

Michael Chekhov

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THE ACTOR IN THE THEATRE OF TODAY

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I am very glad that I can speak to you, and as the time is short, I shall try to speak in a condensed way, although I am not sure I can. So please stop me if it is too long.

What do we think about the theatre, as a rule? What does it exist for? We have become accustomed to thinking that the theatre exists for us actors, to give us the opportunity to express things - to express the author's ideas and our own feelings, thoughts, will impulses, through the author's words. That is true, of course, but I begin to doubt that for our times it is just as true as it was for actors ten, fifteen, or twenty years ago. I think they had many things inside of themselves which they could express, but forgive me for saying so, I doubt that we have very much to express now.

Our life has come to such a point that we are compelled to express things which are there in us, to express

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them and to make them obvious to ourselves. We have certain feelings, certain opinions, certain desires, but we modern people are afraid of our own feelings, of our own thoughts, and we try to become more and more uniform. With such an attitude of mind, I don't think we can express very much being on the stage.

#### THE ACTOR IN THE THEATRE OF TODAY:

Let us speak about things which are going on just now, and ask ourselves honestly and for a moment without fear, do we really feel what is going on there in the Phillipines, in Java, and in Australia? I don't think we do. We know, yes, but whether we feel I doubt very much. Because if we were really able to imagine what is going on there, then I don't think we could go on living as we do. This is our lack of imagination. I speak now about actors - this is not a political speech. I speak about actors because they hope to be able to express things from the stage, and those who wish to be actors, or to exercise certain things in the theatre, must reconsider their own inner state of mind if they really want to approach the theatre of today.

The actor who is not able to cry, imagining these mothers and girls and boys in the Phillipines - to imagine them so concretely that it will change our life in an instant, inwardly at least - what can such an actor express on the

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stage? What feelings? The only thing left for us, if we are not able to imagine all these mothers, sisters, brides, and boys there, the only thing which is left for us on the stage today is to walk from one chair to another to say "hello" and "goodbye" and curtain.

#### THE ACTOR AND THE PLAYWRIGHT OF TODAY:

Is this the theatre for today? I doubt it. This does not mean that we have to have plays which speak about this war. It is not necessary. We know about the war, we know everything about the war, we don't need to hear words about the war from the stage. That would be too primitive to take the newspaper and make a play of it. I don't speak about these words - I speak about the manner in which we actors - if we are really able to imagine what is going on in the Phillipines - shall say even "hello" on the stage. I speak about the actor's soul which must be present on the stage whatever words you have to say, whether it is Shakespeare's or your own. If we cry, being alone sometimes, about these mothers, and brides, and boys, then we can make even out of Saroyan's plays something which will convey to our audience something which is intangible, unspeakable, but which the modern audience needs.

The modern audience unfortunately thinks just as we do, that the whole thing is whether the play is good or bad. That is wrong. The play is important, but not today. What is important today is who is before me [the audience] on the

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stage, this living being whose radiation I receive, whose voice I hear, whose body I see - that is the actor, and that is the theatre or not the theatre.

#### THE NEED FOR AN ACTING METHOD:

Therefore, I think the method should be found - the method for actors which will serve two purposes, one part would be to see how to express things given in the play, but the other part of this method must give the actor the means to find himself, to awaken his feelings, his sorrow, his joy, his will, his thoughts, his imagination and to be able to express such things through the play.

We know, for instance, that Hitler is the devil of today but some of us don't dare to imagine Hitler because it is a frightening thing to really imagine who he is. But if we will try to imagine, it will, of course, cost us at least some restless nights and days, but we will know something, not in our heads because there we know everything and nothing, but in our hearts. If we think of Hitler - we don't know him, and, therefore, we must express nothing about him - but if we know it in our hearts, then we have restless nights, but if we know him to the depths, then we begin to act against him. If in every opportunity we will take to do something against "Hitlerism" on the stage, in our private lives, everywhere, then our will will be awakened, and this will and this

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heart are the only means to become an actor. An actor in the highest sense of this word, an actor whom everyone can admire.

#### THE ACTOR OF TODAY:

We actors of today know things in our heads, and it is a cold business, and we only do surface things on the stage. We touch upon the problems without really knowing. We seem to deal with things - I am able to smoke and walk on the stage - all this is surface, and it is nothing on the stage. When we try to express ourselves on the stage being on the surface of things, no one, whether they will tell us so or not, no one will admire us and to be absolutely honest, no one respects us actors today, and they are right. What are we doing? Studying as you do? Creating a family life? No. Are we essentially important people? No. Clowns, but not good ones. The modern actor in general is nothing. We are people who are chasing success, hoping to become stars, forgetting that there are thousands of stars. Such primitive illusions are governing and leading the actor's life, and no one respects us. To be polite does not mean that we are respected. To be allowed on the stage does not mean anything for the actor. I have been told that one producer spoke on the telephone and one sentence he pronounced was, "Oh, yes, I am polite to everyone - even the actors."

#### OUR METHOD:

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He was right, this producer, because what does the audience get from us? We are entertaining them, but to have a profession as an entertainer is not a noble one. So we have to find something in ourselves which we can express, and then to think of acting, and to take the plays and express through them ourselves.

I can read the play myself, but to see how this or that actor interprets feelings, wishes, images through the play, that is the only thing I wish to see - the actor's interpretation. So we have to find ourselves first, and the method which I think must serve two purposes, to make us able to express things and to help us to find things within ourselves, it is the Method which I try to give the actors with whom I come in contact, in my school in England, and in the school in the United States, and now I am working with a large group of Broadway actors who seem to me to be accepting the Method because they want something more. Perhaps I am mistaken, but as these Broadway actors have been working with me for several months, I think they have certain interest, and this encourages me very much.

#### IMAGINING THE CHARACTER:

Now let me tell you in a few words what points in this Method lead the actors to the possibility of discovering themselves. First - there are many points, but I will only

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mention a few - the first is that we try to develop a really vivid imagination, so that the actor will stop understanding things and will begin to see them, to visualize, then to imagine them. Through this imagination he will not lose his understanding of things, he will begin to understand them even more, but the kind of imagination will be a special one. I will tell you in a few words what kind of imagination it must be. Through the training which I try to suggest to the actors, the imagination can be developed to the extent that we shall be able to see things, to have them before our mind's eye so that the image - for instance, the image of Lady Macbeth - you can know about Lady Macbeth, and you can see her more or less clearly, how she looks, how she is dressed, and you can close your eyes and see her well. That is the very first primitive stage which is not yet the real imagination, and yet that is the highest point to which the modern actor attains. But that is not anything.

#### THE INNER LIFE OF THE CHARACTER:

The second stage is to elaborate the imagination and see it just as clearly as I can see you. That is a bit higher but still not enough. The next stage is when you are able to see with your mind's eye the inner life of Lady Macbeth. What you can tell - looking at your image - what she thinks at the moment, regardless of the play. The words

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which Shakespeare has given us is a different thing, but your own idea about her is the only thing which you can express on the stage. You cannot express Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth because no one knows her. You can only express your own Lady Macbeth - then it will be a true one and the most profound one. To speak Shakespeare's words from the stage does not mean to act Lady Macbeth. It means to bar our approach to her because we do not dare to find our own interpretation of her. In the way which I suggest we will not be as high as Shakespeare, but we will be at least honest and will be completely in her with our own imagination, our own will impulses, our own feelings.

To reach this point where we create our own Lady Macbeth, we must develop our imagination first. When we get to the point where we see what she does at this moment, when we see with our inner eye how she feels at the moment and what she shows at the moment when we are looking at her, then a miracle happens. Then we begin to feel like her and to see and to think, then we awaken ourselves. Lady Macbeth, when she is going to kill, is unknown to us before we, in our vivid imagination, see how she feels while she is going to kill. This revelation reveals for us actually not Lady Macbeth, but ourselves, and that is the only way for us to awaken ourselves, and being awakened to perform Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth as near to Shakespeare as possible, as human as

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possible, as individual as possible, and as profoundly as possible.

The next stage, when you have got to the point where you can see the inner life of the character you are going to prepare, the next stage is that you must get the ability - there are means for it - to ask the image to become different. If you are looking at Lady Macbeth's inner life, you can ask her, "As I look at you now and see what is going on in your mind, heart, and soul, will you please show me how can you, in this crucial moment, of your life, how can you love?" And then you will see that miracle number two will happen. She will show you how she does strange mysteries, being in love. It is difficult to imagine, but it is possible that even Hitler loves, but how? Just the same with Lady Macbeth, if we ask you how she loves, she will show us, she will perform before us how she loves. That will be again a revelation which we can't understand. It is above any understanding. It is a creative process, for the awakened imagination show us things which we would never be able to think of without this imagination.

In this way you may ask your imaginary Lady Macbeth all the questions you like, and she will answer, acting before your mind's eye, creating to your desire. Then you will be revealed - she will reveal for you yourself, and you will reveal for yourself her psychology because you will get new

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eyes, new ears, new heart, new will, new brain as an actor, as a creator. You will not be satisfied with simply knowing what she means.

#### THE INDEPENDENT LIFE OF THE IMAGE:

Then the next stage is that the image, after you will ask it to change under your influence, under your questioning gaze let us say, then miracle number three happens - the image becomes absolutely independent from you and will come to you whenever it wishes. The image begins to work for you, even when you forget it, when you sleep, or when you are busy, or thinking about other things. The image arrives - you may be reading the book which has nothing to do with the theatre perhaps - and suddenly you feel it is there, whether you want it or not. Rich, complete, much stronger than you yourself are. It is a being which you have created through your active, artistic effort, through your highly developed imagination, and the image comes to you and is there, and you have to obey it. You drop your book because the image is stronger than you are. You have to watch, not with your physical eyes, of course, but you will watch what your image is going to reveal to you.

#### THE ACTOR AND HIS CREATION:

And this miracle number three is a pleasant state. You can imagine how pleasant it is to have this image come to

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you, knowing that you have created it and now it is free and all the corners of its mind are open to you, the heart is there and you know what it feels and you begin to feel the same because you are the image because you have created it, and the image is you - not you - it is your creative ability, a higher ability, it is a gift. Not everyone can have it, otherwise we would all be Shakespeares. When you see this image coming to you, you will be terribly happy, but it is also a terribly painful experience at the same time - I don't know why, but it is.

RADIATION:

Question: You use the term "radiation."

Answer: What I mean under radiation is the natural ability to radiate, in the proper sense of this word, our own being towards everyone. For instance, if we are speaking to someone, and we pay attention to the process which is going on between us two, you will see that you can't stop your radiation. We don't pay attention to it, but when we speak words, we convey our thoughts and dry ideas and we think it is all, but that is not all. We must realize that we are always radiating. Even if we are indifferent to the person, there is an instinctive desire to stop our radiation, and then the radiation becomes turned inward, but the polite business goes on. If I am sympathetic or in love, this

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radiation goes on. Not only because I am Russian! Here in America I have noticed it, in spite of all the politeness, people radiate very strongly towards you and from you. And this radiation is very full of meaning and content, if one pays attention. For instance, if you meet someone and you feel the radiation is against you, you can even guess what kind of thoughts are in the person which he takes away from you. Or even it may be fear - "This crazy Russian - I will investigate him." For the theatre, radiation can be developed strongly and consciously, and then it becomes a very strong means of expression on the stage as soon as the actor begins to govern and manage this natural ability of radiation.

Question: Do you place more emphasis on the feeling aspect, rather than the knowing?

Answer: The realm of the feeling is the realm of art. Here is science, and here is art, and here is religion - the most profound level where the whole human being is taken by this way of life...

Question (Professor Clarke): I feel that in life the feelings are ninety percent and the thought is ten percent. In education we spend ninety percent on thought and tend to repress the ten percent which is left for feeling. Perhaps a better perspective will come when that percentage of feeling will get its right place. Then we will be contributing a greater part in American art...I saw your play, The Cricket on the Hearth, most beautifully produced last year.