

M. Chekhov

March 1, 1938

SPACE  
URGENCY  
INDIVIDUALITY - "I AM"

Moscow Art Theatre  
Stanislavsky  
Nemirovich - Danchenko  
Sulerzhitsky  
Vakhtangov

SPACE:

Spanish Evening:

Will you try without special preparation to take the style of Henry's play. Try to do what I ask you to do with this ability to fill the space. The theme - take it with your imagination.

Scene:

Early morning meeting of the young people. They enjoy each other, they enjoy life and gradually the mood rises and these gay, happy people see a strange person who carries his caravan into the town, and without losing their gaiety they become interested and fascinated by this strange figure. They surround him and ask him who he is.

I want you to start from this muted state (pianissimo) and increase all expressions, voice, movement, and be aware and conscious of your ability to fill the space around you. This is all I want you to do is to fill the space with your whole activity. Don't allow your mind to be disturbed - concentrate definitely on this one work. We are able to go on

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when we are able to fill the space.

Realize two things: It can be primitive but truthful. It is not interesting what you have done, but it is truthful. When something is done primitively but truthfully it can be developed - it is the seed for something which can grow. This is the feeling of truth.

Our Phantoms:

We shall take quite a different thing in a different style. I want to transmit it into another style. We will take half the boys and half the girls in the Railroad scene from Mr. Shdanoff's play.

What makes me happy today is that you used so little means to express the content of your inner life. You fill the space with such humble means. This is really a great thing - the good artist uses unimportant material but the bad artist uses much material and the result is bad. The main idea is to fill the space with little means.

URGENCY: Scene:

Mother's room when she wants to help the son. There are two things which are very important on the stage which were used in the Moscow Art Theatre by Stanislavsky, Nemirovich-Danchenko and even perhaps Sulerzhitsky and Vakhtangov. They always tried to find something which they formed in the word "urgency." Everything which the actor does or fulfills on the

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stage as a character must be "urgent" - it must be done, otherwise it cannot be shown on the stage. Therefore, each objective, each atmosphere, each psychological gesture must be found urgently. This urgency makes the whole difference between art and everyday life where everything is not urgent. When things are urgent in everyday life they express themselves in a hurry, but on the stage to be urgent means to be full, quiet and so on.

What we have seen was expressive, but it was not urgent - it is not important from a certain point of view. It was not urgent to perform it - it was not urgent to look at it. The actors could say that we are not elaborating the scene, but here we come to another idea of the Moscow Art leaders. (These two ideas are twins.) The real actor - when he appears on the stage, even during rehearsals when nothing is yet set - when they have not discovered all these important moods, atmosphere, objectives, etc. - he is significant, important. It is urgent to be with him, to look at him, and for him it is urgent to be on the stage even without having any objectives, etc. What is this? This is the personality, individuality, and, therefore, in addition to what the Moscow Art Theatre have discovered about this "urgency," may we add to the urgency on the stage a second thing, the group of individualities, of "I am," who are searching for this "urgent" performance.

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INDIVIDUALITY - "I AM":

This second thing, the "I am", was not elaborated in the Moscow Art Theatre. It is very good to realize that individuality can be developed as well as the part - can be "rehearsed" if I may use such a word. Therefore, when, for instance, they appear on the stage and it is not urgent, what should they do? They should take the urgency from their individualities and radiate it and then it would be urgent and all right, and that would be art because real individuality - I mean the person who is always burning inside of the human being - the artist, sometimes must be appealed to.

Deirdre, as the mother of Nicholas, had not yet this material to be important. She must appear on the stage so that we would feel it is urgent. Therefore, we may ask ourselves sometimes what are we doing on the stage if there is nothing to be shown? The answer is there is always something to be shown - my individuality. We shall try to do it - to appear on the stage somehow.

Three beautiful things. Blair tells me that everything is "contact," Eleanor tells me that everything is "the feeling of truth" and Deirdre sees "radiation." That means that everything is as important as the other, and that we are developing. Tomorrow it will be rhythm, atmosphere, significance. Today you have your eyes open for this special thing, and tomorrow you will discover another.

The reversed "I am" is when the star appears on the stage with his individuality first of all, and the part means nothing. "Me." It is the reversed, contorted sense of the individuality - a wrong aspect of it. The power of individuality when it is rightly understood and used radiates through everything.

Spanish Evening:

Actor's March in the style of Henry's play - butterflies.

Scene:

Two houses. Florinda, bridegroom, mother, two captains. The mother has three gestures. 1. Dress the bridegroom. 2. Keep the daughter in the kitchen. 3. Prevent the captains from getting to Florinda. By dressing the bridegroom she must give him life (up - like a plant growing). Her gesture to the bride is to keep her in the kitchen (down - like a plant in the earth). To the captains (chaotic, fluttering).

We have here the beginning for all the things which can be developed later.

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Our Phantoms:

I want to mark the transitions of a new situation which we have not yet tried.

Scene:

This is the moment when Nicholas, (who through his whole life has been so tortured), is packing his things without being aware of where he is going. This is only a symbol of his inner state, his desire to depart from his own torturing thoughts and "beings," (because the spy is a real "being" in his life who appears everywhere and in everything in his imagination. The beggar girl is another "being"). Between these two extremes of "beings" he is always seeking his way through them but he cannot find it. He wants to depart psychologically now and unconsciously or subconsciously he packs his things, and this process is the incorporation of his desire to depart, to escape, to get rid of these beings.

The mother (with her heart, not with her brain) knows that she loses him at this point forever, and she feels she is already left alone psychologically, inwardly, and perhaps outwardly as well. Her desire in this case, her objective, is to follow him, to entirely merge with him, and if he goes toward great danger, she wants to be with him. Her objective is to become one being with him, to lose her will in the son's will. The son's objective is to depart, in a very psychological sense.

From this we will find the transition to another and most important picture. The son wants to depart from this world by the condition that nobody will notice him. He is

packing subconsciously. The mother must not notice his psychology. She is trying to form words so that they will penetrate into his being. They must be powerful enough to merge in him. The son does all this packing psychologically, taking one thing instinctively from the table and putting it in his pocket.

Imagine that he goes out of the room and walks along the street, with the same psychological gesture to depart from all these things. Take the objective in the form that it is urgent that you leave this world. When the mother asks where he is going, he must try to comfort her.

Scene with the religious man: He, perhaps only he, will be able to help because he is religious. But Nicholas is an atheist and he cannot expect any help from this source. When he comes psychologically to the moment when he must depart from this world, this strange person is the last person he will try. He comes through the streets to the door of the old man, and opens the door subconsciously, and when he enters, without knocking, he comes out of his daze and realizes that he is here.

He sees a strange picture in the empty room, and on a wooden bed sits the strange old man, who is always happy. He knows something which makes him happy through and through. He once had a revelation in which all worldly things became transparent, and this was the moment he entered into this

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world of happiness and received the ability to know everything. When he sees a person he knows everything about him. He hears, sees, feels everything, and everything for him is joy. All problems are transparent to him, so simple and so non-existent, that he is able to take other people's burdens on his shoulders and help them.

Here lies the contrast between the two natures - Nicholas clamped down and bound - the old man absolutely free.

Anger rises in Nicholas when he realizes he is here with this stupid person. He takes pleasure in offending him. This is the psychology of Nicholas when he is angry. This scene must be considered as the result of this long way that he has come. It is not like the beginning of the play, where everything was superficial gestures - now everything is so deep, every gesture is so strongly brought up from the depths.