

ADVICE TO DIRECTORS

SPACE

TIME, SPACE, ACTIVITY, QUALITY - PSYCHOLOGICAL GESTURE

IMAGINE THE PLAY AFTER THE CURTAIN

IMAGINE WITH "CONDITIONS"

THE SPINE OR MAIN LINE - THE WHOLE

Jaques-Dalcroze

Don Quixote

Tolstoy

King Lear

The director must have a special attitude of mind.

Otherwise he will become dry as dust. The right attitude of mind is to start with a vacuum and to create everything from the very beginning. Each moment must be a creative one.

Before the director begins to work, he must see that his cast is active and ready to work, and responsive to him.

SPACE:

One way to approach a scene is to discover the space and the other qualities relating to the scene, which will add color. One approach is through the imagination, and another is through exploring the scenic world: height, depth, space, etc. Try to find a gesture which will be part of the spine of the scene.

Do not discuss the play and the characters. Instead, discuss the Method, or rehearse. The Method's aim is never to speak, but always to do. It is better to prepare more and to avoid intellectual conversation. The director must work on each exercise until he feels that he has explored all its possibilities. He must find a better and more complete form all the time. It is very helpful to try and look at the end of an imaginary performance; from time to time you must see the play completely - see it as a finished product. In your imagination

you must bring the curtain down, and try to realize what was the most important moment in the play. You will get real inspiration from this, and it will lead you in the right way. In this way you will see the real idea of the play, which becomes clear only at the end of it. You will get a special eye for your play.

Criticism of second rehearsal:

1. What is the purpose of the exercise? In what way does it relate to the play? This must be told to the cast before they begin to work on it.
2. Don't use the word "feel." Use "explore, discover, sense," etc.
3. If possible let your cast sit and rest when you are not working with the body. This will economize the activity and you will get the most from their full power. If you really explore the psychological gesture, you will find that power coming from behind you differs from the power in front of you. In order to do the psychological gesture, you must not only use your imagination, but your whole body. The deepest moment in the play can be understood from doing these simple psychological gestures. Through them you will reach the tragedy underlying a play, without speaking about it.

A creative state is the composition of everything - your feelings, imagination, body, atmosphere - everything. We must find the way to make this creative spirit flame up, and so we start with one thing: your imagination, your body,

M. Chekhov

January 16, 1937

etc. The director must always pay great attention to the questions asked by his cast, as they will be of great help to him in clarifying his ideas. He must know why his cast is doing certain things. He can change his opinion about the play as he digs deeper into it. He must grow with the cast and develop as he begins to know the play better.

TIME, SPACE, ENERGY, QUALITY - PSYCHOLOGICAL GESTURE

Jaques-Dalcroze gives us a definition of rhythm as TIME, SPACE, AND ENERGY. The composition of these things can give different rhythmical patterns. In our psychological gestures we can express many differences in time. We must have a feeling of time so that in one psychological gesture we can feel the passing of many years, or the passing of a few moments, whichever our purpose requires. The feeling of time is given through our gesture so that we can feel it as we want. This is one of the beautiful qualities of the gesture which the human body can produce.

And so with space. We can have the feeling that our gesture encompasses miles and miles. The human body gives us the possibility to imagine and feel infinite space. This is also true of energy or activity: we are able to use different kinds of activity by these gestures. We can use the same gesture but the condition of the activity can differ. For example, it is possible to produce the illusion of volcanic power.

A whole world is contained in these three beautiful words - TIME, SPACE, and ENERGY - to which we must add another word, QUALITY. For example, is it soft, is it hard,

M. Chekhov

January 16, 1937

is it rude, is it happy, is it sad? These and many other things are experienced in quality. Under this thing, quality, we must understand many things. Therefore, the psychological gesture is not the gesture we use on the stage or in our life. It is a special kind of gesture which is rich and without boundaries. It is the greatest aid to us.

For example, if we are speaking about a play, let us say Don Quixote, and we find that the idea of this play is to show idealism under the guise of stupidity, we can speak about this, but whether we feel the space, time, or quality of Don Quixote's life, we may or may not. But if we try to imagine Don Quixote in a psychological gesture, it means much more than if we speak for hours and hours about this character. Our psychological gesture substitutes for intellectual conversation about the play and the intellectual approach to the feelings and ideas. Nobody can really find the idea of the play without psychological gestures.

Many clever and witty things can be written about the idea of a play, but I find that in spite of the clever things that are said, they never touch on what the author does. There's a great difference between finding the idea of the play, or describing the play in words. For example, you can describe the whole story of King Lear, but it will remain a description and nothing more. But if you find the gesture of King Lear himself, then you will find the idea of

M. Chekhov

January 16, 1937

this image. This idea includes TIME, SPACE, ACTIVITY, QUALITY and other things as well. We have the right to find the idea in our individual ways because we are different people, but the intellectual approach to a play adds nothing to what has already been given. Nobody can tell what Shakespeare had in his spirit when he wrote. In comparison, the gesture will help you to find the idea of the play.

The same is true of the characters. We can only understand the characters through the gestures. From the highest idea of the play to the simplest incorporation of one moment, we must use the same means - the psychological gesture. This is like bread and water to the actor, because he needs this feeling of TIME, SPACE, ACTIVITY, and QUALITY.

The Method of Approaching Our Sketches:

At the moment we are concentrating almost entirely on the psychological gesture, and this is good because we must get accustomed to this part of our work and understand some of the difficulties. However, there are many other possibilities for starting a sketch. But which one will be used depends very much on the character of the sketch. The director can use all these approaches alternatively, and be absolutely free. Do not take pedantically any suggestions that I may give you. You are entirely free to question and in this way clear up difficulties. Difficulties are good because they mean we are going deeper and deeper into the understanding.

M. Chekhov

January 16, 1937

THE SPINE OR MAIN LINE: THE WHOLE.

It is absolutely necessary in preparing a sketch or play to find, in time, the spine or main line of the play. This is sometimes called the idea of the play. In trying to find this idea, directors and actors of today begin to use their intellects and find something which they call the idea. We must escape this intellectual approach when finding the spine or main line or idea. The whole Method I am trying to give you is directed towards escaping this bad way of intellectualizing about the play, which kills the possibility to be in the aura of the play. The intellect is not able to enter into the aura of the play. It kills it.

IMAGINE THE PLAY AFTER THE CURTAIN IS DOWN:

We must find the approach to the spine of the play. There is one very helpful principle. Imagine we are looking at a very good performance. Imagine that we have seen one act, another, and the third act. The curtain is down. We continue to sit in the theatre and are open to the impression we have received. Try to understand what is going on in your soul at such a moment. You are living through the most important thing in the performance: the idea, the spine, the main line, the whole. This is only possible when the play is over because there is this beautiful moment when you can catch with your whole being the result of the whole play. And what is this result? It is the aim, the spine, the idea, the main line. Perhaps you are able to name this moment with your intellect - not yet. This is not necessary.

Imagine that you are going to prepare a sketch.

M. Chekhov

January 16, 1937

You must imagine that you are looking at this sketch which is not yet prepared. You must look at some pictures which you have already created, and then pull down the curtain in your imagination. Now you wait until you feel that something is growing in your imagination as a result of your attempts to look at the sketch as if it were performed and the curtain had come down. This is a well from which you will get many inspirations for finding the main idea. Each director and each actor must try to do this. From time to time it is necessary to repeat this act of going through the performance and bringing the curtain down, in order to see how the sketch has grown.

Tolstoy suggests that if you are very angry with someone, try to perform the whole act of your anger up to the moment when you see ~~the~~ reaction of the other person. At the moment you see this reaction you will no longer wish to do or say the angry things. When you have seen the result - the curtain is down and your enemy is lying before you helpless - what more is there to do? There is nothing to do but help him up and get rid of yourself. Therefore, the result of all the evil things you wish to do is exactly the opposite!

The director must always find the difference between action and acting. The action is the preparation for acting.

Let us suppose your psychological gesture is "pushing." The purer your pushing is at the beginning - that is in the Platonic world - the richer will be your pushing in the world of the performance. And this will create a persuasive

thing for the audience.

The director must always try to give the purest form of the psychological gesture. Otherwise bad habits and ideas will develop, which have to be uprooted later.

Criticism of the Third Rehearsal: The Fishing Scene

1. You must remind your cast as often as possible, until everybody will understand, that each psychological gesture is given in order to explore some depths. Without this reminder to the cast the gesture is often done without achieving the best results, because the actors forget that the gesture is being done only to explore and not for acting.

2. You did not tell your cast clearly enough what the purpose of your psychological gesture was: for example, to penetrate.

3. You referred to the physical part of the exercise. We have no purely physical exercises; each exercise has its physical and psychological side.

4. You gave the action too vaguely. You must give a clear physical and psychological gesture: for example, to penetrate - force the knees, chest, head, and forehead forward - that would clearly describe the gesture.

5. The director must have a very clear idea of what he is doing, and of the series of psychological gestures which will lead his cast the right way. Through such a series of gestures you can awaken feelings, interpretation, etc. You



You could explore the penetrating gesture with the gesture of being pushed from behind, and compare the two.

6. Don't use the word "objective." In our sense this means the task which the director gives the actor to do. It would be better to use the word "result, aim," etc.

7. The Abyss: Never tell your actors that they are standing before an abyss. You must tell them to imagine a figure standing before an abyss.

8. In order to experience a sensation of "relief," you must tell the actors why and how they are relieved. You should give them a psychological gesture for this, the opposite gesture to the one which you gave to penetrate. For instance, stand and imagine that you are going down, down, down. This will help you to understand what it means to go down into an abyss. But if you stand and say that the floor in front of you is an abyss, you must be crazy. You could approach the problem in another way: through the psychological gesture, in which case you would tell your actors to send their centers down.

9. You cannot explore and feel at the same time. To explore you must have an unlimited amount of power. In doing a very clear psychological gesture, you must have a lot of power. If you ask your actors to stand before an abyss and feel at the same time, you will over-strain their powers.  
CONDITIONS:

The world of real life and the world of imagination are two entirely different worlds. In the world of imagina-

M. Chekhov

January 16, 1937

tion you can do anything you wish. Imagine that you see a throne with its heavy golden frame. Then open your eyes and see an ordinary chair. Through your imagination it will be possible for you to use the chair as the throne. We have the ability to imagine and the ability to understand conditions. The actor understands the "condition" and fuses it with the aura which he has created in his imagination. At the moment the actor loses the feeling of the "condition" as such, he will be mad. By "condition" we mean accepting something as a symbol of something else: for instance, the chair is the symbol of the throne. We use the word "symbol" here in its simplest form.

The "abyss" exercise would have been all right if the director had first given his cast the possibility to imagine the aura. We must either start from the imagination or from doing - for instance, the psychological gesture. In this case the director did not give his actors an imaginary thing because it was too real, and it was not a doing thing because there was nothing to do. If the actors had really been able to realize the abyss, they would have been mad. The right way would have been to give the exercise either as a psychological gesture to be explored, or as an imaginary exercise. It fell between the two poles - imagination and action.

THE FISHING SCENE

CAST

A 13-year old boy whose stepfather is on the Jane.

The mother of the boy. First husband drowned on the Mary.  
Second husband on the Jane. Sick child at home.

Middle-aged spinster

Girl of 15 - only brother out at sea.

Old woman whose husband and sons were drowned many years ago.

Young woman with baby - husband on the Jane - only man saved.

Old woman - sometimes thought to be a witch.

Young bride from the city. Husband on the Jane.

Young girl in love with man who has married the city girl.

One fisherman who returns on the Jane.

THE FISHING SCENE

CAST

Catherine	A 13-year old boy whose stepfather is on the <u>Jane</u> ; son of Gretel
Gretel	Mother of the boy. First husband drowned. Second husband on the <u>Jane</u> . Sick child at home.
Paula	Middle-aged woman with two sons out at sea.
Mrs. Elmhirst	Middle-aged spinster; two nephews out at sea.
Anna	Only brother out at sea; an orphan
Eleanor	Sea has taken all her men.
Jocelyn	Her husband is on the <u>Jane</u> .
Esme	Old woman
Beatrice	In love with Felicity's young husband, who is on the <u>Jane</u> .
Felicity	Young bride from the city. Husband on the <u>Jane</u> .
John	Only fisherman saved on the <u>Jane</u> .