

Michael Chekhov

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THE INSPIRER
ANTICIPATION
ARCHETYPE
IMPROVISATION

Old Students:

To be able to act rhythmically one must be able to improvise rhythmically. After this term we will perhaps be able to start on the work of improvisation in connection with rhythm, but it would be too soon now. It would be wooden and imposed, which is always the way when this is given to soon, and it would also spoil our efforts in connection with improvisation as improvisation.

THE INSPIRER: Peer Gynt:

You must know quite clearly what our aim is in this exercise. Our aim is to be able to open our doors to the inspirer, to the audience. To be relaxed psychologically and physically and anticipate what we are going to show to our audience, and to do it quite technically. We must not look upon this thing as a performance - don't confuse the two things. The longing of Asa is very strong before death. To have the boy with her, and to die near him - this is a tremendous diapason. You must work for much more colorful and powerful suggestions from your inspirer.

If, for instance, we start on some play for our repertory we must be crazy from morning to evening with the ideas of this play. We do not do this at the moment - we only touch on

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the sketches from time to time, and only as exercises, therefore we cannot expect the same power as we would have if we were working on a performance.

There were many characteristic efforts during such work on the feelings. One of them was to get the bigger scale. The effort was right but we were able to see the scaffolding of this effort - there were only bones - it was bare. If we work more and more on this effort the skeleton will have more flesh and finally an aura, but this requires imagination and effort. The effort we have seen, and we must appreciate it at this time. Without effort we will never get the scaffolding, and without the scaffolding we will only have a mass of flesh.

Repeat the scene. Again the same thing. If we have the right idea about our Method, we shall see at once that in order to elaborate this scene we need continuous imagination and objectives, etc. If both actors, both characters, had been clear about objectives, how much it could have given them! And atmosphere, how much it could have given, and imagination, and significance as means of expression. Therefore, by working yourselves, by looking at the actors as though you were the director, as helpers, as actors you must always know what is lacking at each moment. The Method is given.

Balladina II:

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The same technical exercise for the feelings - not a performance - with the same clear idea of what we are lacking and what we have got. Review what you have seen, as directors, actors and producers. The task is quite technical - I want you to be good technicians today.

Suggestion for Terrence: Perhaps one thing can be desired - you have had a very fine kind of contraction which we must understand. You were contracted and your fear was not to have contact with the other person. Sometimes it seems to us that we are acting freely and well, but we are entirely alone, and it is difficult to detect this. With very experienced actors who follow the right way, sometimes this is one of the very dangerous points - to do something and be free but to sit in a stone tower and not even dare to make an attempt to be with someone else. This can be done if the actor wishes to separate himself from others in order to work upon certain things, but he must do so consciously.

When I was an actor I suffered very much from this kind of contraction, and therefore I know this problem especially well.¹ I know how much it can steal from the actor. It is a great illusion to feel yourself free and full of objectives, but after perhaps half an hour it occurs to you that you are alone, and you are suffering - contraction, egotistical contraction.

Suggestion for Blair: To my mind Blair has taken some

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steps forward. Remember the occasion when he found this old man? Compare this moment with what we have seen today and you will see how many weights Blair has thrown away, and how much more free he is in doing so. Remember how contracted he was in the beginning, how contracted he was a year ago, from the technical point of view. To lose such weights is technical, and to get such freedom is also technical.

Suggestions for Beatrice: This is an instance of a very fine danger which we must know. We were attracted to Terrence because he was contracted, while Beatrice was free and we were not so much attracted to her. We were attracted to her more artistically and felt more free about her. We must know as truthful people how to attract the audience. We must attract it, leaving it quite free. Actors know how to attract the audience by doing very bad things sometimes, but we must always try to attract the audience by means which Beatrice employed this time - we don't really notice it because we are full of some improvisation. This is again a technical question. If the technique is right the audience is healthy and happy, if it is wrong the audience is really ill.

ANTICIPATION: Balladina I:

Let us continue with the exercise of awakening the feelings. Anticipation: To anticipate does not mean that you have to find something as a character, but as an artist what you have to give your audience is what you must anticipate.

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The character has its objectives, atmosphere, and other means. Be quite clear and conscious about what you are doing in preparation for your work with the feelings. The exercise is for the purpose of assuming the technique. You must be aware of what you are doing as preparation.

ARCHETYPE:

Anticipation is always something taken from the archetype - the big thing which I have to show my audience through the whole scene, or the whole play. Therefore Alina's anticipation of wonder is a good archetype for her. If you have this archetype, you will find there all possible original means of expression. As far as we are in connection with the archetype, we are able to find original means of expression because the archetype always suggests the original and never clichés. It is so full of life that you will not be able to find clichés there. It is the place where we are able to cure ourselves of these clichés. Therefore, the more clear you are about the anticipation of what you are going to present to the audience, the more you will lose such clichés. That is why you must lay more stress on the anticipation.

Repeat the scene, looking into the archetype and finding the image of Alina, who is absolutely busy with the things around her. She speaks with the flowers and the raspberries around her, very seriously. Sometimes we shut the door to the

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archetype because we are unable to distinguish the clichés. There can be qualities of laughter in such an archetype as Alina's but at the moment the actress is being held by the laughter she is not able to develop the archetype. Of course there is laughter, and everything you like in the archetype, but sometimes clichés seem to be archetypal. We must distinguish between this. Clichés are like labels, but the archetype comes only from the imagination.

To develop the ability to plunge into the archetype, it is necessary to do some mental exercises. For instance if we take the character of Alina, we feel that she is fresh - newly born. In trying to find the archetype for this character, for example, you must imagine the spring, the first shoots, the water - little streams of water in the spring. You must imagine and keep this picture. It will give you more for the preparation of Alina's character than to think of her only as an image.

All these things are the way to the archetype. You must imagine the sunrise, at the beginning when all the dark mists are leaving the earth and flying somewhere, and the sun rises just a little bit. Take this picture and out of it you will find the quality of fresh wonder. Then you must imagine animals - the first butterfly in spring, the first bee - not the second or third bee, but the first one - all these things will develop the archetype of Alina.

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For Balladina it is the heavy powers which try to find their way out of her. You will find this for instance in the owl in the night. Keep this picture - there is something of Balladina's archetype in this hidden night activity. Or imagine simply some dark places - dark spots. Imagine a factory in the night with no one there - all the machines are standing idle - a watchman's light. Enter into this factory in your imagination and you will feel Balladina's devils. This kind of imagining will coax the archetypal values into the soul, and what kind of archetype we have to penetrate into is always very clear, because as artists when first reading the play or imagining the part, we guess these archetypes and that is why we want to act. So we must penetrate into them quite consciously.

I have seen a very gifted actress who had no idea of any method, but who was always living in the archetype. In one very difficult scene she played the part of a girl who takes her dress off before an old man who is sitting watching her, before making love to her. She has found such a strange archetype, that she has done all these things absolutely seriously, without any shame about her life, so that she was strange and charming and as a result the dirty part was taken away absolutely. We could penetrate into quite another approach, and we had the feeling that there was nothing dirty at all, only a very great unhappiness and despair with the girl. She could have done this in many different ways, and it would have been at once bland,

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common, uninteresting and vulgar. It is only possible to do what this actress did if the person is living in the archetype. It cannot be found through the head, or by touching the archetype lightly - only by penetrating into the archetype.

The cliché smile, when acting a young person, makes the person old. Children never smile without real interest. The cliché makes the actor try to show his feelings, instead of letting us feel sympathy for her or him. The actor does not need to have sympathy for himself - the audience will have sympathy for him. If you will really look upon everything from the point of the archetype, you will find beautiful things. For Balladina one of the archetypes is that of a black, evil clairvoyant - she sees always the picture before her as a big objective for her whole life, therefore she sees through everything and everybody. For instance, when she says, "Through you," she sees herself. When she comes back to reality she says, "Lie down," and she kills - she kills everything on earth. For instance, this can come out of the archetype if you will elaborate it - such things will be unexpected even for yourself.

IMPROVISATION:

A family scene with a husband, a wife, and an aunt who have become so accustomed to each other that they hate each other. When they are eating, everything makes them angry - how the wife holds her spoon is something very aggravating for the

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husband. They are unhappy because of the aunt and everything. Develop this scandal and quarrel from nothing.

Another family comes to visit them - father, mother, husband, wife, and aunt. When the visitors enter the room the people suppress their anger, but in time they begin to quarrel with the other family. They offend them, but having twinges of conscience they find peace among themselves.

On the basis of atmospheres - first an atmosphere of depression and then one of quarreling. It is not tragedy or even drama - it is simply a play between comedy and drama, but it will be interesting to develop the atmospheres, when the theme is an insignificant one.