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MICHAEL CHEKHOV'S FOURTH CLASS FOR PROFESSIONAL ACTORS:

"THEORY AND PRACTICE"

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EXPRESSIVE OR INEXPRESSIVE ACTING
SUSTAINING
PREPARATION OR ANTICIPATION
THE PAUSE
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THEORY AND PRACTICE:

Perhaps you will be so kind as to regard all my abstract theoretical talks as things which, if they are really digested, are absolutely practical. If we take them as theory only then, of course, they will be of no use for our professional Broadway work. But if we take them and digest them as suggestions which can permeate everything we are going to do on the stage, then you will be convinced that it is so. Everything depends on how we use these seemingly theoretical things. There are things which are more practical than others. For instance, atmosphere. This can be used by every actor on the stage. Then you will realize that I do not give you anything which is purely theoretical.

EXPRESSIVE OR INEXPRESSIVE ACTING:

I will also give you certain means which can apply everywhere - almost like "tricks" - which will make your acting more expressive. My students in our school must not hear about them yet, although actually this is not a "trick", but among us it may become like a "trick" if you will apply

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it. We know that atmosphere can be applied on the stage, that feeling of ease can and must be applied, and that they will make the acting more expressive. Now I will give you one more thing which will make everything on the stage much more expressive.

Acting becomes less expressive if we forget or neglect one very simple fact which is that the human being - and the actor's being is the increased, enlarged human being - has a certain ability; when doing or speaking something we can stop our speech or action or even our emotions quite abruptly, in order to get as quickly as possible to the next word or business. This abrupt killing or cutting of the word, or emotion, or action is the thing which makes the human being crippled, but it makes the actor-being twice as crippled. The most inexpressive performances are those in which the actors are cutting their words, their emotions, their actions, their business sooner than they should. This little fact makes the acting either expressive or inexpressive. We will try some examples and exercises and you will see what I mean.

Now say the word, "Yes," so that after you have pronounced it something will go on after the word - as if you were making a gesture with your arm and hand. Say the word, "Yes," and then follow with your arm and hand. Then say, "No," with a gesture which follows it. Sustain it. Now just turn your head, as if you have been called.

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SUSTAINING:

Take another example. Get up from your chair, and continue getting up even after you are already up. This sustaining is something which the actor's nature requires. It can become a long and sustained pause. There cannot be a pause on the stage without this sustaining. To be able to hold the pause one has to develop this ability to go on without actually going on. Now say the word, "What," and go on into a long, sustained pause. Try to find enough confidence in yourself so that you can go on sustaining the pause for a long time. You will see how pleasant it is - the "dish" is good, but the "gravy" is the pleasure. This sustaining is the "gravy". Now get up and say the word, "What," and sustain it. It cannot expire because we are actors. The person who is not an actor will not understand what we are talking about, but our actor's nature is longing for this. If we do just the opposite and stop too soon we will be filled with emptiness and shame.

If we develop this ability to go on with what we want, and as long as we want, then we will discover one of the "tricks" I mentioned. Now do it again but this time make it as short as possible, but there must be the idea of sustaining in it. Try to find the difference between cutting the thing abruptly, or having at least one spark of the sustaining. When it involves a long period of sustaining, it is

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quite clear, but we must have the courage to sustain just for an instant, then the "gravy" is there. This concerns everything we do on the stage, words, emotions, movements, listening, speaking, everything on the stage can be done in this way, and actually should not be done differently. All other dry means are inartistic.

There are moments on the stage when we have to drop our words abruptly, but even then we have to perform as if we have stopped our words abruptly but still there is a little "tail" left for ourselves and the audience. Try saying, "Why are you doing that?" First do it fully and completely and sustain it. Then say, "Why are you...?" and stop as if something had happened - drop the words for the audience but not for yourself. Imagine if I really abruptly drop the words, then I have the impression that nothing is left in the space which I have left. Or I have the illusion that another "I" still lingers and even follows me. That is just what is needed. As actors, we are doing this thing on the stage all the time, and I am only trying to make you aware of the fact. Because I have told you from the beginning that everything is there in our actor's nature, and I have only to point it out for you.

PREPARATION OR ANTICIPATION:

The process of sustaining is something which follows our action, speech, etc., but there is another process of sus-

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taining which precedes it, and is just as important. Before I ask, "What," I must already start. Before I speak I must start inwardly - not at once, abruptly and dryly. This we can also do with the gesture. Every little word, or sound, or long speech and business is thus framed by something which is purely an artistic thing which is the air that gives life to everything we do on the stage. Without this preceding and following air or space all things are dry and dead. Let us repeat the exercise with "What". To make it still clearer, precede with the right hand and follow with the left. Now do the same with the exercise of getting up - first the inner gesture of preparation, then get up, then follow with sustaining.

THE PAUSE:

The pause on the stage - in the sense that there are no words - may be one which follows a certain action. The pause cannot exist as pause - it is always the result of what has just happened, or it is the preparation for a coming event. Then it is a pause full of theatrical sense. For this we see the pause on the stage falling into several parts. It must be for the continuation of something, or for the preparation of something, and the most beautiful pauses are those which are the continuation of something, and then the turning point of preparation for something new, and a new action. Of course, there are pauses which are only a continuation, and then the

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pause expires and the action takes place.

Exercise:

First say, "No," out of which the pause starts as a continuation of the "No," then when I tell you the turning point, prepare it and prepare the word, "Yes," which will be the result of the second part of the pause. Now repeat the exercise: Preparation for "No," sustain, turn the pause, prepare for "Yes," speak and sustain.

If we are filled with certain "tricks," the audience will follow us absolutely without question.

IMPROVISATION:

Let us work on the sketch - the scene in the Tavern - the series of atmospheres. Like a lot of ants, the people in the tavern are drinking, speaking, moving in the general atmosphere of chaos. 1. Senseless activity - chaos. 2. The atmosphere becomes organized and everyone sings, and all are absorbed in the one song - harmony - excitement, activity, desire to love, etc. 3. The moment when the Captain gives the order - a short moment of disorganized life, certain unpleasant shock. 4. Intimate life - intimate talk - secrets - muted - tired and exhausted. This dying out life gives diminuendo - romantic. 5. Scandal - quarrel - fight between sailor and lover. This breaks up the action between the girl and the sailor - attention - impending disaster - long pause. 6. Out

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of the pause will come compassion, which is expressed in the form of mockery and teasing the sailor who is crazy and depressed - like an animal who is pursued. This atmosphere is the warmest and most friendly one, but the expression is wrong. For the sailor it is one blow after another, and he does not know how to take it. Friendly.

When we start with the right atmosphere and follow it, then lose the atmosphere and follow our acting, having forgotten the atmosphere, it may lead us to the wrong kind of expressiveness. It would be very good if, each time you decide to take the atmosphere, to remind yourself to make sure whether or not the atmosphere is around you. If you will do this and recall the idea of the atmosphere, it will keep you in the right line in your work, whether on Broadway or here in our studio.

FEELING OF EASE:

Another thing we have spoken about is the feeling of ease. Now let us repeat some of the exercises. Lift up your arms so that you get the illusion that they are losing their weight. Now kneel. Now add to this the words, "I am getting down," so that the words will be permeated with the feeling of ease. Increase the volume of your voice, but avoid shouting. The feeling of ease will allow you to speak loudly, but it will never be shouting. Shouting on the stage occurs only if you are without the preparation or

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anticipation, and the sustaining. It will be much more effective if it is produced with the preparation and sustaining, and with the feeling of ease. If you will exercise this, you will see how pleasant it is to speak loudly without shouting.

Now take an oath and produce it with increased volume but without shouting. Now, moving forward, whisper the oath. Then retreat backwards, saying the oath in a whisper. Now vary it by making a very long preparation, then a very short whisper, and sustain. Now a very, very long preparation, a very short oath, and a long sustaining.