in your heart the audience, instinctively you feel you don't need your voice - you are satisfied because you are alone. Therefore, you don't feel the necessity for our voice production work. It is a very psychological thing with you. Being alone, your subconscious tells you that you don't need your voice, because you have no one to speak to about it. This is a great danger. I tried to overcome this myself when

M. Chokhov

April 5, 1939

I was young - before the performance I tried to pray to help me. That didn't help me at all!

Erika has another danger - quite another one which comes from her other theatre experience and which I don't blame at all. This danger is to have developed your actor's technique in a certain way so strongly that it disturbs you from digging a little deeper, and sometimes you cannot even distinguish between yourself being technical or being humanly right. For instance, in the scene where you say, "I shall have no husband now," it was purely technical, but you were convinced that you were full of things which were not there. You have been given so much talent by God that it is worthwhile to fight now with technique. You don't have to throw away your technique and experience, but you must never allow yourself to rely only upon technique. Work upon it and fill it with Erika, who is rich enough to fill all these technical things and much more interesting.

Iris, there is one thing which is very characteristic of you at times - you consist of two parts on the stage - above and below - one part cannot produce without the other, and the lower part hangs like a weight on you. What do we mean by the whole being? It means that in each part of our body lives a certain definite power, which you will not find in another part of the body. You will get it through exercises and through Eurhythmy - the moment you understand Eurhythmy

8221
M. Chekhov

April 5, 1939

you understand immediately that you are a whole being. You must find how to awaken this part of your body which constricts you too much.

Alonso, I have told you that you have from your nature, and from your previous training, a very good and right way which you have chosen for yourself. Your artistic nature is fortunately so honest that it leads you in the right direction, and this is very good; but now you must try, on the basis of this truth, to allow yourself more than the truth requires. Whereas you, Mary La, must not allow yourself anything which is above simple truth, and when you do fall in love with truth, then you will do things. Alonso, your nature is in love with truth, so you can allow yourself certain mischief - don't be always under the truth only.

This is a very individual problem. Try through your imagination, through the psychological gesture, to get the strongest thing, the most original, the most unexpected even for yourself. Even if it is only in your imagination, it will be good. I got the feeling that you are inwardly moving and jumping, but you don't allow yourself to do it. You must allow yourself more, under the guidance of this truth. Today you moved from the right impulse to move, but it was wrong nonetheless because you didn't explore the inner desire to move. That means that you have to allow yourself to follow strong imagination, relying upon this truth, and not choke

M. Chekhov

April 5, 1939

things which can die if you are being too honest on the stage.

Deirdre's mistake comes from a slightly different source than Sam's. She is also too much alone on the stage - Sam is alone on the stage because as a human being he is too egotistical - but Deirdre's is from a purely professional point of view. She wants to use everything immediately in the most beautiful way and characteristically, and, therefore, she is alone professionally.

Mary La, I feel that you were trying to get the real truth, and this is the sanitorium for you. You are curing yourself, and must go on with this work. Honest things - don't allow yourself to do anything which is over and above this simple truth, if you want to go this long way which we must go in this School.

Hurd, you are a character actor, and when you find your characterization, you are a really good, marvelous actor; but when you try to add something to what you have, you are immediately a bad actor. The boundary is so inner and so close in your soul, that you must be careful with this one thing. Don't try to add anything to things you love. You add something, God knows from where, and immediately it is wrong, and not only for a moment but the whole Hurd is wrong. You are like absorbent cotton - one drop of water spreads through the inner life. You can add, but it is minus.

Your danger is a very subtle thing. Last time your

0222
M. Chekhov

April 5, 1939

character was simply addition and addition, while today you were charming and persuasive and humorous because you were simple. You don't need to add more than you can justify. When the truth is there, immediately the actor lives for the audience - eyebrows, eyes, hands, face, everything begins to be alive on the stage. Today you were only blinking, but it was a wonderful thing. When you begin to add, you lose your face, your torso, your hands - everything, and we have no interest for you. I told you once that you are an actor of big dimensions. You will see yourself, that if you got this truth you will develop this other side of your artistic nature, and you will do in a certain very characteristic way a hero. You are rich enough to develop yourself, but don't add things.

Louise, there was a very good moment. Don't perform. Really try to add things with the feeling of truth and objective, and nothing more. Only true things, with the objective, and then the moment will come when you will develop in yourself a certain ability to sparkle on the stage. I have seen in your audition marvelous moments in your Juliet, but you are somehow allowing yourself to be spoiled by some actor's mannerisms which you should not have. Throw them away, and rely only on the feeling of truth and the objective. This is the moment you must use. Our School uses your whole time for developing only the objective and feeling of truth, and you will awaken your sparkling nature, and you will be very soon cured.

M. Chokhov

April 5, 1939

Daphne, today I have seen one thing which makes me so happy - in the scene with Iris when she touched your heart, there was a certain reaction and certain qualities of sparkling. Your nature is growing up, and we will help you, but we will not drag it up. Don't think that we, as teachers, don't pay attention to you, but don't ask us to lead you with the same leading means as with Sam.

Frances, in the scene with Daphne today you have made very good progress. You have changed the character, and it has become now a character in the psychological sense. You showed the inner life of the person - the inner life of the character. How you got it I don't know. If you will understand that the speech is such a lover, and that unless we understand this, we will lose the main instrument which we have. Through the speech we can get the whole character. Gradually, you will understand that it is a real lover. Every actor must be able to speak well, but we are higher because we have a technique, and a philosophy of speech which is again on the same principle as the whole School is built. The speech is the whole being - the whole being speaks - it is one, indivisible thing - the human being.

The speech must penetrate into me and not only be heard by me as audience. The better you speak on the stage, the better you move. It is the whole being which is taken into consideration.

M. Chekhov

April 5, 1939

Sam, when you think you are a finished actor, you are simply a student, but when you are a student, then you are a good actor immediately.