

Michael Chekhov

November 8, 1936

THE ABILITY TO WORK
LEARNING THE TEXT
GESTURES IN SPEECH
RHYTHM - DYNAMICS
Stanislavsky

THE ABILITY TO WORK:

There are two very important and very different things in the theatre. The first one is to be in a creative state, doing creative work. This is the only thing which vitally interests actors. But this is not the most important thing. The most important thing is work. Here is creation, and here is the ability, the possibility, and knowledge of the work. This is very important because everybody has a gift from nature, more or less, but what we have really in our hands is work. It is the only thing we can do. We cannot do the gift, but we can do the work. I think of our school, and afterward our theatre, as consisting of work, work, work. Gift, talent, inspiration, and intuition will come of themselves, and they will come in greater degree if we will work. We must not wait for the moments when we will be inspired. Therefore, let us say that the main principle of our school is work, and the same will be true of our future theatre.

From now on our lessons for The Golden Steed will not be lessons but will be rehearsals, as if we are already a theatre preparing a performance as actors, not students. First of all, we must work here in our classes on the play so that you must become crazy with all your images. You must really work every minute of the time to imagine your characters,

the settings, costumes, music, etc. I got some advice about this from my teacher, Stanislavsky. If you are really working, it may happen that sometimes you will work when you are walking on the street. It is possible, but don't do it because it is very dangerous, and you might get hurt. But by being really active, you will see that you are able to work even while walking but not on the street.

LEARNING THE TEXT:

The Golden Steed:

First you must learn your words by heart. In the theatre today actors are making a great mistake. They think the words must be very fresh. They think that they must be excited every time by these words, and they don't learn the words because it will take something from them. On the contrary, the words must be learned by heart at once, and you must repeat them so often that you lose the feeling that you are saying the words only. You must learn them without the fear that you are becoming accustomed to them. You must work with them so much so that you will learn a new artistic way of speaking them. It is an amateur principle just to speak the words because they are interesting to you.

GESTURES IN SPEECH:

The gestures must not be explanatory or literal. Through your feeling of the gesture, through your feeling for

the rhythmical whole, every moment of the play must be organized. Each actor must feel that he is acting the whole evening. Then you will be working in the right way. You must be in the music of the play.

Never produce the gesture cool and mechanically. You must always consider the atmosphere so that the gesture will be born out of the atmosphere. You must start with the atmosphere, and then you will find the right way to produce the gesture and be full of feeling. If the gesture is right, it can never be too strong. You must be constantly changing your gestures until your director tells you that they are right, and then you must fix them. You must seek for and ask yourself how you can produce better and better gestures. That is what we call work.

RHYTHM - DYNAMICS:

In The Golden Steed, Antin is coming from the world of passion and is trying to rise above it, while all the powers are trying to push him back to their level. This is the rhythmical dynamic of this scene. The Wise Old Man gives to Antin always what he is lacking. Now Antin is full of passion, and the Wise Old Man must give him support. When Antin is too high, he must give him weight. He is always the person who gives balance - that is the rhythmical, musical way of the Wise Old Man.

Everyone who is for the Guard, by pushing Antin

M. Chekhov

November 8, 1936

down, they succeed so far that Antin says he will not see the mountain top, and he is defeated. This is a victory for the evil group, and we must give Antin the possibility to say these words. The Wise Old Man in this scene gives Antin inspiration with his support.

Always listen to the director's words with your imagination, not with your mind! The mission of the evil group is to push Antin down, pushing him gradually slowly but surely, until he is defeated. That is the dynamic of the scene. You must always have the picture of your gesture, and then you will be free to speak your words. The actor must always know that even when he leaves the stage he is acting through others on the stage. As in King Lear, even when he is not on the stage, Lear's melody is acted by others and is felt all the time. Try to appreciate the possibility of playing by feeling and having an instinct for these moments.

These three or four things are all that we have been able to do so far: 1. Atmosphere. 2. Speech out of atmosphere. 3. Gesture in speech. 4. Characters. We must feel and know these music compositions. This ability can only be reached by hard hard work. We are not yet artists until we can do this as easily as a pianist can play. We are as yet children.

The good group has three gestures: 1. Toward the mountain. 2. To protect the good people. 3. To gently

M. Chekhov

November 8, 1936

push the evil forces away. The whole scene is a composition of these movements. This is the scaffolding. We must never do things in half gestures. First we must find the primitive elementary gesture, and out of that, we will make the ground work. Then we will find finer movements, and finally we will build the castle.



Good



Evil



Antin