

Michael Chekhov

Morning June 9, 1938

THE INTELLECTUAL APPROACH

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To avoid making a mistake in the understanding of our Method, it is necessary to point out the following thing: We are always speaking about the intellect and are always trying to discard it - to discard the intellectual approach to our work. Why? Because the intellectual approach kills certain creative abilities. Therefore, it is necessary to say: don't even try to create with your intellect, because instead of using your whole creative being, which includes your spiritual, soul, and bodily abilities you may make the mistake of using your intellect which is not soul, body or spirit but simply a certain kind of little figure of death living in us somewhere - a little devil - a little murderer - a little anti-artist. We must refuse to let this little devil interfere with our work because he makes us as artists as small as he is, whereas our aim is to grow, and to expand, and to be wider, more powerful and more significant, etc., and not to use the intellect, as artists, in creative work. But now we come to the point - this is the ground, on which the artist stands. What is underneath?

However, the intellect has its function which the artist must use, and this is where the confusion lies. With your intellect you must understand the meaning of the words you are speaking on the stage. The intellect is for the com-

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prehension of the words in the text. I have noticed that not only in our Studio but on the stage in general, actors speak words without any comprehension of them. It is a very important point and even in our studio we often speak words without any simple logical understanding of them, or what the sentence is written for.

When we say discard the intellect, we mean discard it for the creative work, but not for the simple human ability to understand. Understanding has many stages - we walk on the ground...this is the simple ability to walk. Now we want to create through the feeling of ease the idea that I am flying. This flying feeling can be accomplished only if I really touch the ground - I must have the illusion of flying, not really flying, because it is not possible. I must have the same ground in all my work. If I understand them I can speak the words in a logical way. ^{* Insertion (1)} I must understand the meaning of the words and the scene, but this is not yet the objective. If you understand you will be able to act at once, but if you do not understand you will have only the illusion of acting.

Insertion (2) As directors and teachers you have the right to ask your actors whether they understand what they are saying. We must know what we are speaking about - this is underneath the ground on which the actor stands (see diagram). We are appealing to the simple human mind which has nothing to do with the little devil which tries to make

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us small.

1. HOW: "DO NOT CREATE WITH THE INTELLECT"

⊗ Actor

2. WHAT:

THE INTELLECT IS FOR THE
COMPREHENSION OF THE WORDS
SPOKEN ON THE STAGE.

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If I understand then I can speak the words in a logical way.....

INSERTION: (1) If I start by speaking in the atmosphere, for instance, "Shut the door", the meaning is very simple. With bigger sentences it is the same thing, and with the whole scene it is the same. Not only the words, but the meaning of the scene must be there. If I come into the room to ask someone to give me some money, I should know the whole part so that I may understand the meaning of the words.

INSERTION: (2) For example: I have seen one actor on the stage who loved himself very much. When he embraced an actress he did so in a very stupid way because it was simply passion without any understanding whatsoever.