

Michael Chekhov

Morning June 13, 1938

## PSYCHOLOGICAL ACTIVITY

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The Possessed: Scene between Mother and Son:

Imagine two psychological pictures: The mother's body is now weak and poor, but psychologically it is a vessel or form for her spirit which catches and holds the son with invisible hands, with a strength not seen before during the whole performance, during her whole life. The condition is that the body is weak and only psychologically she catches and keeps him, presses him, embraces him, and draws him to her.

For the son, imagine the picture of a body which is actually empty, the spiritual and psychological part is striving to come back into the body to see the mother, to speak reasonably, but this spiritual part with tremendous power leaves the body - like a person who wants to sleep very badly.

Concentrate on this spiritual, physical image and speak the words. By imagining we do not mean passively looking at, but active in the doing of the picture.

Repeat, trying to perform exclusively the process of awakening in the son. Don't be awakened, and don't be absent - perform the process, the effort to get his surroundings, to get his ideas, to get everything. The mother must try not to let her body become active through her inner activity.

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Try to divide the spiritual activity and the weak body. It will give more interesting pictures although it is more difficult to get. Don't perform the weakness of the body - a lion's spirit in a dying body - something similar to the Peer Gynt scene we have done - flaming psychology and dying body.

Take the sentence, "counting the days until you come," in the sense that you want to keep him, - keep him. Don't pay attention to the words. Imagine you are seeing on the stage this figure - an absolutely exhausted body and burning spirit - eyes full of tears - mother and son. A certain kind of agony; not physical agony.

The son must imagine the same thing but with the condition that this is really the last and most important moment of his life on this earth - after this he will disappear, - perhaps commit suicide, or go to Father Daniel, or do anything - but this is his last effort to say good-bye to the world which is the mother. It is a big and powerful struggle with this spirit which leaves him - the struggle does not take days or hours, perhaps only half an hour. If he allows the spirit to go away he will go mad, or something. Half an hour he has to be on earth. Therefore the mother is full of fear and tries to catch him. See the picture on the stage as if you are the audience, then speak the lines.

The son must try to justify his body as an organ for clinging to the earth - he must stay here, otherwise he will be gone. Each movement must be justified in this way. He must

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imagine the whole scene in the realm of the will - nothing of thinking or feeling. The will to keep the earth for half an hour.

The mother's activity must be full but she only catches him inwardly. She must hide her bodily activity. She must catch and keep him with every sound, every movement. With her active burning spirit she must have a relaxed body.

The son gives the impression as if he comes only to pass through; as if he was not on the stage there. This gesture of passing is the most marvelous thing, and for this character, especially, it is absolutely right.

The mother must actually act in two levels - her body is that of a weak, weeping woman but her spirit is that of a heroine who is saying good-bye to her son. This division is the most beautiful thing - to keep the activity by losing the body. Then the actor's nature will get the beauty of acting in two levels. A sad, crying, weeping body - take this as an archetype.

The mother has a shawl. Explore whether it is right for her to be shivering or to be too hot.

The son must pass by as if he is falling down from a very high sphere - down, and then again up, during the whole scene. The nearer to the earth the quicker the tempo, so that the scene comes in a very quick precipitation.

You must never act the feelings; they will come of themselves if you are doing something actively. The mother's

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objective, "is I want to keep him," with the condition that her body is weak but her spirit is burning. The nearer the son comes to the quick point in his descent, the more will he require to pass it.

Exercise: The son must pass through a door and across the room, and the mother tries to catch him, with the condition that she can only go so far physically - receiving him, catching him and losing him. Without words, but having in mind the whole future scene. The mother's objective is still to keep him, but she is physically weak. Divide the body and the spirit. For the son, the tempo grows quicker and quicker as he passes through the room. The mother must anticipate and then sustain. He says, "Good-bye, Mother" - She says, "It's not forever is it?" He says, "Yes, I will come back." Everything takes place in the small passage where they meet.

For exercise, try quite naturalistically as a mother and son going to the door saying these words. The son goes without making any break at the threshold. There is no beginning and no end. The end only comes later on in the audience. Then do the same thing in quick tempo - in the region of the will for the son.

The entrance must be the same - it is not the son's room - it is the Mother's room - the son comes in to say something, or perhaps he doesn't know he is in her room - he is so much in the spirit that he does not know what he does - he is not sure he even speaks the words - only passing by - some words are spoken

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but he doesn't know he speaks them.

The same exercise of passing through the room, using more words. The mother has the same burning spirit with the weeping body, and the objective to keep him. The son is moving in a big curve - pressing down in order to come up. The mother can use her body, because the objective must always be taken with the whole body, but her body consists of water. Therefore, use the body but in a different key - it is similar to the moment when she says, "There is an element of holiness in it," only in a different key. For the son it is as if it is in a small railway station in the night, and a train rushes through.

Special suggestion to Mrs. Elmhirst: You are inclined to use words without any inner necessity. The words must be used as a means to fulfill the objective. Never speak the words simply as empty sounds - every word must be full of meaning. The mother's objective, taken as a gesture, is to embrace him. Never have the illusion that you are taking the objective - it is really unmistakable for the actor when the objective is there. If you feel that the objective is empty, then quickly take a gesture inwardly. The mother must try to make different gestures, all of which will be different colors for the objective which is to keep him.

The mother is sitting in a chair in her room. Her objective is the same but now she must justify that although she is crying continuously, she tries to appear as if there were no tears. The son comes into the room and by saying good-bye to

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the chairs and table and bric-a-brac, he tries to create a desert so that these things will hold him back. A certain kind of making the death around him.

Special Task for Deirdre: The Mother must have some staccato quality in her, which will kill the singing quality that is there now.

The son must feel free in his body, free in his hands, in his gestures, in everything. He must feel the quality of the folds in his clothes, the well-cut coat, the large hat. His character consists of illogical things. He can make strange movements illogical movements. Nothing about him is too logical - this belongs to the purely inner characterization. It must not be too obvious - he is always in two realms.