

IMAGINING THE PLAY
THE FEELING FOR THE AUDIENCE

Vakhtangov

Continuation of Shdanoff Play: [The Possessed]:

The more professional we grow, the more we will realize that we must speak the words clearly, although we are only touching them - if necessary, even whispering them. You must also realize the danger of slow tempo in the rehearsal. This is a psychological problem. You must also remember your words, your speech. Remember that you are on the stage and in the theatre, and you must have a connection with the theatre. When the audience is there, it is still more difficult to speak. We must keep this in the back of our mind all the time.

IMAGINING THE PLAY:

We will try to approach the scene from another angle, by doing the following exploratory work. Be aware of the size of the stage, the two chairs, the table, and the couch. These are the things that you have at your disposal. Now I will read the text of the scene by the condition that you are again concerned with your imagination and with solving the riddle. First of all, by reading, imagine how you, Nicholas, can express this by means of your voice, your psychology, and the *mise en scène*, etc. This is Nicholas's task.

The mother's task is to solve the riddle, of how she

tries, in this scene which is a purely psychological one, to absolutely influence and overpower him. She is not begging, asking, or pleading, and there is nothing of sentimental feelings about her. She is like a physician who comes at the last moment and says, "My son, this is very dangerous. An operation must be done." No sentimental connection at all. You are free to imagine anything you want, but when you are ready, we want to see the scenery and everything complete. Now make the *mise en scène* and move as you have seen yourself moving in your imagination. Nicholas's task is to express the idea that there are two persons on the stage by means of changing the *mise en scène*, the speech, etc. and he must develop these two persons inside and outside. The mother must not lose her warmth, but she must have at the same time a strong will to cure. These two things are one being.

The success of this experiment depends on what we can do, being only students. When we are actors we will have more understanding of this work. You must not be disappointed, but imagine that we have done it in the right way, and to the fullest extent and have responded to the request of the director, which is really a very simple one, namely, to imagine two persons speaking together, and the mother as a person who heals. Imagine it was done correctly - now what will the next step be? For instance, Mrs. Elmhirst as the mother was a very interesting figure when she appeared from the curtains, and

we saw in her this quality of being ready to do everything, but at the same time, being careful in approaching Nicholas. When the mother speaks weakly it is wrong. She must have warmth. The more the mother is concerned with Nicholas, the more powerful it is. The mother's objective in the beginning is, "I want to get an answer from Nicholas." If the objective is really taken, the actor will be able to ask himself afterwards about certain details which he has observed. He should be able to simply remember certain details, if the objective is really taken.

The real objective means to be concerned with something or somebody. The more we will understand this, the more we will really have it, even without knowing it. Our present helpless state comes because we are not yet really able to have the objective, the gesture, the atmosphere, etc. To have an objective we do not necessarily have to have this or that objective, but to be in a state of doing inward gestures, in a state of atmosphere, even without knowing it - this means that the actor has grown up. For the actor it is quite natural to appear on the stage not knowing what objective he has, but being in a state of having the objective. Being an actor he actually cannot appear on the stage without an objective. To be able to take the objective means to be continuously in the state of the objective, and only sometimes having a label, "I want..."

Nicholas (Hurd): The best suggestions you gave us were when you were speaking the words of someone who was not there. When you as Nicholas were speaking, I got the impression that you were speaking to the other Nicholas, who was there just a moment before. Try to develop this.

Nicholas (John): The most interesting moment in your character was when you have spoken as the gentleman in spectacles, and then you have answered him. This was the most interesting moment. When you were a person who was fighting, who was sharp, evil, angry, sudden, that was interesting. When you were passive, you were not so interesting, and I don't think it suits your character.

THE FEELING FOR THE AUDIENCE:

There was one interesting moment when we saw Nicholas sitting up in bed with his hand before his face, and then we saw the face. This was artistically interesting. We must have more feeling for this sort of thing, more feeling of the audience, because these things cannot be interesting if we are doing them for ourselves. The actor always needs the mirror of the audience. If we don't feel the audience, we can't understand ourselves as actors. This is a very fine thing. Therefore, we must be aware of these things and appreciate them, and we must be conscious in our being of the audience which receives the things we are doing. Therefore, this feeling for the audience is such an important thing.

Vakhtangov always directed sitting in the audience room, surrounded by an imaginary audience, and he directed with the inspiration of this imaginary audience. Other directors I have known who have been able to do interesting things on the stage, but who have had no feeling for the audience, have failed. All of us need the feeling of the audience much more than we have; to feel the audience, and imagine the reaction which comes as inspiration. To catch some suggestions. To anticipate what the audience requires of me as an actor.

Our work today has proved how much we need to develop our imaginations. We must do our exercise so that our imaginations must be developed until it is like a fountain. This is the real imagination, and we must be patient enough to do the exercises we have for this purpose. We need more imagination which must be like a second person which is near us, around us, so that we can actually turn ourselves to the character which we have not actually prepared, but because our imagination is so lively that, if we want to incorporate something, it is here, because our imagination is constantly working. This is my suggestion to you as students.

Suggestion to Hurd: You must justify everything much more. This scene represents a great fight - two powerful individuals are fighting - therefore, the moment you show us one of the persons as weak, it is wrong. This scene must be

a battlefield. Therefore, whatever psychological color you take, it must be powerful, and the bodily impression you give must be powerful. You must not allow your body to take weak physical positions.

As the director, I expect you to continue the work we have started here, and to bring something more to the next rehearsal. You must go on and elaborate the tasks given:

1. Reading the text by imagining.
2. By reading the text be responsible for the atmosphere.
3. Show certain movements and mise en scène which are suggested to your imagination by means of certain sentences given.
4. Nicholas must show two different persons, and the mother, a person who heals.