

Michael Chekhov

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New Students:

Each moment when we are in our school we must develop the habit of being active. Rest when it is over, but during the lessons be consciously active with spirit and mind - this is the right approach to our school. All the things you have had from me have been given you to use not only during the acting on the stage, but, what is more important, during the preparation of your roles. You have to follow the same suggestions but if you are working on your parts without anything, what are you actually doing? You may be a genius but if you have no method you will be an amateur.

CONCENTRATION:

I will give you a small soliloquy to work on, and you will have two weeks in which to prepare it. You must try to find out how to apply all that you have been given, during this time when you will be working alone. That means that when you decide to work you must be concentrated on your work for

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the whole time. 1. Try to train yourself to use concentration each moment. Not only as artists but you must understand the soliloquy from the point of your concentration, the concentration of the character, etc. You must understand the concentration of the character - you as an artist, and you as a character, both must be concentrated. You will remember certain impressions which you have got from actors who are acting very dull sometimes. Why? Because they do not know on which things the character is concentrating, therefore they walk and speak vaguely on the stage.

IMAGINATION:

How will you start with your work? You have to imagine this soliloquy as if your character pronounces the words. Your make-up, costumes, everything must be imagined. It must be in composition with concentration, and that will give you two very strong tools. After two weeks time you must give me sketches or drawings of the settings, the mise en scène, etc.

INCORPORATION:

You must imagine your character and try from time to time to incorporate it. Be very pedantic about this, and do exactly as I tell you, then you will succeed in the method. Imagine and then incorporate - do not do vague or half and half things - you must fight with this weakness of floundering.

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RADIATION:

You must see your character, not as something which is confined to the body. You must always imagine and incorporate the character as radiating; the words must radiate, the outward presence must radiate, the setting must radiate, everything must radiate.

ATMOSPHERE:

Nothing must be done without atmosphere, because then it is at once dry and less expressive for the audience and yourself. You must follow the images only in the atmosphere.

OBJECTIVES:

You must find the various objectives of the character in this or that moment, then take the objective with your whole body.

CONTACT:

As this is a soliloquy you may think there are no contacts. Not at all. You must know the whole play, and must feel that this person as a character is in touch with so many other persons. That is one side, and the other is that you must feel the contact with your audience.

PAUSES:

If you find some pauses, you must know what kind they are.

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It would seem that these simple lines have become so difficult, but it must be so, otherwise it would be amateur work and that means nothing but empty space for us. You must take this small scene and find out how to apply everything to it. In these two weeks you must grow and understand many things, otherwise you will have lost the experience.

The soliloquies are: Ophelia in Act III, Scene I. in Hamlet - "O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown!...To have seen what I have seen, see what I see!" Hamlet in Act I, Scene V. - "I am thy father's spirit...List, list, O, List!"

One of the most powerful enemies we have to overcome is egotism. The theatre is a business where everybody depends upon everybody else. Therefore, if, for instance, Sam is egotistical then I am suffering from this, just as if I am egotistical then Sam suffers. Everything depends upon who we are in our profession. All our business depends on our inner structure. We have to deal with our egotism when our business begins. We must be quite open and frank about these things on which our professional business depends.

THE OPEN HEART:

Let us make a circle and exercise this invisible gesture of opening our hearts, without any element of sentiment, it is our professional attitude and our business. Not vaguely, but to everyone as a professional thing, try to find as much warmth as you can because without warmth you can put together two walls but not two human beings. Consciously exercise the

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gesture, and with time it will increase your talent. Now take each others hands and anticipate that as a means which will help you to increase the contact. Add to this a slight movement forward, and use it as a means to increase the power of

the contact.

CONTACT:

At the moment you feel that you are not quite comfortable you are becoming sentimental, because of our preconceived idea that everything which has to do with the feelings is sentimental. Don't confuse the two things - the exercise for our hearts and feelings, and sentiment which makes us frightened. Then put all your hands in the center and use this as a means of developing your heart's business, your warmth. Now step back, but as a result of the separation of your outer contact you must increase your inner contact. Remember that everything we are doing in our school is absolutely part of our professional business.

INGENUITY AND ORIGINALITY:

This is a very important exercise which we must develop through a long period of time. Each actor possesses a certain amount of ingenuity and originality, but we must develop these two powers as consciously as we develop our hearts. My business is to develop your ingenuity. We are all born with certain abilities, but what you want to be is the question in which we are interested. I will give you a small simple theme,

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and you must act this scene and repeat it on the condition that you must not repeat anything that you have done before. You must do it again and again until you will want to kill me! You must, as artists, find original ways of expression. After a certain time you will feel that everything has been used, and that there is nothing new. Then you may prepare the sketch and bring it again in a new form.

The scene:

A famous philosopher has left the town and has gone to the country for a certain number of months, in order to write his book. ~~The idea of the book is that it is possible to overcome~~ fear, which is so torturing human beings, and which is the cause of all the bad things in the world. He is entirely absorbed in his work. He lives alone.

After he has worked hard for some weeks he gets the contact between himself and the idea of the book so strongly, that he loses the feeling of reality of the world in general. One night he hears some noise in this very lonely place, and gradually he begins to hear sounds as though of people walking around - something very strange.

He tries to find out what it is, and gradually he feels fear coming into his soul and taking possession of him more and more. He is not able to free himself of the fear, and he forgets his theory of fear and how to escape it. He forgets

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that part of his life, and the fear grows so strong that he is almost mad. He tries to find his revolver but is not able to. When his fear has reached its climax, he touches his papers and realizes what he is doing. Then he finds for the first time a contact between his theoretical writing and real life, and this is the moment when his philosophy begins to live in him. Through the head into the frightened heart, and then the contact is established and he feels that it has happened. He has no more fear, and he has the right to write about it. He is a new person.

Take the problem as tragic-humorous, comic, or what you will, but you must be original each time you repeat it. The less vagueness the better. It must not be too long - the shorter the more difficult.

INSPIRATION:

Inspiration must consume your whole body, your whole being if you are an artist. If you become sleepy under inspiration it means that your technique is wrong. If you are only doing it in the class it is not enough because the technique is as fine and difficult as the technique of playing on a violin, therefore you must exercise it more. You must take this problem very seriously. It will reward you many times if you will do so.

IMPROVISATION:

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THE OBJECTIVE:

On the basis of objectives: The scene is between two persons, one of whom wants to persuade the other about something. (If the actor hears the words, "one wants to persuade the other," he must be already acting - it is something dynamic.) The other person does not want to be persuaded, because he disagrees with the whole world of ideas held by the other. For one person it is a matter of to be or not to be - if the other person leaves the place without being persuaded it means that the conspiracy which surrounds the whole business is obvious. It is a matter of life and death for a whole group of people.

The other person wants to escape - he despises the whole business but he is not able to leave. Each movement of his hand is already a sign to kill the whole question. Either he will say yes or he will be killed. They both know this. It is a political theme.

The scene takes place in a garden cafe; people are walking around and about. The problem is absolutely difficult. The objective of one person is to have the other person know his fate, in the form of persuading and overpowering, or killing. The other person has the objective to escape mentally, morally, and physically. The conditions are that other people are walking around, and it is impossible to get away. Both have a fire inside them which consumes them.

ANTICIPATION:

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What is your ideal for your feelings, for everything in this scene? The ideal must not come unexpectedly, it must be anticipated. For example: we are going to rehearse this scene, so we must anticipate the ideal for it - how you imagine it in its fullest and finest. Without this ideal of the scene it is possible to make many mistakes, which we will not make if we have this picture before us which leads us.

By having anticipation of the ideal scene, or word, or movement, or feeling we coax the inspiration and it is always bigger and richer if we anticipate an event on the stage. But what is necessary to know is that the anticipation must be worthy, therefore it is bound together with the archetype, because anticipation on the scale of the archetypal really gives us something. If we only anticipate small things, then they are really nothing.