

Michael Chekhov

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We will continue the work with the feelings. Try to penetrate into the world of feelings and get some knowledge of what this means - streams from your hearts, that is what actors must give. Let us work on The Fairy Tale, [The Two Kings].

This play is very good propaganda against naturalism. In the majority of cases we could very clearly see that these were not the feelings of the actors, and this is very good. It was as if the feelings came to them and through them to us. It is absolutely wrong for an artist to squeeze out the feelings from himself. They are always dreadful and not quite clean, and they will never be persuasive.

The audience does not want your personal feelings, but something which is above you and around you. Therefore, we artists must be able to show something which does not belong to us, but which speaks through us. Something which belongs to the artist's imagination or inspiration, but not to him as a person - not to you as a person, but to you as an artist. That is why all the stupid things we have just seen were so persuasive. We can compare this with the musician who practices on a violin. How dreadful it is at first and how torturing.

At the moment when we try to squeeze out our personal feelings, then they are torturing us and the audience. Actors have always some shame in doing this because they know that in them there is nothing inside, nothing more than any other person on the street. When we try to squeeze out our

personal feelings for the audience, all the small acts of our lives are really contained in them - they really speak to the audience. But at the moment when we are able to manage our instrument quite easily, then we begin to be artists.

If you remember the work we did on The Fishing Scene this morning, at the moment when they cried "Catch!" it was personal - the instrument was very difficult to play upon. With time you will catch the secret and you will be able to define at once what is "me" and what is "through me". There is no greater pleasure for the artist than to let such streams go through him. That is why we are so busy with the idea of "giving out," because the moment we keep something back we close the doors through which we can get inspiration. This contraction inside the actor's soul, in an effort to accumulate feelings, will kill the real feelings. The more the actor is busy with himself, as to whether he has feelings or not, the more closed are the doors and they (his feelings) will remain as soiled as they are in his own private life. The private life must not be shown from the stage in the form of feelings.

In The Fairy Tale today the actors have given us streams of feelings; it was a kind of inspiration because nothing was prepared, but intonations and small movements came at once. For instance, through the characters. The character is something like a door through which the audience can get something. Remember the voices today as such, and you will

see again how the voices were nothing less than doors through which the feelings, which did not belong to them, came out. It is very important to pay attention to these small facts. All their small movements were a means for conveying something which did not belong to them.

THE ARCHETYPE:

Now let us make a small experiment: try to imagine the actors in one special moment. Recall it as you like, and try to imagine that they are sending out, by the same means of expression, their own feelings. You immediately know how wrong it is in spite of the same voices and characters. If you imagine them sending out their own personal feelings, squeezing them out, they will only be dreadful things like the early practice on the violin. Try to love these feelings which are streaming through without stopping inside. What was good in this case was that the actors, in spite of existing as real persons, gave us at once the impression that this is the archetype of something, because their feelings did not belong to them.

Sometimes an audience will tell the actors that they have acted so well that they seem to know just such persons as they have seen on the stage. In reality the audience does not know any such persons, but the actors have created an archetypal character which the audience feels it knows. The audience has the feeling that they know such people. This is the mystery of archetypal acting. If we show a character that is a character and nothing more, we will never give the

impression to the audience that they know such characters. For instance, take Peter's character. Such psychology does exist somewhere; and if I were to meet somebody like that, I would immediately recognize him as the archetypal character which Peter has shown us.

It is important to awaken the beginning of this feeling that our art is much more important, more speaking, much richer and much more spiritual than it seems to be. You can act the character of a tramp, which will be absolutely a tramp; but if it is archetypal, it will be a character surrounded by some idea of a tramp. We must be able to play the tramp so that we will be able to see through this tramp into all the tramps of the world.

This ability to act out of the archetype belongs, in a very high degree, to Chaliapin. When he appears on the stage, before he begins to sing or speak, he brings such a stream of the archetype that at once everyone feels that they understand the whole tragedy that is to be performed, because he is surrounded by all this knowledge of the archetype. He was once asked how he prepared his parts - he was always very awkward in explaining his psychology - "How I prepare my parts? First of all I cry about the person, being alone." This is genius. And when he cries about the person, it means the whole world from which the person comes. He cries because it is always touching to live in the realm of the archetype.

When we get the desire to find contact with the world of the archetype, we will understand our method as a means to penetrate these archetypal powers. For instance, our psychological gesture is one of the ways to the archetype. If you work with the psychological gesture sufficiently long, something will begin to speak to you, and you will feel how happy you are; this is the real way to coax archetypal feelings around you. Therefore, we need our psychological gesture and our creative imagination.

If I am acting King Lear, for instance, and I start with the appearance of him as a stupid old man, it means nothing; but if I have seen Lear entering the throne room many times in my imagination, and my imagination is so developed that I am in him, around him, with him, beside him - when I have seen this image enough with my developed imagination - then I begin to see many archetypes coming together. What is the archetype of being old? This is really something to cry about - an old human being - the whole tragedy. An old man can be like a revelation of something tremendous and gorgeous, or dirty [debased], or sexual, or he can be small and insignificant, striving to cling to his past life - indescribable. All these things are lying in the archetype to be old; and looking at King Lear, for instance, you will see that he is not only a person who walks, and shouts, and dies in the third act. You will in this old man a most majestic figure, and at the same time a most pitiful person. You will see a dirty

[debased] old man, an old man who is already dying in the moment when he is most active, and he is living at the moment when he dies. All these things you will be able to read out of the archetypes which are around the image of King Lear.

These are the feelings which the actor, as an artist, can have because it is given to us, and we only need to want it. The imagination, psychological gesture, everything, can be understood as a way to the archetype. Today the cast experienced first the feelings streaming through them, and then they have touched the world of the archetype. That is what I mean by the real feelings.