

Michael Chekhov

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ACTING TECHNIQUE
STYLE
BRIDGES AND TRANSITIONS

The Cricket on the Hearth

ACTING TECHNIQUE:

The only jewel we possess is that we are taking the problem of acting technique more seriously than others. If you feel the necessity to act every moment better and more profound and more cultivated than yesterday, then we shall win our fight. If in the future we are well received, it will not help us if we cannot show real profound acting.

There are two weak points in your acting at this moment - feeling of style and bridges and transitions. These are two poles on which the actor stands. Without bridges and transitions, he jumps primitively from one point to the other; but it is nothing. If you take a comic play, for instance, and act it in dramatic style, it will be terrible.

STYLE:

We have five degrees of style from tragedy to circus, but this is only a scheme. If we take the plunge into these five styles, we will develop the ability to catch all the other styles which lie in between. But to be able to catch them we have to be able to train ourselves in these five main points. There are styles which are not in any of the five and one such is, for instance, The Cricket on the Hearth. It is

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something very fine, lying in between these five styles. Or A Christmas Carol - or Chimes. You must plunge into the style without trying to describe it but with your actor's intuition.

BRIDGES AND TRANSITIONS:

The Cricket on the Hearth:

Imagine a cold night at Christmastime, snow, wind, storm. A small, tiny room. Dot is waiting for John to arrive - she has put a lighted candle in the window. She is waiting for John as usual, but with a certain anxiety about the child, which Tilly is holding. Tilly's psychology is that she is waiting for arrivals from nowhere - that is why she drops the child so often. The exercise is for bridges and transitions in the style.

You are afraid of your speech and that makes you half lame. You are afraid to speak. If you will feel your ability to speak and feel that you know what you are doing when you speak and that your speech apparatus works fully, then you will love to speak, and this will give you freedom and pleasure on the stage. Another sign in this timid way of speaking is that the bridges and transitions are not fully there. If they were, you would be able to speak better because the impulses there would urge you to speak. You will feel the necessity of outer signs - if the whole being is occupied with the problem, the voice will get something from these feelings.

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Imagine the Toy-maker's room. The whole room is filled with these fantastic, primitive, little things. Among these fantastic things we see Caleb's fantastic face, and his blind daughter. Out of love for her, Caleb has always described the room in which they live in the most beautiful terms, and she imagines that they live in a very quaint, charming little, warm fairy tale room. All the toys are a little tortured - they are not happy things. All the figures and houses and toys are somehow crying, as if we look at them through eyes filled with tears. There is great contrast between the world of this old Caleb, who is suffering compassion itself, and the girl who is sunshine, for whom everything is good and happy. He lies to her for his whole life, trying to maintain this impression of beauty in which she lives. The danger is that she will discover the lie. He is continuously looking at her - he is drawn to her not only with his words but with his eyes, his ears, with every part of him.

To be on the stage and be sure that when one enters the stage he will go on acting inwardly through the whole act, the whole play - not to be in a state in which, if there are no words, one has nothing. This killing thing must be discarded. We must develop this inner taste and tact, never breaking the inner life. Don't use words that are not necessary. Don't speak out of the understanding of the situation, but wait until the necessity is there for words - the inner necessity.

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You can play with styles and choose one and then change to another - this is absolutely possible if you do it consciously. For instance, improvise in the style of The Four Tailors fairy tale. See it through this illogical fairy tale prism. Build full and colorful bridges and transitions.

We have seen that the inner ability to build bridges and transitions was too weak and the words were half-hearted in some exercises. In others it was the opposite - you have relied upon the action and the words and have forgotten the bridges and transitions. It was filling the time with words and movement but not with inner things. It was improvisation on the surface, on the given facts but not as deep as the task required it to be. All words and actions must be based on this inner line. Without these bridges and transitions we will always come in conflict - either it will be too low with regard to words and actions, or we will overdo the acting and speaking and so kill the inner stream. Everyone must be a king inwardly on the stage, and the word must be the crown which is the last touch - we have seen words, words, words, and crowns, crowns, and crowns, but no king.

We must always have some ideal character in the back of our minds, created in our imagination, and our rehearsal is always for the purpose of trying to adjust ourselves to this ideal thing. Then all our mistakes become legal, therefore, we have our rehearsal; but if I don't know where

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I am aiming it is simply chaos. You must have as your ideal the actor who has the ability to build bridges and transitions.

Take the same scene between the husband and the wife when the husband comes home riding on the horse. There are three sections: (1) The moment when the wife sees the husband, (2) when she tries to warn him that he is going to knock into the gate, (3) when the husband has his head turned, and the wife has to understand what has happened to him. Follow it with all the bridges and transitions.

Tears on the stage are not so important - the radiation of tears is the important thing. Tears may come but never force, expect, or desire them; but be able to radiate tears, and they will come because of this radiation.