Michael Chekhov

THE PATH OF THE ACTOR (PUT AKTIORA)

by M. A. Chekhov

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It is difficult to write one's biography at an age of thirty-six, when life is far from ended, and many mental forces are only beginning their development and arise in the consciousness like embryos, like seeds of the future. But if there is a more or less clear realization of these embryonic mental qualities, and if there is a certain understanding of the direction in which their development will go; moreover, if there is a will towards development in that direction, then it is possible to sketch a picture of life, embracing not only the past and the present, but also the ideal future. If this ideal should not be fulfilled exactly as expected, let it be so; it will then be an accurate picture of what the soul feels in the present while examining itself.

Five or six years ago I lived through a feeling of acute shame. I could not bear myself as an actor, I did not reconcile myself to the theatre as it was at that time (it

has remained so to this day). I recognized precisely and clearly what it is that stands out as distortion and untruth in the theatre and the actor.

I accepted the theatrical world as a huge, organized lie. The actor seemed to me to be the greatest criminal and deceiver. All theatrical life seemed to me to be an immense sphere, and in the center of this sphere, like a spark, blazed up untruth. This spark blazed up at the moment when the auditorium was full of people and the stage full of actors. Untruth blazed up between the stage and the auditorium.

Meanwhile, in the huge sphere of theatrical life constant, frenzied work went on; books on the theatre, on the actor, on the producer, "research," "experiments," studios, schools, lectures, criticisms, judgments, discussions, disputes, arguments, delights, enchantments and disenchantments, pride, great pride and side by side with it money, rank, servility, fear...huge buildings all over the country, staffs, and amongst them respected persons, semi-respected persons, and persons not at all respected...all this lives, moves, agitates, shouts (loudly it shouts!), flies impetuously from various points on the surface of the sphere to the center and there discharges itself in a flash, a spark, a lie!

In this general picture I saw details with great clarity. I saw untruth, but I had not yet seen the truth. I looked upon myself, a part of this great farce, with disgust,

and upon the farce itself with horror. There was no way out.

That which I had experienced in childhood, and which I will permit myself to mention here, developed before me on a greater scale. In a junior class at school I showed an unusual zeal for learning. Regularly I obtained full marks. I was delighted with my successes and with myself. At last I was asked to teach French to my class companions. I became absorbed in teaching and stopped learning. Some time passed. My pupils were called out to the blackboard, they made mistakes, but I was still above suspicion. But at last I was called out to show one of my pupils his mistake in having written "wous etes" on the board. I went out and proudly wrote "Wu zet." The teacher was dumbfounded. Something incomprehensible and frightful took place. I fell into a precipice. The truth about me was disclosed not only to the teacher and my companions, but to myself. "Wu zet!"

That is how my activity in the theatre seemed to me five or six years ago; I burnt with shame, but did not know how to spell those two short words correctly. The height of my despair was the turning point for me, both as an artist and as a man. From that height I will attempt to throw a glance backwards and forwards and will attempt to link up my past with the future.

"Mikhailo!" - so my father used to call me - "Mikhailo, come and weed the garden! Still playing with toys! You little boy!" But I really was a little boy and could not understand why my father reproached me and why I could not play with toys. "Leave it all; come and weed!"

I knew only too well what "weeding" meant. It meant sitting, for hours on end, with bent back, in the garden, suffering from a pain in the back, and weeping with helpless rage at my father for the interrupted game and for the pain in the back and legs. I did not enjoy good health as a child and was excessively sensitive to all bodily sufferings; but I was afraid of my father and dared not contradict him. He never beat me, and I was not that that I was afraid of. I was horrified by the power of his eyes and his loud voice.

He did not know the meaning of fear and obstacles. Everything subdued itself to him. His colossal strength of will and physical power produced a great impression on others as well as myself. I do not think that he, when he made me weed for hours, could have realized that it could be a difficult task. He would work for hours without visible signs of fatigue.

But I not only feared my father, I respected him and even worshipped him. Often he would, despite my youth, discourse to me in an amazingly fascinating and clear manner on the most diverse philosophical teachings, contrasting and

criticizing them. I listened to him with delight. His erudition was really remarkable; he was well informed not only in philosophy but in medicine, biology, physics, chemistry, mathematics, etc., knew several languages, and at the age of fifty learned the Finnish language in, I think, two or three months.

But...he was too unconventional in his life and that prevented him from using his knowledge and his vital energy at all systematically and in any definite direction. He could not bear anything ordinary, commonplace, stereotyped. He could not, for example, have one pocket watch like other people; he had 14 or 16; and these watches were not allowed to remain in metal cases like ordinary watches; the cases were removed and the watches covered with thin pieces of wood, neatly and skilfully joined together. His wall clock was terrible. It consisted of corks, twigs, moss; it had bottles full of water instead of weights; while next to it on the floor stood a splendid, tall mahogany clock which he left untouched, evidently out of respect for its age.

I suffered through being co-opted as my father's closest collaborator in nearly all of his new inventions. Once I was ordered to stir up old newspapers in a barrel by means of a large stick, gradually adding water and transforming the whole into a thick mush. The object of this invention was to spread this paper mush in a thick layer on the floor of his

study so that when dry it would take the place of linoleum.

Here he had an eye to cheapness. He could not reconcile himself to the fact that people pay money for things which one could make oneself, and make cheaply. The labour of mashing the newspapers went on for several days. Then followed the spreading of the paper paste on the floor, painting it a bright red and...removing and scraping the cracked and warped "linoleum" off the floor.

In the intervals between inventions I played greedily, hurriedly, and excitedly. Even now I have the desire to finish as quickly as possible anything that I like, that gives me pleasure. My games were limited not only by time, but by space.

All the yard of our country-house (we lived out of town all the year round) was occupied by a vegetable garden and a chicken-run. My father had fowls of the most diverse and unusual varieties, and so delicate that they did not survive the winter frosts and gave much trouble and worry to him. His relations with the fowls were so complex and intimate that they were difficult to fathom. When a rooster paid attentions to the wrong hen, then shouting and abuse would be heard from the yard, the rooster escaped from my father, screaming for help, all the fowls would get into a state of excitement, and my infuriated father would retire into his study. When the time came to "charge the incubator" (all eggs were hatched

artificially, of course), than all the inhabitants of the house were on the move. The servants heated water, my brother took this water into the incubator room, I watched the thermometer and the lamp, while father put the eggs on the grid, marking them with dates, breeds, etc. And when, three weeks later, the chicks hatched, my mother and I had to imitate the mother hen, make clucking noises and tap with fingers on the table in front of the chick, while father spent the time inventing various devices which, descending from above on to the backs of the newly-hatched brood, would imitate the fluffy underside of the hen.

Several times a year I would have a happy time when I could play as much as I wished - this was when my father went away. However, he did not go away, but rather, used suddenly to vanish; and several days after his disappearance mother would receive a letter or brief telegram, "I am in the Crimea," "Am in the Caucasus." He loved travelling and did so well. He never took luggage. A camera case with a few clothes slung over his shoulder, and a stick in his hand - thus did my father vanish from home.

My games were always very passionate. In everything I exaggerated. If I built a card house, it would not be a house but a huge edifice occupying nearly the entire room; stilts were built of such a height that if I should have fallen off them, I would have got more than mere bruises. Playing

At Firemen also was carried out on a colossal and dangerous scale. But at the same time I was far from distinguished for courage.

Father's disappearances were joyful for me, but his returns were sad. Sad, because he came back ill. He suffered from heavy drinking bouts which exhausted him physically and spiritually. His disappearances were painful struggles with the approaching bouts. His colossal will power long delayed the approach, but the weakness always defeated him, and he, burning with shame and suffering for my mother and for me, said quietly, with pain in his voice:

"Mother, send for some beer, dear."

Mother never contradicted, never persuaded him; she knew and saw how he himself suffered. In this fate (or perhaps he himself) played a joke on him; he was the author of books on the subject of "Alcoholism and its cure." A then well-known Professor O., who cured inebriates by hypnotism, often placed his services at my father's disposal.

"Leave it, my dear fellow," my father would say with a smile, "it won't do any good."

However, O. persisted, and at last father agreed to a hypnotic experiment. They sat down opposite each other, and, if my memory does not deceive me, O. quickly went to sleep under my father's gaze.

One of the consequences of my association with my

father during his illnesses was that I also learned to drink. During the first days of his illness he frequented the drinking dens and night cafes of the district in which we lived, chatted with crooks, thieves, and hooligans and gave them money. He was very popular in that circle. They loved and respected him, not only for his money but for the discussions which he held with them. Mother and I often heard local hooligans passing our house shouting out to us, "Good day to you! Don't worry, we shan't touch you!" And they never did touch us.

Within my father dwelt the spirit of protest against the social regime of those times. But even this spirit was expressed peculiarly and bore a rebellious character. For example, he would shake hands in a demonstrative manner with the policeman in the street in order to arouse the indignation and anger of the powers that be; and he visited persons in high positions in clothes quite unbefitting for the purpose.

With the approach of his illness, my spiritual life took on a somewhat different character. On the one hand I suffered for my parents; on the other I was glad on the attention which my father paid me during his illness. He told me many wonderful things, and his stories were extremely fascinating. He could write and speak simple, forcibly, colorfully, wisely, fascinatingly, and, when necessary, wittily. A. P. Chekhov said of him:[3]

"Alexander is far more capable than I, but he will never achieve anything with his talent - his illness will

destroy him."

I would sit by father's side for hours and listen to his stories of the stars, of the movements and structure of the planets, of the signs of the Zodiac, etc. He acquainted me with the most variedphenomena and laws of Nature, illustrating them with the most unexpected and beautiful examples. We never touched upon religious subjects,because he was an atheist, and his outlook was materialistic. He cultivated a love of knowledge in me, but all my attempts to study systems of philosophy or separate sciences never were of a systematic nature and were no more than flashes of enthusiasm. I did, and still do, suffer a great deal through the inability to work systematically. Nearly all my knowledge was absorbed rapidly,passionately, but superficially.

It was only after experiencing my disappointment in the realm of the theatre and after certain complications in my spiritual life than I began to realize for the first time, although late, the necessity for strict and systematic work in the realm which it is desired to conquer. And the more I valued inothers that which is called "distinction, talent," etc., the more I am now horrified by such talent unless it desires to acquire culture by means of persistent, resolute work. In these days, when the tempo of life cannot be called other than insane, all "distinction" and "talent" which does not wish to be associated with the discipline of work is doomed to retardation and death.

Sitting up, sometimes for whole nights, with my father, I not only listened to his stories but watched him drawing caricatures. I was delighted by his ability to give in a few strokes not only a resemblance of the person portrayed by him to the original, but also of his character and his mood of the moment. He sketched himself in health and illness, my mother, me, and our friends. A love of caricatures has remained with me forever. I used to spend much time with them, and I believe that this played no small part in my development as an actor.

However, a sense of the comic has always been strongly developed in me and, fortunately, has not been extinguished yet. Humor gives knowledge necessary for art and brings a lightness into creative work, while humor directed at oneself frees one from excessive self-esteem and pomposity. It teaches one to value things within and without oneself at their true worth, and not in relation to personal inclinations, sympathies, and antipathies. Such an objective outlook is quite indispensable to the artist.

The power of humor lies also in the fact that it raises a man above that which makes him laugh. That which has been laughed at becomes so objectively comprehensible that it becomes easy to play it on the stage. The actor (and the artist in general) who can only regard life and himself seriously can hardly be a good, or at least, an interesting artist.

It is remarkable that people who are able to laugh at once recognize each other, understand each other, and become, quite often, friends. And, of course, the seriousness of people gifted with a sense of humor is far more serious and deeper than the perpetual seriousness of people who do not know humor. It is an extremely fortunate thing that humor can be taught. In theatrical schools there should be a class in which humor is taught.

In addition to a sense of humor, I have the gift of being easily amused. This is hardly an advantage. It caused me a great deal of discomfort on the stage. Not only did I laugh myself, but infected my partners. This quality on the stage is very widespread amongst actors, and it is difficult to combat. Often the smallest trifle was sufficient to reduce me to uncontrollable laughter. Sometimes the impression which amused me stuck in my memory for several days, and I would return to it and roar with laughter, adding new particulars and details.

Through this I was often placed in awkward situations. Once, while discussing important business with a certain respected lady, I felt trat I was threatened with the danger of an outburst of laughter. I became afraid of this danger and made an internal effort to restrain my mirth, but it was too late. I suddenly burst out laughing, and so loudly that I was unable to say a single word in explanation or justification

of my behaviour. The lady was confused, she blushed, but went on discussing her business. I was almost in despair, but roared louder and louder. At last the poor lady, with tears in her eyes, asked me why I was laughing at her. I could not reply.

In the next room was sitting one of my pupils (this was during the time when I had my own Drama school). This pupil hastened to my aid. He, knowing my habit, attempted to explain to the lady the true cause of my behaviour, but his words were so put that one might have got the impression that I was of unsound mind. This amused me still more. The lady jumped up and rushed to the door, but got caught in the curtains and hit her forehead on the ledge. My state became incredible. I no longer attempted to restrain my desperate laughter. The lady went away without having stated her business, while I sat in despair and burning with shame. This tendency on the stage offends the public, and I have often sinned in this way before my audiences.

I often used to see my father at his writing desk. I saw how he, having cut long stips of paper, would cover them with small, beautiful handwriting. I saw how he corrected proofs and saw his articles printed in papers and magazines. All this fascinated me, and I decided to become a writer. I cut myself a large number of long sheets of paper, sat down, and started to write. I had no subject, but this did not

deter me. I dipped my pen and wrote at once, "He walked about the room..." Here I stopped and myself started to walk about the room, seeking the next sentence. Some time passed, and I realized with astonishment that something essential was lacking in me, preventing me from becoming a writer at once. Having waited a little and having tried over in my mind several sentences which might have been a continuation of the first, I put down my pen and sadly collected up the paper which had been prepared for a big work.

The shock of this failure was so great that for a long time I did not renew my attempt to write. Buthaving once read in Dostoyevsky's works a description of the life of one of his heroes, where Dostoyevsky describes the childhood, youth, and adult life of the character, I felt that the secret of authorship had been disclosed to me. I immediately set to work. I began to describe how a certain old lady spent her childhood, her schooldays, how she was expelled from school, how she fell in love, how she fell out of love, a whole series of details of her life, and finally how she became an old lady.

The story was long and was written in small writing, just like my father's. I was triumphant, excited, and felt happy. I asked mother to listen to my long story. She patiently heard it to the end and said that it was very nice, but perhaps not very interesting. I remember how the pain went to my heart. Why was it that Dostoyevsky made it interesting, and I did not? Why? Did not he, in just the same way, describe

the childhood and subsequent life of his hero? I could not answer this question and again gave up the ambition to become a writer.

My first attempts to act plays took place, as is always in such cases, in a domestic atmosphere. My mother and my nurse were my constant audience, and they were also the heroes whom I represented in all kinds of possible and impossible situations. My father was not particularly interested in my performances, although I often portrayed him. In general, the idea of myself as an actor did not arise in our family for a long time. Even I myself, when choosing my future career, as children usually do, wanted to be a fireman or a doctor and never thought of acting. Fire-fighting attracted me, probably because my father was a volunteer fireman. A special telephone hung over his bed to call him in case of fire, and he often went away to fires by day and by night.

Gradually the circle of my spectators widened, "performances" were arranged on the balcony, where I read Gorbunov's stories, and performed scenes from Dickens, augmenting them with episodes of my own composition and introducing a certain element of piquancy. My father always called things by their names, and from childhood I became accustomed to words of a certain kind, seeing nothing wrong in saying them. For a long time I could not understand this difference between two kinds of words which people found so frightening. Even when adult,

I had to train myself to unlearn a forbidden vocabulary. In childhood I only saw in these words, and in their associations, a comic significance which entertained me. For a long time I could not understand why people blushed when they heard me use an expression which, in their opinion, was not permissible; and I was sincerely convinced that they themselves added something to the word which made them blush and be shocked. Later I thought that it was because all people, and especially women, are simply immoral.

My family performances on the baloony became more and more popular, and finally I persuaded one of the local amateurs to let me act upon the club stage. My delight was boundless. I was mostly given comic old men parts. It made no difference to me whether I was rehearsing or performing in public because as soon as I went on the stage, I completely forgot myself and my surroundings and abandoned myself to that <u>elemental feeling</u> which, as a basic mood, accompanied me on the stage not only in childhood but in a later period of my life until I lived through the inward crisis of disappointment in the theatre. Together with the loss of this feeling I ceased to be convincing to the public and lost the internal creative urge.

<u>The feeling, and even the pre-feeling of the whole,</u> that was the internal feeling which I lost during the period of my mental crisis. It was due to this feeling that the thought that any part, or story, or simple imitation would

not be successful never entered my head. Doubt in that sense was foreign to me. When I had to act a part, or, as used to happen in my childhood, when I was to play some effective joke, I was powerfully gripped by this sense of the forth-coming whole, and trusting in it fully, without wavering, I fulfilled whatever occupied my attention at the time. Details arose spontaneously from the whole and stood objectively before me. I never thought out details and always only played the part of observer in relation to whatever arose by itself from the sense of the whole. This forthcoming whole, from which arose all particular details, did not run dry or become extinguished, however long the process of development might take. I can only compare it to the seed of a plant, a seed which miraculously holds all the future plant.

Much suffering falls to the lot of actors who do not appreciate sufficiently in their work this amazing feeling, a basic necessity for all creative work. All the details of the part fall into thousands of tiny fragments and form a state of chaotic disorder if they are not bound together by the feeling of the united whole. Often actors, having this pre-feeling before the commencement of their work, lack sufficient courage to trust to it and to wait patiently. They painfully think out their images, invent characterization, and bind it artificially to the words of the part with artificial gestures and forced action. They call this work. Certainly it can be called work, hard, painful, but not necessary since

the actor's work to a great extent consists of waiting silently, not "working." This, of course, does not refer to the work of provincial actors whose creative life is spent in special, peculiar and infinitely wearying surroundings.

This "feeling of the whole" bore me like a mighty impulse through all the difficulties and dangers of the actor's path. It went with me to the theatrical school and after. I cannot say that I learned theatrical art at the school. Rather, I studied the splendid teachers: Savina, Dalmatov, Glagolin, Sladkopevtsev, Arbatov, and others. I now remember hardly anything of what they taught me in the shape of theoretical rules, but I remember them. I learned not from them, but I learned their own selves. This was because the feeling I have described gave me a whole image of them in their unattainable genius. I spent my time in the theatrical school semi-consciously. I observed and acted with delight, but I learned nothing. Theoretical subjects (history of art, history of the theatre, phonetics, etc.) were foreign to me, and I could only do examinations by "cribbing." Voice training lessons amused and irritated me.

Three years in the theatre school flew by like a dream. I was only happy when I was acting something, but since I was nearly always "acting" something, happiness was my principle mood. I literally could not utter a single word in a simple manner. Sometimes whole days went by as one continuous

play. Very much later, when I had entered the Moscow Arts Theatre, Stanislavsky explained to me that it is bad and harmful for an actor to be "acting" continuously for nearly a whole day. And when, on his adivce, I began to struggle with the habit of "acting," I felt how much power I had formerly wasted unproductively and how that power increased and concentrated when used economically.

Who does not know actors who up to old age cannot conquer the habit of "acting" in everyday life! As the years go on, these actors almost lose their personalities; they stifle hundreds of most vital questions with this acting, avoiding their solutions and thus delaying their human development. Even the look in the eyes of such actors is not quite normal, and an unexhausted and unsensed pain and sadness always appears in them. Their soul is neglected, dark, and abnormally young. As it is harmful to be on the stage "as in real life," so it is equally harmful to be in real life "as on the stage."

My confidence and boldness in my creative state, which was due to the constant jests and tricks which I performed, was often taken by me into everyday life. For example, I was firmly convinced that I was the possessor of huge physical strength. I once leaped on a schoolfellow in order to knock him down and beat him in front of the other schoolmates. I was confident of success. He was much taller than I and was

fairly strong, but my confidence, which had a full right to exist in the realms of the imagination, now became transformed into a pitiful conceit. I was thoroughly beaten. My opponent dragged me head downward on the floor and then threw me like a discus into the corner of the room. Thus, I learned to distinguish between boldness on the stage and in life. The same thing happened with my voice. Here, too, confidence changed to conceit. I strained my voice and only then understood that the power of the voice on the stage and in life differs and should not be confused.

From the earliest childhood up to an age of twenty-eight, I had one constant friend - my mother. Her love belonged to me alone; I was her only son. (My father had two sons by his first marriage.)

I had no secrets from my mother. I took to her all my sorrows, joys, successes, and failures. She devoted the same inimitable attention and seriousness both to my home childish "performances" and to serious work when I was a professional actor. All my parts were prepared with her assistance. She made hardly any comments on the parts. She had a way of her own of expressing her opinion, and I understood her slightest word or hint.

My inward life was so firmly bound up with hers that I did not require any verbal instructions or rules of life from her. I understood myself much of what my mother required

of me, and we wasted hardly any words on discussing ordinary incidents.

At an age of 13 to 14 I was unusually and catastrophically prone to falling in love. At the very first meeting with any little girl I inevitably fell in love with her, regardless of her appearance. Her internal qualities were to me unimportant. However, I always found some trait in her which filled me with delight. It might be her eyebrows, or her smile, or some movement, or plumpness, or slimness. I could even fall in love because I liked a frock. I once fell in love with a very tiny girl because she had played some childish piece on the piano with one finger. In a word, it was immaterial to me why I fell in love or how to justify my "love." The ultimate object of my infatuation was always marriage. At the very first meeting I firmly resolved to marry. Having made that decision, I would not leave my future wife for a minute. However, my wedding plans generally broke down for two reasons; either I chose several brides simultaneously, when marriage became technically an impossibility, or I attached myself to my future wife to such an extent that she, embarrassed by me in herevery action, could no longer stand her loss of freedom and hid from me. I suffered and was jealous of everything and everyone.

Once I fell in love with a little girl who was older than myself and who was unhappy in her home. She did

not love her parents and frequently ran away from them. My love was, at last, reciprocated; and the affair went on for many days. I kissed her literally from morning till night, and then I suddenly noticed that she had a snub nose. For a moment I was grieved, thought a little, and then remembered that I had a snub nose too, and joyfully proposed to her. She agreed, and I literally fell on my knees before her...from fright and despair. I did not know what I had to do. I did not know what to do to get married, and what one would have to do after the wedding. I only dimly realized that one must marry for a long time, for life! I was ready to cry in despair, but I controlled myself, rose, and saying, "Just a minute"...went out of the room and rushed to my mother. Quickly I told her as well as I could of my tragedy, not hiding my despair. Having heard me, she went to my poor bride and said to her...I do not know what she said, but the poor girl went home full of grief. The story of my unsuccessful marriage soon spread all over the district, and for a long time I was the laughing-stock of all my playmates. "Bridegroom, bridegroom!" they shouted after me in the street. I bore it all without a murmur, feeling my guilt and dying of shame.

The influences on me by my father and my mother were so different that I lived as if in two different families. My father's directness, simplicity and even crudeness were balanced by the tenderness and affection of my mother, and

both these influences lived side by side within me in a strange manner. I sensed no discrepancy in the fact that on the one hand I was carefully guarded from all evil influences, and on the other was given a complete liberty of action. I went to school with an escort, and a muff in my hands, and at the same time received "three roubles for..." from my father. I could return home late at night and not alone, and yet I could be tenderly and platonically in love. I first knew the love of women at an early age, but I never stooped to low immorality.

Many contradictions lived together <u>within</u> me, but for a long time I could not reconcile them <u>without</u>. The worst and most painful antithesis for me was the case of my parents. I was afraid of this antithesis. I always felt that something was liable to happen at any moment with which they themselves would not be able to cope. I literally watched their lives and was always in a state of tension and ready to enter into that which was to happen and which I awaited secretly and with anguish. There was no particular external reason for me to worry, because my father was nearly always very tender with my mother, and their quarrels were rare and very restrained.

A life of contrasts and contradictions, of efforts to reconcile these contradictions within myself, and also my infatuation with Dostoyevsky at an early age all helped to create in me a certain special feeling in relation to life and people. I accepted good and evil, right and wrong, beauty and

ugliness, greatness and smallness, as certain entities. I did not demand only good actions from a good man, was not astonished at an evil look on a beautiful face, did not expect primitive truth at all costs from a man whom I was accustomed to believe, and somehow understood him when he lied. On the contrary, I was irritated by direct "truthfulness," "ultimate sincerity," "limitless poetic sadness," or "contempt for life without a gleam of light." I did not believe in straight and simple psychologies, sensing the smug face of egotism behind them.

A feeling of annoyance arose in me on seeing one of these egotists, wearing the mask of a straight-forward "optimist," "pessimist," "romantic," "wise man," "simple man," and so forth; I saw that these were different forms of the same sentimental egotism, wearing a mask in the hope of deluding or enchanting people of indifferent intelligence. Those who believed them and found a delight in intercourse with these "masks" were to me just as unpleasant as the masks themselves. Neither knew the feeling of "humanity." They did not know that to be human it is necessary to reconcile contradictions. All this, however, was within me in the form of an instinct and did not take the shape of clear thought. Later, when working on character parts, I could not see in my imagination the character in the form of a primitive "mask." Either I saw him as a more or less complex being, or I did not see him at all.

It is true that if I should now chance to meet one of these "masks," I understand that it is no more than a temporary state in the developing conscience of man; and it no longer causes me such sufferings as in my youth. I have learned to understand that irritation against people, hate and merciless struggle against them are mainly the result of an untrue conception of the invariability of human character. Even now I often recognize the feeling which I had at an age of six or seven when I used to be sent out for a walk with my head wrapped in a scarf, and I once accidentally caught sight of myself in a mirror and was disgusted at the appearance of my wrapped figure. Even now I have such feelings, but they can no longer have the power over me which they had in my childhood.

Everything within me, such as fear, confidence, love, passion, tenderness, crudeness, humor, gloom, etc. all of these qualities were permeated with a passionateness which boiled within me. My passionate nature not only enhanced these qualities, but it combined them into strange designs and forms. When I now look back on all this, I see that due to this passionateness I literally accelerated my life; that is, I lived out all that was within me much more quickly than I might have done if I had not this passion. Although I was heading rapidly toward a mental crisis or even a nervous braakdown, now, having left the acuteness of the dangerous moment, I

feel grateful to fate for a rapid, though painful, solution of the problem of my life.

Once, during my wanderings round the night cafes of St. Petersburg, I strolled into a "dive" which had a certain notoriety. It was very clean and neatly furnished. Entering, I saw a large company of merrymakers. The place was stuffy, noisy, and the air was misty. A piercing whistle sounded from time to time. It seemed to me that the company was of some special character. I looked closely. The faces of the merrymakers were not of the usual night-club type. They were intelligent, refined-looking, well-dressed people, with intelligent but intoxicated and tired-looking faces. It seemed that they were linked together by some common center round which they were grouped. A vain, loud pride and emphasized independence showed itself in their poses and gestures. It was evident that these people were not so much having a gay time as copying some style. Their light-heartedness was unnatural and restricted by a desire to merge with that style at which they aimed. A piercing whistle sounded from the center of the group, and several plates flew up to the ceiling. The plates flew beautifully, and it could be seen that they had been thrown by a skilful hand. The crowd caught them with shouts, and servility could be seen on their faces, although

they tried to appear independent and free.

I began to seek the solution, to look for the center round which they were grouped. In the center sat a man with a swollen, drunken face, with clotted blood by his ear. His wet hair stuck to his forehead. His expression was horrible; anger and contempt showed through the laughter. When throwing plates he apparently did not consider the possibility that they might hit one of the surrounding people on the head. Sometimes a plate would fly not up onto the air, but straight into the face of one of his companions. All the crowd produced an eerie and sad feeling. I recognized the central figure to be A. I. Kuprin. But was a difference between him and his surrounding company! I do not know what he was feeling, what caused his face to be contorted with pain and anger, but I knew that was serious, deep, and real to him. All the people around him formed a bad caricature of the "sorrowing and drunken soul." They enjoyed their peculiar proximity to Kuprin, buying it at the cost of lying and toadying.

I must have looked at this company too closely and took in the atmosphere too fully because I felt a sense of unbearable oppression and fear. I ran out of the "dive" and ran along the Mikhailovsky street toward Nevsky Prospect. It was misty and the day was dawning.

"How pure, pure you are!" I suddenly heard. I turned round and saw one of those "masks" who seek direct

psychologies. His words made a deep impression on me. I never stooped to the depth of sincerely imagining myself "pure"; but at that moment, when my perception had been sharpened, I felt the lie of "direct and simple" psychologies especially clearly and deeply. I realized how far real purity of heart was from me, how difficult it is to attain and how the "masks" are capable of soiling the best impulses and aims of the human soul.

On completing my course at the theatrical school I entered the Maliy Suvorinsky Theatre, where I spent a year and a half. B. S. Glagolin took a great interest in me, and in my first year I was given the part of Tsar Feodor and a whole series of other parts. My father first noticed me as an actor after the performance of "Tsar Feodor." After the play he congratulated and even kissed me.

This performance is associated for me with another experience; I knew the meaning of theatrical intrigue for the first time. After the second performance a huge laurel wreath with ribbons was brought on to the stage in view of the audience. The wreath was intended for me, but for a long time I did not realize this and tried to get away from the attendant who was offering it to me. The audience applauded. I looked at the inscription and saw that the wreath was really for me.

At the same moment I felt a pain in my left arm. The actress D., who took the part of Tsaritsa Irina, gripped my arm and in a horrible voice whispered, "You presented yourself with the wreath."

She bowed to the audience and painfully gripped my arm. I was quite bewildered. I tried to explain to her immediately that I knew nothing about the wreath, but she whispered in an evil voice, "Splendid! To present such a wreath to yourself!"

The curtain fell, while D., shaking with anger and pointing to me, shouted about my improper action with the wreath. The actors listened in silence while I stood like a convict in the center of the group with the huge wreath in my hands.

Arbatov was the chief producer at that time. His industry was astounding. Not only did he produce plays in the theatre, teach in the school and work whole nights at home, but he found time to do complicated and responsible work elsewhere. One such work was the creation of a cycle of historical plays. Nicholas II wished to acquaint himself with this cycle, and a series of performances was organized at Tsarskoe Selo.

I remember how we, the actors of this cycle, were taught the rules of behaviour in the Palace. There were so many of these rules that it was quite impossible to remember

them all. We were frightened, alarmed, and bewildered. All the rules and instructions, which we had received from a general who had come specially for the purpose were forgotten at a time when they were most needed, namely in the presence of the Tsar himself. One young actress sat on the keys of the piano while curtseying; an actor who did not catch a question addressed to him by a member of the Royal Family, rushed impetuously forward shouting, "What did you say?", thus disturbing the silence which reigned in the room; while I, in reply to the Tsar's question, "How do you stick on your false nose?", quickly pulled it off and almost shouted, "Like this, your Majesty!" An awkward situation ensued,, but the Tsar was not angry and asked me whether I would like to go on the Imperial stage. I could not answer correctly, for which I was often reproached by my comrades. Nicholas extended me a white gloved hand, which I shook and soiled with the grease paint off my nose.

The hours spent on the stage were a real spiritual rest for me. For a time I would forget my oppressive thoughts and plunge into a creative state which wholly took possession of me. Once my acute nervous state brought an unusual result It was on a tour by the Maliy Theatre. When the performance in one of the towns was nearing its end, the rumor spread amongst the actors that the building next to the theatre was on fire. I had the part of a Chinaman in this play. Having

finished me part I left the stage and saw that the building opposite the theatre was really in flames. I became frightened and started running down the street toward the station. I ran in my make-up and Chinese costume, with a pig-tail streaming behind. The theatrical tailor ran after me.

"Mr. Chekhov," he shouted, "give the trousers back!"

Without stopping, I ran on. At last the tailor began to gain on me. Then I stopped quickly, took off the wide Chinese trousers and, leaving them, ran on.

The actors knew some of my weaknesses and often played jokes on me. However, their jokes were nearly always harmless.

The masterly productions and acting of B. S. Glagolin produced an ineradicable impression on me. When I saw him in the part of Hlestakov, I underwent a kind of mental shift. It became clear to me that Glagolin plays the part of Hlestakov <u>not like others</u>, although I had never before seen anyone else in that part. And this feeling of "not like others" arose in me, without any comparisons and analogies, directly from Glagolin's acting. The unusual freedom and originality of his creative art in the part astounded me, and I was not mistaken; indeed no one else played the part of Hlestakov as he did. When, later, I had to act this part myself, I recognized the influences of Glagolin on myself. Stavislavsky, who produced "The Inspector General," led me in the direction which partly

coincided with that which lived in me as an impression of Glagolin's Hlestakov.

By his productions, Arbatov taught me to appreciate delicacy and clarity of stage work. Under his influence I felt for the first time what a significance clear <u>form</u> has on the stage. It is true that all his productions were conceived exclusively on a naturalistic and everyday plan, i.e., on a plan which by its nature admitted of no <u>style</u> (and there can be no art without style), but I was at that time not worried by questions of that type, and in Arbatov's productions I accepted form as such. Arbatov loved and understood form. Sometimes he invitedme to his home, and I could see how skillfully and delicately he created his beautiful work. All the setting of his study was a combination of harmonious forms. The form of the lamp and of the table were in strict harmony; the book cases, furniture, the books themselves, everything harmonized in form and color. He spent whole nights at his skillful and delicate work, seeking forms of sets, cards for time tables, of the week's work, designs for cloth covers, etc.

It is a pity that Russian actors, on the whole, even now insufficiently love and appreciate form. It is true that it is difficult for them to seek it. They lack the specialized preparation for the purpose. As for the theatrical schools, the teaching in them was carried on and is being carried on now without any plan or system. The teachers are splendid

actors, but poor theoreticians on the questions of psychology of creative acting. They do not take the trouble to give the young actor methods by the aid of which he may learn to rule his creativeness consciously. Generally, pupils imitate their teachers but do not acquire knowledge of principles from them.

Why does the so-called system of Stanislavsky have such tremendous power? Because it gives the young actor hope of mastering in practice the basic powers of his creative soul; those powers which are the integration of all the parts of the creative process. Actors who are not acquainted in principle with the questions of form and style either attempt to use old, obsolete forms, or else remain entirely without form, throwing out raw material from the stage, in the shape of passions and affectations, calling them temperament. The actor slowly begins to like dilettantism, mistaking it for freedom. But how fatal for him is this freedom! It leads to lack of control not only on the stage but in life.

I can remember how this "freedom" showed itself in some of the actors of even such a disciplined theatre as the Maliy Suvorinsky. They chopped objects in their dressing rooms with property swords, pushed elderly and little-respected colleagues down the stairs in large baskets (I remember how after one such joke a victim had to go to the hospital), and excelled in the invention of little jokes on their friends. All this

was without talent, without brilliance, without humor, without skill, merely out of a sense of "freedom."

In time the actor will realizehow closely his life and profession are bound together. He will understand that it is impossible to be a cultured actor while remaining an uncultured man. I often have to hear actors saying, "Why should I know what form, style, and so on, are? If I have talent, my talent will tell me the true style and the necessary form. Theoretical knowledge is only capable of destroying my ability." But knowledge is of two kinds, and the actor who speaks thus implies dry, intellectual knowledge. In that he is right. True, living knowledge, which the actor lacks, is of a totally different nature.

I will explain this difference by an example.[1] Take the Gothic style. A Gothic cathedral. You see its forms, study it, memorize the visual impression from them and become so accustomed to them that it becomes impossible for you to confuse them with any other forms. Take a Greek temple and similarly thoroughly study and memorize its forms. You will distinguish these two styles from each other and from any others. Here you will be able to stop and say to yourself, "I know the style of Greek and Gothic temples." But such knowledge is dead and intellectual. The actor has the right to say, "I do not need it." But it is possible to go further in the study of these two styles. Can we imagine the Gothic

1. The following conception of two styles belongs to Dr. R. Steiner.

cathedral empty, not filled with worshippers? No. It will only be complete in its architecture, in its style, when you see in it a crowd of worshippers with their hand folded in prayer. You will then experience the upward urge which is issuing from the interior of the Gothic cathedral. The Greek temple, on the contrary, you will understand better if you visualize it empty. According to the Greek's feelings, a deity inhabits it. In it there need not be a single human being, and yet it will be a perfect example of Greek architecture.

This is another conception of style. The force of such conception lies in the fact that it ceases to be intellectual and awakens in the spirit of the artist creative forces which are capable of educating him in such a manner that he himself will no longer reconcile himself to his creative art, when it appears deprived of style and form.

The actor-artist will understand that style is that which he introduces into his creation as its most precious part, as the thing which ultimately makes creating worthwhile. He will understand that naturalism is not art, since the artist can introduce nothing from himself into a naturalistic "work of art;" that in that case his problem is limited to an ability to copy more or less accurately from "nature" and, at best, to bring into a new juxtaposition that which has existed and does exist outside, without him. He will understand that

to apply himself to naturalistic art is to be no more than a photographer of "nature."

The future of naturalism in the theatre is dreary. Remaining in the limits of narrow themes and problems, naturalism will be compelled to seek more and more lurid combinations of facts, combinations capable of affecting the nerves of the audience with greater force than was done yesterday and the day before. It will reach the necessity of giving the spectator a series of "powerful sensations," capable of causing a nervous shock at the cost of pathological effects. On the stage will appear pictures of creepy forms of death, physical tortures, soul-rending catastrophes, pathological nervous diseases, mental derangements, bestial cries, yells, and gunshots. All this will be the height of attainment of naturalistic "art," but also its end.

As a heritage, naturalism will leave a coarsened, nerve-racked public without a sense of artistic taste. Much time will be needed to restore it to a state of health.

My work in the Maliy Theatre caused my parents to move into the town for the winter. My father's illness increased, intervals between attacks grew shorter, and the attacks themselves grew longer and longer. Once, I was told that he was thenceforth going to live apart from me and my mother.

I did not know the true cause of this. A new feeling appeared in my soul - I began to guess the meaning of solitude and old age. When my mother and I visited my father, I tried to guess his feelings. It was clear that they both had made some sacrifice for my sake and were both suffering. But I was with my mother, my father remained alone. Being accustomed to respect and worship him, I noticed that a feeling of pity toward him was being born in me. This feeling hurt me, but I could not drive it from my heart. Visiting him, I felt awkward when greeting him as an acquaintance; I did not know what to say, what to do, what to ask him. It seemed to me that half of him had died.

My mysterious and complex inner life became more difficult. Externally, I became coarser and coarser. I began to drink more and frequently acted when drunk. Once, having commenced a performance in an inebriated state, I could not continue with it and came to my senses in my dressing room alone, ill and broken. How and when the performance ended, I do not know. My relations with women became more coarse and primitive. The worse my behaviour became, the more I loved my mother and pitied my father. However, no matter what I did, I still concealed nothing from my mother.

At first, another trait began to appear in me - contempt for human beings. It hardened me and, therefore, made contact with the outside world easier. It became easy to be

with a man whom I despised, but as if to counterbalance this, I became attached to some people with an exceptional force. I divided mankind into the few whom I loved and all the rest, whom I despised. My materialistic state of mind assisted this considerably. Ethical feelings clashed with materialism and were rejected as unnecessary. My physical health became worse and worse, and I began to develop tuberculosis of the lungs.

Once, during the performances of the Moscow Arts Theatre, I was sent, as a relative, to visit O. L. Knipper-Chekhova. I could not conduct myself in the presence of prominent people and asked to be relieved of this heavy obligation. My pleas led to nothing, and I set out on my visit. I was dressed up a little, and I arrived. She received me graciously and pretended not to notice my awkwardness. (I think I caught my foot in the carpet and knocked my elbow on a light, decorative table.) The conversation lapsed painfully, and I looked with dismay at her half-closed, wily eyes. At last she asked me,

"Why don't you want to come over to our theatre?"

I was astounded at her question.

"I dare not even dream of it," I answered sincerely, and this time without embarrassment. She laughed and said,

"I shall talk about you to Stanislavsky, come here tomorrow."

Bewildered, I ran out. The next day I came again.

A. L. Vishnevsky met me. He embraced me and said,

"Did you know that your father used to beat me?"

"What for?" I asked, not understanding what he was talking about. He told me that he was at school with my father, where they were in the same class and used to fight.

He gave me a preliminary test, asking me to read some scenes from "Tsar Feodor." The following day I had to appear at the theatre before K. S. Stanislavsky himself. They dressed me up even better than on the previous day. My collar was so tight that it choked me. At the theatre I was met by Stanislavsky himself. Seeing his majestic figure and gray hair, I ceased to reason and feel entirely.

"We are very pleased to have a nephew of Anton Pavlovich Chekhov in the theatre," he said, shaking my hand.

In my consciousness the single word "Stanislavsky, Stanislavsky" resounded unceasingly. He was immeasurably charming and tender. At his invitation we went through into one of the foyers of the theatre, and I sat down by his side on a red divan. He asked me a series of questions, which I answered mechanically, almost without understanding their meaning.

"Now read something from 'Tsar Feodor,'" he said at last.

I suddenly wanted to escape. A sound of tearing was heard, my collar burst and the ends stuck in my cheek. I was

paralyzed, dead! A minute passed, and I ceased to care. I read a portion of "Tsar Feodor" and Marmeladov's monologue. Stanislavsky said a few kind words to me and told me that I was accepted into the Arts Theatre. He told me to go to V. I. Nemirovich-Danchenko to arrange all the matters in connection with entry into the Arts Theatre.

It was during those days, so notable for me, that Stanislavsky invited me to dinner. I arrived at his hotel and found O. L. Knipper-Chekhova, M. P. Lilina, and V. I. Kachalov there. I felt extremely embarrassed; and when I saw on the laid table special knives and forks of a kind I had never seen before, I felt a very unhappy man. Even joy borne of conceit died in me. During dinner I performed most complicated mental labors in trying to figure out how and with what instruments the various dishes should be eaten.

I was at once placed into the "filial" section of the theatre. This was intermediate between being an assistant and a member of the troupe. Members of that section at that time were: B. M. Sushkevich, E. B. Vakhtangov, V. V. Gotovtsev, G. M. Hmara, and A. A. Dikiy.

My first parts were a "player" and one of the rabble in the rebellion scene in Hamlet. Never did I feel such excitement as in playing these parts. As one of the rabble, I beat with such fervor on the iron door with a property axe, that one might have thought that the entire play depended upon me.

Stanislavsky watched my development as an actor and spent a considerable amount of time acquainting me with the rudiments of his "system." Soon he gave me the part of Mishka in "The Provincial," and himself worked on the part with me. In the year of my entry the theatre procuded Moliere's "Le Malade Imaginaire." I, together with my new colleagues, took part in this, representing one of the doctors. Our object was to be funny, and we were given a free hand in the search of means of amusing the public.

This task fascinated us all. We excelled in the invention of comic turns of speech, comic intonations, etc. All our dressing room and many other actors arranged a "totalisator" or sweepstake, betting 20 kopecks on the actor who would amuse the public most that day. It seemed that all the methods had been used. At last I invented the stammering doctor. The actors who staked 20 kopecks on me won. At the following performance I was the favorite in the betting. Stammeringly I spoke my lines. The next to speak was Dikiy; and suddenly we heard vague and unintilligible sounds. He had gathered together nearly everything that had hitherto been invented in the way of comic methods, and with exceptional temperement and speed, coughing, sneezing, and stammering; spoke his lines. He broke the record and amused not only the public but all of us on the stage. However, after this unexpected display by Dikiy we were forbidden the further development of

our parts in this direction. Stanislavsky feared a further step, which could only have been anticipated with alarm.

In the same year, Stanislavsky commenced his educational experiments with the younger members of the theatre. From these experiments the first studio of the Moscow Arts Theatre subsequently arose. E. B. Vakht.. ov was given the task of working with us on Stanislavsky's system. Seeing me amongst his pupils, Vakhtangov said, "I shall not work with this actor of the Maliy theatre." I was grieved, but not for long because he started working with me. The work was conducted by Stanislavsky himself, L. A. Sullerjitsky, and Vakhtangov. The exercises and studies were in the nature of improvisations. We also worked on enacted stories. At the same time Boleslavsky, in his own initiative, took on the production of "The End of Nadejda." The work was ready in several months. Stanislavsky looked at the work, approved it, and suggested that we should invite our friends and relations to show them the work. "Charge them a rouble each," he said, "and you will pay your expenses."

This we did. This was our first independent public appearance at a time when the Studio, as such, did not really exist.

Sullerjitsky was a man in whose presence one could not think heartlessly or devote oneself to worries about one's own affairs. His moral and social authority was great not only because he spoke fervently and well on the questions of

the theatre and its associated life and work, but mainly because he did the things of which he spoke. We saw his fervent soul and acute mind rather than heard it.

He knew the secret of leadership and government. He knew that a man who wished to lead others to a definite aim should, in the first place, watch himself and be severe with himself. He knew that the knowledgeable should be given full liberty, when they would voluntarily follow the leader. This was the course of action that he took. He knew yet another secret which consisted of a clear understanding of the idea that to guide is to serve the guided, and not to demand services from them. His authority was as great artistically as morally. His artistic influence showed itself in all the productions of the Studio; but he undertook no independent productions in the Studio.

My senior colleagues often offered me the opportunity to take part in the building-up and the guidance of the life of the Studio, but I was prevented by the unbalanced and gloomy state of my mind. Pessimistic ideas and moods gripped me so firmly that I could not understand the ultimate need of everything that was being done all round me with such affection and care. However, side by side with this I took part in the life of the Studio, driven by the force of that creative instinct which I had not yet completely lost. These two feelings, two forces, struggled within me, and I remember how Vakhtangov

was interested in this duality. I remember with what interest he listened to the phrases in which one or other of these moods was reflected crudely and acutely. Smiling wisely and shaking his head, he would look at me saying nothing; and to this day I do not know what thoughts arose in him under the influence of my strange and often unhealthy reasoning. I became attached to Vakhtangov, and I think that his attitude to me was warm and friendly.

In addition to our joint theatrical work, in which he was my teacher, we often spent hours together in conversation and joking, despite his busy life. Our jokes were always of a special character. Usually he would invent some kind of "trick," and we worked on it for hours, getting more and more perfect in the dexterity and facility of its execution. The "tricks" usually were not complicated. For example, we had to portray a man who, wishing to drop a match into an empty bottle, misses the neck. He does not notice this and is amazed on seeing the match on the table, supposing that the match has, in some miraculous manner, passed through the bottom of the bottle.

Tricks similar to this were repeated by us dozens of times, until we reached perfection in their execution. However, it sometimes happened that having started with a trick, Vakhtangov became fascinated by the image of the man portrayed by him, and this image became an interesting and

complex being. In such cases I usually took the part of a spectator and loved these inspired moments of his. Playing such "tricks" is very useful for the development of the actor, and it should be included in the programs of theatrical schools. A trick is never successful if done in a heavy manner. Lightness is a necessary condition in its execution.

Soon after my entry into the Moscow Arts Theatre I received an invitation to act for the cinema. I was flattered and excited. Having obtained my theoretical consent, the man who invited me became inspired and began to discuss my fee. He swung his arms decisively and, advancing toward me, forced me into a corner of the room. There we both stopped and he began,

"Just you think of what the screen will give you! Glory! You will become famous! Everyone knows you! And who has done it? The screen! You see? Besides, you will get thirteen roubles! Accept and be done with it!"

But I was "done with it" from the moment he waved his arms and advanced on me. I agreed. He vanished at once.

The film was being prepared for the third centenary of the Romanov dynasty. Part of the filming was to be done in one of the smaller towns of Russia. There followed two days' railway travelling and two days' stay in a horrible inn

in a tiny town. It was a cold winter. On arrival at the place we were made up and dressed in a cold, barn-like building. The actors behaved in a very free manner, drank a great deal, shouted and paid great attention to the leading man. He was a gray-headed man with a swollen face and signs of genius; for example, he was afraid of stairs and had to be led up and down stairs, while he emitted little cries and put his hands to his eyes.

On the first day of the filming I was put on a high mountain. The camera was erected at the foot. I was representing the Tsar Michael Fedorovich. When I appeared in the gateway, I heard several despairing voices from the vicinity of the camera,

"Abdicate! Quickly! There's only two meters left! Quick! Abdicate!"

I abdicated as well as I could.

On my left I saw our leading man. He was dressed as a priest and led me by the arm, uttering somewhat obscene words. The filming went on for a long time, and I felt colder colder.

After the day's work we dined, drank a good deal, the leading man told stories, and everyone except me was very merry. I spent a bad night in the filthy hotel; and on the next day, going to the set, I felt wretched and miserable. Before the filming started, the police had to drive away the

local inhabitants who, having seen our unusual costumes, came to us with petitions in which they stated their needs. When the petitioners had been dispersed, the filming started. I was put on a horse and was told to ride slowly to a neighboring wood. To protect myself from the cold I took a pair of goloshes with me. When I was told to sit on the horse, I hid them under my costume fearing that they might be taken away from me, but fortunately they were not noticed. According to orders, I slowly rode toward the forest, when suddenly one of my goloshes slowly slid out and fell into the snow. I was horror-struck. After a minute the other one followed. I expected a riot, shouting, and a reprimand, but to my surprise no one noticed my mishap, and after the filming I found both my goloshes. The filming was becoming painful, and I was ready to run away from my benefactor and to refuse the promised glory and the thirteen roubles.

In the evening the executives of the film company gave a formal supper to the chief of police and other prominent officials of the town. The chief of police was a very handsome man with a curled moustache and medals on his chest. The supper commenced with speeches. From these speeches it seemed that the chief of police was the man on whom all cinema production, all success of the cinema in Russia, both materially and artistically, had depended in the past, did depend, and would depend in the future. Moreover, it seemed

that Russian art in general was in the hands of the chief of police. The latter did not deny his influence on the cinema company for "...everything in general..." and expressed his readiness "...also in the future...". In a word, he did not express his thoughts nearly as definitely and clearly as the executives. In a strange and unexpected manner formality passed into affection, and many embraced each other with tears in their eyes. Photographs were passed round, and all those present autographed them, for no known reason. The chief of police autographed a photograph of some memorial.

Suddenly some person, small of stature, with weedy, ginger hair, stood up, and in a high-pitched voice shouted greetings to the chief of police, addressing him in familiar terms and ready to embrace him. The chief of police frowned, an awkward situation arose, but the little man could not be stopped. He was beside himself, and had to be led out. After his departure voices were raised in argument; some were for his removal, others against. The guest of honor looked angry. The executives were in confusion, but at last it became known that the little man was lying in a tank of goldfish in the hall of the hotel and that he was very drunk. This seemed to pacify everyone, but nevertheless the police chief left soon afterward.

The next day I was back in Moscow. The filming was not yet finished, but I flatly refused to take any further

part in it. In my place another actor was engaged. He was also made to ride a horse toward the nearest wood, but he was only filmed from behind in order not to show his face, which in no way resembled mine.

Such was my first appearance on the screen.

When I entered the Arts Theatre, I moved into Moscow alone, without my parents. Nevertheless, of course, I did not break my association with my home. I wrote to my mother from Moscow daily, sometimes twice a day, and she wrote to me just as often. My father was in the South. She wrote to tell me that he was returning through Moscow and asked me to meet him at the station and see him for a while. He was travelling with his son. When I entered the compartment, I found him in a sad plight. He was developing cancer of the throat and knew it. Even before departing for the South, he, having just got over his usual illness, was obliged to go to the doctor--he was alarmed by an unpleasant sensation in his throat. After examining him, the doctor suggested an operation without naming the disease. My father, however, demanded to be told what the disease was; and since everyone obeyed my father, the doctor could not refuse and told him that he had cancer of the throat. On his return home, he told my mother and immediately decided to go to the South, refusing an

operation. He relied on the beneficial effects of the climate - or so he said, but he knew enough about medicine to know that he could not seriously depend on it. He knew that it was a matter of time and that in the end the disease was incurable. For the first time he did not leave home alone. Clearly he was struggling with despair at the knowledge of approaching death. He again began to drink, and the bout continued unbroken for several months, while the cancerous tumor developed.

At the end of my first season in the Arts Theatre I returned home, and we all went to our country house. My father was rapidly growing weaker but did not lose consciousness. He clearly described to me the picture of his approaching death, and I think even predicted the day on which he would die. We took turns at watching him at night. He began to get into a state of delirium.

"It's aggravating," he said to me once, "I have lived for so long, and what do I see before death? Long trains of geese! How aggravatingly stupid!"

He had no fear of death; and even when he was suffering, choking from his tumor, although I noticed signs of irritation on his face, I never saw fear. He suffered terribly. The tumor was slowly strangling him. Although I was unable to help him, nevertheless I could not leave his side and could not tear myself away from the contemplation of the picture of horrifying human suffering. For the first time I saw death

so near. I watched his breath becoming shorter and shorter, his mouth opening wide in search of air; I caught the moment when his eyes ceased to see. His agony lasted several hours, but during those hours time did not exist for him or for me. At last his forehead turned yellow, and the yellowness spread rapidly over his face. He was dead.

How incorrectly do we actors portray death on the stage! We devote too much attention to those physiological processes which, so it seems to us, give a true picture of death. However, this is wrong and inartistic if only for the reason that a naturalistic representation of human physical sufferings before death cannot be art. We should not torture the public, choking or writhing before it in agonized convulsions. By this means we will not produce anything except pain and disgust; and the more accurately we represent the physical pain of dying, the further shall we be from the picture of death as it should be in art.

Death on the stage should be shown as a slowing-down and disappearance of the sense of <u>time</u>. The actor representing death should at that point so build up the <u>rhythmical</u> and metrical picture of his part that the audience, watching him, should feel a retardation of time and should imperceptibly reach a point where the retarded <u>tempo</u> appears to stop altogether for a second. This cessation will convey the impression of death. At the same time the audience must be liberated from

the obligation of watching crude and inartistic methods showing the physiological processes of the dying man.

Of course, such a problem demands a high acting technique. It is essential that the actor should learn not only to control the tempo. Very often one is forced to watch hurriedness instead of tempo on the stage; and yet the more the actor hurries on the stage, the slower his acting seems.

The actor is also unfamiliar with the sense of <u>space</u> on the stage. He does not distinguish the right hand side from the left. He does not distinguish fully the front and depth, straight and curved lines which he traces out when he walks. He has not yet learned to "draw" figures and lines with his body on the stage and in the stage space; but at the same time actors are very fond of making from time to time, "wide and beautiful" gestures with their hands. At such times the instinctive sense of space lives in them. Why, then, do they not wish to make a beautiful and expressive gesture with the whole of their bodies?

The main fault here lies in the habit of "miming" which the actor has. He wishes, first of all, to put his expressiveness into facial expression and thereby destroys the expressiveness of the body. The gesture of the body becomes the gesture of the face and becomes petty and often pitiful. To say nothing of the fact that the actor's face simply cannot be seen by everyone in the audience; in addition, his face

cannot give him such expressiveness as is innate in the body as a whole. The eyes of the actor have a prior right to maximum expression, but the eyes will only become really expressive when the actor's body, motivated by the will, draws its forms and lines in the space of the stage. If the body is alive, the eyes will of necessity become filled with meaning and expression. When commenting on a performance, the onlookers say, "What eyes he or she had in that scene," but they do not say, "What a mouth," or "What cheeks," or "What a chin." The body in space and rhythms in time - these are the means of the actor's expressiveness.

After the death of my father, my mother and I moved to Moscow. I was 21 years old and was due to be called up for military service. My mental state was at that time already very painful. I nearly lost my mental balance in the presence of a large number of people. This developed later into a fear of the crowd. The days on which the recruits were being called up were unbearably painful for me. Sullerjitsky understood my mental state. On the day when I was called up he told me that he would come with me to the recruiting station. I was amazed and shaken by his attention. His presence had a pacifying influence on me, and I had not the courage to refuse his offer. However, I am sure that in any case he

would have gone with me, and I would not have succeeded in persuading him. His moral impulses were so strong that he submitted to them without regard to external obstacles and apparent "common sense."

Early in the morning I parted from him at the doors of a huge building in which the recruits were being inspected. Crowds of excited and already angered people gathered at these doors and slowly, jostling and swearing, entered into the building itself. There was an infinite number of dirty rooms, a cold stone floor, shouting soldiers directing us to and fro, jostling and swearing. Each one of us longed for something left behind at home. Hours passed in aimless fuss. Parties of us were sent into one room or another, locked in for a long time, then let out again and locked in again, apparently without any sense or reason.

Sadly I looked at my fellows and could not understand whether the soldiers directing us had any plan or system, whether our numbers were decreasing or not. Had the inspection started anywhere? Through the window one could see how the pouring rain soaked the crowd of women, old and young, who were waiting for their brothers, husbands, and sons. At last we were ordered to undress. We threw our clothes on the floor and stood naked for several more hours. Late in the evening I reached the medical inspection. The doctors were tired out. They shouted at us, snatching at us with their hands and

prodding our backs and chests. I could hardly stand and dully waited my sentence. Suddenly I heard "Three months." a postponement! My dream had come true! A postponement! All the painful and complex pictures which had painted themselves in my imagination and had grouped themselves round my mother faded, and I felt as if I had been granted three more months of life. I spent another hour looking for my clothes, and it was quite dark when I went out into the street. It was still pouring with rain. I felt giddy with happiness. I started running, greedily inhaling the fresh air. "Misha!", I heard suddenly a quiet and affectionate voice say. I turned around. Sullerjitsky was by my side, soaked through with the rain. I was amazed. He had stayed there all day and waited for me amongst that crowd of relatives bemoaning their only ones... What was I, then, to him? Brother? Son? I was merely one of his pupils!!!

As all really kind people, Sullerjitsky loved to appear at times angry, strict, and even fearsome. He started a large book in the Studio, into which each one of us could enter his thoughts. Once he himself wrote into this book a series of amazing ideas about workmen, of their hard life under modern conditions, and the consequentnecessity of attentive relations with our theatrical workmen. Having read this article, I was inspired by its contents, but, unfortunately, could find nothing better than to place my inspiration into

a series of caricatures with which I illustrated his article.

Coming into the Studio in the evening, I heard a voice of thunder. Sullerjitsky was looking for the perpetrator of the illustrations and, it seemed, was ready to tear him to pieces on the spot.

"It is an insult!", he shouted, approaching us. "Who has dared to do this?" He appeared in the doorway, looking for his victim.

"Who did this? Speak at once! Who?"

"It was I..." I answered with terror. There was a pause.

"Well, what of it," he said kindly and peacefully. "Well, you drew them! Well, what about it? Why, nothing!"

He embraced me and was ready to pacify me, as if he had been at fault and I had been reproaching him. Such was the extent of his vindictiveness!

His artistic feeling and sense of truth were astounding. He did wonderful things. For example, he would take the beginning of a story unknown to him, study its portrayals, and then would say how, in his opinion, the author would develop the story and how the characters would act in the story. His intuitive prophecies were right. When he conducted a rehearsal, he made actors work for a long time on the first two or three sentences of the text. He could not rehearse the entire piece without finding the beginning from which he could continue,

evolving the following text. He sensed comic and tragic situations equally well, and we learned a great deal from him in that respect. He drew and painted splendidly. Many of the properties in our productions were made by him. I remember how late one night we sat with him on the floor and painted an overcoat for the part of Caleb in The Cricket on the Hearth. The coat had to be old and dirty. Sullerjitsky made a thin solution of coffee and painted mud on the coat. Once he said to me, "Do you know, Misha, what I would like to draw?"

"What?" asked I.

"That," said he seriously and throughtfully, "that which one cannot see." I could not understand what he meant, and he explained.

"When you look at some object, you see it clearly and definitely. The neighboring objects are already less visible. The further away you go, the less easy it is to see the surrounding objects. You do not really see them at all. And yet where are the boundaries where you really cease to see? That is what I would like to draw, how one does not see surrounding objects, how they gradually disappear from his field of vision and from his consciousness."

I believe he once made an attempt to draw that which one does not see.

Sometimes he would spend a great deal of time with his head resting against the wall, with his eyes shut and

humming some tune softly, tapping with his fingers and palm on the wall, tapping out the rhythms and metrical patterns of the tune. Keeping his eyes shut, he would slowly go to another wall, where the same things happened, after a minute or so he would go to another place, and so on. What was going on in his mind at those times?

Needless to say, this peculiarity was no secret to us, and Vakhtangov, when imitating his beloved Sullerjitsky, copied this particular trait and did it very amusingly. But once, after Sullerjitsky's death, when we were telling each other our reminiscences and impressions of him, Vakhtangov suddenly got up and imitated Sullerjitsky by a wall, humming with his eyes shut. The result was unexpected. Not only were we not amused, we suddenly felt the proximity of Sullerjitsky, and several of us felt frightened. Vakhtangov stopped his imitation, and we parted in silence.

Sullerjitsky used to suffer from a disease of the kidneys, and often came to rehearsals pale, with a swollen face, scarcely able to move his feet; but after a quarter of an hour one would not recognize him. He became inspired, his illness was forgotten, and he ran about, showing us how to act and laughed with us like a youth.

Once, on a tour of the theatre, Sullerjitsky announced to all the members of the Studio that after that day's performance we were all to gather in his room as he had something

important and serious to tell us. All day he wore an arr of concentration, and we were interested and even alarmed by the forthcoming conversation. What it was to be about, we could not guess. In the evening, having finished the performance, we quickly changed and went to Sullerjitsky's hotel. There, outside the door of his room, we found waiting those of our colleagues who had not taken part in the performance that night. The door to his room was shut, and we waited for him to open it and let us in. However, the door did not open. Having waited some time, we decided to knock. There was no reply, and we quietly opened the door. The room was in darkness. Evidently, he had not yet returned home. Quietly we came into the room and put on the light.

"Who is there?" suddenly came a startled cry.

We turned around and saw Sullerjitsky. He sat, undressed, on his bed, wrapping his blanket round him. He looked sleepy.

"Who is it? What do you want?" he shouted.

"We have come, Leopold Antonovich."

"What for? What has happened?"

"You told us to..."

"When?" He rubbed his eyes and suddenly burst out laughing. "My dear fellows, I forgot! Honestly, I forgot! Go home! Some other time!"

Going out, we heard him roaring with laughter.

The theatre was on a tour of the southern towns of Russia. Vakhtangov and I agreed to share the same hotal rooms. I cannot remember what detained me in Moscow, but I was due to arrive in the town where we were playing a day late. Having arrived into the strange town, I approached a cabman with my luggage and gave him the name of the hotel in which our actors were staying.

"Are you the nephew of Anton Pavlovich Chekhov?" suddenly and unexpectedly asked the cabman, leaning toward me.

"I am," I answered with astonishment.

"Come along, please!"

I was so astounded that I did not even attempt to guess what this incident ment. The cabman would not take any money from me. At the door of the hotel I was met by a commissionaire.

"Are you the nephew of Anton Pavlovich Chekhov?"

"I am."

"Come along, please!"

I was led into a large room. There I found Vakhtangov sitting and roaring with laughter. His prank had succeeded brilliantly. He and I shared rooms. Despite our friendly relations, our life was not without certain complications. These were due to me. At that time I was fascinated by Schopenhauer and constantly wore an absent and gloomy expression. On my face was written that I knew something which no one could

know who had not read Schopenhauer. This apparently irritated Vakhtangov, who felt the unnaturalness of my behaviour. For days I would lie on my bed with a volume of Schopenhauer's works in my hands. Vakhtangov bought two mandolins and taught me to play by music. We played duets, but my pessimism did not diminish, and I was a dull and heavy companion for him; and the heaviness of our relations was intensified when I bought a big black dachshund from a street ragamuffin, paying him a rouble for it. The dog was ill, and I concentrated all my attentions on it. It irritated Vakhtangov, as it used to whine both at home and in the theatre, where I used to take it with me.

As a result of our strained relations, a special kind of game arose between us, apparently spontaneously. We called it the game of "trained ape." Each morning we made coffee in turn. The one whose turn it was, was the trained ape. He got out of bed first and, while remaining on all fours, had to do everything associated with the making of coffee. The other, who was not the ape that morning, had the right to beat the ape for everything that he considered deserving of punishment. The ape had to bear the beatings without complaint and await the following morning, when the other became the ape and the indignities could be avenged.

It is easy to guess that each day our artistic temperaments became more and more inflamed. Rolled-up mats,

chairs, etc., were put to use, but we bore everything without complaint. None of our colleagues knew of this game. We had our own ethical code, which compelled us not only to stand the beatings but to preserve silence. Our accumulated passions finally culminated in a minor catastrophe. I do not remember which one of us was the trained ape on that occasion, but the "ape" mutinied, and a fierce fight began. One of his blows struck my face and knocked out a tooth. I literally tore open my tongue on the remaining fragment of the tooth, but the fight did not cease, and after a few seconds I succeeded in gripping his head under my arm and squeezed it hard. Taking advantage of his helpless position, I decided to rest a moment. Suddenly my glance fell on the face of my victim; he was choking and black in the face, I let him to. The battle ceased, and with it our "enmity."

For a long time I could not eat, my mouth swelled up, and he tended me with care. Later, when I asked him why hedid not tell me that he was choking when I squeezed his head, he told me that at first he did not want to beg for mercy as up till then neither of us had done so, and later he could not say anything as I was pressing too hard on his neck, But, however strange it may seem, however incredible it may be, our fights, despite all their crudeness, were not really so crude! Apart from their sporting nature, they contained a great deal of fun and youthful bravado, which it is now pleasant to

remember. These more than intimate relations of ours did not prevent me from regarding Vakhtangov as an older friend and teacher in the art of the theatre.

He was an expert on the "system" of K. S. Stanislavsky. When he was working, the system came to life, and we began to understand its driving force. Vakhtangov's teaching genius worked miracles in this direction. Teaching us, he himself developed with amazing rapidity.

"Do you know," he said to me not long before his death, "I can attain any theatrical situation, any stage idea, as easily as taking a book from a shelf."

And he really did create his theatrical ideas literally before our eyes. Aphorisms built themselves up in his speech when he discussed the theatre with us or with his studio pupils.

His talent as a producer is known to all by his productions. But that was only one side; the other was the way in which this producing genius manifested itself in his work with the actors during the production of a play.

The problem of the relationship between producer and actor is a complicated and difficult one. Dozens of lectures could be given on the subject, but they will lead to nothing if the producer has not the peculiar "feeling" of the actor. Vakhtangov possessed this feeling to perfection. He himself spoke of it as a feeling which a man has when taken by the hand and led patiently and carefully to a desired goal. He, as it

were, stood invisibly by the side of the actor and led him by the hand. The actor never felt a sense of compulsion from Vakhtangov, but could not deviate from his production ideas. In fulfilling the demands and ideas of Vakhtangov, the actor felt them as his own. This wonderful quality of his solved the question as to whom belonged the leading voice in the treatment of a part; whether to the actor or the producer. Moreover, one must be glad that this question is not yet "theoretically" solved; otherwise, despotic producers and stubborn actors would abuse either solution of it.

Vakhtangov solved the question in a practical manner, and this solution consisted of the humaneness of Vakhtangov himself, in his ability to penetrate into another's mind and to speak his language. A man can be convinced in the language of his own mind if one speaks to him in his language. Vakhtangov could do this. He was never sentimental with actors, and actors never interfered with his ideas by their whims and obstinacies. In order to become a producer of the type of Vakhtangov, one must learn humaneness and an attentive attitude to people in general. Here moral and artistic questions meet again.

Vakhtangov had yet another quality indispensable to the producer; he was able to show the actor what constituted the basic picture of his part. He did not show the image as a whole, he did not play the actor's part for him, but he

showed and acted a scheme, an outline, a sketch of the part. When producing Eric XIV, he showed to me in this way a sketch of the part of Eric, over a whole act of the play, without spending more than two minutes on it. After this the whole act became clear to me in detail, although he did not touch detail. He gave me a basic, free framework in which I could then place details and portions of the part. He had an exceptional ability for "showing."

Two completely incomparable psychological states are felt by the man who shows and the man who does. The man who shows has a certain confidence, a lightness, and has not the responsibility which lies upon the man who does. Because of this, it is always easier to show than to do oneself and showing is almost always successful.

Vakhtangov commanded the psychology of showing to perfection. Once, playing billiards with me, he demonstrated his wonderful ability. We both played rather indifferently and rather rarely potted the balls. But then he said, "Now I am going to show you how to play billiards," and, changing his psychological outlook, he easily and skillfully potted three or four balls in succession. After that he stopped the experiment and prodeeded with the game as before, only occasionally potting the ball.

Thanks to this wonderful quality of Vakhtangov, there was very little talking at his rehearsals. All the work

consisted of showing, of demonstration of images, etc. He understood very well that if an actor talks a great deal about his part, then it means that the actor is lazy and is delaying the moment of the real rehearsal.

Actors and producers should work out a special working language. They have not the right to discuss with each other while working. They must learn to incorporate their thoughts and feelings in images and to exchange those images, replacing by them the long, dull, and uselessly clever conversations about the play, the part, and so on. I firmly believe that the time will come when actors will understand that their tortures and sufferings, connected with their profession, are caused in the majority of cases by their inartistic methods in working on artistic productions.

Finally, Vakhtangov had one other wonderful quality; sitting in the auditorium at rehearsals, he could always feel the hall to be filled with an audience; and everything which happened before him on the stage was refracted to him through the impression of the imaginary audience filling the hall. He produced plays for the audience, and for that reason his productions were always so convincing and easy to understand. He did not suffer from that disease of producers which is so widespread in our day and which induces the producer to put on a play exclusively for himself.

Producers suffering from this complaint have not the sense of an audience and must always approach their art purely

intellectually. They suffer from a special form of mental egotism.

I am very happy that fate permitted me to work for a considerable time with Vakhtangov. Memories of him, a master of stagecraft, now give me much knowledge which tells of the truth of the theatre.

From my first meeting with my pupils I felt a sense of tenderness toward them. My forthcoming teaching activities received a correct direction right from the start. I was seized with that amazing presentment of the whole which I had latterly lost almost entirely. In this whole was contained the whole idea of the future school, and in the course of the following four years this whole developed integral parts from within itself and formed what the pupils called "the Chekhov Studio." There were errors in the life of the Chekhov Studio, grave errors, but I am now glad of those errors - they taught me and my pupils much. I never prepared lessons; on arriving at the School, I was each time seized anew by the idea of the whole and immediately would read in the whole what integral parts were to be shown that day.

I shall never permit myself to say that I taught by the "system" of Stanislavsky. That would be too bold an assertion. I taught what I had myself absorbed from my

association with Stanislavsky, what had been handed on to me by Sullerjitsky and Vakhtangov. As I accepted and felt that which I had from my teachers, so I handed it on to my pupils. Everything was modified by my own individual acceptance and everything was tinged by my own personal reaction to the accepted material. With all sincerity I must confess that I was never one of Stanislavsky's best pupils, but with the same sincerity I must say that much of what was given to us by him has been permanently absorbed by me and has been placed into the foundation of my further, more or less independent, experiments in the art of the theatre.

Besides working with me, my pupils worked independently with Stanislavsky and Vakhtangov. Vakhtangov, it is true, only read two lectures to them, but he touched upon a whole series of most vital questions - on tragedy and vaudeville, on the "solution" of stage problems, etc. The work of my pupils with Stanislavsky lasted a whole year; several studios (Vakhtangov, Armyanskaya, Habima, and the Chekhov), having combined, worked with Stanislavsky on the "system," successively studying "the work of the actor on himself," and the "work of the actor on the part." For practical work on the part, Stanislavsky chose Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice, intending to execute this production by the combined forces of the united studios. The work on the play was actually begun, but later ceased, owing to the departure of Stanislavsky with the Moscow Arts Theatre on a foreign tour.

Side by side with the internal discipline which reigned in our Studio, we lived in an atmosphere of freedom; but where the realm of liberty ended and the reign of discipline began, it is hard to say. We had no "officials." The respect toward myself which I found in the pupils was not the respect of subordinates. To a certain extent we were all friends. We had no recognized measures of punishment for offenses, but a person was elected to whom the pupils were responsible for their transgressions. They were responsible to this person as to a father, and his position was called "Father of the Studio." Signs of the great uplift which he underwent remained with him for a long time, if not forever.

Members taking upon themselves the care of the life and affairs of the Studio were changed frequently, and there arose a selection of the more capable for the various phases of administrative activities. We did not have a <u>position</u> of administrator, inspector, housekeeper, treasurer, etc. All these problems were solved in other ways. The group of people who were at the time taking care of the life of the Studio would call one of the members and say to him that such were the problems facing the Studio, and such were the affairs which needed attention, such questions were vital; he was to <u>create</u> a position which would serve those needs of the Studio. And so themember who received this task would create his new position. Of course, the newly-created position very strongly

resembled the duties of "inspector," "actor's manager," "stage manager," or "financial manager," but this resemblance was only superficial.

For example, the creator of the position resembling that of financial manager was inspired by his creation, and his position became an inspired, live and interesting task. Meetings on household questions were as interesting as lessons and rehearsals. We were never perturbed by the fact that there is a series of accepted and recognized rules associated with the conduct of various institutions. We began everything from the beginning, and this saved us from the dullness and apathy of professional "household managers."

The creative life of the Studio was also supported by the fact that the pupils never made use of hired labor. Everything was done by the students themselves, right down to washing floors. They did this willingly, and often there were more hands available than circumstances demanded.

All the first period of the life of the Studio was spent in the performance of various "studies." The vast quantity of these studies formed a whole "book of exercises." The students intended to present this book to Stanislavsky himself, as his teaching at the time was based on studies. Often, a study would grow into a complicated and long stage performance. We would play it for several days on end, and for that purpose would use the whole of the flat in which I lived, and often

even went out into the yard and the street. We loved space and did not restrict ourselves in it.

I could than not give myself any clear account of what was going on in the minds of the students during our classes. Now I understand this. It is clear to me that the pupils were experiencing that sense of the <u>whole</u> which I have already mentioned more than once. It was provoked by the whole structure of our Studio life, it penetrated all our studies and exercises, it united us into a friendly community. Briefly, that feeling was what the pupils learned, without suspecting it, during the first period of their work in the Studio.

Little by little, we approached the second phase of our life, the creation of public performances. Our evenings were, almost entirely, improvised. They had a humorous character and were executed in an easy manner. I often took part in them, replacing one or other of the pupils. The evenings were a celebration and a joy. Nothing deterred us in the arranging of them; neither the absence of adequate accommodationnor the primitive nature of the technical accessories. We could all accommodate ourselves in a tiny room which represented at the same time our only dressing room and our property room.

We were saved by the tremendous state of organization which we worked out specially for our evenings. While some of

us were making up for the next scene, others dressed them in suitable clothes, others removed previously used scenery off the stage, others brought new scenery on, and each one moved along his exact path without noise and fuss. We literally performed miracles in this way. Pictures were changed with lightning rapidity and with the same monstrous speed the performers themselves altered. I cannot forget the feeling of happiness which I experienced at such times.

I am tortured by a theatre in which so many people fulfill so many different functions with indifferent, dull faces, with a complete lack of interest in their own work and in the work of their neighbors.

The theatre will never stand on the right road if it does not wish to renounce unnecessary complexity and the destructive indifference of hired laborers. The theatre is only possible as an organism which is united and alive in all its parts. Such a theatre, in time, can and must arise. It will be created by people who will understand that it is possible to create always and everywhere, and that a live, creative organism cannot be chained up inside dead forms of reasoned technique. It will be created by people who will be able to serve and not just do a job, who will work and not just earn, who will love the live organism of the theatre and not dead organization within the theatre.

Our Studio was free from all such faults. Its

members did not watch the clock and were not afraid to expend their energies. They knew from experience that energy spent by them in a common cause would return to them with interest from this same cause. They knew that the only effort irrevocably lost is the effort which is expended toward personal ends within a common cause. Nearly all my pupils had other employment and came to the Studio tired and nerve-racked, but the Studio atmosphere revived them and raised their fitness to work.

Even in 1919 and 1920, when the country was suffering from famine, the working capacity of the pupils did not fall. They gathered strength from the inspired atmosphere of the Studio. After a heavy working day they would eat, without butter or salt, boiled grain brought by someone or other; if they could obtain a little flour, the meal was augmented by a few pancakes resembling pieces of charred wood. The sawing of firewood was also one of the duties of the pupils.

A single impulse united them all, none complained of the difficulties and hardships of life, gloomy moods did not exist, there was a life common to all. Artistic subjects were created in a united impulse by all the staff of the Studio. For example, the question of the cultivation of a sense of truth would arise, and all the members of the Studio would be absorbed in it. The subject of the actor's imagination would appear, and the life of the Studio would go on under the flag of imagination.

In this way our "evenings" were created, and in this way we went on to our work on the fairy tale, which was to be our first work, built strictly on those creative principles which had occupied us all that time. I am convinced that the fairy tale, as a form of artistic work, contains deep and powerful possibilities for the development of the gifts of young actors beginning their careers. It stimulates creative imagination, it raises the consciousness of the artist above naturalism, it miraculously interweaves tragedy and humor, it develops a sense of artistic style, it demands clear and exact form and does not admit of internal artistic falsehood which so easily penetrates on to the stage.

At about this time the teaching staff of the Studio was augmented from the pupils. V.A. Gromov and V.N. Tatarinov was an instructor in the 1st Central Studio and a member of the College of Teo Proletcult, while Gromov was in charge of the Kursky Studio. They brought their Studio experience into the Proletcult, while their Proletcult experience they brought to the "Chekhov Studio."

When, through the annual examinations the Studio staff increased, the members created a special duty, that of "nurse." On the responsibility of the "nurse" lay the artistic education of a certain number of young students. Students could go to their nurses (who

included men in their number) with any questions which disturbed them. In difficult cases the "nurses" conferred with each other and solved problems together.

The conditions of studio life made us consider the acquisition of premises which would permit us to develop the work of the Studio wider and to satisfy the prospective pupils eager to join the staff. In the autumn we generally examined about two hundred candidates, and we suffered considerably from the absence of suitable premises.

We were due to receive the title of State Academic Studio from the Narkompros. The Narkompros fixed a day for the inspection of the Studio. A fortnight remained to that day, on which we had to show a whole theatrical performance which would recommend us as a complete theatrical unit. All our previous repertoire seemed to us inadequate from that point of view. It was decided to take Tolstoy's fairy tale, "The First Wine-maker" and N. A. Popov's "Shemiaka's Judgment."

I announced to the pupils that if they would give me a fortnight's daily work and four nights for rehearsals, the performance would be ready in time. The pupils agreed; we presented the performance, in which all the scenery (seven scenes) dresses (about forty), all the properties, everything was made and painted by the pupils themselves in those two weeks of intense and inspired labor.

In addition to that, we rehearsed with the utmost

precision the shifting of the scenes and reached a stage when the most complicated shifting occupied us 50 seconds. Members of the Narkompros, headed by Lunacharsky, were invited to the performance, which took place in the "Habima" premises. The performance was successful. The Narkompros recognized our right for existence and gave us a title, and with it the rights which we had lacked so much.

When I now look back on the whole history of the "Chekhov Studio," I see on the one hand those inspired impulses and those important beginnings in the realm of creative acting, which I am only now realizing to the full. But, on the other hand, big and small defects rise before me just as clearly, both in the artistic and in the organizing sphere. These lessons, this past experience, bound up with all that the following years of my stage work have given me, fill me with the confidence that I could now organize the Studio more profectly and actively. All the organism of the theatre as a whole, beginning with the most primitive technical questions and finishing with the most complex artistic ones, everything from the simplest thing to the most complicated tasks of the producer - all this could become a subject for study and creationin the new Studio.

The Studio life absorbed and excited me, but pessimistic ideas and gloomy moods were still with me. Once I

happened to come across one of the books, very popular at that time, from the literature on the Hindoo Yogi. I read it attentively, but without any particular interest. However, on reading it I did not have the feeling of internal protest which I had previously on reading books of a similar character. My spirit was so weary with the inescapable heaviness of my attitude to the world that it sought no escape any more and did not hope for a new attitude to life. I now no longer had to defend my gloomy attitude. It had finally grown and defined itself. I did not fear serious contradictions, and the Yogi philosophy was accepted by me quite objectively, without any hope for a new attitude, but also without the slightest inernal resistance.

My impartiality played a definite part. I began to consider calmly and coldly what lay at the foundations of the Hindoo philosophy, and I succeeded in understanding that <u>creation of life</u> is the basic note of the Yogi. <u>Creation of life</u>! That was the new note which was slowly penetrating into my soul. I began to look carefully on my past and to study the present. Was there not creation of life in the process of the foundation and the guidance of the Chekhov Studio? Was the Moscow Arts Theatre Studio not <u>created</u> by Stanislavsky, Sullerjitsky, and by ourselves? Why, then, had I accepted as creation only that which took place upon the stage?

The realm of creation became wider for me, but I was

still very far from accepting life and looking at it through new eyes. The questions of the meaning of life and of the goal of creating were as insoluble for me as before. The senselessness of human suffering and the accidental nature of life were still a deciding factor for me. The widened scope of "creating" penetrated slowly into the depths of my consciousness and dwelt side by side with the structure of thought which had been built up within me by my previous life.

Finally yet another idea, another feeling, began to possess me. It was the feeling of the possibility of creation within oneself; creation within the limits of one's own personality. I dimly guessed at a difference between a man creating outside of himself and a man creating within himself. I could not then see the difference with the clarity with which it stands before me now. By experience I knew only of one type of creation - outside oneself. I thought that creation was not subject to the will of man and its direction depends entirely upon the so-called "natural predisposition." But together with the idea of creation within oneself, a voluntary impulse arose within me, a kind of impulse of the will toward the mastering of the creative energy in order to bring it within, into oneself. However, these feelings were weak, temporary, and hardly yielded to rationalization.

In reality, my will was dormant, and I was inwardly weak, as any man is who is passing through a phase of wearying

pessimism. Nevertheless at times an unaccountable joy would spasmodically spring up in the depths of my soul. This joy corresponded to those joyful moments which I had known formerly as an actor and as a member of the life of the "Chekhov Studio." Yet, the more often I had these new feelings of joy, the more maliciously did pessimism revenge itself. It made its subordinate ideas more acute and placed more and more clearly before my consciousness its unbearable questions of aim and goal, and frightened me with the insolubility of the problem of life without finding the law of justice, which alone can struggle with the cruelty and senselessness of chance. But I could find justice nowhere, and my flashes of joy extinguished themselves helplessly, unable to justify themselves before the force of rational thought.

I found yet another new fact within myself. That mental uplift, that ability to forget which I had experienced in a state of intoxication and for the sake of which I used to drink, ceased to be what I had known them to be. Something interfered with the state of my intoxication. What it was I, of course, did not know, neither did I wish to know. I found dreariness in my intoxicated soul and was internally disgusted. I felt a sense of disappointment. Formerly, wine had made me witty, merry, facile, discerning, bold, and so forth; but now it had become tinged with dreariness and spoiled the merriment, spoiled the wit and discernment, which had formerly given me

satisfaction and joy.

How hurt I would have been had someone been able to tell me then what was happening to me in reality! I was losing the joy of pessimism! I was living out of it. I would have been grievously hurt had I been told that pessimism is a type of joy and that is why the tortures of pessimism are so lengthy; that behind them hides a deep joy and that these joys are loved and cherished. It was fortunate for me that no one told me this; it would have been too disappointing and joylessly painful to realize that the idea of the senselessness of life, with which one has lived and which one has loved with heart and soul, with all one's being, that this idea is that meaning of life with which one lives during the period of pessimism. The pessimist must not have the meaning of his senselessness taken from him. That is cruel, crude, and useless. He must be shown another meaning and must be offered the right himself to refuse the former meaning and voluntarily to accept the new.

My soul was growing out of its pessimism and was getting ready for the acceptance of the new meaning. The deep sufferings of pessimism are a way to growing out of it, while the secret joy of pessimism is the protection of the suffering soul from catastrophe, from suicide. A very small percentage of pessimists commit suicide. It is said that when Schopenhauer, at an old age, at last received recognition of

his pessimistic philosophy, he was glad that man could live to a hundred!

When the painful period of pessimism comes to a happy end, and one recovers from it and returns to life, the first thing which he begins to understand is the meaning of sufferings. And so I, as I grew out of my sufferings, began to understand their meaning. The theoretical idea of the senselessness of suffering without, slowly changed into a sense of the meaning of suffering within. I was one being when I had plunged into sufferings and emerged another. All the ideas which had tortured me for several years were forgotten or replaced by others. They were all without reality, without weight, without truth. They were a "super-structure" over the suffering of the soul, and only the suffering itself was real, and it only bore fruit.

It is clear to me now that my past sufferings have given me strength and right for the enjoyment of many joys, for much knowledge in the realm of art and life. But it is only now that I see it so clearly that I can speak of myself objectively. Only now. Then, during the long and painful process of resurrection from pessimism everything seemed otherwise. For example, at that time I gradually defined the distinction between <u>ideas</u> and <u>moods</u>. I slowly realized that the gloomy but still coherent thoughts were going on in my mind as a separate, more or less, independent life; and side

by side with it went on a life expressing itself in gloomy moods, outbursts of fear, and so on - a life of disordered nerves. It is true that gloomy ideas disordered my nerves and the disordered nerves created gloomy ideas; but nevertheless, they went on separately, and I distinguished the life of thought from the life of "nerves."

It became clear to me that nerves could and should be cured by the means which science possesses for the purpose, but thoughts must be dealt with otherwise. I understood that it is possible to have healthy, strong nerves and at the same time to have erroneous thoughts.

My mental entity began to disintegrate in this way, and I attained a certain measure of approach to myself. I was advised to go to V. F. Kapterev and to try a course of hypnotic treatment. I agreed and placed my nerves in the hands of Kapterev. In five treatments significant results were reached. I was able to go out into the street almost without fear. A new sense of lightness came to me. I could compare it with the feeling of having had a load removed from my shoulders, which I had carried for a long time and to which I had become accustomed. My nerves began to be pacified. New thoughts, slowly dawning on me, flashed joyfully more and more often in my mind. My will gradually woke. My healthy mental entity, which had struggled so stubbornly all those years with external influences, began, visibly to me, to conquer all the heaviness

and gloom which had settled as a thick layer on the surface of my soul.

My instinctive dissatisfaction with the theatre became clearly outlined and arranged itself into concrete thoughts. I began to explain to myself the good qualities, the hidden possibilities and the paths of the theatre. My waking will demanded definite action from me, directed to the improvement of the theatre. It is true that I still suffered from theatrical lies and from the complacent indifference of the theatrical world, but this suffering was counterbalanced by the hope of the possibility of the renewal and renaissance of the theatre. Again I was seized by the sense of the whole and in this whole lived the future theatre. And, as had always happened, the whole seed began to grow, put out a root and stem and to open its leaves.

I worked on the question of the theatre in the widest sense of the word and collected and selected the incoming material until the whole had blossomed out into a beautiful and gorgeous flower. But, I repeat, the process of my return to life went on slowly, my knowledge of theatrical truths demanded much labor, and healthily joyful moods came to me gradually until the answer to the question on the meaning and goal of life had matured and defined itself.

Many of my habitual moods were becoming foreign to me. For example, I observed that I no longer had the necessity

to try and despise people, as was the case previously. Formerly I used to confuse a man with his actions, and together with the actions I despised the man. Then, however, I began to dissociate a man from his actions and even from the temporary traits of his character, and spent my ire on them, leaving the man himself alone. It became easier for me to be with people.

One evening I was called to the telephone by the Studio of the Moscow Arts Theatre. I cannot remember who it was that spoke, but I was asked whether I would like to appear in The Flood on a certain date. The question was unexpected; without having time to think it over, I answered, almost accidentally, "Yes." By this "yes" I killed instantaneously a whole series of ideas and intentions which were associated with the idea of leaving the theatre. I again began to act; but that "yes" did irreparable harm to the Chekhov Studio. I was able to devote less and less time to my pupils, and this gradually caused the end of the "Chekhov Studio."

A little while before Sullerjitsky's death, we observed a certain restlessness and undue excitement about him; these were quickly followed by a decline of strength. He became apathetic and indifferent to many things. It seemed that he plunged into thoughts and feelings which he did not wish to disclose. In such a state he once came to me very late in the

evening. Coming out to him, I saw a strange figure before me. His shoulders drooped, his sleeves covered his hands, and his hat was over his eyes. He looked at me silently, smiling. All his figure expressed unusual kindness. I was surprised and pleased by his coming. I asked him to take his things off, but he did not move. I took off his coat, hat, and gloves for him and led him in. I asked him whether he would like to have something to eat.

"I have some vegetables. Would you like some, Leopold Antonóvich?" (Sullerjitsky did not eat meat.)

He hardly understood my question and suddenly, incoherently but joyfully, started telling me something that I could not understand. I could only see the pleasure which was exciting him. Then be became silent. Having sat with me for an hour or so, he went, still smiling happily and mysteriously. That is my last impression of Sullerjitsky alive. Soon I saw him again, but this time in his coffin, with a serious, and kind face. He died on the 30th of December, 1916, in great agony.

I was preparing two large parts simultaneously; Eric XIV with Vakhtangov, and Khlestakov with Stanislavsky. My working day was divided into two parts - in the mornings I rehearsed <u>The Inspector General</u> in the Arts Theatre, and

in the daytime I went over to the Studio and worked on Eric XIV. Vakhtangov asked me each day about the progress of the rehearsals in the Arts Theatre, and I had to tell and even show him how the work on Hlestakov was progressing. He often laughed and seemed satisfied.

The day of the closed dress rehearsal of Eric came. Vakhtangov and several of his colleagues sat in the hall. The curtain rose and the first act began. Vakhtangov did not say anything to me. The second and third acts also passed without comment. This was a rare occasion. I did not clearly realize what was going on on the stage. It was the first dress rehearsal. Such rehearsals are usually termed "hellish." They are distinguished by the fact that in them actors lose all self-possession, waste a great deal of unnecessary energy, are excited and nervy, and act badly.

At the end of the rehearsal I asked for Vakhtangov's opinion, but strangely enough could not find out what it was. It was only after the next rehearsal that I was told that after the previous one Vakhtangov sat plunged in grief in the hall. He was grieved by my acting. It was so bad that he began to think of not putting the play on. It was decided to give me another rehearsal. This I carried off more successfully, and the meaning of the mysterious silence and the deep scheme of Vakhtangov was then told to me. When the parts for the play were being apportioned in the Arts Council, Vakhtangov closed

my ears with his hands and said loudly so that I could hear, "I would like to be given the opportunity to double Chekhov in the part of Eric." He very muchwanted to play that part, the clothes were made for him, but illness did not permit him to fulfill his wish. He loved acting, but acted very little. He always rehearsed more interestingly than he acted. I remember a rehearsal of The Cricket on the Hearth when he rehearsed one of the parts with an inspiration which I never once saw later in a whole series of performances. Was he, perhaps, feeling himself a producer showing how to play the part?

Once Vakhtangov came into the Arts Theatre during one of the performances of The Inspector General. He wanted to see the second act from behind the scenes. My acting produced a particularly favorable impression on him on that occasion. He entered the hall and sat through the whole performance to the end. He was very pleased with me, and I told him the cause of my success that day. It was as follows: I had always had a fondness for medicine. I loved and love doctors, and especially surgeons. One well-known Moscow surgeon with whom I had the pleasure to be acquainted, listened to my pleas and admitted me to one of his operations. I was dressed in a white coat and led into the operating theatre in the guise of a student. I was unusually excited and eagerly watched all the preparations for the operation.

The atmosphere in the operating room filled me with trepidation. The patient was brought in, laid on the table, and chloroformed. My eyes did not leave the doctor. At last he took a scalpel and with a bold, handsome stoke opened the patient's abdomen. Something happened to me at that moment. An unusual creative impulse was born in me. I understood art from yet another aspect! The surgeon's skill, as it were, flowed into me, and I trembled under the influx of creative forces. The abdominal cavity of the patient was opened, and I saw the beautiful bluish intestines. I had never imagined that they were so beautiful! Living, bluish, elastic intestines!

As if under a spell, I watched the surgeon's movements. He worked boldly and confidently in the open abdominal cavity of the patient. Suddenly I noticed that the surgeon's facial expression was changing. I was hushed. He said a few sharp words to the men surrounding him. They began to move silently, and a look of peculiar concentration appeared on their faces. It was clear that the operation was becoming more complicated and dangerous. I was burning with affection for the sleeping patient and for the great artist in the white coat who stood before me. I saw how he, with great concentration felt the beating of the pulse in some internal organ of the patient and then rapidly inserted a bent needle a millimeter from the pulse.

I stood with bated breath. Again a dead silence,

and again the needle is plunged by the side of the beating vessel. By a dextrous movement, the ends of the thread are tied and the organ is ready for amputation. After a minute the still warm and, to me, unknown human organ was handed to me and someone was whispering unknown words in my ear, explaining the object which I was holding in my hand. The patient's abdominal cavity was drained of blood, and the wall stitched up rapidly.

I was intoxicated, inspired, enchanted! What art! Wherein lies the force of this art? Is it not in the fact that the surgeon creates, having before him the quivering life of a human being? Is it not in the fact that in his creation the question of life and death of the patient is often decided? Where did he learn such terrific concentration? Did he exercise his attention for years, as we actors do? And whence the dexterity of his hands, the precision, boldness, and beauty of movement? Did he learn the plastics of the actor? Whence has he then this brilliant ability to rule his soul in creative moments? Whence? From a sense of Life, which is in his hands, in his power. The life of another - that is the source of his creative force. This life has taught him plasticity, attention, force, agility, lightness, boldness!

Why is it, then, that we actors, creators, train in agility, lightness, and plasticity for years and do not attain even half that power which shines in the creative work of one

before whom life throbs? Because for us, for actors, everything is dead in our art, everything surrounds us in cold heaps; scenery, costumes, make-up, wings, footlights, the auditorium with its boxes - everything! Who is it that has killed all this around us? We, we ourselves! We <u>will</u> not understand that it depends upon ourselves whether the theatrical world around us lives or dies.

We shall only attain to real creation and raise the theatre with us when, like surgeons, we shall be responsible for the <u>life</u> of our performance, for the <u>life</u> of our theatre.

The operation which I had witnessed inspired me tremendously, and I retained my inspiration and uplift throughout the performance. Vakhtangov had sensed my unusual mood that night and remained to see the whole performance.

During the production of <u>Eric</u>, Vakhtangov began to feel ill. He even had to leave the production entirely for a while, and for a whole month his place was taken by B. M. Sushkevich. Afterwards, he returned, but his illness still tortured him, and he suffered from stomach pains and often took morphia. Once, I was returning with him from the Third Studio. He was going home without having finished the rehearsal. He walked slowly, doubled up with pain. However, he never used to complain about his physical agonies; and on that occasion I believe he tried to persuade me to go home and not to go with him. But he looked ill, his walk was uncertain, and I saw him right to his home.

"My dear Misha, how I do want to live!" he would say to me during the last days of his life. "Look, here are stones, plants, I feel them in a new, special way, I want to see, feel them, live amongst them!"

However, he apparently had no thoughts of death. He simply <u>wanted to live</u>. Each day he became more and more changed. His face turned yellow, and a characteristic leanness appeared on his neck near the ears and sharpened the angle of his shoulders. He would approach a mirror, look at himself, and...not see the signs of imminent death.

"Look," he would say, "see how strong I look. Arms! Muscles! And what strong legs! Do you see?..."

I suffered mental agonies at such times.

"Give me your hand," and he would take my hand and make me feel a large, cancerous tumor in the neighborhood of his stomach. "Can you feel a bump? That is a scar after the operation. That happens sometimes. Doesn't it? Doesn't it?..."

I agreed with him.

The Studio was producing <u>The Flood</u>/ The Deluge/ Vakhtangov had the part of Fraser. His acting was more than splendid, and all the rest watched him with delight, but they all thought that it was the last play in which Vakhtangov would appear. And so it was - he was acting for the last time. Why did he act so magnificently? Because he was defending his <u>life</u>. <u>Life</u>, a sense of <u>life</u> had produced a creative state. Are we, artists,

only capable of feeling life when it is in danger or is being extinguished? Can we not fight our way to a sense of life while we are healthy and not so difficult to look at oneself, healthy, full of strength, and say to oneself, "I am well."

A consultation of doctors was called to Vakhtangov, and the specialists examined him in my presence. After the consultation was over I came into their room and understood all...

"How long, do you think?" I asked them.

"Four - five months." was the reply.

Vakhtangov waited for me downstairs. I came out to him and, perhaps for the first time, lied to him. He was glad and cheered up. Later, he went down again and did not rise any more. His interest in the life of the Studio of the Moscow Arts Theatre increased greatly. He inquired about everything that went on in the Studio and became suspicious - it seemed to him that we were hiding something from him. At that time the Studio was preparing for its tour abroad. Vakhtangov did not even admit the possibility that he might notbe a member of that tour. He called a photographer, got out of bed, had his photograph taken for a passport. The photograph reflected the approaching death cruelly and openly, but again he did not understand. The day of the tour was near, and we really did not know what to do with him. We felt that we had no right to tell him the truth about his tragic position and could not

find the means of convincing him of the impossibility of a foreign journey. But the illness progressed rapidly, and he died on May 29, 1922. I was not present at his death.

During the heavy years of famine my mother was taken ill. She lay in our cold, unheated lodgings, and groaned softly day and night. She needed skillful and complicated attention, and with difficulty I got her placed in a hospital. I came to see her nearly every day and could see how she was sinking. Her reason was weakening, and she began to talk incoherently. She died in my absence, and I could hardly find her in the morturary amongst the bodies which lay on the tables, on the floor, in fantastic poses, embracing each other, with swollen faces, with open eyes.

A typhus epidemic was raging in Moscow, and there was no time to bury the dead. With great difficulty some semblance of a funeral was contrived. The cemetary presented a ghastly picture. Into the graves were lowered people without coffins, wrapped in rags, sometimes tied together in pairs to wooden boards with ropes.

From the time of my mother's death I seemed to lose the ability to feel. It seemed to me in some way unimportant whether she was dead or not. I could not realize her death and remained strangely placid. The thought of suicide did not

enter my head, and I got over my mother's death in a state of dull indifference. Her grave was soon lost, and now I do not know where her remains repose.

By the time of the foreign tour my theatrical ideals had become sufficiently well defined. The necessity of realizing them had reached its limit. I began to discuss questions of art with friends and met with understanding and sympathy from many of them. We talked warmly and much about reorganization of the Studio.

With the death of Vakhtangov the Studio had lost its artistic leader who could have led it along new, living paths. This loss worried me. Even during his lifetime Sushkevich and I had almost agreed to lead the Studio where the talent of Vakhtangov directed, but his death did not permit us to realize the idea of a precise fulfillment of "the face of the Studio."

I began to think of myself as the artistic leader of the theatre. I announced that I was taking the artistic guidance into my hands for a year. It seemed to me that much could be done in a year toward raising the standard of theatrical acting technique, but my inexperience had deceived me cruelly. I have now been working in the theatre for several years but cannot say up to this day that I have reached any prominent results in the realm of acting technique. The artistic

problem which I have raised can hardly find its full solution soon, since the life of the theatre is complex and demands a great deal of labor in directions bearing no direct relation to the actor's creative art.

The rapid growth of our theatre in the last few years demanded a great expenditure of forces on the part of the management. The annual budget of the theatre went up from 100,000 to nearly 400,000 roubles, the troupe had increased considerably, asalso had the technical personnel. With great satisfaction I must say that the energies which the management had expended on all the complicated administrative work, brought excellent results. (Thiswas also noted by the various institutions concerned, which had found the activities of the management quite satisfactory, and the theatre grown and matured in a financial sense.)

The first thing that I wished to do in my new plan was the production of Hamlet.

I was faced by a difficult problem: I had no one to play the part of Hamlet. I did not consider myself quite suitable for the part, but I had no option. With much inward anguish in the cause of my plan, I took the part upon myself. My dismay grew when I realized that my attention was directed on the production as a whole, on the development of the rudiments of a new acting technique, and not on the part of Hamlet, not on myself as an actor. All this complicated my mental state.

Exercises with balls were the first things at the rehearsals of Hamlet. We silently threw balls to each other, putting into our movements the artistic content of our parts. The text of the play was read slowly and loudly to us, while we fulfilled it, throwing balls to each other. In this way, we achieved several aims. In the first place, we were freed from the necessity of speaking the words before we had any artistic internal impulses toward them. We were freed from the painful stage of pronouncing words with our lips alone, without any internal meaning, as always happens with actors who begin their work by pronouncing the words prematurely. Secondly, we learned to achieve in a practical manner the deep connection of movement with words on the one hand, and with emotions on the other.

We were beginning to appreciate the law that an actor who repeatedly makes the same voluntary and expressive gesture, a gesture having a definite relation to some part of his words, receives as a result, a corresponding emotion and an inward right to speak the words concerned.

From movement we went on to feeling and to words. Of course, all these and similar exercises were done by us far from perfectly and in insufficient quantity. In addition, we were constantly distracted by theoretical discussions on the meaning and significance of this or that exercise. However, that may have been, the first attempt was made, and to my

greatest joy I saw that the actors took to new and unusual methods of work willingly.

I myself, in the part of Hamlet, fell far behind my colleagues. Even on the day of the first public dress rehearsal, I, standing in my make-up and costume in the dressing room, felt that certain pain which is known to the actor when he feels that he is not ready to appear before the public. If the actor prepares his part correctly, then all the process of preparation can be defined as a gradual approach of the actor to the image which he sees in his imagination. The actor at first builds up his image entirely in his mind, and then attempts to imitate its inward and outward properties.

So it happened with me during the preparation of the part of Hamlet. I built up a mental picture of Hamlet, saw his external and internal picture, but could not copy it as my mind was occupied by general problems. Even now I can see the remarkable face of my imaginary Hamlet, a face with a peculiar yellowish tinged skin, with wonderful eyes and several miraculously arranged furrows on his face. How unlike this Hamlet is to the one which I act, and how painful it is to realize that!

It was also in the production of Hamlet that the first attempt was made to produce a play by the combined work of three producers. (Hamlet was produced by Smishlaev, Tatarinov, and Cheban.) The task proved difficult, but the idea seemed

to me, after the experiment we had made, definitely correct and desirable. In general, the idea is that the producers, having one common problem and constantly acting on each other with their artistic ideas and images, attempt to solve their artistic contradictions and discrepancies by placing these images in their minds and letting them react freely with each other. They await the result of the clashes of these images and thoughts.

If the producers really succeed in doing this in a pure, impersonal, self-sacrificing way, the result appears as a new, beautiful, creative idea, satisfying all the producers and corresponding to the individuality of each. Such a result always proves to be higher than the ideas expressed by each producer individually, but such a method of work can only be achieved if the producer is more interested in the production and its future than in himself and his future.

After the dress rehearsal of Hamlet, Stanislavsky said to me that although there was a great deal that he liked in my acting of Hamlet; nevertheless, I, in his opinion, should avoid purely tragic parts. Stanislavsky was, of course, right - I have no real "tragic" gifts, but nevertheless I think that if I could succeed in playing Hamlet as he appears to me in my imagination, I would be able, to a certain extent - and perhaps in a peculiar form - to portray the tragic quality of Hamlet.

I felt much easier in the part of Ableuchov [Senator

Ableukhov] in Belov's [Biely's] Peterburg. Although, as in the work on Hamlet, my attention was distracted by problems of a general nature, nevertheless I was able to devote sufficient time to myself. I myself and the rest of the cast of this play, all sought an approach to rhythms and meters in connection with movements and words. Our attempts were not sufficiently finished for the public, but they gave us, the actors, a great deal; and I hope that attempts to introduce new methods of technique, which were indicated in the production of Peterburg, will be developed further in a subsequent work of ours.

The production of Delo went in a slightly different direction, and the further development of acting technique did not enter into itsproblems, but nevertheless, I personally attempted, within the limitations of my part, to use some of the theatrical methods which help to ease the work and tend to a greater facility of execution. I attempted to work out the theme of imitation of an image. I observed the image of Muromsky in my imagination and imitated it during rehearsals.

I did not act as we actors generally do; I was imitating an image which itself was acting for me in my mind. As a result of this imperfect attempt of mine, when I portray Muromsky on the stage, I, to a certain extent, remain away from him, and, so to speak, oberve him, his acting, and his life. This "standing aside" enables me to approach that state of the

the artist when he purifies and ennobles his images without introducing into them any unnecessary traits of his own personal character.

When I commenced the contemplation of the image of Muromsky, to my surprise I noticed that the only clearly visible characteritstic consisted of his long, gray sidewhiskers. I was not yet able to see to whom they belonged, and patiently waited for the appearance of their owner. After a while, the nose and hair appeared, then the legs and the gait. At last came the whole face, arms, position of head, which swayed slightly as he walked. When I was imitating all this at rehearsals, I suffered a great deal through being obliged to speak the words of the part before I had heard the voice of Muromsky as a mental image. Time did not permit me to wait, and I had almost to invent the voice. However, I experienced a great deal of pleasure even from the little which I had achieved during the hasty production of Celo.

The production of Hamlet coincided with an important and significant moment in the life of the Moscow Arts Theatre Studio. The Studio became the Second Moscow Academic Arts Theatre and moved into new premises in Theatralny Place. The small hall accommodating 175 spectators was replaced by a hall seating 1350. This gave the theatre an opporutnity to fulfill its social obligation; the management of the theatre succeeded in raising the annual organized attendance to 110 thousand and

that of students to 26 thousand per season!

My mental stability grew stronger every day. New thoughts penetrated into my consciousness. They gave me strength, confidence in life, and attached a meaning to my activity in the theatre. I scrutinized all my previous knowledge and easily selected everything containing a grain of truth, rejecting everything that acted destructively on the consciousness and undermined the will. For example, I read with satisfaction in the works of Dr. R. Steiner the story of a teacher who, explaining Laplace and Kant's theory of the origin of the solar system to his pupils, rotated a drop of oil in a beaker of water. The rapid rotation broke up the drop of oil and separated it into a series of smaller droplets. In this way the teacher gave his pupils a visual illustration of the origin of the solar system and the planets. The pupils understood the idea conveyed by their teacher, but could not understand who had rotated the huge nebula in space, in place of the teacher.

I had not yet become thoroughly familiar with the new ideas which were coming to me, but I was already understanding the direction in which my further inward life was to go. The problem of re-educating myself arose before me. I knew that it would depend upon myself whether my mental life would remain the same as before, or whether it will change and subjugate itself to my ego.

Despite the powerful resistance which my character was putting up, I began to transform my mental qualities. Religious moods were already less foreign to me. My physical health began to improve. My interest in science was renewed, but I could not devote myself to it owing to shortage of time; although even formerly I had not been able adequately to fill the gaps in my education. When I had already become an actor of the Arts Theatre, I engaged a teacher of mathematics, but our lessons soon came to an end; this end was caused by a mirror which hung in the room. During the lessons my teacher would not take his eyes off his image in the mirror, and this placed me in an awkward situation. I looked at him, and he at himself, while my calculations remained uncorrected.

My life was slowly changing, and I noticed that around me there was no longer a single person of those who had surrounded me in my childhood and youth. I recollected how, when young, I used to think with horror how terrible it would be to lose one of those near to me; but now I had lost them all, but also a part of <u>myself</u> as I had been previously.

Sometimes, it is true, flashes of memory arise in my mind from my childhood and babyhood, and in them I recognize certain traits of my character which I have today. For example, I can remember myself sitting on the knee of Anton Pavlovich Chekhov. (I was probably six of seven years old at the time.) Anton Pavlovich leans over to me and asks something in an

affectionate manner, and I have a feeling of shyness and hide my face. I remember this feeling of shyness well. I know it well even now. It comes to me suddenly, without apparent cause, and I feel shy and awkward without knowing why, just as I did when I sat on Anton Pavlovich's knee.

I can remember yet another experience. It was in 1900. My mother woke me in the morning and wished me "A Happy New Year and new century." Her words made me feel strangely glad. I did not know what had made me glad, but my joy was at something big, something which, so it seemed to me, had taken place somewhere outside, in place, in time, in the universe...I know such joy even now, but now I know to what it refers. I know now that it refers to the creative forces in the world, to the harmony and rhythm of life, to the great justice which reigns in the world, that justice which I sought so painfully in the days of my pessimism; to that order which I had then lacked.

However, side by side with the experiences which I have now just as I did in my childhood, I find others which stand out in opposition to my childish sensations. For example, whatever I might have been wanting in my childhood, whatever game I was playing, the most important thing for me was the result, the end, an effective conclusion. I did everything hastily, hurriedly, striving fervently to attain the desired result. I experienced nearly no pleasure from the <u>process</u> of

playing, aiming only at its conclusion.

I remember how baffled, irritated, and excited I was when the thought had once entered my head that paper might be cut up so small that it will turn into water. I cut up a tremendous quantity of paper, torturing myself to exhaustion by anticipation of the result. Such was the case in my childhood. Now, during the course of any piece of work, I nearly always have an opposite tendency. All my interest is directed at the process of the work itself; the results appear unexpectedly, and I let them exist objectively, as it were, separately from me, without considering them my property and not getting attached to them as I had done in my childhood.

Thanks to this new attitude to the results of my activities, I have found two new feelings in my life. I have noticed that the results of my different activities compose themselves, as if spontaneously, into a harmonious picture, a harmonious mosaic, where each stone in harmony with the others gives a whole and significant image of a huge picture. And there is another thing I have noticed; that feeling of agonizing solitude and emptiness which I had experienced formerly at the moment when results had been attained, had become my property, and I did not know what to do with them, that feeling has vanished from my soul. I did not want the results, and they tortured me, emptying my soul and producing anguish, weariness, and apathy in it.

My self-possession grew gradually, and I noticed that in connection with this the ease with which I became fatigued became less. I was fatigued by masses of external impressions, which I allowed to act upon me uncontrolled. I was torn apart by the most diverse and unharmonious impressions. The sense of integration was foreign to me; I could not repel unwanted impressions. Reacting to everything which I met, I wasted and exhausted my mental strength. When I walked along a street, I became literally filled with the contents of the street signs, the street noise and roar, the faces and snatches of conversation of passers-by. I suffered from this disintegration, but did not know how to combat it. Only a certain degree of consciousness of self has saved me from the anguish of mental chaos. I still see street signs, I hear street noises, and so forth, but these impressions no longer penetrate into me against my will and do not weary me as they did.

I began to admit far fewer impressions into my consciousness, but I have found a relation to these few impressions. I am, for example, pained by the sign hanging over the door of a restaurant bearing the inscription "Tasty Corner" or simply "Taste Restaurant", or "L'Ours" written in Russian characters with a picture of a half-lion, half-tiger by its side. All this hurts me but does not exhaust me mental forces because I regard "L'Ours" and its portrait consciously, and can laugh at the train of thought of the inventor of the name.

I have learned that the artist should know how to receive impressions. That is, to be able to select impressions and to seek a relationship to them; but it is not to escape from painful, heavy, or even pitiful impressions; no, the artist should receive all kinds of impressions and seek a proper relationship to them. I had the good fortune to receive a sense of majestic mental uplift at the sight of the Roman ruins, when I was in the Coliseum, in the Pantheon, and amongst the ruins of the Forum. I was deeply moved by the Roman catacombs, impressed by the might of the human will; and I fell in love with Venice - I walked its narrow, maze-like streets day and night and pined for the love of Venice.

My journey to Italy has left many unforgettable impressions on my soul. But here am I in Moscow, and I am met by "L'Ours!" What should I do? Turn away in disgust? No! I must listen even to what "L'Ours" has to say about the human soul. "L'Ours" is just as much a witness of human life as the Coliseum and the Pantheon. One must not fear the pain caused by "L'Ours," and then it will tell of many wonderful things that the artist ought to know.

I feel bound to say a few words about Italy, a country that miraculously combines greatness and childishness, grandeur and humor, pride and simplicity.

Italy is full of contrasts and of the unexpected. She can develop the artistic taste of man to the greatest

heights, but she can also stoop to unforgettable breaches of taste. I remember a gloomy prison on the shores of the bay of Naples. This prison conveys a gloomy and depressing feeling by its very appearance. Its hopelessly thick walls are made of massive stones. The more horrible its walls look, the brighter is the sunshine, the purer and clearer the air over the bay, the merrier the songs, laughter, and swearing of the Italians in the streets.

The prison is almost the only place in Naples that one wishes to leave quickly. But the desire to leave changes into a desire to run away, into a feeling of despair, when it is seen that near one of the prison walls, nestling close to it, is a small cabaret. Singers appear on the stage, the spectators are merrily eating, drinking, swallowing oysters and jesting with the Italian girls who wait on them. They sing not only on the stage, they sing at the tables, they sing in the streets, near the cabaret, they sing everywhere! The first thought to enter one's head on seeing this picture is, can the prisoners not hear these songs and merry laughter? On the wall by the stage hangs a large picture of the Madonna, decorated with flowers, ribbons, and flooded with light. All this combines into one chaotic impression which it is quite impossible to sort out.

There are also contrasts in the street signs and in the names of various things. For example, a bank is named

"Bank of the Holy Ghost," a wine - "Tears of Christ," fillets, "A la St. Peter." In the shops are sold little statuettes, representing Christ with rosy cheeks and a pretty, doll-like face. In the church of St. Pietro in Vincoli is to be found Michaelangelo's Moses; it is fenced round, and tourists approach it with awe; but on coming out of the church they can, in a little shop nearby, buy a tiny statuette representing Moses with an idiotic face and disproportionate arms and legs. In such shops one can even buy a Coliseum made of some yellowish substance, about one and a half inches high. This not only doesmot resemble the original, but it frankly lacks a wall.

I went into one of the little ancient churches in Florence. Having inspected its amazing frescoes and having enjoyed the wonderful beauty of its antique style, I went toward the exit. At the door, a little, bent, old women barred my way and smiling in a friendly manner, beckoned me to return into the church. I followed her. She led me to a large pane of glass, resembling a shop window, and solemnly turned an electric switch on the wall. The window lit up, and I saw a doll in a bright dress. It was an image of the Madonna. I was horrified, but the old woman joyfully pointed to the image, apparently inviting me to inspect the figure more closely. She pointed to her own chest and again at the figure. Suddenly I saw that the Madonna had a small ladies' watch pinned to her breast. I understood that this had been done for ornament and out of respect for the Madonna. I

became very sorry for the old woman. I thanked her quickly, paid her several lire for her services and went out. I was not feeling insulted for the Madonna, no; the Madonna does not suffer because simple souls honor her as they know how, from the depths of their hearts, with love thd faith; I was sorry for the old woman, I was sorry for the little child within the bent, gray-haired old creature, unsteady on her feet. This contrast for some reason brought tears to my eyes.

On arrival in Capri I was met by a religious procession. An image of the Madonna with upraised arms was being carried high. The procession moved with song, and the rocks shook from the explosions of rockets, and the echo flew between the cliffs and merged into an unbearable, unceasing din. Heavens, how they fired! I was ready to return to Naples at once, but the steamer only left on the following say. I nearly went insane through the shooting which went on half the night. How can the Italians keep any religious feeling in their souls in the presence of such deafening noise? That will always remain a riddle to me.

Once, when on board a steamer going to Venice, I watched several Italian workmen joking merrily with each other. Roaring with laughter, they snatched off each other's hats and pretended to throw them overboard. All the passengers soon began to take part in their game.

Everyone on deck was roaring with laughter, delighted

over and over again at the same joke with the hats. But suddenly the merriment reached a tension when one of the hats really fell into the water. Everyone was hushed, and all eyes were on the owner of the hat, who leaned overboard and for some time looked at his departing, perhaps his only hat. But when he sat down again, his face shone with a child-like smile, and he roared loudly. Everyone roared again. There was not a trace of offense of annoyance. It is far funnier to lose a hat than it seems to an onlooker. However, the fun did not end here. The delight of the friends of the hatless one expressed itself in their tearing out hunks of hair from the chest of their cheerfully suffering friend. The laughter changed into yells of joy. The look of delight did not leave the face of the man without a hat and without hair! I could not understand it and had to confess it. Perhaps the workmen's fun was also built up on contrasts.

Here is another impresson. A piano stands on the deck. Someone approaches it and clumsily, quietly hits a key with his finger and timidly looks around at the people. The crowd remains silent. He hits the key again. They he begins to improvise, without any regard for harmony. After a minute he sings, hitting the keys anyhow. A crowd gathers round him, and they all sing, men and women. Someone else is already at the piano, while the originator of the merriment, with his hat on the back of his head and shaking his black locks with his

wide-brimmed hat will not accommodate, conducts the chorus and shouts, and sings, and dances. Is that not Italy? Italy! It is the sun reflected in the souls of the dark-skinned Italians, and it sings, and it shouts, and it dances within them!

We, when we arrive in Italy, put on dark glasses and with weak, northern, cold voices say, "Ah, what sunshine," while they, dark, uncontrolled, and merry as devils, carry this sunshine inside themselves and are delighted by its rays, not descending to them from the sky, but ascending to the sky from them in their songs and laughter! Italy - the school of joy, love, laughter, the school of a special dancing way of living! With my own eyes I have seen the driver of a large omnibus chasing an Italian girl around the streets of Rome, for fun, in his huge machine. I literally snatched her from under the wheels of the bus, but my "heroism" was taken for participation in the merry game, and both the driver and the girl, laughing merrily, went on their way.

The Italians swindle merrily and simply. One should check one's bills in restaurants - they are meant to be checked. Just as a cabby asks a price which allows of a reduction, so does the Italian waiter write out a bill which allows of a reduction! That is in the order of things. Neither the waiter nor the customer minds when the bill is reduced a little, and both part and go on their way contented.

The Italian cabby is unable to give change. For a long time he will not understand you when you demand change but even if finally he does understand, then, raising his waistcoat and pointing to his stomach, he will say simply and convincingly, "Volgio manaiare maccheroni," and you, of course, will refuse the change.

Obviously all these and similar impressions do not seem to me fundamental and essential for Italy, but I have no doubt that they are characteristic. I even think that impressions alone, connected exclusively with the beauty and majesty of Italian art, Roman ruins, catacombs, etc., would be insufficient to feel and love Italy as it isnow. The customs, faces, voices, and laughter of the Italians is another aspect of what we see in their churches, museums, and in all their nature. The Italians love showing their sights and love giving long explanations to them, but their explanations help far less to understand their country than do they themselves when they lose their politeness before foreigners, and when they become themselves.

There can hardly be a man who has had the good fortune to visit Italy and who does not have the desire to describe his impressions. Italy demands to be spoken about, shouted about, and written about. I myself am not free of these desires, but nevertheless, I feel it necessary to refrain not only because Italy has been decribed by many talented people,

but also because I am deeply convinced that it is impossible to describe Italy. Even reproductions of Italian pictures and ruins only become understandable and dear to one when one has seen them with one's own eyes.

A certain mental equilibrium and peace began to penetrate slowly into my entire life. Even my visits to the recruiting stations, which were repeated regularly every three months, when my postponement ended, passed off more peacefully than before. The more peaceful and firm my mental state became, the more surprised I became at my former behaviour. I ceased to understand it, and it seemed to me that I was remembering not myself, but someone else, a stranger to me.

On one of the first days of conscription, when I was going to Moscow by train (I lived out of town), it became unsufferable for me to be with the other passengers, and I jumped out of the moving train on to the railway track. Now I cannot understand that action. I have almost forgotten the nervous tension which had then made me jump from the moving train. There is a very, very great deal that is now strange and incomprehensible to me.

A certain, apparently insignificant trait of my character played a large part in learning to regard myself objectively. It consists of my habit of constantly finding

myself in comic situations over trifles. Laughing at myself, I learn to regard myself objectively. (I differ from Epichodov inasmuch as he is unable to laugh at his own misfortunes and regards his fate tragically.)

While possessing an honorary pass of admission to a cinema, by a misunderstanding I was once forcibly removed, with shouts, from a queue of waiting people.

Often, when greeting someone, I donot receive a greeting in reply. Sometimes, out of excessive politeness in conversation with slight acquaintances, and trying to find polite and pleasant expressions, I say, "Thank you" instead of "Please," "Good health" instead of "How do you do," "Excuse me," instead of "Goodbye."

Once I was having tea with Chaliapin and was feeling self-conscious. I took a mouthful of tea, and without having had time to swallow it, noticed that there was a silence at the table. Not wishing to swallow loudly, I kept the tea in my mouth. The silence continued. I felt that I was blushing and that someone was going to ask me something to ease the situation. I decided to swallow the tea, but the action was not successful, and the tea poured out in a thin jet on to the table cloth, as if out of a nozzle.

All these and similar trifles can have a great significance if the proper relationship to them can be found.

The more serious was my attitude to the theatre and the more I worked theoretically on the question of a new acting technique, the more complicated became my relationship to the public. Formerly, I had felt the auditorium to be one undifferentiated creature, and I quaked before this creature seeking its approval or fearing its condemnation. Little by little, however, other feelings started reaching me from the auditorium. I began to distinguish the composition of the audience. It was not a matter of indifference to me, who sat in the hall. I began to feel the will of the audience, its wishes, its moods.

The audience has dozens of facets and each night presents new aspects of these facets. The audience can be kind and cruel, flippant and serious, inquisitive and indifferent, respectful and dissolute. But even in the general mood which reigns in the hall I can also distinguish a silent struggle between different groups. Formerly this did not reach my consciousness, and I acted as my inclinations dictated; but with the new sense of the audience my acting changed. I began to act as the particular audience wished me to.

This pained me because I felt that I was losing my independence and subjecting myself to outside wishes. The pain became the more acute, the more superficial and flippant the audience. To pander to it, I began to act more crudely and more simply, almost <u>explaining</u> my acting. The will of

the audience was so strong that I could not conquer it. Each performance, especially at the beginning, was a heavy trial for me.

I found the answer in the new acting technique. I understood that the audience has a right to influence the actor's creative art during a performance, and the actor must not interfere with that. The objective attitude to which I have already referred is a means of giving the public an opportunity of reading upon the actor and of introducing its characteristics into the performance. This will always happen to the truly inspired actor. Contact will only be established between the actor and the audience when the actor loves the public, <u>any</u> public, and when he gives it the scenic image of <u>that day</u>, allowing that image to do all that his inspiration demands, and in which there is also the will of the audience.

For example, it is possible to use the advice and directions of a person whose opinion one values and whom one trusts by giving oneself to his influence in this way. For example, I often use the directions of A. I. Cheban, without actually troubling him. I mentally put him into the auditorium during a performance or a rehearsal and allow him to react on me. I then feel how my acting changes, how it becomes ennobled, and what clarity appears in my gestures, words, and whole portions of the part.

The artistic sense, taste, and craftsmanship of

Cheban, whom I trust unconditionally as an artist, all begin to act upon me, or, rather, <u>within</u> me.

The actor who imagines himself to be the creator of his work, repels the public and arouses its protests. Why does the poet say that Apollo summons him to a sacred sacrifice? Why a sacrifice? Because to give oneself up to inspiration and through inspiration, to the <u>public</u>, to <u>the spirit of the times</u>, to <u>the epoch</u>, and so on - that is to sacrifice oneself. The actor who loves his own will and inclinations in art does not know what sacrifice in creative art means, and he will never be capable of replying either to the epoch or to the demands of the times.

What a great deal is talked these days about "coordination with the present day" and how little is understood of what is meant by this coordination! I have often been reproached for acting <u>Hamlet</u>, who is not required by our epoch. The trouble does not lie with <u>Hamlet</u>, or any other classical play. Hamlet contains inexhausitble wealth for our epoch; the question is <u>how</u> and <u>for whom</u> <u>Hamlet</u> should be acted.

I can remember one performance of <u>Hamlet</u> when the entire audience consisted entirely of teachers who had come to Moscow from all parts of Russia. I remember how greedily they absorbed everything that went on on the stage and what a great deal of new material this audience brought into the performance from itself. I am grateful to them, those teachers

who visited us, for those silent corrections and alterations which they introduced into the performance. The new acting technique to which I am referring is the key to "Coordination with the epoch," the new, deep-thinking actor, an actor sacrificing himself to the public, is the key to modern acting. The classics, the greatness of which consists of the fact that they stepped far beyond the limits of their own times and touched upon the interests of coming epochs, these classics will live and will talk to us in our own language if we, instead of stifling them and driving them away, put at their disposal a new technique, a new art, a new actor, to reincarnate the classic as the epoch desires.

The new actor will only recognize, understand, and consider the wishes of the new spectator with his new consciousness when he learns, through the new technique, to sacrifice his own will, his personality. No theoretical treatises, no arm-chair theories of modern theatrical thinkers will have access to the consciousenss of the actor. They do not know the secret of modernity; the actor will not hear or understand them. The actor cannot be persuaded to be "modern" without being shown the actor's path to being modern. The actor must hear the words of the modern epoch, not from the theoreticians of the theatre, but from the audience itself, from the living spectator, on the night of the performance. For this he must have an organ for hearing these words, and this organ is the

new acting technique, which will teach the actor sacrifice instead of free will in art.

My heart aches with pain for the theatre when I see how the ranting "theoreticians and connoisseurs of the modern theatre" call the community to crude and cruel dealings with the theatre. My heart rejoices again when I realize that, in reality, the "theoreticians" and "connoisseurs" of the theatre are not numerous and that the real connoisseurs who love and understand the theatre do not permit and will not permit them to kill the young growing shoots of the really new theatre. For this, many thanks to them, connoisseurs and patient protectors of the theatre!

It is clear to me that the first problem of the theatre is to transform itself, its technique, its artistic being. The theatre will be saved not only by a new repertoire, but by a new actor!

I can remember what pleasure Boissi gave me by his discussion of the technique necessary for the real actor. I can remember with what affection he explained to me, how the diaphragm and the breathing should be controlled, how the vocal chords should be treated, and so on. He pressed his fingers into my stomach and shouted with delight, looking at me as if it was I who was shouting and not he. I could see how he loved technique and what great importance he attached to it. He is infinitely right! Who needs technique more

than the talented, fiery, and temperamental Russian actor? I was happy to learn that Stanislavsky spoke of Moissi with delight and advised young actors to learn from him.

The obligations of the actor to the audience are great, but the public also has certain obligations to the theatre. I have often noticed that a performance is going worse than might be expected from the composition of the audience, and only because the audience (or, rather, a certain part of it) is not too attentive at the very beginning of the performance. The moment when the curtain rises is the moment when the actor feels very acutely. It is the moment when the actor receives his first message from the auditorium, and often this is the sad message that the audience "is not ready." Whether the actor realizes this or not, he loses something of his power when he receives an unfavorable message from the hall.

The public can raise the quality of a performance by its participation in it, but it can also lower the quality by excessive placidity and passive waiting for impressions. The public should <u>want</u> to see a good performance, and it will see it if it <u>wants</u>. A performance consists not only of actors, but also of an audience. I watched the public with envy when I saw it in 1925, during the International Chess Tournament in Moscow. In the presence of Lasker, Capablanca, Marshall, and other great players the public showed what forces it

contains within itself, and what performances it can force if it should care to treat Stanislavsky, Meierhold, Reskvin, and others with the same attention as Reti, Norres, Bogoljobov, etc.

I would like to say a great deal about the relationship of the spectator and the actor, but this topic will enter into the contents of another book of mine, specially dealing with questions of the theatre as such.

I speak a great deal of the new acting technique. But do I have this technique? No, not yet. Here is the dividing line on which I now stand and from which I glance at my past and my future. I am preparing myself for the acceptance of the future new technique. I await it and long for it. A few attempts to master it have shown me its immeasurable depths and value. I look ahead with hope and faith. Inwardly, I have finished with all that is old in the theatre, and I find it painfully difficult to outlive this remainder of the old and to struggle with obstacles which stand on the way to the new. In reality, I have not yet played a single part as it should be played, and if I was asked which of my parts I consider the most successful, with all sincerity I would have to reply: the one which I have not yet acted.