

Michael Chekhov

November 11, 1938

ACTIVITY
JUSTIFICATION AS OPPOSED TO
EXAGGERATION
REHEARSING IN REALITY AND IN
THE IMAGINATION
STYLE-TEMPO

Criticism of the whole Spanish Evening play:

There are a lot of things which we must elaborate, three of which I will tell you about:

ACTIVITY,

1. You must promise me quite definitely, that in spite of all the difficulties in your work, you will not lose the activity which you have shown me up until today. You have worked and prepared things and really done something. If you lose this activity we cannot go on. Now I have seen after two years that you are able to work, and now I require from you that you will always keep this activity. If you lose it, it cannot be justified and it will be a personal offence to me. I have spent two years of my time to give you everything I can, and I could not understand why you were so passive, but now I see that you can do it. If you stop this activity I will stop working with you. I speak this out of the pain I have had for two years, trying to get this activity.

JUSTIFICATION AS OPPOSED TO EXAGGERATION:

2. I will give you two tasks, which are for everybody. Both of which appeal to your inner artistic feeling, because what concerns the outer part of the performance we will do together. The directors will help you, the stage designers will help us to form

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the performance, and the musician will help - all this will come from the outside, but there are two things which only you as artists can give from inside. So please take these two things seriously.

First: Definitely stop exaggerating, because as long as you exaggerate and rely on this cheap exaggeration you will never find the comedy; you will never be funny. Then I will not be able to find the way into your souls, because this exaggeration is like a thick wall, through which no one can reach your innermost souls. So you must tell yourselves that from the 11th of November, 1938 we have decided to stop exaggeration, whether it be in comedy, tragedy, or whatever, we will stop this denial of the feeling of truth, we will stop this exaggeration.

When I tell you not to exaggerate that does not mean you must try to use weak means of expression. On the contrary, use the most strong means of expression, but justify them by your psychology. You may take impossible positions and shout and do everything, if they are justified by you, not by your director, because he cannot help you if it is not justified from inside you. This is the holy of holies for the actor, to be able to justify everything. This is your business and nobody can help you with it.

REHEARSING IN REALITY AND IN THE IMAGINATION:

So, Number 1 is activity, and Number 2 is no more exaggeration but justify everything. I would recommend you to get this from your imagination. You will rehearse your parts with your bodies and your voices, but if you will include your imagination between

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rehearsals, you will always be able to meet these difficulties. If you try to do something without having imagined it, your body and your voice will lead you astray because you have not imagined yourself acting with truth.

These are two things which must always be there absolutely - real rehearsing on the stage with real body and voice, and imaginary rehearsing in your creative imagination. They are the two parts of one whole thing which will make you masters of your own soul. So I would recommend you to appeal to your imagination day after day. Take five or ten minutes or half an hour to be crazy with your parts, taking this definite scene or that one. You will have done something on which your artistic soul will respond, and will give you real good results.

STYLE-TEMPO:

3. This is not so disastrous but it must be done - you must get the feeling for the style. At present the tempo is absolutely like AEschylus - and old Greek tragedy - and that makes the work very hard for you, and for the director. You must find this tempo by imagining and producing the style. Therefore I have given you the style, to awaken in you this feeling of form and ease, the butterfly, etc. Each point was leading to a tremendous flying tempo; you know that tempo is not simply time, it is different psychology.

The same scene in two different tempos produces two different scenes, from the psychological point of view. It cannot be otherwise. You cannot say the same thing in a quick tempo and a

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slow tempo without it becoming a different thing at once. So look upon this tempo as different psychology which I want you to understand through the style. When you imagine your parts and scenes in the real tempo, you will discover the real psychology of the play, of the characters, of the situations, etc. Even if you have not got the words you can keep the tempo inside.

When we have not yet got the feeling of the style of the play, the tempo is wrong, and where we mostly lose our time is between words, between actions, and this is why I recommend to Peter to do everything in one big wave. If you will get this feeling of the whole, you will see that there is no time to make dead pauses or drag inside you.

It is absolutely in connection with the feeling of the whole, and it is in connection with the style of this special play. Try to do it in your imagination, without exaggerating, and slowly come to the right tempo. It is not possible to get the tempo at once through hurrying. Get the tempo through the feeling of the style, then it will be the right tempo.

I will be patient if you will really try to get this tempo, but the exaggeration you must stop at once. For tempo I give you time to get it, but as for exaggeration simply stop from now on.

1. Activity. 2. No exaggeration - justify through imagination.
3. Tempo. These are your tasks.