

Michael Chekhov

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ATMOSPHERE
IMAGINATION AND INCORPORATION
LIFE ON THE STAGE
THE FEELINGS
THE INSPIRER
MISE EN SCENE

Max Reinhardt

ATMOSPHERE: Old and Now Students:

We are going to do an exercise speaking and moving out of atmosphere. Fill the space around you by means of radiation, absolutely, concretely. Each part of your body must be really full of this atmosphere. Get up and down in the atmosphere. You must be aware of what is going on in each part of your body. You must hear and feel it like music. Like a sound, not only a vague idea. Create the atmosphere. Keep it and increase it. Something unhappy is about to happen. The sentence is: "Isn't it strange?"

We have to radiate the atmosphere, and at the same time we have to take it into our inner experience; and if we really move and speak out of atmosphere, that will increase the atmosphere. To the power of radiation we add movement and the voice, which are not only in harmony with the atmosphere, but they increase it. The actor is only allowed to appreciate his voice and movements when they are filled with this atmosphere and come out of it.

The ideal performance must always be filled with atmosphere; then each word, each movement will be as a jewel, (not just soliloquies and dialogues, with the audience understanding

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nothing or, at best, something). Each movement can be as a jewel only in the atmosphere. We must develop our love for the future theatre from this point of view. We are always in the atmosphere and each word and each movement is in the atmosphere. Your body must be like a crystallization of the atmosphere. We must never forget what a beautiful, flexible thing the body is. Out of this atmosphere run into the next room and back; then say, "Isn't it strange?" in a very loud voice; and then run into the next room and back and repeat the sentence in a very low voice.

IMAGINATION AND INCORPORATION:

Now an exercise on imagination and incorporation of images. You must imagine as quickly as possible the figure of one character after another. Imagination, incorporation, performance - as quick as possible - in one minute. The theme is a street between two and four a.m., in a big city, a side street. Show five different characters walking down the street.

Criticism:

I am very disappointed with the characters. First of all, they were weak; and second, uninteresting to watch; and third, no vision - nothing. Max Reinhardt once said that he was surrounded by thousands of images which overwhelmed him and that he had to make performances because he must give them life.¹ That means a fine, developed imagination. Of course, he is

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perhaps by nature a genius, but he has also developed his imagination, which means he was interested in developing it.

If an artist simply waits for some images, or even doesn't consciously wait for them - if they come, they will; if not, then not - this is wrong. We must be interested to develop our imaginations and images. It is not enough for us to do some exercises in the school; we must create the life around us all the time. If not, you will only see the poorest things. You must take the problem much more seriously than you have done.

In yesterday's improvisation, and in the incorporation we saw today, two very important bells have been rung. No teacher, no playwright, no school can give you anything if you are not aware of what is going on in you. In this school we have a serious approach to the theatre - you will not find a deeper one in the whole world - and because of this serious approach you must put some questions before yourselves, such as: What shall I do? What has happened to me? What is my imagination? You will see, perhaps, that your imagination is a plain sheet of paper - if so, you must be afraid of this. Remember the invisible wall. Which point of the method calls you to work?

We are too quiet about ourselves. If you will read some biographies, or if you have met some real artists, you will realize that they always have images around them. Ask

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yourselves if you have some images around you. I don't think so. Perhaps you must ask yourselves the very serious question: Must I choose another profession?

LIFE ON THE STAGE:

Another question is that of life on the stage. All the figures in the scene today were made out of papier-maché. We have tried to find the way to increase our life on the stage and during the performance, but today it was just the opposite. You must understand that this is a life problem. It is dangerous in a serious sense, because none of us wants to spend three years or more for nothing. Every one of us wants to be an actor. But we must not only want to be here, we must do something. The teacher will do what he can, but he is not able to do things inside you. He must have a reaction and then he is able to give more and more, to go further and further. Such examples as yesterday and today are very illuminating, but they make it necessary for us to take our whole life problem very seriously.

Let us speak about the exercise we did yesterday in connection with the psychological gesture and higher beings. In this exercise we spoke about developing our spiritual side - quite apart from the religious side. You will never be able to act fairy tales or fantastic or spiritual themes as everyday things if you do not do such exercises. You will not even be able to act naturalistic things if you are not able to embrace the other side as well. It is not possible to paint only with black or with white. You must use both black and white. There-

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fore, it is not so simple. You must experience more than the symbol of a thing - the thunderstorm as a symbol, the child as a symbol, age as ^a symbol - you must have some auras around you, and then you are artists.

Again this question of life on the stage. This is a problem, just as the question of images is a problem. You must decide whether you want to have this ability to have feelings streaming through you, and to consciously have an inspirer who wants to give to you, and who will respond to your requests. I have given you the picture of the imaginary angel on top of the mountain, but this does not mean that you have to take it. Your own highest being - the artist in you - this is enough for inspiration, but something must be decided, something must be taken. You must not be satisfied just to accept. You must ask yourselves whether you have an inspirer or whether you want to have one. I don't think you have taken these things as a problem. You must decide this problem for yourselves, and perhaps you will come and tell me that you have no inspirer - that will at least be a decision. Don't be vague about this. It must be important for you - it must be something definite - everything must be your decision.

THE FEELINGS: The Fishing Scene:

If you accept the things which our school stands for, you must decide to work with them. If you don't understand,

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ask me and I will try to give you other means to help you.

With your inner technique, do everything consciously. We are not helpless. We have a technique. Appreciate this.

THE INSPIRER:

To have free bodies is the first step. Then we have the theme. Now being free, we have to take the atmosphere out of the theme and radiate it. And this is what we call the ground for exploration. If you can remember objectives, take them also. Take your characters, everything you know. Be concentrated with these means. If we have had enough experience, we are able to concentrate. Being concentrated, you must open your creative mind to your inspiration - your inspirer - whatever you may call it - and to your audience. The way is free because you are not contracted. The inspiration will come because you show to your inspirer such things as character, objectives, etc. This is what we mean by asking for certain feelings and letting them pass through us, instead of keeping them inside. Everything easy...this is art. Everything exists and does not exist.

Today we started with an atmosphere and then lost it in the first three seconds. And then we forgot that we must have it. That is why we are exercising. It is better to stop and begin again. This is the reason for the school. When you are actors, you will not have time to do such things. You have to exercise now. Don't do vague things, because this will preclude us from going forward quickly. Even in our private lives

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we are not aware of what we are doing, and these vague things we transmit into our school.

Today we are doing an exercise which is very complicated and which requires much concentration and awakened minds. If you don't agree or don't understand, tell me; but if you agree, then do it. Perhaps when you start to speak, you lose everything. Stop - begin again. That's why we have so much time for conscious work but not for vague floundering around the exercise, thinking that we have done it. We have not done it the moment we are vague. Start again and be quite, quite sure of what you are doing. You must always breathe quite freely during this exercise with the feelings, otherwise you may change your pulse. You must be as free with your breathing as you are with your hands and arms and bodies. This applies particularly to Anna.

Fairy Tale:

Very technically prepare yourselves for this work with the feelings. What are you going to do? On the grounds of what? Consciously prepare yourselves. We know what we must exercise in our school in order to be able to act freely later on: exercise your inner technique.

MISE EN SCÈNE:

Now take mise en scène. Take your positions as revelations, as a means of expression for your inspirer. When you

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move, it is even a greater revelation than when you sit still. These are the means to increase your transparency. Realize that now that you are moving, you have the means to send out even more, and that you can speak to your audience through all these things. This is the actor's psychology. Everything you do, everything you have increases your ability to send out the inspiration.

Now appreciate your mise en scène as a means to send out your inspiration. When you do this, every movement will become charming. Appreciate the position of your hands...these are the means through which you can send it out, and it will also be the ground for your inspirer. Tell him, [your inspirer,] that you wish to do such a thing with your body and he will give you the means to justify it. If it is wrong, your inspirer will give you something else. ~~Every gesture gives you the possibility to send it out, so you must appreciate the slightest movement. Try to feel it like sunshine coming to you - each part feels differently. You must be happy about all these means of expression. Be very conscious that your voice is a means to carry your expression to your audience.~~

Why do we create such chaos as in the wedding scene, for example? Because we are not able to appreciate our own means of expression and therefore are incapable of appreciating those of our friends. When we are able to appreciate everything we have, we must be in harmony with everyone else on the

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stage, or not in harmony, as the case may be. This is the real appreciation of the means of expression. To be transparent, and to give the possibility to my friends to be transparent and to act as I am able to act. Begin again and realize that at ~~the moment your movements are more important than Michelangelo's~~ because you are creating them. Each sound, each movement must be like a jewel. You must keep the character in your speech. It must be clear to the audience.

I want you to understand what I mean by this appreciation. I will repeat it many times. Each movement, each word, even the smallest, is a beautiful means of conveying the inspiration through you to the audience. Now make small movements with full appreciation. Look before you on the floor, and when I tell you to begin, you must lift your eyes as if stopping someone who is moving before you. You must really experience this movement with your eyes so that in the largest theatre it will mean something for your audience. In doing the slightest things on the stage with your eyes or your hands, they must be full of meaning. Exercise this by means of clenching the fist with the feeling of hatred; and of opening the hand with the feeling of love; or lift one finger, but with such power that it has the force to stop someone.

On such occasions as yesterday and today we must study our Method more seriously. When everything is all right and the sketch has gone well, no one will think about the Method; but

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when we are unhappy and awkward, then we must pay attention to the Method and study it. If not, we will always be floundering in the realm of accident, and for this aim we do not need to have a school.

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Yesterday, when Peter was giving his class to the new students, I heard some terrible noises. I must warn you never to give hysterical or insane themes. When the students utter such dreadful noises, you must tell them that such things are not applicable to our art. Never give them the opportunity to do such dreadful things. This is not art. If we must show a disaster, we must find certain means of expression, a certain style which will give the meaning of the disaster; but if it is done in a real way, it is the way to become ill.

As a result of yesterday's improvisation, the thought occurred to me that one of the biggest mistakes was that you did not feel the style of the performance, and this was very obvious. Paul, for example, was absolutely out of style. Some things were not necessary even for the theme, and absolutely unnecessary for the style. In our next improvisation we will take into consideration this problem of style.

Please study the Method and do not apply it in a vague form. Put problems before yourselves as human beings. Do you want to go this way or not? Each year will be more

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difficult for you if you do not decide now. You will be unhappy with the theatre, and it will be unhappy with you if you are not a clear-thinking person about your profession and your way.

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[model]

The "baby" theatre is for the following aim. Directors and designers must show what they have found as a simplification of the new sketches. This does not apply to costumes, only to the settings; but if the designers are able to show some sketches for new costumes in accordance with the new settings, that will be very good. It will only be possible to indicate the lighting. It will be very necessary to have some small figures in proper proportion.