

Michael Chekhov

(afternoon)

February 28, 1938

SPACE  
PSYCHOLOGICAL GESTURE  
PRESENCE

SPACE:

The exercise is to get a professional idea about space because without this ability, we are working in vain. All our exercises and ideals are in vain because this must be carried on to the audience. Two important points:

Standing on this staircase in the middle of the stage, try to fill the whole space only through inner power, not through outer efforts. Diminish the voices and increase the power with which you are sending out words. Having the staircase as a psychological obstacle, speak over this obstacle without exerting anything, using only your inner power. Your full human activity, send it out, send out your artistic soul. Do the same kneeling down, lying down, and at the back of the stage. Now, everybody in chorus say, "Do you hear my voice?" Quiet voice - send it to one living point, the object on the stage.

Move through the whole space across - your soul, your body, your voice, everything moves through the group to the back of the theatre. Now, back again. Now running. Now, come back running and speaking at the same time. Get up slowly, at the same time sending out your artistic soul through all these obstacles, as if you were performing in the Coliseum in Rome. Spiritual ability and free body.

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Never rely on your physical voice or body, only the spiritual ability can conquer the space. Your position is sending out your inner power. No tension anywhere. Here is an instance where the voice was weaker than the activity. The voice must be sent out.

#### PSYCHOLOGICAL GESTURE:

Try to understand the real psychological gesture which is the activity we need, and when an actor has to run through space, then the dilemma is before him, his nature knows what the gesture is. This is the psychological gesture which must be continuously in the soul of the actor. It must be the lever for us. We try to make heavy things without any means. We must have this lever, this inner activity, or rightly understood, psychological gesture. You must feel your obstacles to overcome them. Psychological tension is the same as physical tension. Do not confuse not being tense with being weak. After you have done this running, you have physical help from the circulation of the blood, but the ideal is to do it psychologically the first time. We must master our psychology.

You must develop an ear, so that it will be repulsive to you when an actor does this separation between the artificial and the right way. We have only our psychology - keep it in your hands. Finish with all tension - only spiritual activity. In addition to your inner activity, each

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movement, each fold of the costume must carry out the inner activity. If an artist speaks on the stage, it must be full of meaning.

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Our Phantoms [The Possessed]:

Scene: Mother and Son

The mother must give orders, not how. Individuality on the stage is as precious as in our private life. Never become the crowd, the crowd is made up of individual people. It is a part of creative activity not to lose oneself in the group.

Psychologically, as actors we must always be able to cover space; we must be big enough to cover the Coliseum, but without exaggeration.

PRESENCE:

Everywhere must be your artistic presence through your voice, and movement, and radiation. Fill the space as artists, not as shouting dictators. Each point of our bodies must be the point of radiation. Do not be abstract. Your artistic power is being sent out and around you.

Try to understand that there is a great difference what kind of space is around us, and what obstacles are here. Do not be abstract. If I am standing here it is not enough to fill the room. If I am standing here, it is quite a different

thing. This must be felt with fine sensitivity. If I am a good artist standing here, I may spend hours and hours quarreling with the director about this way or that way - for me it is quite a different thing where I am standing. It is right when an actor tries to have this or that position, because he knows he has to fill the room - he must have the ability to create different effects.

Do you really exist in this room? Try to exist in this room. Are you able to exist so that this existence is filling the space and time? This is inner artistic power, to be able to exist on the stage, and on top of this ability to exist, you can move and use your voice. Now, with the light, we are existing in the light, as light. Simply your existence. I exist as an artist psychologically. Fill the whole space each moment - do not confine yourself to one small part. Always free - never weak - only our inner activity, inner life.

Our Phantoms [The Possessed]:

We shall take some words from the play, and now I want you, without special exercises, to awaken the kind of activity you got this morning. Try to get it out of your will.

Curtain goes up in darkness, full darkness on the stage, and during this scene which I will describe, gradually the light comes up and we see the scene.

Scene:

The spy is trying to persuade Nicholas to go home with him. Out of the darkness, the audience hears the following words. This is the end of a long talk which was begun before the curtain goes up. When the light comes up we will start another scene, which is the actual scene of the play. That means we start with "And..." The spy, being unable to penetrate Nicholas mentally, grasps him physically.

Spy: You must, you must, you have promised...

Nicholas: You are lying - I have not promised.

Spy: You have been the whole time with us - you have helped us - you have worked with us...

Nicholas: But now I would see you and all yours in hell.

Spy: But the manifesto! Who has written the manifesto?

Nicholas: To the devil with your manifesto.

Spy: You cannot deny it - I will not let you go.

Nicholas: Leave me - go away.

Spy: I won't go away - I won't free you. (Repeat. Repeat.)

The spy has lost his reason. Now the light is full, and we hear the famous word of Nicholas: "Fool!" This quiets the spy because he has no more resources. Create out of the darkness this feeling which is more physical than spiritual.

Important: For the real actor, all these things, curtains, lights, etc. are part of his psychology. If not, then the actor is playing somewhere apart from the theatre. Therefore,

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take all these effects - curtains, light the orchestra, etc. - when you are rehearsing. Then it is a real performance and real acting, and the actor has the right to be on the stage.

This scene opens with the feeling that it is the "carried over" action from the previous act. We must get the feeling of merely a pause between the last act and this act.

We must get the impression of a gesture coming together - you are one being and then the break, your activity is finished, absolutely exhausted. Then we will get the feeling of a wave that was once very strong, and now these two people have nothing to do with each other. From the rhythmical point of view, it is getting up - climax - down - long pause.

The spy tries to persuade and threaten. Combine one with the other. For Nicholas, everything is one big psychological gesture. He presses the spy down, under his foot, and keeps him there. The scene is so short that the spy must have a crescendo immediately. He is running and jumping all around Nicholas. Nicholas makes the minimum movement, but maximum effect.

Be occupied with everything, but "how to get it" is the important point for today.

Scene:

Mother's sitting room. The mother is full of suspicion. The mother is asking, but afraid of the answer. She asks to get an answer, but is ready to invent something quickly

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to cover the scandal that may arise from the answer she gets. Her mother's heart feels something strange about the beggar girl. Liza is the ward of the mother. The mother asks the beggar girl what she knows about Liza, and the beggar girl answers that she has heard about Liza from Nicholas. The mother is prepared to justify anything about Nicholas, no matter what he may have done.

If an actor is on the stage with his full power, he actually raises and lowers the curtain. It is part of his psychology. Concentrate on two things: Beside the work of sending out, try to do it in the form of very tense atmosphere, and the two moments which oppress you most. "My mother," (down). "Nicholas," (down).

The beggar girl sees Nicholas behind everyone. She is dreaming she is seeing something behind everyone.

The mother gives her commands because in the back of her mind she has prepared something to save the situation. Quite opposite to the beggar girl who has nothing - she is quite satisfied. The mother is always in a state of suspense. She is taking something from the outer world and postponing it, and will not do it until the right time comes. (The real performance can arise only if everybody knows the real psychology of everyone else. Then we can suffer or be happy with our partners.) She is ready to reckon with Nicholas for his whole life, and is full of this feeling.

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The mother: Pulling back - the form is full - suspension - the form breaks. Each word of the mother is very dignified. She is a little bit of an actress. She hits with each word - knocks with each word. Each word is a little hammer, but the quality is warm. She knocks, but with warmth. The part of the mother is very complicated - she is an actress, she is a general, she is a woman, yet she is warm. It is a big task to combine all these things. We must elaborate the psychological technique for this character which is so complicated.

The beggar girl: Lives only in the moment - she is not here - she is here. Something is going on in her which changes her. She is always seeking something - Nicholas. She feels somehow that Nicholas is coming nearer although she does not know it. That is why she came to the church. She touches them more with her spirit than with her hands. It is more ethereal. When she touches with her hands it is too material for the character.