

Michael Chekhov

October 12, 1937

IMPROVISATION
ATMOSPHERE

The Deluge [The Flood]

IMPROVISATION: Old Students:

On the basis of atmosphere, a scene from The Deluge [The Flood by Henning Bergor].¹ A small provincial American town, full of business. The people are enemies because of the kind of competitive life they live. Then something happens - storms and floods. A small group of people are in a bar. They close the shutters but around them they hear water rushing. The lights fail, and the telephone stops. They feel that the whole world is being drowned, and they realize that in a short time they will be dead.

They begin to drink, but gradually they become tired and worn out. They are not able to face death as they were when they were full of activity. They begin to have certain feelings, and to see the people around them as human beings. They speak of things which were not spoken of before. In spite of their previous lives, their hearts begin to open to each other, and they begin to show qualities which they would never have shown in their usual lives, nor would they ever have spoken such words to each other. They find they are so happy in a certain way, and are absolutely prepared to die together.

Then comes the moment when it is clear that nothing has happened and that life will go on as before, but they are quite different people because of their moments of confiding

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in each other. Then gradually everything returns to the first atmosphere, and they are more evil enemies than they were before, and they will use the power they have gained over each other.

Take it from the point of view of the businessmen. It is not necessary to be absolutely true to national characters - we must take it from our artistic point of view and exaggerate some things. We will take it from the moment when the shutters are closed. Realize this moment when everything has stopped - it is a psychological problem. Start from this moment and go on to the moment when you open yourselves to each other, and become filled with these new feelings.

Imagine the town full of life - then everything stops. On the basis of atmosphere: the first atmosphere is that of business - business and enemies - everyone is blind to everyone else. The second atmosphere is that something has happened - disaster. The whole world is cut off. The third atmosphere is that of the gradual opening of the hearts.

The characters are: A young businessman who is very lucky and successful. He buys and sells grain. In the days when he was an insignificant person he was in love with a pure young girl, but he has now forgotten her. Another character is that of a lawyer - a very strange person who is a philosopher, but he despises the life around him. He appreciates higher feelings, but he pretends to hate and despise them as evil things.

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In his heart he believes that someday human hearts will be opened. He realizes this during the scene and he leads the others and makes beautiful speeches, but when everything is over he is the first to break because he realizes that his ideal will be broken.

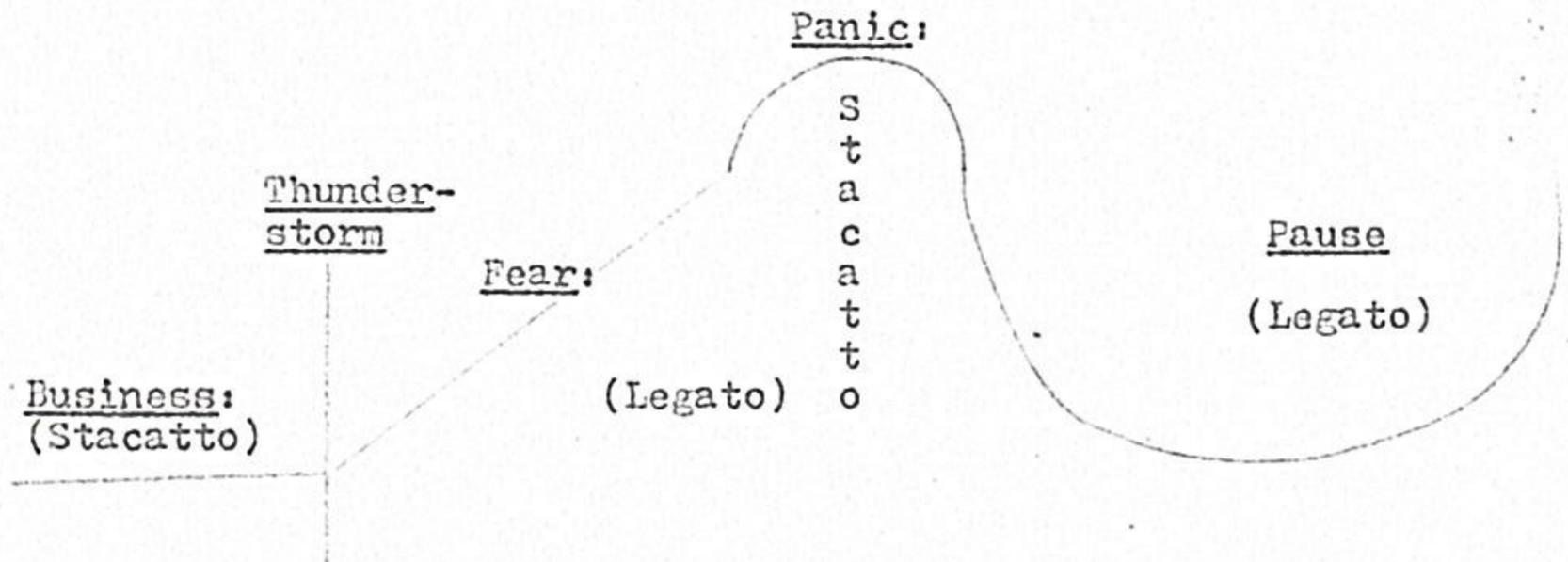
Then there is the character of the girl. There is also another businessman who is very unlucky; he always loses and is always left behind. He is very unhappy. Another character is that of the barman whose whole idea is to make money from the bar, in order to give his son and daughter a good college education. It is not enough for him to be a barman, he must be something more. He is like a bull, and he sees nothing but this around him.

Two other pure people come in from the street, quite by accident - they don't belong to the other group of customers. They are very strange people; one is an inventor whose inventions nobody buys. He is always looking through a telescope, and he tries to sell his ideas. A very nice, warm person. Then there is an actor, very sad and tragic. The lawyer is in charge of the dam which is not yet completed, and which may break. Everybody knows this. He drinks too much and says strange things, and perhaps this is one of his tricks. He is guilty.

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Let us repeat the scene from The Deluge, but this time with four different atmospheres:



Take the final pause and turn it, and out of that begin to open your hearts to one another.

Criticism:

It was good, and very fascinating to watch because you had the same direction, the same line which you followed throughout the whole scene. We must take our method, our systems, consciously and some day you will wake up and find that you have the means in your hands - it will come. When you do conscious things it is absolutely charming to watch. In the first half of the pause you were not in the room, and when you turned the pause you came back. Gradually the room was full of people because your spirits came back. It is as strong as visible movement and audible sound. Our inner radiation is as strong as our body.

The Fishing Scene:

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The cast is becoming more and more free. The freer you are, the stronger will be your feelings. This freedom must lead you to the possibility of taking your partners in reality - for instance, when John is in the boat it is quite right for you to look out into the distance for him, but in the last part when he is really among you, you must take this into consideration.