

Michael Chekhov

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STYLE OF COMEDY
PSYCHOLOGY OF CHARACTERS
APPLYING THE METHOD

STYLE OF COMEDY:

Pickwick: [Adventures of Samuel Pickwick, Esq.]

I want to remind our students that we have started this comedy with the motto, "Feeling of Truth." That means that you have to decide to discard all the lies of the stage. In the first days you didn't like it at all, but then it became sometimes more or less funny, and you have lost the more usual, trite, and common attempts to make the audience laugh. It is the most hopeless thing the actor can do - it is tasteless and rude, and not funny at all. Imagine for a moment that you see yourself on the stage making such faces and indications, and you will see how disgusting it is. Get the desire not to try to make the audience laugh by such cheap means.

If the comedy is acted by such primitive means, I will not show it to the audience. That means we are responsible to our organization because I have promised to show the two productions on Broadway by October 17. Our reputation is at stake. To show such primitive acting of a comedy is not our task - we must show something finer. We can be a group of young people, and that will be forgiven, but we must have good style; we must show certain qualities. Whether we are young and undeveloped it does not matter, but to show old,

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bad habits I protest against. Stop trying to persuade the audience that you are funny! This is the negative side.

PSYCHOLOGY OF CHARACTERS:

What to do? You must feel the psychology of the characters just in the same way as you would for a serious drama. Take this play as though it were The Seagull, with its human psychology, its psychological truth, then it will become funny. Forget all about it being funny; take it as seriously as if it were a drama, and then you will get the right feeling for humor. Then Dickens will become funny, and through him, you.

Don't forget the things which have been suggested. When we have found a certain psychological pattern and then come back to it, I find that everything is forgotten, and I cannot get again what we are aiming at. You have no right to forget. If you have a bad memory, you must write it down, but you are responsible for all the things I suggest. You are not allowed to forget.

We must elaborate the characters in the Pickwick performance. That means the characters in the sense that we are trying to understand that the character is a thing which consists of two parts - the characteristic psychology and then the body of this psychology. The characterization lies in the psychology, and the body accomplishes the psychology.

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You are doing the opposite now - you try to get the characterization with your bodies, and you don't pay attention to the psychology, and I see a series of puppets walking around, which are not very interesting. Everyone can distort his face, but if I want to get some characteristic, I must get it first from the psychology. When I have found it psychologically, I have the right to do it physically. I must find out what the psychology of the character is, and not start with the body first.

1. Drop forever these attempts to be funny when you have no character.
2. Take the character first psychologically, then it will come physically.
3. Never forget any single instruction given you.

Scene II - Atmosphere of love, amorous, romance, mystery, moonlight. The psychological gesture between Rachel and Tupman is to come together, to overcome the distance. The gesture is one of flying from the periphery to the center - everything comes to the center. The center is in them both.

APPLYING THE METHOD:

The difference between what was being done and what is being done now is merely to know what you are doing. Why flounder in this old world of mistakes when it is so easy and much more sure because there is a certain technique, and we feel that we can build certain technical things, - rather than to wait for the moment when you may become funny or perhaps not.

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Why do you study the Method during the lessons and not apply it during the rehearsals? Take two or three of the points and apply them consciously. I cannot remind you on each occasion of the points of the Method. During rehearsal you are compelled to do it yourself. When I give you the business, you must take some point of the Method and apply it. As the director, I must be free to direct you - I am no longer a teacher - but I must be sure that in our school you have a clear idea of the objective, the psychological gesture, etc., etc., and I must be sure that you will do it with the right atmosphere, etc. Then we will understand each other, and I will not be so helpless, and you will not be so helpless. You know the Method, to a greater or lesser extent, so you must apply it during rehearsals. Don't force me to teach you on the stage - I cannot teach and direct the play. By October you must be actors and not students on the stage. Make the effort - otherwise I am helpless.