

Michael Chekhov

November 12, 1937

FIRE - FLAMING FEELINGS
THE ACTOR'S WILL
King Lear
Hamlet

FIRE: Old Students:

Continue with the King Lear scene - work for the instant flaming of the feelings from the imagination. It is important to develop the ability to be inflamed instantly by the image - as actors this will give you much economy of time and you will prepare your parts twice as quickly. Take the image as professional work.

"Nothing, my lord."

"Nothing."

Pause

You are going to perform the pause which takes away from you almost all means of expression, and yet you have to show the flame and explosion inside this old man. This is the problem. In "Blow, winds...rage! blow!" you have words and movements, but now it is quite the opposite, you have nothing except a big pause, but the fire must be as strong as in "Blow, winds...". Do everything in your imagination to increase this fire. Take this exercise as a special one connected with the problem of finding the "fire", then get it into your actor's soul. The task again is fire - in the three scenes we have done the task has been fire.

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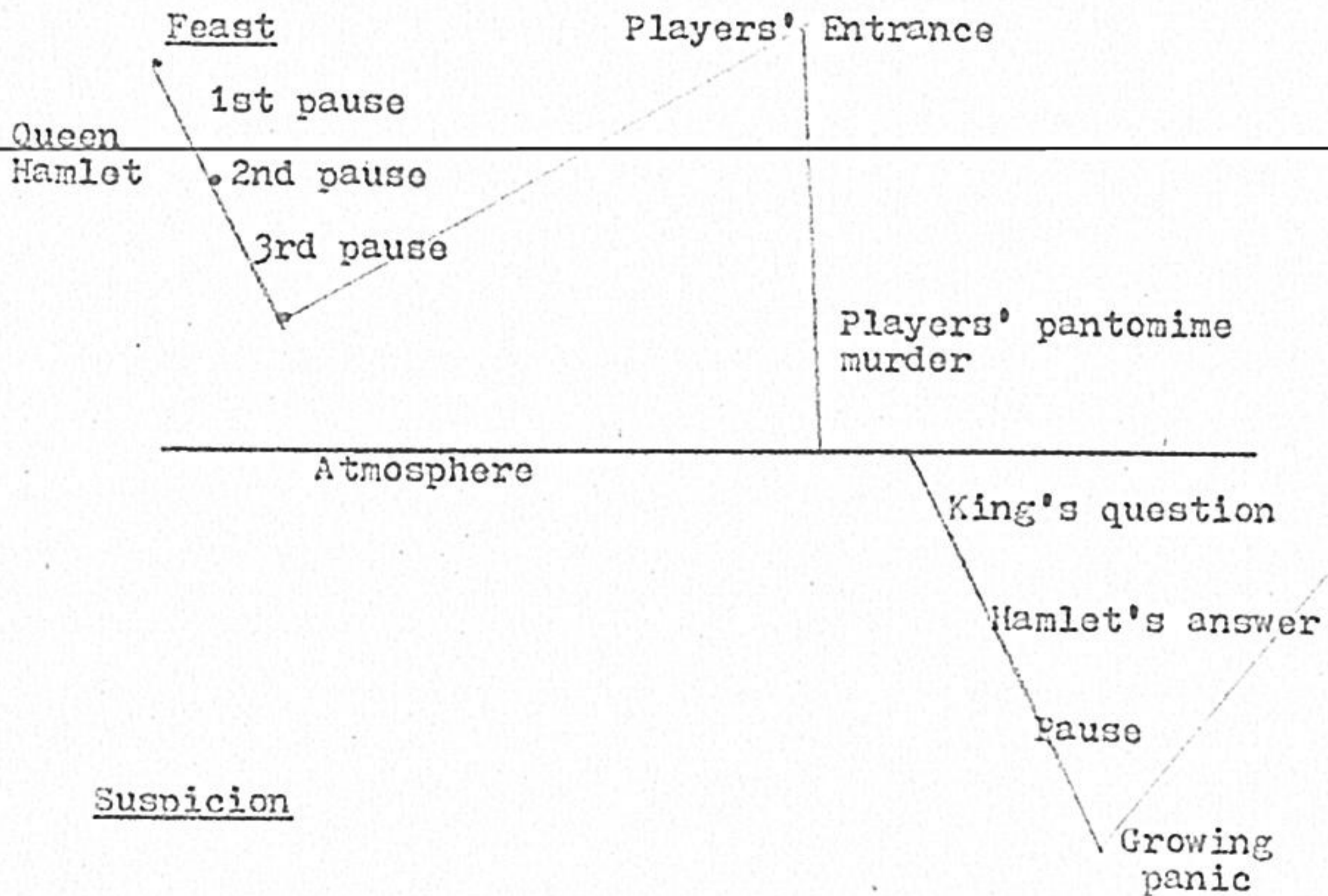
Criticism:

From this you will see how much we have to learn in order to get this ability to flame. You have done the scene very cleverly, and it is important to recognize this. ~~Everything on the stage can be done stupidly or cleverly, and I appreciated seeing that our group has developed this cleverness.~~ But what you lack is fire. Your cleverness will reach the audience, but your fire will not touch them - it is too weak. You must see your image burning and flaming, and then take this image into you. We will repeat these three scenes until I feel you have taken a step forward. All of the pauses and the words must be imagined as flame and fire. Imagine everything through the prism of fire.

THE ACTOR'S WILL:

Let us take the players' scene from Hamlet. Take in the arrangement of the constructions in space, with your actor's will, and make it your world, and be intimate with it. Establish the right will connection to the stage as if you have built it, as if you are doing its movements, molding the setting, creating it until you will really live it and want to be in this setting. This is absolutely necessary in order to be able to improvise. You must be as familiar with it as with your own room. Experience what the slightest change in the setting means to you as an actor - even the smallest change will make your relationship to everything different. Close your eyes and experience the whole scene from inside.

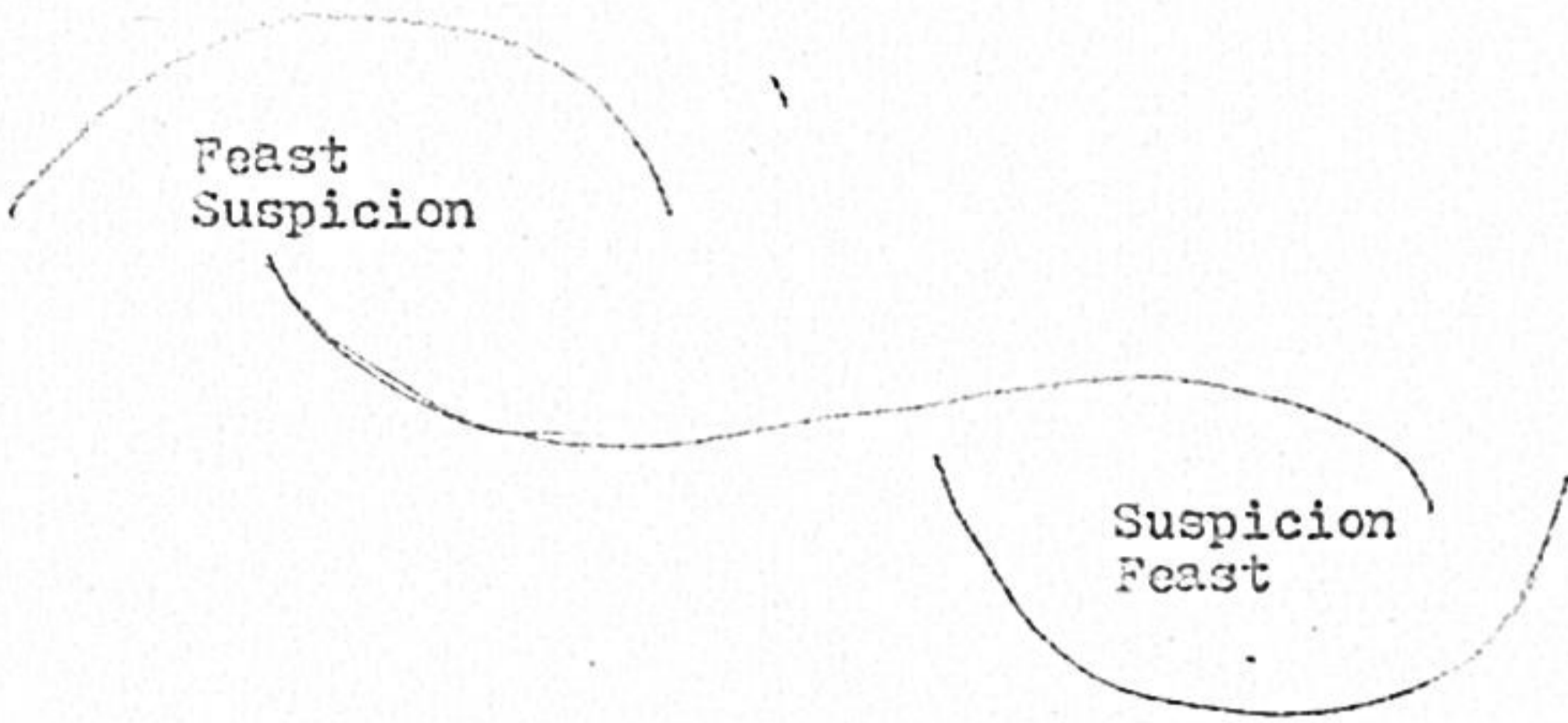
Let us take the scene from Hamlet when the Queen says: "Come hither, my dear Hamlet, sit by me." And Hamlet replies: "No, good mother, here's metal more attractive." We will do the scene on the basis of atmosphere, which at the beginning is a stately feasting one, but in this atmosphere one feels somebody (Hamlet) can at any moment do something to spoil the feast, therefore a small element of danger is there. An element of fear and suspicion, which disturbs slightly the atmosphere of the feast.



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Old Students:

Continue with the Hamlet scene;

Hamlet: He poisons him i' the garden...

Ophelia: The king rises.

Queen: How fares my lord?

Polonius: Give o'er the play.

King: Give me some light. Away!

Polonius: Lights, lights, lights.

It is very interesting to rehearse the play by sitting and speaking the words, being full of everything we have worked upon. Being full of everything, the words will contain all these things.

We must find the gesture of the scene - everything, every moment of the scene has its gesture and we must find it. At the beginning there is a pause out of which the lines are spoken, and in three steps the atmosphere is led from one of stately feasting with slight suspicion, to one of great suspicion and little feasting.*

Crowd: Lights, lights, lights.

Hamlet: Didst perceive?

Horatio: Very well, my lord.

Hamlet: Upon the talk of the poisoning?

Horatio: I did very well note him.