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Michael Chekhov

(afternoon) January 24, 1938

STYLE
REHEARSING AS ACTORS
JUGGLER PSYCHOLOGY
CHARACTERIZATION

STYLE:

Spanish Evening:

A light capricious theme was played on the piano - the task was to take this light frothy quality and to keep it inside while pretending (in a very good sense) to be sad, then to be angry. Then the task was to move the chairs in a pretended mood or mask of sadness. But all the time this capricious, frothy, butterfly quality must be inside. If this quality is really there then on the ground of it you will be able to use the mask of anger, sadness, etc.

Actors of the old school always make the mistake of acting comedy obviously. The laughter and gaiety must be there penetrating through the whole body. The laughter must be inside and must be absolutely serious. If you are required to cry you can do so but in the background the laughter must be there, and if it is the comedy is there. Without this laughter inside you will get only very primitive clichés.

REHEARSING AS ACTORS:

I want you to improvise certain themes on the basis of the knowledge you have from our school, but you have to use this knowledge yourselves. The director gives you the following task: The period of the scene is the Comedia dell' Arte.

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This group has been invited to give a performance. They enter the stage and in a professional way take the dimensions, examine costumes and accessories, etc. - their own costumes are not there. They meet the owner of the theatre and the carpenter. On the basis of having this wine inside (gaiety) try to be very businesslike by trying to explore the stage, lights, props and costumes, etc. We shall take four types of characters:

Pantaloon (always acts old men)
Capitan
Harlequin
Columbine
Old Lady

I want you on the basis of these characters to imagine how they will enter the stage - imagine what kind of mise en scene they need. During the sketch you must use materials for appropriate costumes for each character. The advantage of having the two levels, one of frothy wine inside you, and the other businesslike activity, will save you from exaggerating.

JUGGLER PSYCHOLOGY:

The owner of the theatre despises this wandering troupe, whom he has found in the tavern, but he needs the business and wants to have nothing to do with them apart from business. Try not to lose yourselves in too many things - two or three will be enough. Now this time repeat the exercise, but this time there will be a director who is in charge

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of the group which is very professional. Feeling of ease combined with juggler exercises. The idea of the rehearsal is to develop the ability to step on the first step, then on the second step. This is what we must get as a new approach to our work. I do not want you to make any effects for me. Just take the problem as simply as it is given. The rehearsals have nothing to do with the school examination. This is professional work. Fear must be thrown away forever. This is a rehearsal, therefore you can make mistakes. The group cannot blame you and I cannot blame you. We are looking and preparing for a good performance in the future. The psychology in our theatre is that if I work one hundred percent I am right - if I do not I am lazy.

CHARACTERIZATION:

We will now begin some improvisations on the play of Mr. Shdanoff. This is an entirely different style - it is drama. I want to give you some more details about the mother's character. She has much activity and will inside her - the most important person in the town - very well educated in the sense that she shows nothing outwardly - poise. The only indication of her strong will that we have, is the manner in which she handles the cord which is around her neck. Everyone in this small provincial town looks up to her as a queen, an oracle. This has happened for so long that she has accepted

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the idea herself.

The task for Mrs. Elmhirst and Deirdre as the mother: You have to justify the fact that the mother never looks down but always straight forward. She has only two things to do in her life - to help people and to give advice, and if someone does not ask her advice or help she has nothing. One of the three beggars is an old woman who has a sick nephew. The mother asks about the nephew's condition. The beggar girl sees the bride and says, "I knew you were like that - so beautiful". There must be definite sustained reaction on the part of everyone when beggar girl says, "John's mother." Develop it inside.

The task for Mrs. Elmhirst and Deirdre: In addition to the mother's strength and generosity, there is another characteristic - each glance means something for everyone surrounding her. If the mother looks at someone, the person is already her servant. Meditate on or imagine this, and from this quality you will get certain economy in your movements, and radiation will come from it if you are sure - like a queen. Everyone follows the mother's every movement and word.

I want you to explore this character and imagine she never smiles or laughs - she is always serious. Therefore her presence is a little oppressive for everybody. She is too serious - like a queen. Such a character is easily developed in a small town as everybody depends on her. There

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is a slight flavor of humor about her in the minds of the audience.

Another scene: The son is involved in many difficulties in political life, and he is very deeply involved in this conspiracy. He is further complicated psychologically between the bride and the beggar girl. Both are very strange. Then there is the further difficulty with his mother. (Later we will see the mother, in the room of her son, is a very different person to the oracle or queen we have seen before). He wants to find the approach to mother's heart and to the two women's hearts but is not able. He wants to find the answer to the tragedy of the political situation. He is a tortured human being and from this torture he grows gradually to a very vague feeling that something is above all this which is around him. He does not know what it is: what is worthwhile seeking for, and what can save him and open for him the meaning of life.

Therefore, this person seems very strange the whole evening because he is half here and half there - looking, wanting, guessing and suffering very much. A real human tragedy. His personal life, social life, heart, brain, visible and invisible life are tragic. This torture and guessing at something which is above him, have given this character the quality of going through life absolutely fearlessly. He knows everything, he despises everything, he is alone, alone, alone.

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He does not appreciate his own life - he is going somewhere with closed eyes asking where is the truth. This is the ground for imagining the character.

The scene is a rainy, cold autumn night. The son has just left the house of conspirators, and has been with the beggar girl who has spent much time with the mother. Now having had all these contacts during the night, he goes home with his brain burning. Suddenly a strange figure appears before him with a hat which covers his head and face, and asks if he can be sheltered under the umbrella. The son looks at him and recognizes a very bad character, an outlaw who has escaped from prison. The son asks what he would have from him. The outlaw answers, "Perhaps I can be of some use to you." ~~The son realizes that there is further intrigue and~~ that this convict is waiting for the order to kill the beggar girl, because the members of the political society feel the son is not free from his personal life, and they want to rid him of the beggar girl. The son tells the convict to go away from him. Being fearless, he turns suddenly on the criminal and commands him to drop the knife, which he knows intuitively he has been carrying.

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