

Michael Chekhov

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Our Phantoms:

We must get a certain idea about the psychological pattern and imagination in the style of the play. The psychological style of this play is stormy - ready to break. The form is full of activity and storm.

Scene:

After the engineer has left the room, and idealist comes in from the upper floor. Will you please imagine through this style the following thing: Two personalities - both of whom want to penetrate into the last deepest depths of everything. Each problem in their lives they must go through and see the last point. This is the meeting of two persons who want to speak about this last point, and this is the idea of the scene. They are not speaking because of speaking, they are trying to penetrate to the last point. This activity will give you this "stormy" quality, and the character of this scene. Therefore, there is not one single word which is not aiming at the last moment of solution. The right attitude in acting this scene would be that each of these two characters somehow hopes to find such a word that it will be the last and only word. This is their type of character. Although the dialogue is a very long one it is full of this feeling of the last sentence, the last word, and everything builds up to it. The destiny of these two persons was so closely bound that they have a destiny in common, and, therefore, they have to

come together to solve this problem. It is a question of their destiny. I am interested only in your imagination in the style.

Idealist: Why have you not been all this time?

Nicholas: You were sure that I would come.

Idealist: Of course.

Nicholas: That does not matter. You hit me because...because...?

Idealist: I hit you because of your fall; because of your lying; because of your brutality; because of your being mixed up with that man in spectacles; because you once meant so much to me. How could you mix yourself up with them? I had such faith in you - you were the only person. Do you remember the talks we used to have out there?

Nicholas: Yes, I remember them.

Although the talk is a long one it must be built on this feeling of the last sentence, the last word. Two strong personalities using ordinary words in a strong way. The meeting is full of feeling, tense, and not broken. They had always been thinking of one another. Through the whole play the idealist is trying to protect Nicholas from the spy. The destiny of these two people is so closely bound that they have a destiny in common, therefore, they have to come together.

The psychological gesture for each of them is to close their eyes and try to grasp with their hands deeper and deeper into something, but there is nothing there to grasp. They meet each other in the depths of their souls. (Do the

gesture nearer to the earth.) This is the basis for the whole scene.

The kind of lying that the idealist refers to is not, the usual ordinary word for it, but in this word lies much more than it sounds. It is for him the last depths of lying, the last depths of brutality. Here we see two strange personalities who use usual words but in a very unusual sense. Nicholas has decided to take all the blows which the idealist gives him. This is the only moment in the whole play when they are able to speak with one another absolutely to the depths. Nicholas's unhappy destiny is to be an ideal, to be idealized and not to be able to bear it.

Scene - Spy, Idealist, Engineer:

I want you to imagine two moments in a simple way to be able to develop the picture. When the spy has decided to discard, to kill the engineer and the idealist. When the decision was taken and thought out, the spy has no hesitation at all, not because he is a brutal person or an animal, but because he is clear thinking. This intelligence in him, this ability to think clearly makes him heartless because he knows the necessity so clearly, so logically that he cannot arrive at the other point of view ethically or morally. They are disturbing the work, therefore, they must be done away with. These two acts of killing must be done as if they are some fine mathematical computations. When an animal kills there is

no problem, but when a mathematical thing kills a human being there is a problem.

Scene - Engineer and Spy:

The engineer is mad but he is a fine and warm being.

Engineer: I will, but I can't do it in your presence. (Because he despises him.)

Spy: Oh, I will go and stand behind the door. Farewell. ("Farewell," in the sense of two plus two equals "Farewell".)

The whole scene will be "I can't do it in your presence, because I despise you." The spy gives him the revolver.

Next scene:

The spy is standing alone where the engineer stood. The spy does everything as if with a very fine pen point. He is even beautiful at this moment, because a devil can be beautiful. Now the idealist must be killed. The engineer is in love with his beautiful thoughts, and now somebody comes and spits on this beautiful thing and contorts it, therefore, he is offended. It is his child, his everything, and now the spy comes and takes it and pushes a gun in his hand. Everything becomes concrete and rude and wrong. Therefore, he is deeply offended, and cannot stand the presence of the spy because he sees a devilish grimace where he had only seen the beautiful face of a child. When the engineer takes the gun he loses the whole beauty of his ideal. He gets smaller and smaller like a child throughout the scene. When he says, "I

can't," the spy and his two assistants take out their guns absolutely without emotion, like three numbers dancing.

(The spy is the dance of intellectual powers.) Then the engineer says, "All right."

After the death of the engineer the spy's two assistants are a little pale and in disorder. When the spy sees that they are depressed psychologically, he says, "Thank you." They are the victims of his tremendous intellectual power, and do everything he does because they are his slaves. The spy gives them the sign to hide themselves, mathematically, as he does everything, as they hear the idealist approaching. When the idealist enters the room and bends down to get out the papers, the two assistants come in and hold him while the spy mathematically measures the shot and holds the gun to the idealist's head. (Black out.)

Then the spy says to his two assistants, "Thank you, you have fulfilled your duties. Goodbye, gentlemen." He is no longer interested in his two slaves. The spy is a number, not a human being, and his assistants are numbers when with him. But when he leaves them alone, we see them as two exhausted human beings who don't know what to do.

When the engineer takes the gun it is cold and heavy in his hands - nothing more - he does not know what to do with it, like a child he used to love the beautiful shape of the gun.

Scene: Political Meeting:

After the revolution which miscarried, there is an unorganized, spontaneous meeting of all the supporters of the organization. They accuse the spy, as their leader, of having been too secretive. They have worked as slaves and have not known what to do. After this dangerous miscarriage of plans they feel they are in great danger from the police. Now comes the crucial moment when they ask:

Members: We demand our freedom and equality as members.

Spy: (shouting) Silence! I command you to be silent. Think of your discipline; think of your responsibilities!

Now we see the spy as a real intellectual animal. Imagine how each one of you will do this individually. The spy must be aggressive and must burst the form. - he has never been seen by these people in such a rage. They must react to all these blows he gives them and become depressed and subdued, and they become slaves again. They are depressed by his violence, and shocked by all the tricks he does psychologically and morally. This is a preparation for a later time when he will shock them into accepting his demand to kill the idealist. This is the scene with shocking and physical effects. The spy is the aggressor. They are not frightened but they are as if before a white sheet. Their wills are killed by this noise. They are empty - they cannot understand.

(1) The group shall start with the intellectual

accusation, "Where is our freedom?" This is dangerous for him as he must give a reasonable answer.

(2) When the group is retreating after being shocked by his aggressiveness their wills are killed by this attack - they are empty. This is the only scene where we see him absolutely like an animal.

A very difficult condition: The whole scene must be in conspiracy in spite of all these things. The group leads their intellectual questioning to a crescendo, to a very high intellectual point and the spy takes this point and turns it like an animal. The group are his disciples. They are all smaller editions of him at this point. He is like a spider and they can't get away from him.

Scene:

Nicholas, after getting the violent blow from the idealist, is sitting at home and half waking, half sleeping and having nightmares, and Liza comes. The mother is living under the pressure of these unsolved problems when she will try to solve in the next scene. After he has spoken with the invisible gentleman in spectacles, the spy, about the laws for "usual and unusual people," and so on. After the servant has announced, "The gentleman in spectacles has come," and Nicholas shouts, "Don't let him in," the spy appears saying, "I am here," and he begins to speak about different things

which seem to be unimportant, but each sentence is important as we shall see later on. He comes with the engineer.

I want you to do this sketch only for Nicholas, who looks on the spy as if he were not sure whether it is a continuation of his nightmare, or a reality. The engineer is standing apart with his idea, his "brain child." He does not pay attention to anything, and the spy is very intensively taking in the mood of Nicholas, and every detail of the room, to guess what Nicholas' reaction will be. The spy is a real spy in this scene. He would like to read all the papers and letters which are lying there. He tries to understand Nicholas' mood and by speaking certain sentences he tries to guess what Nicholas' reactions will be - if! He has the fine quality of the spy who wants to know everything. Therefore, speak some insignificant words which will not make the sketch too difficult.

1. The spy wants to know everything.
2. The engineer is absent-minded.
3. Nicholas confuses the reality with his nightmare.

Everything which is not "stormy" falls out of the play. Everything the spy does is a fine mathematical thing, and in a way, gracious. He is very quick, like a toy top - everywhere at the same time, in his mind, his body, his movements and everything.