

An Actor's Work on a Role

Konstantin
Stanislavski

A contemporary
translation of
Creating a Role by
Jean Benedetti



ROUTLEDGE


An Actor's Work on a Role

An Actor's Work on a Role is Konstantin Stanislavski's classic exploration of the rehearsal process, applying the techniques of his seminal actor training system to the task of bringing life and truth to one's role.

Originally published over half a century ago as *Creating a Role*, this book became the third in a trilogy – after *An Actor Prepares* and *Building a Character*, which are now combined in a newly translated volume called *An Actor's Work*. In these books, now foundational texts for actors, Stanislavski sets out his psychological, physical and practical vision of actor training.

This new translation from renowned writer and critic **Jean Benedetti** not only includes Stanislavski's original teachings, but is also furnished with invaluable supplementary material in the shape of transcripts and notes from the rehearsals themselves, reconfirming The System as the cornerstone of actor training.

Konstantin
Stanislavski

An Actor's Work on a Role

Translated and edited by Jean Benedetti

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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

An Actor's Work on a Role outlines the final year of the three-year course on acting Stanislavski planned, the first two years of which are described in *An Actor's Work*.

The Russian edition clearly describes it as *Material for a Book* since all we possess is a series of first, uncorrected, unedited drafts in diary form, written between 1929 and 1936. They deal with classes on *Othello* and *The Government Inspector*. They show Tortsov/Staniavski initiating his students into the Method of Physical Action. Other supporting material is derived from the production plan Stanislavski drew up in 1929–1930 for *Othello* and extracts from the Notebooks contemporaneous with the class on *The Government Inspector*. Since we are dealing with drafts, there are a number of variants, different versions of the same material contained within the texts, which I have left as they stand.

The order in which the material is presented, however, is a matter of editorial choice.

The first Russian edition appeared in 1957 and was translated, with cuts, by Elizabeth Hapgood as *Creating a Role* (1961). This is roughly, though not totally chronological in order and starts with an unfinished article on *Woe from Wit* drafted between 1916 and 1920, followed by the classes on *Othello* and *The Government Inspector*. Extracts from the *Othello* production plan were also included.

A revised and expanded Russian edition appeared in 1991 which included extracts from the Notebooks and other material. It is that edition which provides the basis of this translation although some of the new material is not accessible to English-speaking readers and has, therefore,

after consultation been omitted. I have also added in some further material from the Notebooks and the *Othello* production plan. I have not, however, followed the roughly chronological order in which the material is presented.

One of the aims of the Routledge edition is to give readers a sense of the 'system' as a coherent whole as Stanislavski conceived it. It is intended for two distinct readerships: students in training and professional actors on the one hand and academics and scholars on the other. The priorities of both were served in *An Actor's Work* by presenting the diary as Stanislavski wrote it for students with additional material of interest to scholars in the Appendices. That was the strategy of the Russian edition.

I have followed a similar approach with *An Actor's Work on a Role*.

Stanislavski intended *An Actor's Work* and *An Actor's Work on a Role* primarily as a course of study for students. It is therefore important for them to see *An Actor's Work on a Role* as a direct continuation of *An Actor's Work*, as the third year of a planned course.

Academics and scholars exploring the history and development of the 'system' and its theory may be more interested in the basic material from which the book arose.

I have, therefore, divided the book into two parts.

Part One contains the draft chapters, in diary form, which follow directly on from *An Actor's Work*. These are supplemented by extracts from the Notebooks of 1935 and 1936 written at the same time as the chapters on *The Government Inspector*. I have also included extracts from the *Othello* production plan (1929–1930) which are essentially intended for Leonidov and other members of the cast, teaching them how to approach a role, with a crucial breakdown of Act III scene iii into Bits and Tasks.

Part Two, intended for scholars, contains material dating from 1885 to 1930 which shows the development of Stanislavski's ideas and rehearsal methods prior to the emergence of the Method of Physical Action, which he taught in the last years of his life at the Opera-Dramatic Studio (1935–1938). It also shows the transition from straight exposition, via the semi-fictional form of *The Story of a Production* to the diary form Stanislavski ultimately selected.

Readers may, of course, read the two sections in any order they choose.

Jean Benedetti

London-Les Fontenelles 2008–2009

Part I

Drafts 1929–1937

1

OTHELLO 1930–1932

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TORTSOV'S INTRODUCTION

'We are starting our [third]¹ year with everything we acquired in the previous year in good order. If we have not mastered it fully, you are sufficiently aware of what you have to do with your artistic apparatus, both mental and physical.

'You know what the general working state is. That enables you to study the next phase in our syllabus: work on a role. For that we need a role to study. So much the better if we find a complete play we can use and if each of you finds a suitable part in it. Let's start with the choice of the play. Let's decide what we are going to perform, or, rather, what we are going to study and how to apply what we learned during the [second] year.'

The whole class was taken up with selecting the roles, extracts and the complete play on which we shall work.

I will not describe the long disagreements and conversations that are inevitable in these kind of discussions. We are all too familiar with the kind of scenes that occur in amateur circles and productions. I prefer to describe the reasons which guided Tortsov in avoiding plays that were beyond us, and which he considered too difficult and dangerous for raw beginners.

To my great joy his choice fell, no more no less, on *Othello*.

These were his reasons:

‘We need a play that will appeal to you and offer all, or most of you, suitable roles. *Othello* appeals to everyone and it is wonderful to cast . . .

‘*Othello* is also suitable because there are many small parts and crowd scenes. I shall give these to our young collaborators in the theatre with whom we have to go on working this year, as we did last, on the “system”.

‘Shakespeare’s tragedy, as I have often stated, is too difficult for beginners. Moreover it is too complex to stage. This will protect you from cobbling performances of roles together which are beyond your limited strength. I am not going to make you perform a tragedy. We only need it as material to study. We could not find a better play than this. It is first class and there can be no doubt as to its artistic quality. Besides which, this tragedy is sharply etched in its individual bits and the logical sequence in the development of its tragic emotions the throughaction and the supertask.

‘There is a further practical consideration. You beginners are drawn to tragedy. This is mostly because you do not know their tasks and demands. Get to know what they are as soon as you can, as closely as you can, so as not to fall victim to unimaginably dangerous temptations.

‘Every director has his own individual approach to a role and a way of putting it into practice. But it must not be set in stone. But its basic phases and psychophysical techniques drawn from our own nature must be exactly obeyed. You must know them and I must demonstrate them in practice and make you feel them and test them out for yourselves. This, so to speak, is a classic example of the process of working on a role.

‘But apart from that you must come to understand and master all kinds of variants because the director varies them according to need, the progress of the work, the situation and the individual actors’ personalities. That is why I will deal with the very many scenes in *Othello* differently. That is why I will do the first scene using the basic, classic pattern, while in other, later scenes I shall constantly introduce new techniques, sequences and variants into their structure. On each occasion I will warn you in advance.’

FIRST ACQUAINTANCE OF THE PLAY AND THE ROLE

. . . . 19 . .

‘Let’s read *Othello*’, suggested Tortsov at the beginning of the class.

‘We know it! We’ve read it!’ several voices exclaimed.

‘Splendid! In that case, tell me what it’s about.’

Nobody said anything.

‘It’s difficult to relate the contents of a complex psychological play because at first we are satisfied with conveying the action, the succession of events.’

But no one responded to this suggestion either.

‘You start!’, Tortsov urged Grisha.

‘But for that, you see, you have to know the play!’, he evaded.

‘But you do know it.’

‘Look, please, I’m sorry, I know the whole of the role of Othello, by heart, because it’s my kind of role but I have scarcely looked at the other parts’, our ‘tragedian’ admitted.

‘Is that the way you first got to know *Othello!*’, Tortsov exclaimed. ‘That’s pathetic! Perhaps you can tell us the contents of the play?’, said Tortsov, turning to Vanya who was sitting next to Grisha.

‘There’s no way I can do that. I read it but not all of it because there were several pages missing.’

‘And you?’, said Tortsov to Paul.

‘I don’t remember the whole of the play as I saw it with touring foreign stars. And, as we know, they cut anything superfluous, that is, that has nothing to do with their role’, Pasha stated.

Tortsov merely shook his head.

Nikolai had seen the play in Armavir but in such a bad production that it would have been better had he not seen it.

Leo read the play in a train and so his memories were a blur. He only remembered the big scenes.

Leo had read all the critical articles on the play from Hervnius² onwards, but he could not relate the facts of the play or their sequence.

‘It is very bad that such an important process as the first acquaintance with a writer’s work should have been done just anywhere: in a train, a cab or a tram. It is even worse that this is often done not to get to know the play but so you can pick the best roles.’

‘This is how actors first get to know the classics which in time they will perform. This is the way they approach a role with which sooner or later they will have to merge, and in which they must find their second “self”.’

‘This moment of getting to know a role can be compared to the lovers’ or spouses’ first meeting.³ It is unforgettable.’

‘For me these first impressions are of decisive significance. At least they have always seemed so in my personal experience. What I first felt, for good or ill, finally without fail was present in my creative process and however anyone tried to take them away from me, they stayed firm. You

cannot destroy them, you can improve them or iron them out of the play and they are embryonic experiences. Moreover, first acquaintance often leaves its imprint on all an actor's later work. If our impressions at first reading are valid, that is an indication of future success. If this vital moment is lost, then the second and later readings will lack the element of surprise, so powerful in intuitive creative work. Correcting false impressions is more difficult than initially creating true ones. We must pay extreme attention to the first acquaintance with the role, which is the first phase in creative work.

'It is dangerous to wreck this moment with a wrong approach to a work since it can create a false impression of the play and the work or, what is worse, a *preconception*. The battle against it is long and hard.'

When questioned by the students, Tortsov explained what he meant by 'a preconception'.

'It is many-sided. Let us begin with the fact that it can be for or against', he said. 'Let us take Grisha and Vanya. They both know *Othello* partially. One sees a lead role, the other does not know what is missing in the old incomplete copy he has.

'For example, Grisha does not know the play, only one role. It is splendid. He is in raptures about it and takes the rest on trust. That's all right if the play is a masterpiece, like *Othello*. But there are many bad plays with fine roles (*Kean*, *Louis XI*, *Ingomar*, *Don Cesar de Bazan*)⁴. Vanya could fill his missing pages with anything he liked. If he believed in his ideas, that could become a preconception quite unrelated to Shakespeare's ideas. Leo started with critical commentaries. Are they infallible? Many of them talk mediocre rubbish and if we believe what they say, then that becomes a preconceived version, preventing a direct approach to the play. Leo read the play on a train, confusing the memories of his journey with the memories of the play. They cannot be reconciled. Nikolai, not without cause, is afraid to remember the performance he saw in Armavir. I am not surprised that, given his impressions, he has formed a poor opinion of the play.

'Imagine that you cut one beautifully painted figure out of a canvas or that you are shown snippets from a large picture. Can you judge it or understand the whole picture from that? What errors can arise as a result! It is fortunate that *Othello* is perfect in all its parts. But if it were otherwise, and the writer has only been successful with his main character and the others were not worth noticing, then the actor who judges the whole play by one role would form a false but favourable impression. That is, so to speak, a favourable preconception. But if the writer had been successful with all the parts except the lead, then the false impression

and the preconception would be on the other side and would be unfavourable.

‘Let me give you such a case.

‘A famous young actress, in her youth, had never seen *Woe from Wit* or *The Government Inspector* and only knew them from her lessons in literature. She did not remember the works themselves but the exposition and critical opinions of poorly gifted teachers with whom she studied. Her classes at school left her the memory that both classic plays were fine but . . . boring.

‘That is one of the many mistakes of preconception about which we are speaking. Fortunately for her she had to take part in both plays and only after many years, when the roles had become part of her was she able to remove the thorn, the preconception from her mind and see the plays with her own, not other people’s eyes. Now there is no greater admirer of these two classic plays. And you should hear what she says about her bad teacher.

‘Take care this does not happen to you as you approach *Othello*!’

‘We were not read the play at school and thus not given a false interpretation’, we stated.

‘Preconception cannot only be created in school but also elsewhere.

‘Imagine that up to the first reading you heard all manner of right and wrong, good and bad comments about it, and so you start to criticise it before you have even read it. We Russians are inclined to criticism and, what is worse, to shallow fault-finding. Many of us really believe that understanding and appraising a work of art and art itself consists in being able to reveal their flaws. It is much more important and difficult to look for the beautiful, that is to discover its merits.

‘If you are not armed with your own compelling, free attitude to a work and your opinions about it, you cannot stand up against the traditional view of the classics. This forces you to understand *Othello* in the same way “public opinion” states.

‘The first reading is often entrusted to anyone who turns up and has a big voice and clear diction. He is handed the manuscript a few minutes before the reading begins. Is it any wonder that this accidental reader recites the play the first way that comes into his head, without understanding its essential meaning.

‘I know of cases when the lead role has been given in an old man’s voice, not realising that the character who was called an “old man” was in fact young but took a disillusioned view of life and so acquired his nickname.

‘These kinds of mistakes can wreck the play and create a false impression and create a preconception.

‘But here’s the rub. Even a model reading which is too good, too talented, and clearly conveys the reader’s talent can create another aspect of preconception. Imagine that the reader’s and the author’s understanding are not the same. But the reader’s mistake is so talented and entrancing that the actor is captivated by it to the detriment of the writer’s ideas. In this case the preconception errs on the good side and is difficult to fight against. It is difficult to get away from the reader’s charm. In such moments the actor is in an impasse: on the one hand he is unable to get away from the reader’s interpretation with which he is enamoured; on the other hand, his interpretation does not tally with the play.

‘Here is another instance. Many dramatists read their works splendidly and often the readings are a great success. After the applause has died down, the manuscript is solemnly handed over to the theatre and the electrified actors dream expectantly of interesting work. What is their disappointment when, at the second reading, they realise their mistake? It becomes apparent that what was most talented, what had aroused their enthusiasm, lay in the way the play was read, and that disappeared with the reader, while the worst lay in the writer and the script.

‘How are we to leave behind what was exciting and talented and how are we to come to terms with what is bad and talentless, that is so depressing and disillusioning? In this case, the positive aspect of preconception is created by a fine reading against which we have to fight.

‘In the cases which I describe, the preconception is all the more powerful and inescapable because the writer appears all omnipotent before a defenceless audience. The first has finished his work, the second have not yet begun theirs. No wonder then that the latter helplessly surrender to something stronger even when in this case, it is false. Now we have to be very cautious not to fall into hands of preconception, however beautiful it is.

‘But even when alone in our rooms, we must know how to approach a new work and not allow any new kind of preconception to enter in. How can this happen when we are alone and where does it come from? From bad personal impressions, personal problems which have nothing to do with the written play, from a bad state of mind when everything seems wrong, from a lazy, apathetic, listless mood and for other personal and private reasons.

‘There are plays that can only be understood and known after some time since they are elusive, complex and their content is confused, plays like those of Ibsen, Maeterlinck and many other writers who abandon realism for generalisation, stylisation, the grotesque or all kinds of conventions with which contemporary art is full. These works have to be

deciphered. Be careful not to overload them at first acquaintance with unnecessary intellectualising, which can all too easily create a dangerous preconception, namely that they are boring.

‘Be wary of approaching such works “calling forth woe from wit” because of complex cerebral intellectualising. This often proves to be the worst kind of preconception.

‘The more intricate the thinking, the further it leads away from creative experiencing and to mere intellectual acting or playacting. Symbolist and stylised plays require special caution when we first get to know them. They are difficult because the major role is given to intuition and the subconscious, to which we must turn with special caution, especially at first. You cannot playact symbolism, the stylised or the grotesque. They should be the result of one or other internal approach, a feeling for and understanding of the essence of the work and its artistic shape. There is little or no place here for reasoning and a large place for actors’ intuition, which, as we know, is extremely apprehensive.

‘Don’t frighten it with preconceptions.’

‘However’, I said with interest, ‘there are times that are often written about in literature,’ when the actor achieves an understanding of the role and is carried away by it on first acquaintance. The bursts of inspiration are what fascinate me most in creating a performance; genius is revealed in them so clearly and so compellingly!’

‘Of course!’ they love writing about it in ‘novels’, said Tortsov ironically.

‘You mean it isn’t true?’

‘Not at all, it’s quite true, but it isn’t always the rule’, Tortsov explained. ‘In art as in love, an attraction can flare up in a flash. It can also live and be fulfilled in an instant.

‘In *My Life in Art*, there is the example of two actors, who had been given leading roles in a new play, who came out of the first reading walking in character. They had not only felt them but could portray them physically. Evidently there had been dozens of chance occasions in life, when things had matched and had prepared the kind of creative raw material they needed. It was as though nature itself had created these men so that they could play the roles that were destined for them.

‘It is a great good fortune when the fusion of the actor and his character occurs immediately, in an invisible fashion. This is an example of a direct, intuitive approach to a role when there is no room for preconceptions.

‘In such cases, it is better to forget all about technique and surrender completely to your creative nature.

‘Unfortunately these such events are rare, once-in-a-lifetime occurrences. You cannot consider them the rule.

‘Chance plays an enormous part in our work.

‘Who, for example, can explain the fact that a role or play is disliked and the actor fails in it when all his gifts were made for him to play it. Or, how are we to explain the fact that another role, which for every reason is entirely unsuited to him entrances him and he is a great success? Evidently in all these cases there is something hidden helpful or harmful, which creates the incomprehensible, the mysterious in the actor’s mind.

‘That is an example of how a negative preconception is no obstacle to feeling the quintessence of a play and expressing it on stage.’

With that Tortsov referred to *My Life in Art* with the story of a director who had written a splendid *mise-en-scène* for a play in a new style which he not only didn’t understand but which he didn’t like. Then his creative subconscious set in. It spoke to, stirred creative impulses. Despite his conscious mind the new style was now part of him and became part of the atmosphere in theatre. The subconscious, already infused with the new style, suggested what the conscious mind had already rejected to him and his entrenched preconceptions.

‘All the examples I have given affirm that the first acquaintance with a role deserves far greater care and attention than it is usually given. Unfortunately, this simple truth is not known by most actors, including you. Your first encounter with *Othello* took place in far from favourable circumstances. It is more than likely that you have already been given a false impression of the play which resulted in preconceptions.’

‘Well, you know, from what you say’, Grisha interrupted, ‘it follows that the actor shouldn’t read classic or any other kind of play so as not to spoil his first encounter with them because, you see, he might sooner or later be cast in them. The actor, you know, shouldn’t even read critical articles, some of which are splendid, otherwise he might be infected with false preconceptions. I’m sorry, but you can’t protect yourself from outside opinions, you can’t shut your ears to what is being said about old and new plays, you can’t tell which play you will sooner or later be in!’

‘I absolutely agree with you’, Tortsov replied calmly, ‘precisely because it is so difficult to shield yourself from preconceptions that we have to learn either to avoid them or protect yourselves when you feel their pressure.’

‘How are we to do that?’, I wanted urgently to know.

‘What do we have to do to get to know the play and the role?’, the students asked.

‘This’, Tortsov explained. ‘First of all you must study and listen to everything, as many plays as you can, critics, commentaries, other people’s opinions. They supply, expand raw material for creative work. But you must also learn how to protect your independence and ward off preconceptions. You must form your own opinions and not idly accept other people’s. You must learn to be free. That is a difficult art which you will learn with acquaintance and experience. This is not mastered by obeying a single law but a whole complex of theoretical studies and practical work on technique and mostly through personal reflection that digs into the essence of objects through long years of practice.’

‘Use your time at school to augment your scientific knowledge and learn to turn abstract theory into practice for your battle with the play and the role.’

‘Gradually you will learn how to separate your impressions out how to get rid of the false, the irrelevant, the unimportant, to find the essential, how to listen to others and yourselves, how to reject preconceptions and find yourselves in other people’s opinions. You will find the study of world literature and language a great help here. If you want to believe what I am saying, look at how easily men with a good literary education can study new works. They quickly seize the structure of a play, recognise its basic idea and understand its development.’

‘Every play, as every living organism has a skeleton and limbs: arms, legs, head, heart, brain. Like an anatomist dissecting the structure and form of every member, the man of letters finds his way immediately and knows the motor and nerve centres.’

‘He quickly dissects a work, assesses social or literary meaning, discovers its faults, its adherence to or departure from the basic theme. Men of letters soon find new and original approaches to a play, its inner and outer characteristics, all the interweaving lines, the interrelationships among them, assessing all this knowledge, ability and experience is highly important in evaluating a work. Remember all this diligently, in depth, and make full use of your classes in language, words and literature which the school provides.’

‘What you learned last year will also be of great help, especially matters concerning the supertask and the throughaction of a work.’

‘But literary specialists are far from always being versed in the particular demands that are made on us as actors and directors. Not all works of literature, however fine, are right for the theatre. The demands of the stage, although they have been studied in practice, have not been scientifically defined. We have no stage grammar. We have to evaluate a work without the help of our scientific colleagues, only on the basis of practical methods

which are taught at school. They were given you last season. What can I add today to what you know from the recent past? I can only tell you how, in my opinion, you should read every new play, so that the very first acquaintance does not create false opinions and preconceptions.'

. . . 19 . .

'However unsuccessful your first encounter with *Othello*, you must take it into account and use it because it will influence your later work.

'Try to see clearly what has stayed in your memory from the first reading. In building your part you will adapt to whatever went deeply into your mind. Who knows, perhaps, among those impressions there are those that will reveal elements of the heart of the role, seeds of real life to you.

' . . . The corners of your heart where glimmerings of the feelings that came alive on first acquaintance with the role, for me are like a darkened room with closed windows. If there were not cracks and chinks in the shutters that corner of your heart would be in total darkness.

'But various beams of light, broad or narrow, cut through the darkness, making pools of light of different shapes and sizes. These beams and glimmers alter the darkness. Although the objects are not visible, we can guess at their shape.

'Here we have a kind of giant wardrobe and, not far off, a chandelier and a sort of vague shape. If the separate pools and patches of light could grow, the rays would become stronger. Finally, light would fill the entire space, driving away the shadows. Only the corners would be left dark.

'That's how I picture the actor's state of mind after the first reading and after further acquaintance with the role.

'The same thing happens to us after our first acquaintance with *Othello*. Although some moments and different passages have stuck in your mind and your memory, the rest is plunged in darkness and is still foreign to you. There is only a hint here and there which you vainly try to recover. These unconnected impressions and fragments of feeling are to be found throughout the length of the play, like patches of light in the darkness, oases in the desert.

'Subsequently, on further acquaintance as you get into the play, the moments you have felt develop and broaden, make contact with each other and finally fill the entire play and the role.

'This primary process when the role is born out of separate flashes and moments of feeling can be found in other arts, for example in literature.

'My *Life in Art* describes such a case with Chekhov.⁵ At first he saw

someone fishing and someone bathing in a pond nearby, then a hapless gentleman who loved to play billiards⁶ arrived. Next he was aware of a large open window through which the flowering branch of a cherry tree was pushing. From that the whole of ‘the cherry-tree orchard’ which was soon changed to ‘the cherry orchard’ arose⁷ as this word suggested a beautiful but useless luxury that was disappearing from Russian life. Where is the logic, where will you find the link, the similarity between the hapless billiard-player, the flowering cherry orchard and the coming Russian revolution?

‘Alas, the ways of art are unfathomable.’

‘The genuine poet scatters the pearls of his art throughout the play. This is the best way to feed our enthusiasm, the combustible material to detonate artistic inspiration.

‘The beauties of a masterpiece are hidden everywhere in its outward form and in its secret depths. We can wonder at the beauty of form, the style of the inner or outer nature of the roles, the grandeur of the ideas, the social significance of the play, the depth of its feeling, etc. Actors are high-spirited, sensitive, responsive to the beauties of art, the noble, the disturbing, the interesting, the joyful, the amusing, the frightening, the tragic, in a word to everything living, natural in a role, to everything that fires the imagination.

‘If the attractions of a work lie only on the surface then the work itself and its artistic appeal will also be superficial, but if there is a seam buried deep or hidden in the subconscious then the play and its artistic appeal and our experiences will be profound, and the more profound they are, the closer they are to the biological nature of the character and the actor.

‘The attraction you feel on first getting to knowing a role is the first moment when the actor merges with individual passages in a role. This merging is especially valuable as it is direct, intuitive, natural. Who can define why some moments are lodged in an actor’s emotion and other kinds of memory for his whole life? Perhaps this happens by chance or coincidence, but, perhaps, because there is a natural affinity and a biological link between the actor and those particular passages.’

. . . 19 . .

‘The first acquaintance with *Othello* left few traces in your emotion and other kinds of memory. We have to undertake a series of measures, broaden them and make them appealing . . .

‘First we have to read the whole play through attentively. In so doing we must avoid all the errors arising out of the first reading.

‘Let us try to make the second reading follow the rules that should govern any encounter with a writer’s works.

‘Let the second reading be the first. Of course, much of the direct, emotional impressions has been lost and cannot return. But, who knows, some feelings, perhaps, may stir in you.

‘But this time the reading must be according to the rules.’

‘What are they?’, I asked Tortsov.

‘You must decide where and when the reading will take place’, Tortsov explained. ‘Everyone knows from their own experience, where and how they are most open to impressions. Some like to read the play in the quiet of their room while others prefer to hear someone else read with the whole artistic family present.

‘Wherever you decide to have your second encounter with the play, it is important to create the right atmosphere, to be more sensitive, to open your mind to receive artistic impressions joyfully. The reading should be ceremonious, allowing you to avoid the mundane, so that you can concentrate all your attention on the reading. You must be in good form, mentally and physically. Nothing should stand in the way of your intuition and living feelings, which, as we know are extremely impressionable and apprehensive . . .

‘What are we to do when we only partially merge with the play or when we have no overall mental contact with the role? In every case where we are not fully held by a role and do not merge with it spontaneously, a great deal of work is needed to prepare to create artistic *fervour* without which there can be no creative work.

‘Artistic *fervour* is the drive of creative work. Enthusiasm which accompanies *fervour* is a sensitive critic, and the best guide to the depths of the psyche that are unattainable for the conscious mind.

‘After the first reading, actors should give ever freer rein to their artistic enthusiasm; they should pass it on to each other. They should be fervent about the play; read it right through as a whole and in its parts; they should remember favourite passages; they should reveal ever more beauties and pearls to each other. They should quarrel, shout, get upset and muse over their own and other people’s roles and the staging. Enthusiasm and *fervour* are the best means of merging with, understanding and getting to know the play and the role. An actor’s creative feeling stimulated by artistic enthusiasm and *fervour* will unconsciously probe deeply and directly into the psychological depths that the eye cannot see and the ear cannot hear, reason does not notice. Only artistic feeling intuitively what they are.

‘Skill draws in his feeling, will and intelligence, one of the features of an actor’s talent, one of the major tasks for his inner technique.’

Having heard everything Tortsov said the question arose: since *Othello* was common knowledge, was it the right play to study the first acquaintance with a role? For this to be the first acquaintance the play should not be common knowledge. If it was common knowledge then the encounter, the reading would not be the first but the tenth or the twentieth. On that basis, the students, with Grisha at their head, came to the conclusion, to my great regret, that *Othello* was not right for the work we were doing.

But Tortsov had a different answer. He found that process. He found reviving old impressions to be complex. That's why he considered that it would be more practical to work not on an unfamiliar play but one that was common knowledge like *Othello*.

How can I recount and define Tortsov's reading? He had no artistic tasks. On the contrary, he studiously avoided them so as not to impose anything of his own on his listeners or create any preconceptions, good (but not personal) or bad. I wouldn't call his reading a mere statement of fact, because that implies something boring. Perhaps it was an exposition of the play. Yet, here and there, he not only brought out this or that beauty, this or that line which he considered important for the work as a whole and he interrupted his reading to explain them. It seemed to me that, above all, he tried, as far as possible, to convey the story-line and the structure of the play. And indeed, many scenes and passages which had previously passed unnoticed now came alive and found their proper place and meaning. Tortsov did not experience what he was reading, but he pointed out the passages that required feeling.

He carefully pointed out literary beauties. He stopped here and there to repeat this or that phrase, this or that expression, comparison, or individual words.

But he did not achieve everything he wanted. For example, he was not able to reveal the motive for Shakespeare's taking up his pen. He did not help me find myself in the role of *Othello*. But I somehow had a feeling of the direction I had to follow. He also quite clearly marked the major phases in the play.

For example, previously I had had no feeling for the opening scene, but now, thanks to his reading and comments he made in passing I appreciated the skill of its dramatic structure. In fact, instead of a boring exposition, which in less talented dramatists is a down-stage dialogue between two characters, such as a servant and a maid or a contrived meeting between

two peasants, Shakespeare creates an entire scene of interesting and important events. Iago intends creating uproar while Rodrigo balks at the idea. He has to be persuaded and the reason for that is what leads us into the play. So, two birds are killed with one stone. Boredom is avoided and the action.

And later, as the story unfolds, the exposition of the play is even more skilful in the scenes of the arrival and departure in the senate. The end of that scene, that is the birth of Iago's diabolical plot, also became clear. Further on, as an extension, I discovered a similar scene in which Iago's plan develops in the conversation with Cassio in Cyprus during the revelry. The uproar, which becomes extreme, increases Cassio's guilt at a dangerous moment, when the conquered people are in tumult. In Tortsov's reading you could feel not just a quarrel between two drunks but something greater, hints of mutiny among the native residents. All this greatly increased the significance of the scene, its dimensions, and excited me in those passages which I had not previously taken notice of.

I consider the main result of the reading is that I noticed the two basic, conflicting lines, Othello's and Iago's. Previously I had only felt one line – love and jealousy. Without a clear conflict, which was now defined in Iago's line. The previous line I had lacked the significance it had now when the conflict was stronger. I felt the tightening of the tragic knot which gave a premonition of horror.

It made me feel aware of the space of the action, with room enough for great, sweeping movements. I had not felt it before probably because I was not aware of the writer's ultimate private purpose, contained in the words. I knew even less that the play was seething with inner action and movement towards as yet an undesignated, universal goal. I summed up everything the reading had revealed to me.

Tortsov was happy with the results of the reading.

'No matter. We don't have to carry out the entire syllabus I laid down, but we have achieved something more than you got from the first reading. The patches of light are a little bigger.

'Now, after a second reading, I shall ask very little of you. Tell me, in orderly line, all the facts of the tragedy, or as it is called, the story-line and you', he said, turning to me, 'as our perennial annalist, write down what each one says.'

'First, you must arrange everything on shelves, find the correct line of the play, which is obligatory for all of you, and without which there can be no play. Each play has its frame, warp it and it is crippled. It holds you

together, as the skeleton does the body. How are we to find it? I would suggest the following way. Answer me: what situations, events, experiences, etc. are indispensable to the play?’

‘The love of Othello and Desdemona.’

‘And then?’

‘The divisions between two nations.’

‘Of course. But that’s not the most important.’

‘Iago’s evil plot.’

‘And?’

‘His diabolical slyness, vengeance, ambition and resentment.’

‘And?’

‘The gullibility of the wild animal.’

‘Now let us examine each of your answers separately. For example: what is it without which there would be no love between Othello and Desdemona?’

I had no answer. Tortsov answered for me.

‘The romantic rapture of a beautiful young woman, the fascinating legendary stories about the Moor and his military exploits, the innumerable obstacles to their misalliance, which exult the revolutionary young girl, the sudden war which forces the acceptance of the marriage of an aristocratic woman to a Moor, in order to save the country.

‘And what is it without which there can be no division between two nationalities? The superiority of the Venetians, the aristocratic sense of pride and their contempt for conquered peoples, to one of which Othello belongs, the genuine belief in the disgrace of mixing black and white blood . . .

‘Now, tell me what is it without which Iago’s evil plot cannot happen? . . .

‘Do you think that without any of these things there would be no play, no framework which is indispensable for all the members of the cast?’

‘Yes, we do’, we had to acknowledge.

‘In that case you have a whole series of well-established situations by which you have to be guided and which will show you which way to go like signs along the road. All these given circumstances provided by the writer, are obligatory for all and lead in the first instance to the score of your role. So, remember them well.

. . . . 19 . .

‘. . . We selected *Othello* for the purposes of studying the techniques of working on a role. And so now, after our experiments with scene one, let us try to establish a method and the principles on which the scene, “alarm

and pursuit” is based. Or, in other words, let us turn to theory to substantiate what you have done in practice.

‘Remember, it began with my taking the copies of the play away from you promising for the time not to open them.

‘But, to my astonishment, without them you could not remember or recount the contents of the play. However, something must have stuck in you, notwithstanding the unsatisfactory nature of your first acquaintance with it. And, note them down and fix them more firmly.

‘After that the play was read to you to refresh your impressions. This created more memories which, though patchy, strengthened the line of the tragedy. You remembered the facts and after that gave a quite decent account of the contents of *Othello* and then played the first scene using the facts and physical actions. But there was no truth in what you did and creating it proved the most difficult part.

‘The most simple physical actions require special attention and effort, more than the ones you know from life, such as “walking, looking, hearing”, etc. You portrayed them better than the average professional, but you could not do it as people. You had to study things that you know from life all over again. How hard it is! But finally you mastered it and achieved genuine truth, at first only here and there, in different passages, but now throughout the whole line. When a major truth does not come immediately, then minor ones spring up and merge into larger ones. With truth comes its inevitable companions: truth and the genuine performance of physical actions and the whole life of the human body. In this way one of the personalities of the two characters you portrayed were formed. By frequently repeating “the life of the human body” it was strengthened: “it is hard to create a habit but the habit itself is easy”. You finally mastered the external, physical aspect of the role and other, unfamiliar physical actions the writer and the director indicated became your own. That is why you repeated what you did with such pleasure and you revelled in them . . .

‘Undoubtedly, you will soon need words and speech, and instead of the writer’s lines you will resort to your words. You need them not only to help physical action in fulfilling external tasks but to express thoughts and convey nascent inner experiences. I used their logical sequence so as, unbeknownst to you, through demonstration, frequent repetition, smoothing out the line of the scene, to make the unfamiliar familiar, easy, your own and finally you mastered the scene we had rehearsed. Now the writer’s unfamiliar stage directions and the life of the spirit are your own and you revel in them.

‘However, could you obtain the same result if, on a level with the “living body” a corresponding “life of the spirit” had not been born?

‘Then the question automatically arises: can the first exist without the second and the second without the first?’

‘But more. Since both these lives derive from the same source, *Othello*, they cannot be different by nature. On the contrary, their affinity, their correlation are obligatory.

‘This is the law I indicate so strongly because it is the basis for the psychotechnique which we have only just come to know.

‘It has great practical significance for us, because when the life of a role does not arise spontaneously, intuitively, we have to use our psychotechnique. It is very fortunate that there are practical ways open to us. We can, when needful, arouse the life of the spirit with the life of the body, which is much easier by means of reflexes (?). That is an invaluable storehouse in our creative psychotechnical process.

‘We use it in total contrast to other actors who foolishly want to experience the role from the very first so that thereafter the rest will follow. That is rarely the case. It is difficult to live a part when the part itself has not come alive. And so, for these actors there is nothing left but to work directly on feeling. But it is easy to violate and you know what that leads to. But that confirms my case. Thoughts, words and speech are the most important.

‘You remember how at the beginning of our work I took the script away from you for a long time and made you use your own words to express the ideas in your roles in the same logical sequence as exists in Shakespeare’s play. In the end that sequence of ideas became familiar to you, to such an extent you took it for your own. Without any demonstrations from me which had to enable me to confirm it.

‘The same process was true of the words and the role. Initially, as in life, you chose those which fell into your mind and your tongue, which best helped you fulfil the task you had been given. In that instance your speech flowed in normal conditions and was dynamic and active. Then I held you back for a long time until the role and the score had come together and the proper line of tasks, actions and thoughts had been smoothed out.

‘Only after that preparatory work did we ceremoniously return to the reading of the script and your roles. You were hardly able to learn the words because for so long I was careful to prompt you with Shakespeare’s words when needful, when you were looking for them to fulfil verbally some task or other. You jumped at them eagerly since the writer’s words are better than your own in expressing ideas or performing the action. You remembered Shakespeare’s words because you had fallen in love with them and you needed them.

‘What was the result? Someone else’s words became your own. They set

you on the right path, without forcing and so didn't lose that important quality, active speech. Now you don't gabble your lines, you use the words actively to fulfil the basic tasks of the script. That is why you were given it.

'Now think carefully and tell me: do you maintain that if you begin work by learning the words by heart, as most people in the theatre do you could achieve what you did, using my methods?

'I tell you now, you could not achieve the desired results. You would cram yourselves into the muscular memory of your tongue, into the muscles of your organs of speech, the sounds of the words and lines by force. The ideas would fade and die and the lines would be detached from the tasks and actions.

'Now compare our method with what is done in any common-or-garden theatre. There they read the play, perform the play according to their preconceptions, so that by the third or tenth rehearsal everything is known by heart. They have a reading then go on stage and act, book in hand. The director shows the staging and they remember what he has said. At the appointed rehearsal, they put the books down and follow the prompter, until they have learned the role by heart. When everything is settled, they rush everything in case they "dry", quickly fix the date for the public dress rehearsal and put up the posters. Then there is the show . . . "success" and the reviews. After that the play is of no further interest, they repeat it in stock-in-trade fashion.'

TASKS, THROUGHACTION,
COUNTER THROUGHACTION, SUPERTASK

[*Othello* III.iii.]

. . . . 19 . .

Today, Tortsov went back to doing exercises . . . It was decided that we should perform our whole repertoire for him.

To that end one of the students was summoned to the office and asked about his passport and with which version we should start for *Othello*.⁸

Initially I declined to do anything on the spot with no preparation. But after a moment agreed because that was what I wanted to do.

I was so wild with excitement that I rushed ahead, unable to stop myself.

Tortsov said to me:

'You remind me of a motorcyclist rushing along the road in Petrovski Park, yelling, "Stop me or I'll crash!"'

'When I'm excited I boil over and can't control myself', I said in self-justification.

'That's because you have no creative goal. You are playing tragedy "in

general”. The “in general” is dangerous in art’, Tortsov assured me. ‘Do you know why you were acting today?’, he asked.

‘It is so much better if we can restrict ourselves to one single supertask, containing images of all the bits and tasks, both major and minor.

‘But only a genius can do that. It isn’t easy to feel the complex quintessence of an entire play in one supertask. That is beyond us poor mortals. The best we can achieve is to limit the number of tasks in each act to five, and twenty to twenty-five for the whole play, constituting its essence.

‘The path we take, artistically, is like a railway line that is divided into large, medium-size and small stages and half stages, that is tasks. We have our big cities,⁹ that is major centres, and less important stages¹⁰ and even less important centres¹¹ and other small or very small stations or stops which require greater or lesser attention and long or short waits.

‘Besides these we can pass through in express trains, passenger trains and freight trains. We can stop at every station or only at the most important, selected ones. We can make a short or long stay.

‘Today we went express, not stopping anywhere, through all the tasks in the exercise. They flashed by like telegraph poles. You didn’t have time to notice them, recognise them or feel any interest in them, because you didn’t know where you were going.

‘I didn’t know because you didn’t tell us’, I said in self-justification.

‘I didn’t because there wasn’t the time, I talked about it today because it’s time for you to know.

‘You must see to it that the goal you establish is clear, true and well-defined. It must be extremely precise. You must think about it first. You must direct your voluntary wants and endeavours towards it. Otherwise you reel the words off as you did today.

‘Besides which your goal or task must not only be precise but it must have appeal, it must be exciting.

‘A task is a sprat with which to catch a mackerel, the one our creative will is hunting. It must be tasty and the task must be substantial and tempting. Without that you cannot draw your concentration in. The will is powerless until it is inspired by impassioned needs. A compelling task is its stimulus. This last is a powerful driving force for the creative will, the former a strong decoy.

‘It is also extremely important for the task to be right. Then it evokes true wants, true wants evoke true endeavours, and true endeavours end in true actions. On the other hand, a wrong task evokes wrong wants, endeavours and actions . . .

‘To play truly we must act upon right tasks that are like landmarks, indicating a road through the steppes.

‘Let us correct this mistake and do the scene again.¹² But first let us divide it into corresponding major, medium and minor tasks . . .

‘Rather than go into details, divide up your scene into the major bits and tasks. Which are Othello’s and which are Iago’s?’

‘Iago arouses Othello’s jealousy’, Pau said.

‘How does he do that?’, Tortsov asked.

‘By being cunning, slanderous, by destroying his peace of mind.’

‘Of course, in such a way that Othello believes him’, added Tortsov. ‘So you choose this goal as the best way to persuade Othello who isn’t here yet, just Kostya Nazvanov who is sitting opposite you very much alive. If you can manage that, I won’t ask any more of you’, Tortsov decided.

‘What is your task?’, Tortsov asked me.

‘Othello doesn’t believe him’, I said.

‘First, Othello doesn’t exist yet. You haven’t created him. For the moment all we have is Kostya Nazvanov’, Tortsov corrected me. ‘Second if you don’t believe what Iago says there is no tragedy and we have a happy ending. Can’t you think of something nearer to the play?’

‘I try not to believe Iago.’

‘First, that is not a task, and second, you don’t have to try to do anything. The Moor has such faith in Desdemona that it is his normal state of mind. And so it is difficult for Iago to shake that faith’, Tortsov explained. ‘It is difficult for you even to understand what the villain is talking about. If you heard terrible news from someone else, not Iago whom you consider to be honest and faithful, you would smile and dismiss the plot and all would be over.’

‘In that case, perhaps the Moor’s task is to try and understand what Iago is saying’, I said, suggesting a new task.

‘Of course’, Tortsov confirmed. ‘Before you can believe, you have to try and understand the unbelievable things that the Moor is being told about his wife. Only after when he reflects on the slander, does the need emerge to show the falseness of the allegations against the purity of Desdemona’s heart etc. And so, to fulfil the task you try at least to understand why Iago is saying what he is.’

‘So’, Tortsov summed up, ‘let Paul try to confuse you and you try to understand what he is talking about. If the pair of you only fulfil these two tasks, I shall be content.

‘Take each of the secondary, helpful tasks, form them, so to speak into a throughaction and, finally, and close it like a clasp, with a supertask, towards which everything is moving.

‘That is the moment when you achieve completeness, beauty, thought and strength in your work.’

After this explanation we had to do the exercise once more as Tortsov stated ‘using the tasks, the throughaction for the purposes of the supertask’.

Then came comments and explanations. Tortsov said:

‘Good. You did the exercise thinking all the time about the throughaction and the supertask.

‘But thinking still doesn’t mean action for the sake of a basic goal.

‘You musn’t be drawn to the supertask intellectually. The supertask requires a fully committed, passionate sense of endeavour in all the passing actions. Each bit, each individual goal of the play, the supertask. That entails an undeviating, direct, unflinching approach to the goal.

‘To be creative means approaching the supertask passionately, directly, intensively, productively, appropriately, properly.

‘If you want to see this clearly, go to hear a touring conductor of genius, X. I heard him the other day. This is what he showed me.

‘When he first came on’, Tortsov said, ‘I was disappointed. He was small, plain . . . But once he raised his baton, he seemed to undergo a complete transformation. For him there was no black hole, no proscenium arch, no audience. He fixed his eyes on the orchestra and they on him. And not only the orchestra but us as well, sitting in the stalls. He prepared and made us do the same. That is what is called creative concentration. He began to pull everything coming from all the musicians together with his baton. He held us tight in the palm of his hand. The baton was raised and X not only drew everyone’s attention to himself but all the countless given circumstances, the supertask on which he had long worked and must have prompted him from within with the right passion or feeling that seemed true. He was filled with it and was born anew.

‘And later, before the first note, I could tell from his face the orchestra was going to play something important, significant, mysterious, eternal.

‘X conducted without hurrying, clearly, and outlined with his baton all the inner ideas of which the music spoke. We understood this tiny but important musical phrase, but not until it was complete. X did not hurry, he did not pass on to the next bit or task until the bassoon had taken its time until it reached the final note beginning the phrase. On, on . . . less . . . less, the bassoon took its time and put a full stop. Only then was the baton lowered. Another second for him to turn his head to the other side, to the first violins that logically, in their turn developed

the musical idea, which had ended so well with the oboe and the bassoon.

‘Now X took an even firmer grip on the strings. He gave them all the help he could. The musical idea grew and moved onward. Some strings were inadequate, needing the violas, but they could give little. So, X imperiously turned to the woodwind, but as the musical idea grew bigger and bigger the conductor’s baton called on the brass. But X did not let them blare. He held their enormous strength back that burst out of the trombone section. X entreated them with his eyes and hands to be merciful. But metal was already rasping in the metal hearts of the players and they could no longer hold back. Now they raised the bells of their instruments, as though begging for freedom. But the conductor was implacable. The extreme emotion from the brass would end the developing musical thought which contained the major idea of the work. But he hadn’t the strength to hold them back and X, like a flapping sail darted upwards and after him here was a roar, a whirlwind from which he, too, suffered, that spread across the entire orchestra. Bows rose and fell. The cellos and basses almost sawed themselves in two out of sheer emotion. Female hands fluttered through the harp-strings. The lips and cheeks of the trombonists filled with blood and their eyes popped out of their sockets. But now the trombonists and the brass stopped, having finished the final phrase, they had completed their task, they had said it all, but apparently not. X didn’t lower his baton, but, on the contrary brandished it almost menacingly so that everything would be said right through to the end, otherwise watch out. On, on, on! I won’t let go, I won’t allow it!

Now it is all over and a satisfied X has completed all his bits and tasks.

‘Here is something else I noticed: X did not put the finishing touches to and point up all the bits and tasks. Some he assiduously glossed over. Others he singled out, was concerned to make them clear but as soon as the musicians were carried away and were too clear, he gave a nervous sign with his baton and hands to tell them not to go too far. His movements said: no, no, we don’t need that, stop. Many small bits he considered insignificant and he even, I thought, played them fast. He also glanced at the corresponding pages in the score as being unimportant and not to be lingered over. In other places he was extremely cautious and careful over not only each bit and task but also over every individual note. As far as some bits are concerned, he seized on them and went right through to the very end. Often he drew out the last note with all his heart. Like an angler he drew a fish out of troubled water with his rod, fearing, it would fall off the hook. And how he tried to round off the other bits he considered important in the overall pattern of the symphony in the programme and

make them clear, colourful and razor-sharp! He enticed them onwards with his trunk, summoning them, bending his whole body back as though he were being dragged. Often X would fling his arms up so as to draw the sounds and chords he wanted.

‘In this way X revealed the supertask.

‘It is highly possible, or even probable that he did not know the terms by which they are known, or even what the throughaction is. But he knew exactly what musical bits were and unconsciously felt their logical sequence and their mutual dependence more than anyone . . . The rest came from within himself, intuitively.

‘Didn’t you feel in everything he did his passionate, personal striving with all his might to reveal as fully, distinctly and clearly as possible not just this or that particular task for its own sake but the supertask and the throughaction which need all the he general tasks?

‘Actors should do the same. They should strive with all their energy and passion to reach to supertask which must unremittingly excite and draw them. They must doggedly follow the line of the throughaction, and reveal their creative path as clearly and three dimensionally as possible.

‘As far as the secondary tasks are concerned, of course they must be completely performed but only in so far as they serve the supertask and for you today for each task as such, separately *an und für sich*.

‘Remember to take this line as much as you can: from the supertask to the wants, the striving, the throughaction and the supertask.’

‘How can that be?! Start with the supertask and finally come back to it?’, we asked, bewildered.

‘Yes, yes, precisely that’, Tortsov responded. ‘The supertask is the fundamental basis, the essence and must arouse creative wants and striving towards action in the actor, so that finally he can master the supertask that aroused the creative process.

‘Do you realise that the process we have just gone through, to test out the line of physical actions which I compared to beating down an overgrown path¹³ is not casual as we work to create our role? It is the *self-standing, important action in the creative process which must be legitimised once and for all*.

‘Life is movement, action.

‘If they do not form an unbroken line spontaneously, naturally, we have to develop it on stage. This operation proceeds with the aid of the *feeling of truth* and the constant care for the physical life of our own nature as human beings.

‘You know now from your own experience, what that work consists of

since we have just done it. In our artistic language this is called *getting rid of clichés*. Why? Where does the expression come from and why clichés?

‘You also know that every role with us actors starts with deep-rooted, worn-out clichés. That is a law and any departure from it is strictly forbidden.

‘You also know that we actors secretly cannot help ourselves, we love clichés and are instinctively drawn to them.

‘They are comfortable, easy, always to hand; they follow the line of least resistance. They are a habit, and, as is well known, habit is man’s second nature.

‘Our feeling of truth is often thrown out of joint because of incorrect work and damaging clichés which become a habit and enthusiastically believe our lies when we are overacting. Unfortunately, ingrained habits have few have not fast, deep roots.

‘That is why actors’ clichés are our constant companions especially in the early stages of creating a character. We know why clichés are particularly useful at this moment in the creative process. Initially, when we have not beaten a path, it is easy to go astray and fall into lies and clichés, which like a highway has been laid down by time and practice.

‘When he falls into clichés the actor feels more at home than in a new role which is unknown, unexplored territory. Clichés are habits, signs, familiar. But this familiarity does not have its roots in feeling but only in external mechanical habit. Crammed with clichés you felt very much at home in your new role. The most amazing thing of all is that these “habits” we easily and eagerly took for inspiration.

‘The greater is our amazement, when the first rehearsals are over, that we do not receive the praise and enthusiasm we expected. Instead, the director had to explain at length the difference between genuine experiencing and simple overacting, between inspiration and mere habit and clichés.

‘The greatest danger of this disjunction is that the clichés that have been sown fill the places intended for the genuine, living feelings of a creative actor. How are we to clear them away? Root them out? But their place can be taken by other, perhaps worse clichés. That could be because the actor in the early stages does not have a store of what he needs for the role. When he brings genuine living feelings and actions alive and creates a genuine belief in them then the clichés are pushed out in the same way as an old, rotten tooth is pushed out by a growing new one. This process is worth special attention. It is worth Rakhmanov’s placards and demonstrations’, Tortsov joked.

‘For that reason I shall devote the following class to a much more detailed study of this process.’

OTHELLO PRODUCTION PLAN (1929–1930)

Extracts

Stanislavski's production plan was written in 1929–1930 at the same time as he was drafting the chapters for Work on a Role. He was convalescing in Nice at the time and therefore wrote out, as in his early period, details of the stage action interspersed with advice on using what came to be known as the Method of Physical Action. Some advice is addressed directly to Leonidov who was playing the lead role and others. These comments need to be read in conjunction with the draft chapters in diary form since they are essentially teaching.

Stanislavski placed great emphasis on what he called The Line of the Day by which the actor created the life of his character before the beginning of the play and what happens to him between entrances.

The Line of the Day Before Act 1.

Rodrigo's past

Who is Rodrigo? I think he was the child of rich parents. They were merchants and they exchanged their agricultural products for velvet and other luxury items in Venice. These products are exported abroad, including Russia at huge prices.

Rodrigo's parents are now dead. How can he deal with such a huge business? All he can do is squander his father's wealth, thanks to which both he and his father had been admitted to aristocratic circles. Rodrigo who is naïve and fond of the good life provided money (never returned, of course) to young Venetians who shared his tastes. Where did he get it? For a period the business which was solid, continued to work thanks to faithful old managers who kept it going. But, of course that could not continue. As ill-luck would have it, one morning, going down the canal after a night of drinking, Rodrigo saw, like a dream or a vision, the young and beautiful Desdemona, getting into a gondola to go to church accompanied by her servant, or some other elderly woman, a nurse from Brabantio's household. He froze, stopped the gondola and with his face lined by drink he looked long and hard at her. That drew the nurse's attention. She hurriedly covered Desdemona's face with a veil. Rodrigo followed the gondola for a long time. He followed her into church. His emotion was so strong it sobered him up. He did not pray but only looked at Desdemona while her nurse tried to hide her from him. But the young woman was pleased at what had happened. Not that Rodrigo was to her taste, it was

simply that she was bored at home and wanted to enjoy herself. Brabantio arrived during the mass, found his people, and sat beside his daughter. The nurse whispered a few words to him and pointed at Rodrigo. Brabantio gave him a severe look. But Rodrigo, being Rodrigo, was not in the least put out. When Desdemona returned to her gondola she found it full of flowers. That resulted in a severe reprimand for the gondolier who instead of standing guard had spent his time talking with a friend. Brabantio ordered the flowers to be thrown into the water and put his daughter in the gondola and sent her home with her nurse. But Rodrigo was watching from behind a nearby corner. His gondola went ahead of Desdemona's and he threw flowers he had bought from all the florists near the church into the water as she passed. The young woman liked this extravagance. Why? Because it was happy, because she felt flattered, because her nurse was angry.

Rodrigo lost his head at this very first meeting. He thought of nothing else but Desdemona. He serenaded her under her window. He stayed in his gondola all night in the hope she would glance out of her window at the canal. That happened once or twice. She smiled at him for no particular reason but out of mischief or coquetry. But he, out of naiveté, thought he had conquered and did not know how to express his gratitude. He began writing poems and bribed Brabantio's servants to deliver his love lines to his beauty. They took a lot of money from him but no one could ever say whether his writings ever reached their destination. Finally, on Brabantio's orders, his brother approached this unwanted admirer and warned him that if he did not put an end to his attentions, he would take steps. But Rodrigo continued. Other means had to be found. Servants were sent to chase him away. They did not stand on ceremony: they pelted him with orange peel and kitchen scraps and other rubbish. Rodrigo took it all patiently. But then, one evening, he saw Desdemona in her gondola going along the darkened canal, and going past her threw a large bouquet of flowers and a madrigal he had composed into her boat. But – horror! – Desdemona did not glance at him but with her own hands threw the flowers and the madrigal into the water and, turning away angry-faced, lowered her veil. Rodrigo was mortified. He did not know what to do. To revenge himself of his cruel beauty he could not think of anything better than a week of orgy. Then in revenge he decked his gondola out in rich materials, flowers and lamps and sailed, surrounded by women of easy virtue, past Brabantio's house or along the Grand Canal where Desdemona took her daily walk. Coming back to his senses, Rodrigo fell into melancholy and spent hours in his gondola near his beloved, until servants were sent to chase him away.

This is what happened before Othello arrived. He was in the crowd the day she first met him in the street. With Othello's triumphant return to Venice the fashion for soldiers began. Having conquered the Turks they now became the conquerors of women's hearts. Rodrigo thought of becoming a soldier. The soldiers preferred the company of courtesans in their nightly orgies. Rodrigo paid for everything. This brought him close to the officers and into contact with Iago. In one of the orgies, drunken officers almost beat Rodrigo but Iago came vigorously to his defence. Rodrigo was grateful and wanted to reward him, but Iago assured him he had done it because he liked him. It was thus their friendship began.

At that time the romance between Othello and Desdemona was developing strongly. Cassio, as their intermediary, knew of Rodrigo's love. He came to know him only at the time of the nightly orgies. Cassio knew how naïve Rodrigo was. Knowing of the relationship between Othello and Desdemona, he found Rodrigo's hopes of being reciprocated ludicrous. And so he played all kinds of jokes on his naiveté, teasing him. He persuaded him that Desdemona would be walking somewhere or that she had arranged a rendezvous somewhere else and Rodrigo would spend hours in the hope of seeing his beauty. Humiliated and hurt he ran to Iago, who took him under his protection, swearing to avenge him and finally arrange his marriage to Desdemona, because he did not believe in a romance with a black devil. Rodrigo clung even more closely to him, and showered him with gold.

Iago's past

He rose from the ranks. On the outside he is hail fellow well met, open, loyal. He is a brave soldier. He has been at Othello's side in all his battles and once saved his life. He is intelligent, wily. He understands perfectly Othello's tactics in war which he developed thanks to his military skill and his intuition. He regularly consults Iago before and during battle and Iago has often given him intelligent and useful advice. He is two men, the one others see, the other, the man he really is: one friendly, simple, generous hearted, the other, evil and repulsive. The mask he has assumed hides him to such an extent that everyone (and to a certain degree his wife) takes him for the simplest, most guileless of men. If Desdemona had had a black child, he would have had this great, rough but kind-hearted man to care for it instead of a nurse. The child would also probably have had this wolf in sheep's clothing as his tutor. This is how Othello sees Iago although he has seen his audacity and his cruelty in war. He knows that in battle men become beasts, himself included. However, this does not prevent him

from being gentle, feeling, almost shy. Moreover, Othello appreciates Iago's intelligence and wiliness highly. Iago has often given him good advice in battle. In the camp Iago has not only been his adviser but his friend. Othello confided his disappointments, his doubts, his hopes to him. Iago always slept in his tent. On sleepless nights, the great captain would open up his heart. Iago was his valet, his maid and, when necessary, his doctor. No one knew better than he how to dress a wound and when necessary give encouragement, or strike up a filthy but funny song or tell a good story. People excused him because he was such a good fellow. Many times Iago's songs and cynical stories were a blessing. For example, when the men were tired and fractious along would come Iago with his songs and his cynical stories and the mood changed. At other times, when something was needed to satisfy the embittered soldiers, Iago did not hesitate to devise a form of torture or savage execution for a prisoner that delighted the angry men. Of course, Othello knew nothing of this; the noble Moor did not allow torture. When necessary he would strike off someone's head with a single blow.

Iago is honest. He doesn't steal money, or goods. He is too intelligent to run any risks. But if he can deceive a fool (and there are many of them, apart from Rodrigo) he doesn't miss the opportunity. He takes anything from them: money, gifts, invitations, women, horses, pups, etc. This additional money enables him to lead a riotous life. Emilia knows nothing of this although, perhaps, she guesses. Iago's closeness to Othello, the fact that he has risen from the ranks, that he sleeps in Othello's tent, that he is Othello's right arm, etc., naturally arouses jealousy in the other officers and affection in the ranks. But everyone is afraid of him and respects him, for he is a real, an ideal soldier, a man of war who had very often got them out of trouble or averted a catastrophe. Military life suits him.

But Iago is out of place in Venice with its brilliance, its formality, the grand receptions which dignitaries offer and which Othello has to attend. Besides which, the general is not a man of culture and learning. He needs someone at his side who can make up for what he lacks, an aide who can be entrusted with a commission to the Doge or the senators. He needs someone who can write a letter or explain a military theory which he does not understand to him. Would Iago be able to do that? Of course, Cassio, who is educated, is much more suitable. Cassio is Florentine, and they, at the time, were like the Parisians today, the epitome of elegance and sophistication. How could Iago take a message to Brabantio or arrange a secret rendezvous with Desdemona? Only Cassio can undertake such errands. Small wonder then, that Othello has made him his lieutenant, or, so to speak, his aide-de-camp. Moreover, the Moor never once thought of

Iago as a possible candidate. Why should he need such a post? He is already an intimate, one of the family, a friend. Let him stay that way. Why put an uneducated, uncouth man in a ridiculous situation which would make him a figure of fun? This is what Othello thought.

But Iago thought otherwise. After all his service, his courage and bravery, saving the general's life more than once, his friendship, his devotion, only he, and no one else, could be the general's aide-de-camp. He would not have minded so much if someone of eminence, or someone among his comrades in arms had been appointed, but to take the first pretty young officer who came along and who knew nothing of war! To choose this baby because he can read and knows how to talk to the ladies and bow and scrape to the great of this world – Iago cannot understand the general's logic. Cassio's appointment is, therefore, a blow to him, an outrage, a humiliation, an insult he cannot forgive. But worse is the fact that he was never even considered. But the final blow is that Othello hid his most intimate, deepest concerns – his love for Desdemona and the abduction from him – confided all to the boy Cassio. Small wonder then that since Cassio's appointment as Othello's aide-de-camp, Iago has been drowning his sorrows. It was perhaps during one of these drinking bouts that he met and became friends with Rodrigo. Their favourite topic in his nocturnal conversations with his new friend was on the one hand Rodrigo's dream that Iago will arrange to carry off Desdemona and, on the other, Iago's complaints about the way the general has behaved. To fuel the flames of their rancour, they go back over everything, Iago's merits and Othello's ingratitude which had not been apparent earlier but now seemed quite criminal. They remember stories about Emilia that were current in the army.

In fact, when Iago had been Othello's close friend, there had been stories. To cheer themselves up, the troops had decided all sorts of reasons for Iago's close friendship with the general. One of the reasons given was that something had been going on and was still going on between Othello and Emilia. Naturally they made sure that Iago got to hear of it. But he did not pay it much attention: first because he was not all that fond of Emilia and deceived her; second because he had no special feeling for her. He liked her plump figure, she is a good housewife, she can sing and play the lute, she was cheerful, she might have a little money, coming from a good merchant family and well brought up for the period. If there was something between her and the general (and he knew then that there was nothing) he would not be very upset. But now after being cruelly insulted he remembers the stories about Emilia. He would like, he needs there to be, something between her and the general. That would justify his hate his

desire for vengeance. Now Iago wants to justify these rumours because they are in fact lies. Emilia gets on well with Othello. He is famous, kind, lonely, with no one to look after him, his quarters lack a woman's touch, and so this good housewife comes and tidies the bachelor general's house. Iago knows that. He has met her in Othello's rooms but never paid attention to it but now he blames her for it. In a word, Iago deludes himself into believing something that never happened. This gives him the pretext to rage, and accuse and condemn a guiltless Othello and stir up his malice and bile. It is in these circumstances that Iago learns of something amazing, unexpected, incomprehensible, the abduction of Desdemona. He could not believe his eyes when he went into the general's quarters and saw this painted beauty practically embracing the Moor, who for him now has become a black devil. The blow was so great that his brain almost seized up. When he learns how he, a close friend, has been kept in the dark by the lovers, under Cassio's guidance and when he hears happy voices laughing at him, he runs away to hide the rage that boils up inside him.

The abduction of Desdemona not only hurt him but put him in a totally ridiculous position with Rodrigo. While fleeing him, Iago continuously promised to obtain his beauty, by kidnapping her if need be, if Brabantio did not give his agreement. Now even the simpleton Rodrigo has understood Iago has duped him. Is Iago really close to the general? He no longer believes in his friendship. In a word, their relationship has ended. Rodrigo is angry, like a stupid, obstinate child. For the moment he forgets that Iago saved him from a beating by drunkards.

When Iago learned what had happened he decided not to give up. He believed that all was not lost and that if a scandal was created throughout the city then Othello would be in a bad position and that, perhaps, the marriage might be dissolved by higher authority.

He was right, of course. This is probably what would have happened had there not been the war. The government needed Othello too much for them to annul his marriage at such a critical moment.

Until war broke out, Iago was right to try to annul the marriage.

There was no time to be lost. When action is required, Iago acts with diabolical energy. He covers all possibilities. He goes back to the newly married couple, congratulates them, laughs with them, calls himself a fool. He manages to persuade Desdemona that only jealousy for his beloved general made him behave so stupidly when he learned of the marriage. Then he hurries to see Rodrigo. When Rodrigo learned what had happened, the poor fool first wept like a child, then swore at his friend and decided their friendship was over. Iago has great difficulty in explaining his plan: to create a scandal, stir up the whole city and obtain a divorce

or an annulment. We meet the two friends at the moment when Iago has practically forced Rodrigo into a gondola and taken him to Brabantio's house. They have arrived. The gondolier steps onto dry land, attaches the boat and waits. They must begin but Rodrigo is still obstinate and hardly says a word to Iago.

Rodrigo is very, very angry with Iago.

Iago is very, very perplexed and tries to repair the damage. First because Rodrigo is his purse and second because he needs him today to rouse the whole city. There is no time to be lost, otherwise the wedding night will have passed and the situation will be irreparable.

The line of the day before Act III

Stanislavski divided Act III into five episodes, the fourth of which was The Tower. It is with this episode that we are concerned.

After Desdemona's entrance and the scene with the handkerchief (III.iii 281–289) Othello goes to dine with the Cypriots. It is an official dinner. The general is strange, confused. He pleads illness: his head aches. Desdemona is upset. With her aristocratic manner she makes sure guests do not stay too long after the meal. The Moor is tired. He has only returned from a campaign the day before. The wife pays court to her husband as on their second day of marriage. It is the first time he has been ill.

She lightly speaks tender words. But Othello receives them badly. To distract him Desdemona speaks of this and that and among other things, without thinking, starts talking about Cassio. Her feminine pride is involved. Why is it, on the first day of their married life that she cannot obtain a, as she sees it, trivial request? And so she persists in prolonging the conversation. Of course, this produces its effect on the general, whose mind is already following the line created by the lies. Of course, too, after everything that has happened, Othello is right, to explain Desdemona's persistence in his own way. According to him, the cause of her concern for Cassio is hidden in her unconscious love for him. From that he concludes that such an unconscious warmth of a young woman towards a young man is understandable, that Desdemona is not guilty, the more so since she is unaware. From that follows a whole range of painful conclusions: I am old, did I make a mistake in marrying, might I ruin her life. 'Let it fly where it will!' There is no pleasure in such thoughts.

Dwelling on these painful thoughts turns them, unbeknownst, into a habit and that makes them all the more believable.

By five or six in the afternoon of the same day the awareness of the love between Desdemona and Cassio is even more firmly fixed in Othello's mind and heart, the more so since he has already been able to go through all his memories of her relations with the young, handsome, intelligent lieutenant. Something that previously did not draw attention and did not arouse suspicion now seems quite different. These suspicious details slowly mount up: (1) the trouble Cassio took to arrange a meeting between Desdemona and Othello. He was at Brabantio's house far too often. That is suspicious. (2) Cassio often took Desdemona in a covered gondola. True there was a servant but for a little money she would do as she was told. (3) Cassio's assiduity over the marriage also begins to look suspicious. Why make such efforts? To get them married so he could be near to her, and then with time, or even immediately after the marriage, start to pay court to her and systematically implement his plan. (4) Their friendly banter, the glances that were too affectionate and considerate on his side. Even Cassio did not notice how his face changed when he met Desdemona. Only now, with hindsight did Othello realise the import of what he had seen earlier but did not understand because of his disingenuousness.

Othello recalled all these past hours and his suspicion was strengthened. Desdemona's purity had not been compromised in his eyes, she herself had no suspicion of what was happening to her. On the other hand, the more his memories take her away from him, the more dearer she becomes to him, the more prestigious, the more unattainable. Another hour of reflection and her youthful attraction to someone young like her is beyond doubt. The mistake he made, as an old man, to marry someone younger, became ever more obvious to him.

He could only reproach her with one thing: why did she not tell him directly? But, Desdemona does not suspect what I well know.

'So, I have no wife', he says to himself over and over again. 'However, soon the sun will set, night will fall and I shall have to go to her, as I did yesterday in the bedroom.' But what seemed a fairy tale to him yesterday makes him shudder at the very thought of it. He is afraid to be with her today. He flees from her, first to the garden, then to the furthest rooms in the castle. He opens a door, climbs a steep staircase higher and higher, and suddenly he is on the top of the tower. What is happening down there? Do they think I have gone, am dead? Let them look. I will keep quiet and then it will be obvious what is to be done.

Now he has fled from everyone but not from himself and not from Iago. These two enemies, like shadows, follow him. Iago, like a vigilant detective, and provocateur always has him in his sights

What do you suppose the nature of Othello's mood is? He has been supremely happy with Desdemona. His honeymoon was a dream, the heights of passion. Ordinarily actors playing Othello do not convey these heights sufficiently. The writer gives little time and space to them and yet they are important to show what Othello has lost, the subject to which he turns in the scene on the tower.

Can you renounce a happiness which has become part of you? It is difficult to recognise your loss. When you deprive a man of something that is his life, he is first dazed, loses all balance, then, painfully, tries to get it back. First it was enchantment, how can he go on living without it? In tortured, sleepless nights a man living a crisis goes through his whole life. He weeps for what he has lost, prizes it more and more, and compares it to his future which he can picture in his imagination.

What do we need to be able to fulfil this inner work which is huge? We have to turn inside ourselves to see our past and foresee our future. This is a very profound moment. It is hardly surprising then that in such a situation we do not notice what is going on around us; we are abstracted, strange, and when we return from our imagination to the real world, we are even more horrified, in greater turmoil and look for an excuse to pour out the pain and bitterness we stored while we looked inside.

That, for me, is the nature of Othello's mood in this scene. That is the reason for where it is set. That is why Othello flees to the top of the tower, as in this scene, then flies downwards, to some cellar filled with junk, to hide from people and not let them see his mood.

That is why I see the line of this scene like this: he has gone up the tower to experience the words, 'False to me? To me?' (I do not in fact like the words 'Ha! false to me. To me?' because they contain a threat and there is no element of threat in his state of mind.)

What do the words mean with the repeated 'To me'? 'For that love I gave to her with all my heart and for which I am prepared for any sacrifice, could she not have said three words to me, "I love Cassio?" ' I would have done anything to give her what she wants. I would have gone away, or perhaps stayed to watch over her. But how could she repay my gift of myself by betraying, deceiving me?

I maintain that Othello is not the typical jealous man. Petty jealousy, which is the way Othello is usually played, belongs to Iago. I now see that Iago is really jealous of Emilia in a base, vulgar way. Othello has a noble heart.

Stanislavski provided Leonidov with a guide to physical actions in the Tower scene (Act III scene iii 338–481) by breaking down the dialogue into bits and tasks. This gives a clear indication of his practice at the time when he was drafting the chapter on Othello.

The Plan of Physical and Elementary Psychological Actions

Your role is ready and is going well. There is no purpose in my explaining the psychological line of the role, it would merely confuse you. My task is to help you set what you have already done, to suggest to you a simple score, so that, by following it you are not diverted along other lines and lead you away from the creative mood. This score, or line, which you should follow must be simple. It should attract you by its simplicity. A complex psychological line with all its subtleties and nuances would only confuse you. Mine is a very simple line of physical and elementary psychological tasks and actions. So as not to frighten feeling let us call this line the *plan of physical tasks and actions* but, as we are acting, do only take it for what it is, but, as a preliminary, once and for all let us agree that the hidden essence does not lie in the physical tasks but in psychological refinement, nine-tenths of which consists in subconscious feelings. You cannot dip your hand into the sack of the subconscious and rummage about. The subconscious has to be approached differently, like a huntsman after game which he entices out of the thickets. You will not discover these birds if you look for them; you need decoys to which the birds will fly. These are the decoys in the form of physical and elementary psychological tasks and actions that I want to give you.

The plan of the physical and elementary psychological tasks:

Bit A (I)

Ha! Ha! False to me?

Task: need to decide *why* or *for what reason* Desdemona has been false to me.

So the task and the bit is called *why*?

Explanation. These are the elementary tasks we are speaking of. Imagine that, before the curtain went up, I had asked you to resolve that problem: once upon a time, in a kingdom somewhere, there was a beautiful young woman etc., etc., who had fallen in love with a monstrous Persian or a Chinese or something similar. Then I tell you the story of Desdemona and Othello, how Desdemona had refused all offers from suitors of high rank, how she had left her father's house and in the height of a storm has

followed her husband to war, as she had spent an unforgettable poetic 24 hours with him and did all that to deceive him.

My request to you is this: explain to me why, for what purpose would a decent girl behave like that? Why would she need to?

That is the elementary-psychological problem that concerns Othello at the beginning of the scene and which the actor has to resolve at every performance.

That is it. The difficulty is to stick to this task as you are acting and not to slide over into some showy, actorish task.

You might say, this is cold. So be it. Let it be cold but true. You can go from the true to the real.

Is heat better, even when untrue, false? There is no way you can go from to the real.

Can you maintain that an actor who has spent years preparing the role and the play having let his imagination wander through every moment in entire poems, seeing the set and the lights before him, feeling his make-up and costume, communicating with the other actors, who are living the common atmosphere they have created, reaching white heat thanks to the participation of the audience – do you maintain the actor forgets all this when he is given a task, similar to his situation in the play, and can you maintain that he remains cold?!

Of course, all this will come back spontaneously and this task will become a decoy for the inspiration that he stored up within him. Here is the secret of this trick. If you portray everything you have prepared for the role in a direct manner 90 per cent of what you do is probable, the things you have come across as you play the line of feeling. If you start with actions, nothing more, and resolve the problem anew in every performance, you will be following the right line and feeling will not be scared and will come to you.

Bit B (II)

Iago: Why, how now general! no more of that
 Othello: Avaunt! Be gone! Thou hast set me on the rack,
 I swear 'tis better to be much abused
 Than but to know't a little.

Title of the bit and task: to get away from Iago so as not to hear or see him.

Explanation. Imagine that a surgeon has just performed an almost unbearably painful operation, and five minutes later he returns to probe the wound again.

The rest is self-evident. That is all there is. At every performance decide how you will get away from the pain the doctor inflicts.

Bit C (III)

From Iago's words *How now, my lord?*
to Othello's *Othello's occupation's gone*.

Title: understand what you have done to me.

Task: in every possible way, using every possible adaptation that comes into your mind, on the spot, consciously or unconsciously, show – or rather – try to see with your inner eye and try to make a callous Iago feel what he has done, the pain Othello is going through.

The more clearly you explain, the better you will fulfil the task.

This bit contains the farewell to arms that could lead you into 'emotion'.

To obliterate that you need action. When true emotion is needed for an action, it comes of itself but that is not the emoting that bad actors of the school of representation wish to use to fill the emptiness of their hearts.

What is action?

Allow me to let my imagination wander and I will suggest various things to you.

First it could be a wish to convince Iago.

Or, second, Othello has momentarily forgotten Iago and wants to explain what his future is and what awaits him for himself.

Note: this task is even more difficult because it invites emoting. And so I would only approach it through the first task. This should act as a tuning-fork which makes it easier for you to find the right tone for the second.

Third, in his mind's eye Othello sees his army, drawn up below in the square, or even further away, the battlefield, so that he almost shouts towards them and says adieu in reality.

Note: but this is near to emoting and so this task cannot be approached directly but only via the other two, or, rather, we can reach this in the playing.

And behind all these tasks Othello seems to be saying: understand what you have done to me, this is what you have taken away from me. He is almost in anguish and to increase that, I have nothing against a technical pause¹⁴ after his speech.

Note: if the whole of the preceding line had been performed correctly and the actor has understood the nature of despair and knows what a desperate man does, if he has performed (even with little feeling) these truthful actions, with no clichés then he can use the technical pause to

lure the audience and intensify the impression without tiring himself (very important).

The technical pause is useful because it provides a transition to what follows.

[. . .]

If you find it hard to feel any attraction for military life, any feeling, enthusiasm for it, find an analogy. I would find this useful: suppose I had been forced to quit the theatre forever so that never again would I hear the bell before curtain-up, feel the backstage nerves, the excitement and expectation in the green room. If I had to say goodbye to all that in my mind, I know what feelings and experiences we would be talking about. Knowing the right colour, it would be easy for me to depict my feelings.

I will applaud you warmly when you hold a pause, motionless, not noticing anything around you, and see with your inner eye see the whole picture as infinitely dear to a genuine artist in war. Remain still, wipe away the tears that roll down your cheeks, control yourself so as not to burst into tears openly, and speak in a barely audible voice, the way we speak of our dearest and most secret things.

This speed can be divided up by long pauses during which the actor maintains a frenzied stillness as he contemplates what he has lost. In other pauses, he can fall back against a stone and weep a long time without a sound, shaken, inclining his head as though taking his leave. This is not the sentimental passion of a military man but a tearful adieu before death.

Bit D (IV)

Is't possible . . .
 . . . take mine office

Title of the bit and the task: make Iago understand he cannot trifle with me with impunity.

The actor uses every possible ways and means, adaptations, cajoling, warnings, intimidation, and, finally physical force, and a threatening face to alert Iago as to what awaits him.

Wounded in his heart by the picture of what he has lost, he feels the need to vent his pain on someone. He starts with Iago.

At the end of the bit, at Iago's words *Othello grace! Othello heaven forgive me!* Othello, carried away by the feeling seems to want to exact vengeance immediately. But Iago gives such a great cry he brings him back to reality. Othello stops a moment, realising what he has just done. He is full of disgust and flees. Where?

This is where I need the platform we talked about at the beginning of the scene.

Bit E (V)

. . . take mine office
 . . . sith love breeds such offence

Title: what have I done?

Task: to hide so as not to see myself or others.

Explanation: Othello is so sick at heart, he feels so ashamed that he has to be completely alone. Such is why he runs into the background and lies down.

Iago follows his countertask. A skilful actor, still panting from the struggle that has just taken place, genuinely frightened by the death threat he has just escaped from, he uses his state for a fresh provocation. He wants to give Othello a lesson he will never forget, frightening him by telling him he is leaving.

To play this scene with heat he uses his state of nervous excitement. Othello is stretched out upon the ground, motionless in his despair. (No tears are wanted here, as is usually the case. His pain is beyond tears.)

Bit F (VI)

Nay, stay . . .
 . . . behold her topped

Title: Help! Save me! I have no strength!

Task: draw Iago's pity to obtain his help.

If, in bit C, Othello wanted to explain to Iago the harm he had done him, now he wants to attract his pity, show, physically, the hell he is going through.

It is the sort of display people show each other to depict for themselves what is happening to them.

Othello uses all kinds of adaptations, all kind of nuances of voice and gesture that can explain, to the eye rather than the ear, what he is feeling.

Iago understand Othello's state of mind. He now feels indispensable and becomes more authoritarian.

Bit G (VII)

Death and damnation! . . .
 . . . too weak for my revenge.

Title: investigator.

Task: I want to understand.

Fume, but that would not be good for the gradual changes of colour. So, when he exclaims 'Death and damnation!, Monstrous! Monstrous! I'll tear her all to pieces!' You must understand that this is not because of an established fact but a suspicion. That is enough to encourage Iago to continue.

These outbursts are not the most important element in Othello's performance, but what happens while Iago is speaking? He listens avidly and that, naturally, encourages Iago to go on.

At the words 'Monstrous! Monstrous!' for the first time Othello believes the facts might be true. He is dumbstruck. The next line, 'Nay, this was but his dream', etc., is delivered in the same tone.

Still stunned, he takes in the news.

The line, *I'll tear her all to pieces!*, bursts from him instinctively, like the roar of a tiger.

In the next line, *I gave her such a one* he painfully shows Iago he is right.

All these are steps, an approach towards an ultimate decision, but do not forget only an approach and the inner justification for them lies in the task: I want to understand. The following three lines *O that the slave had forty thousand lives*, etc., are spoken not in a rage but with terrible pain, in anguish not forcefully for the sake of the gradations and placing of colours.

The bit ends with a huge technical pause in which the actors cease to live the feelings that have built up during the performance

How are we now to establish Iago's line in this bit?

In A–D he merely tried to attract Othello's attention. The fact that the Moor wanted to throw him from the tower served his purpose since he has drawn a reaction from Othello and an appeal for help.

From then on Iago follows his own line. As ever, not openly but behind a mask of bonhomie. Now he pretends he is being forced to reveal the truth to save Othello

The Moor demands an answer, no matter what, and obliges him to reveal what he does not want to reveal. Against his will, Iago looks for facts to clarify the matter is oppressing him. In a word, he plays on the fact that he has to do something, but it is difficult to betray a comrade. He would rather not do that. The actor must fake bonhomie convincingly enough to trick not only Othello but the audience as well.

After the pause, Othello rises.

Bit H (VIII)

Now do I see, 'tis true . . .
 . . . a capable and wide revenge.

If, in C, Othello illustrated what Iago had done to him and, in F, he illustrated his pain, in H he illustrates the change that has taken place in him.

That is the task in this bit which I will entitle: *this is who I am now*.

I am looking, as previously, for technical ways of preventing the actor from going into high voltage, otherwise he will tear a passion to tatters. If he goes into high voltage, it is all over. To prevent him going in that direction, he needs a physical or elementary psychological task. He should hang on to it, especially here. What he does must be productive and to the purpose.

Bit I (IX)

Now by yond marble heaven . . .
 . . . upon the instant I'll put thee to't.

Title: the oath.

Task: cut off all lines of retreat (strengthen the decision so that there is no going back).

Bit J (X)

Within these three days . . .
 . . . I am your man forever.

Title: the sentence.

Task: confide a terrible secret that it is difficult to admit to oneself.

Explanation: the decision has been made but it is so terrible we do not dare put it into words, we want to express it by the eyes. This is the terrible secret a man confides to another, mysteriously, between heaven and earth. They mostly speak with their eyes.

Here is the actor's plan for this scene:

- A (I) Resolve the problem: why?
- B (II) Flee from Iago.
- C (III) Make Iago understand what he has done to him.
- D (IV) Warn Iago: beware, you cannot trifle with me with impunity.
- E (V) What have I done? What filth!
Task: hide, not see myself or others.
- F (VI) Help! Save me! I have no strength!
Task: to arouse Iago's pity, obtain his help.
- G (VII) The investigator.
- H (VIII) This is who I am now.
Task: show the change in Othello.
- I (IX) The oath
Task: Cut off all lines of retreat.
- J (X) The sentence
Task: confide the most terrifying, deep secret one dare not admit to oneself.

You can act this plan in five minutes. You need to achieve all the nuances of feeling, not difficult to prolong them. The plan creates and puts you in possession of certain moods, experiences and feeling.

Once the role has been worked on in your imagination, then you can use the plan to feel all of the major bits, extend them by fulfilling the tasks, using all kinds of adaptations, even false ones, provided feeling has been brought to a certain level and in a certain atmosphere.

When you can act the whole plan in five minutes, you can take it the scene is ready and guarantee you will not go stray, but learn it by heart so that you can do it even if you are woken up suddenly. It is the lifebelt to which you must cling, and so confirm it and develop it. That is the technique of experiencing.

2

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The first acquaintance with a role takes place in most theatres in the following manner. The cast gathers to hear the play read to them. If the reading is done by the author or someone who knows the work, so well and good. He need not be a good reader but he knows the inner line of the piece. Such people give a correct impression of the work and illuminate it. Unfortunately, quite often, the play is read by someone who does not know it. In these circumstances a somewhat distorted view is conveyed to the future interpreters of the text. This is extremely damaging since first impressions are deeply engraved on the actor's mind. It is difficult to correct these initial misunderstandings for the future creators of the new production.

After the first reading, in the majority of cases, the listeners have an impression of the work which is far from clear. To remedy that, a so-called 'chat' is organised. That is to say, the cast gathers together again and each member gives his opinion about the play he has heard. Views are rarely unanimous on any given point. More often than not they are quite contradictory and for the most disparate and unexpected reasons. Confusion reigns in the minds of those about to interpret the script.

Even those who apparently have some concept of the work lose their grip on it. It is bad to be deprived of your opinions. After these chats the artists are as puzzled about their new roles as they would be if faced with a

riddle they had to solve quickly. It is both painful and comic to see how defenceless they are. It is also deplorable and shameful because of the impotence of our psycho-technique. In order to penetrate the mysterious innermost depths of a part, artists not equipped with a 'system' try to force an entry any way they can. Their only hope is that some happy accident will let them through. They can do no more than latch on to words like 'intuition', 'subconscious' which they do not, in fact, understand. If they are lucky and fortune is with them they regard it as an act of Providence, a gift from the gods.

'If luck is not with them, they spend hours staring at an open script, trying all ways to get into the part, not only mentally but physically. Tense, exhausted by their efforts, they try to concentrate by mumbling the words of the text, which are quite foreign to them. Their gestures and facial expressions, which are not motivated from within, are not real; they are horrible grimaces. When no other help is forthcoming they get into costume and make-up so as to approach the part from the outside.

'It is difficult to get into a body which is not one's own size. Where is the chink in the armour? The result is tension. Even those rare, vital moments which gave inner life and stirred the soul after the first reading come to an abrupt end and the artist stands before his role as before a stuffed dummy into which he cannot squeeze, like the heart of Sugar into its wrapper, or Water into the tap in *The Blue Bird*.

'What harm this does to his creative energy!

'To get the poor souls out of trouble, the director gathers all concerned round the table and spends several months analysing the play and the individual roles in detail. They talk about the play once more, saying whatever comes into their head. They exchange views, discuss with each other, invite specialists for various talks, read documents, hear lectures. They also look at sketches or models of the sets and costumes intended for the production. Then they decide, down to the most trivial detail what each of the actors will do, what each of them must feel, when, eventually, they get up on the stage and start to live their parts.

'In the end the actor's heart and mind are filled with a mass of details, some useful, some not, like a chicken that has been fattened up by being stuffed with nuts. Not being in a position to absorb everything which has been violently crammed into his heart and mind the actor loses contact also with those rare moments when he was able to identify with the role.

'And then they tell him, "Get up on stage, play your part and apply everything you have learned in the recent months of group study." With a stuffed head and empty heart the actor goes out on stage and simply can't

do anything. More months are needed to get rid of all that is superfluous, to select and assimilate the essential, for him to discover himself – bit by bit, let us hope – in the part.

‘The question then arises whether it is right to force a part in the early stages when it is important to keep it fresh. Is it any good imposing ideas, judgements, perceptions about the part when the mind of the creative artist has not yet been opened up?

‘Of course, some things of value resulting from such work enter his mind and help the creative process. But far more which is superfluous goes in too, unnecessary information, ideas and feelings which, initially, only clutter up the head and the heart, frighten an actor and inhibit his own free creation. To assimilate what is external and alien is more difficult than to create with one’s own intelligence and heart.

‘But, worst of all, all these commentaries, coming from outside, fall on unprepared, untilled, arid soil. It is not possible to judge a work or the experiences it contains, if you have not recognised some part of yourself in the author’s writing.

‘If the actor is in a prepared state to learn alien ideas and feelings armed with his internal forces and his external apparatus, which makes physical characterisation possible; if he feels firm ground beneath his feet, he will learn what he needs to accept or reject among the advice, useful or otherwise, which he is offered. So, I am not against discussion and work at the table but what is not purposeful.’

After a pause of some length Tortsov continued:

‘My approach to a new role is quite different: no reading, no discussions, the actors are immediately given a rehearsal call.’

‘What?’, the students did not understand.

‘I go further. You can act a play that has not yet been written.’

. . . ?!

We could not find an answer.

‘You don’t believe me? Let us try something. I have a play in my head. I will tell you the plot episode by episode and you act it. I will watch what you say and do impromptu and I will write down what is good. So, by our common efforts we shall write a play and immediately act an unwritten work. We shall share the royalties equally.’

. . . ?!

The students were even more bewildered and understood nothing.

‘You know from your own experience the actor’s state of mind on stage. We call it “the inner creative state”.

‘It combines all the elements into one, makes them alert, and points them in the right direction during creative work.

‘It would appear that this state of mind would enable you to approach a play and a role to study it in detail.

‘But I maintain that is not enough. There is something lacking, and for the creative artist to seek out and understand the essence of the writer’s work and form an opinion about it he still needs something to give him an impetus and set all his inner forces to work. Without that kind of analysis the play and the role remain cerebral.

‘Our intelligence is amenable. It can set to work any time. But it is not enough. We need the immediate, fervent participation of our emotions, wants and all the other elements of the inner creative state. With their help we must create the real awareness of the life of the role. After that the analysis of the play and the role will not be cerebral but will stem from the whole creative organism.’

‘Look, please, I’m sorry but how can that be? To be aware of the life of a role we must know what the writer has written, we must, with respect, study it. But you maintain we should not do that without first feeling it.’

‘Yes’, Tortsov confirmed. ‘We need to know the play but not go to it cold, or casually. *We must first fill the inner creative state you have prepared with real awareness of the life of the role, not only mentally but physically.*

‘Just as yeast causes fermentation, so a total awareness of the life of a role produces an inner warmth, a coming to the boil necessary for the process of creative understanding. We can only speak of the approach to a play and a role when the actor is in that creative mood.’

‘Where are we to find the real mental and physical awareness of the life of a role?’, the students asked in surprise?

‘That will be the subject of today’s class.’

‘Kostya! Do you remember Gogol’s *The Government Inspector*?’ Tortsov asked, suddenly turning to me.

‘Yes, but not very well, only in general outline.’

‘Good. Go up on stage and play Khlestakov’s entrance in Act Two.’

‘How can I when I don’t know what to do?’, I objected in surprise.

‘You don’t know everything, but you know something. Play that something. In other words, perform the smallest physical actions in the life of the role that you can play sincerely, truthfully, as yourself.’

‘I can’t do anything because I don’t know anything!’

‘How so?’, Tortsov objected. ‘In the script it says, Enter Khlestakov. Can you enter a room in an inn?’

‘Yes.’

‘Then do it. Later on Khlestakov takes Osip to task for lounging about on the bed. Can you do that?’

‘Yes.’

‘Then Khlestakov wants to make Osip go out and get some food. Do you know how to approach someone with a ticklish question?’

‘That, too.’

‘Then play what is available to you, what you feel to be true, what you can really believe in.’

‘What is first available to us in a new role?’ I asked for clarification.

‘Very little. You can convey the surface plot and its episodes and its simplest physical actions.

‘At first that is all you can do sincerely, truthfully, as yourself, and on our own responsibility. If you try to go further, you will encounter tasks that are beyond you, you will run the risk of going astray, of falling into the power of lies, which will lead to overacting and an assault on your nature. Beware, initially, of tasks that are too difficult for you. You are not ready to get to the heart of a new role. And so stick strictly within the limits of physical actions, find their logic and sequence without which you cannot discover truth, belief and afterwards the state we call “I am being”.’

‘You say: tell us the storyline and simple physical actions’, I argued, ‘but the storyline tells itself as the play unfolds. And it is the writer’s.’

‘Yes, his, not yours. Let it stand. But we need your attitude towards it. Let the physical actions happen but they must be your own, no longer someone else’s. You cannot live sincerely actions that are not yours. You have to create your own, similar to the role’s, indicated by your consciousness, wants, feelings, logic, sequence, truth and belief. Try it. Go up on stage and start with Khlestakov’s entrance. Leo will play Osip for us and Vanya the waiter.’

‘With pleasure!’

‘But I don’t know the words and I have nothing to say’, I said stubbornly.

‘You don’t know the words, but you remember the drift of the conversation?’

‘More or less.’

‘Then give us that in your own words. I will tell you the order of the ideas. And you will soon latch onto their sequence and logic.’

‘But I don’t know the character I’m supposed to portray!’

‘But you do know an important rule. It states: whatever role the actor is playing, he must always do what he does as himself, at his own risk. If he doesn’t or if he loses himself in his role, he kills the character, because he has deprived it of living feeling. So, play every character as yourself, in the given circumstances the writer has provided. In that way you will first feel yourself in the role. Once that has happened, it will not be difficult to cultivate the role in yourself. Living, genuine, human feeling is good soil for that.’

Tortsov showed us how to turn ‘Maloletkova’s room’ into a room in an inn. Leo laid down on the sofa and I entered from the wings and prepared to play, as myself, as requested, a hungry young gentleman. I entered slowly, handed Osip my cane and top hat – in a word repeated all the clichés of a classic role.

‘I don’t understand who you are’, said Tortsov when we had finished.

‘I was being myself.’

‘It wasn’t like you. You are quite different in life from what you were like on stage. In life you aren’t like that and you come into a room quite differently.’

‘How should I do it then?’

‘With some kind of concern, an inner goal, with curiosity, not empty as you were just now. [In life] you observe every moment, every stage of human awareness. You made an entrance like an actor but I want a human being. In life there are other impulses to action. Find them, on stage. If you enter for some reason, or, on the other hand, for none like Khlestakov these actions help evoke the appropriate mood. The usual theatrical entrance, on the other hand, prevents this and produces something quite different: external, showy histrionics. Your entrance was theatrical, “in general”, there was no logic or sequence in your actions. You missed many essential moments. For example, in life, wherever you go, you have to find your bearings and find out what is happening, where you are and how you should behave. But you came on and without even looking at the bed or Osip said, “Still lounging about on my bed”. You slammed the door in the way they do with canvas sets. You didn’t recall or convey the weight of the door. The doorknob worked as if by magic. All these small actions require particular time and attention. Without that people do not recall, feel, recognise truth, they do not believe what they are doing is genuine.

‘After all the serious work you have done for a whole year on actions without objects, you should be ashamed of the mistakes you have made.’

‘They happened because I didn’t know where I was coming from’, I said in my own defence, embarrassed.

‘Really! How can you not know on stage where you have come from and why! You must know that in detail. Entrances from “outer space” never work in the theatre.’

‘Where did I come from then?’

‘That’s nice! How should I know? That’s your business. In any case, Khlestakov tells us where he has been. But as you don’t remember, so much the better.’

‘Why?’

‘Because then you have to approach the role as yourself, from life, not from the stage directions, outworn conventions and clichés. This will make you independent in your views on the character. If you were guided by what is printed you would not fulfil the tasks I want, as you would be blindly doing what the writer says, relying on him, stating his lines, teasing his character and his actions which are not yours, instead of creating a character similar to the writer’s.

‘That is the reason why, at first, I do not give the actor a script, or a role and ask him not to do anything at home, so as not to spoil my ideas.

‘Surround yourself with the given circumstances of the play and answer sincerely: what would you (not someone you don’t know like Khlestakov) do to get out of an impossible situation?’

‘Yes’, I sighed, ‘to do that and not follow the writer blindly requires a lot of hard thinking.’

‘Well said!’, Tortsov remarked.

‘I transformed myself for the first time, felt the situation and the given circumstances in which Gogol placed his characters. For the audience their situation is comical but for Khlestakov and Osip it is impossible. I felt that today for the first time and yet how many times have I read *The Government Inspector* and seen it acted!’

‘That was because you made the right approach. You transposed the situation, the given circumstances in which Gogol placed his characters, into yourself and felt them. That’s important! That’s splendid! Never force your way into a role, never study it until you feel you have to. You must select and play whatever is available to you, however small, in the life being portrayed. You did that here, today. As a result, you felt yourself in the role just a little. Starting from there you can go further and with time reach a point where you feel the role in you.

‘So, tell me, what would you do in real life, here, today, now to get out of the situation Gogol has put you in? Will you die of hunger in the God-forsaken hole you find yourself in?’

I said nothing. I was somewhat confused.

'Think. What would your day be like?', Tortsov prompted me.

'I would get up late. The first thing would be to persuade Osip to go to the inn-keeper and try to get some tea. Then there would be the whole business of washing, brushing my clothes, getting dressed, smartening myself up, drinking tea. Then I would walk the streets, not sit in an airless room. I think that during my walk my town clothes would draw the attention of the provincials.'

'Especially the ladies', Tortsov said teasingly.

'So much the better. I will try to get to know someone and get myself invited to lunch. Then I would take in the shops and the market.'

Having said that, I suddenly felt rather like Khlestakov.

'I would indulge myself and, where possible, in the shops or the market, would try something tasty from a vendor's tray. This would not, of course, satisfy my appetite but, rather, whet it. Then . . . I would go to the post-office to see whether a money order had arrived for me.'

'It hasn't', croaked Tortsov urging me on.

'Now I am worn out because my stomach is empty. There is nothing left for it but to go home and try to get a meal again at the inn through Osip.'

'This is what you bring on with you when you enter in the second act', Tortsov interrupted me. So, in order to come on stage like a human being, and not an actor you had to know who you are, what had happened to you, how you are living here, how you have spent your money, where you came from and many other given circumstances relating to your actions. In other words, merely to make a proper entrance, you need to know them and your relationship to it.

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Tortsov continued working with me on Khlestakov.

'Now you know what you bring on stage with you', he said. 'Establish the right human process of communication so that you perform actions not for the audience but for the object of your attention and go on with physical actions.'

'Ask yourself what it means to go into your room at the inn after a fruitless walk round the town. Then ask, what would I do if I were in Khlestakov's shoes here, today, now after returning home? How would you deal with Osip, knowing that "he was lounging on your bed again"? How would you persuade him to go to the landlord and get a meal? How

would you wait for the result and what would you do in the meantime? How would you receive this food? Etc., etc.

‘In a word, recall all the episodes in the act. Understand the actions of which each was created. Follow the logic and sequence of all of these actions. If you go through the whole play in this way, then you will act the story according to its episodes and physical actions in a natural manner.

‘Start by defining the nature of each of these actions, and their logic and sequence.

‘We are familiar with this process because of the countless exercises in our classes in training and drill. I find these quite easy and can manage them. So, today, I rehabilitated myself after yesterday’s failure, and, mainly, Rakhmanov. This time I did not leave out a single, secondary moment and showed that I understood the nature of each of the physical actions that had been indicated.’

Tortsov recalled our first experiments in actions without objects a year ago, a memorable lesson for me, when for the first time he made me count ‘nothing’ instead of money.

‘The time we spent on that exercise’, said Tortsov ‘and how quickly you managed a a similar exercise today.’

After a short break he continued:

‘Now that you have understood the logic and sequence, and felt the truth of physical actions, and believe what you are doing on stage, it will not be difficult to repeat the same line of actions in the different given circumstances the play offers us and which are invented and filled out by your imagination.

‘So, what would you do here, today, now in this supposed room if you returned after a fruitless expedition through the town?’

‘Start, but don’t act, just decide and tell us what you would do.’

‘Why not act? That would be easier.’

‘Of course. Acting out clichés is always easier than behaving truthfully’. ‘I wasn’t talking about clichés.’

‘But for the moment that’s all you can talk about. Clichés are ready-made, but genuine, productive and purposeful actions, motivated from within, have first to live, and that is what you are trying to do.’

Leo lay down on the bed. Vanya got ready for his entrance as the waiter.

At the same time, Tortsov made me stand on stage and talk loudly about myself:

‘I will remember the given circumstances, the past, the present’, I said. ‘As to the future, it has nothing to do with the character but with me, playing it. Khlestakov can’t know his own future but I have to. My job as an actor is to prepare the future in the very first scene. The more hopeless

my situation in this dreadful room, the more unexpected, extraordinary, incredible my moving into the mayor's house, the lover's tangles, the matchmaking will be.

'I will remember the entire act episode by episode.'

I listed all the scenes and quickly based them on the given circumstances I had created.

When this was done, I concentrated and went into the wings. As I went I said to myself:

'What would I do if as I was returning to my room, I heard the landlord's voice?'

I wasn't able to establish this 'if' when I felt as though something had struck me from behind. I darted forward and, I don't know how, rushed onto the stage and found myself in my imaginary room.

'Original!', Tortsov laughed. 'Repeat the same actions in different given circumstances', Tortsov ordered me.

I went slowly into the wings and, after a pause to prepare myself, I opened the door and stood frozen in an agony of indecision, not knowing whether to go in or go downstairs to the dining room. But I entered and started looking for something with my eyes as though through a crack in the door from the wings. Having found my way into the situation, I exited once more.

After a short while, I entered again in a capricious, difficult mood, like a spoiled brat, and looked around nervously for some time, reflectively, and adapted to something.

I made all kinds of entrances, then finally said to myself:

'Now I think I know what I would bring on with me if I were in Khlestakov's shoes.'

'What shall we call what you have just done?', [Tortsov] asked.

'I was analysing, studying myself in Khlestakov's given circumstances.'

'Now I hope you understand the difference between approaching and assessing a role as yourself or as someone else, seeing it through your own or someone else's eyes – a writer, director or critic.

'As yourself you experience a role, as someone else you imitate it. As yourself, you understand the role with your intelligence, wants, and all the elements of your mind, but as someone else, in the majority of cases, only with your intelligence. We do not need exclusively rational analysis and understanding.

'We must take hold of the imaginary character with all our being, mentally and physically. That is the only approach I recognise. I am preparing you for it by creating the right state of being which is the only way to work on a role.'

. . . . 19 . .

‘What am I to do?’, he said, as he came into class, almost to himself. ‘Talk is boring, unconvincing in practical matters. Better to make you do things and feel for yourself what I want to explain. But, unfortunately, you have not mastered actions without objects sufficiently for you to be able to do what I want. I shall have to go on stage myself and show how you achieve *the life of the human body* through simple tasks and actions, and then create *the life of the human spirit* and how, by doing that you produce a *real awareness of the play and the role*, and how this awareness naturally turns into *the inner creative state*, which you are learning to create.’

Tortsov went up on stage and into the wings.

There was a long pause, during which we heard the sound of Leo’s bass voice. He was arguing about where it was better to live, in the country or St Petersburg.

Suddenly Tortsov ran out onto the stage. I shook at such an unexpected and unusual entrance for Khlestakov. Tortsov slammed the door and stood looking through the crack into the corridor. Evidently he imagined he had run away from the landlord.

I can’t say I was overenthusiastic about this innovation but it was performed with unusual sincerity. And Tortsov himself began to consider what he had done:

‘I overdid it!’, he mused to himself. ‘It should be simpler. Besides, is it right for Khlestakov? After all, as someone from St Petersburg at that time, he considers himself above the provincials.’

‘What prompted me to make such an entrance? What memories? Perhaps the combination of the puerile braggart and coward, that is Khlestakov’s inner nature? Where did my feelings come from?’

Having thought a little, Tortsov turned to us and asked:

‘What did I just do? I analysed what I felt by chance and what happened as a result by chance. I analysed my physical actions in the given circumstances but not just coldly, intellectually. All the elements helped me. I analysed my mind and body. That is the only kind of analysis I recognise. That is why, in our second class, I explained to you what *real awareness of the life of the play* is, and that it must be instilled into the *inner creative state*.

‘I shall continue my work and explain what my analysis suggested to me, my memories.’

‘Logic states that if Khlestakov is a braggart and a coward, that in his heart he is afraid to meet the landlord; outwardly he wants to put a brave

face on it and appear calm. He even exaggerates his calm, feeling his enemy's harsh gaze behind him and chills run up and down his spine.'

Tortsov went straight into the wings and prepared himself, and then performed his idea brilliantly. Was it because of a sense of truth of his physical actions that all the rest, i.e. his feelings followed genuinely? If that is the case, his method is a miracle,

Tortsov stood and thought for a while and then said:

'You saw that I did not do what I did purely intellectually, analytically but studied the character's inner human elements, and, through them, the natural impulse to physical action. I didn't carry the action all the way through because I was afraid of falling into clichés. But the most important thing is not the actions themselves but the emergence of natural impulses towards them.

'I try to find physical tasks and actions in living, human experience. To believe they are true, I have to give them a psychological base and justify them within the given circumstances of the role. When I have discovered and felt that justification, then my psyche, to a certain extent, merges with the role.'

Tortsov carried out exactly the same work with all the other bits: persuading Osip to go out and get a meal, the speech after he has left, the scene with the waiter and the meal.

When it was all over, Tortsov withdrew into himself, mentally examined what he had done and said:

'I feel I have indicated a thin line of the impulses to physical action in the real-life situation and the given circumstances . . .

'Having fumbled for the physical actions in the scene I have just played, I have to note them down just as we did when working on the pause of tragic inaction. Do you remember how we said it was all physiological? I shall do the same with Khlestakov's scene.'

Tortsov began to recall, and write down, all the impulses to action he had noticed in himself.

Grisha found an opportunity to take issue with one of the actions Tortsov had noted down.

'Look, please, I'm sorry, but that is purely psychological and not physical!'

'I thought we had agreed, you and I, not to quibble over words. Besides which we decided that there was a great deal of psychological in the physical and a great deal of physical in the psychological. For the moment I am going through the role in terms of its external action because that is all that interests me. What will come of it we shall see shortly.

'So . . .', Tortsov went back to making his notes.

When he had finished he explained:

‘We can make a similar list of physical tasks using the printed play. If we check the two lists against each other we will find that in places they are identical (where the actor and his part naturally come together) and in other places diverge (where there has been a mistake or where the actor’s personality emerges too clearly, sometimes getting near to the role, at other times diverging from it).

‘The actor’s and director’s work is then to bolster the moments when they merge and bring them together when they diverge. We shall talk about this in detail later. For the moment what I need are the moments when they merge which link the actor with the character he is playing. Passages that are alive draw the actor into the play, and then you do not feel out of place, and certain passages in the role are close to him.

‘Looking at the list’, Tortsov explained, ‘I reduce my tasks, so to speak, to a common denominator and ask myself: ‘why did I perform all these actions?’

‘Analysing and summing up everything I have done I have come to the conclusion that the basis for my tasks and actions was: ‘to eat something, satisfy my hunger’. That was why I came, that is why I made up with Osip, was careful with the waiter, then quarrelled with him. In the future all my actions in these scenes will be directed towards one basic task: “eat”.’

‘Now I shall repeat the actions that have been corroborated on this list’, Tortsov decided. ‘So as not to slip into clichés (because I have not yet created genuine, productive and purposeful actions), I will only go from one proper task to another, without fulfilling them physically. I shall limit myself to arousing inner impulses to action and will strengthen them by repeating them.

‘As regards genuine, productive, purposeful physical actions’, he repeated, ‘they emerge spontaneously. Nature, the miracle-worker, will take care of them.’

After that Tortsov went through all his physical actions, or, rather, he aroused all the necessary impulses to action.

He tried not to make any movements and conveyed his feelings with his eyes, facial expression and fingertips only. Once again he stated that actions happen of their own accord, that they cannot be restrained once inner impulses have been firmly established.

‘There comes a moment when I feel fully grown like a baby chick in its

shell. I feel cramped inside it and the need arises to break out of it so that I can have freedom of action.'

Tortsov once again concentrated his mind and began in turn, with the help of the given circumstances, to call to mind the impulses to physical action in the same order that he had written them. I followed the list and pointed out what he had missed.

'I feel', he said, without interrupting what he was doing, 'that long periods have been created out of individually different actions, and an unbroken line of logical and sequential actions out of those periods. They are pushing forward and that produces movement, and movement, a genuine inner life. The more I repeat this scene, the stronger the line becomes, the greater its momentum, life, truth and belief. Remember, in our terminology we call this unbroken line of physical actions *the life of the human body*.

'That's no trifling matter but half (not the more important half) of the life of the role.

'Consider this: the life of the human body of a role. That's enormous!'

After quite a long pause for reflection Tortsov said:

'Once the life of the human body has been created, we have to think about something more important: the life of the human spirit of a role.

'But it would seem it was already there inside me, of its own accord, regardless of my will and consciousness. The demonstration of that is that my physical actions as you confirmed, were not dry, formal, dead, histrionic but alive and justified from within.

'How did that happen? In a completely natural manner: the link between body and mind is unbreakable. The life of the first engenders the life of the second and vice versa. In each physical action, if it is not purely mechanical but brought to life from within, there is *inner action*, experiencing.

'So the role exists on two levels: inner and outer. They are intertwined. A common goal unites them and strengthens the unbreakable link.

'In the exercise with the "madman",¹ for example, the common inner effort towards self-preservation and your outer real actions were inseparable and ran parallel with each other.

'But think of another way the two levels are joined. On one of them all the efforts would be directed towards self-preservation, and on the other, simultaneously, would tend to increase the danger, that is to allow a violent, insane man access to the room. Need I point out that this is impossible, that the link between mind and body is unbreakable?

'I shall try it out for myself, do the scene from *The Government Inspector* again, not mechanically, as mere form, but totally justified by following the line of the life of the human body.'

Tortsov started to act and explained what his feelings were:

‘As I am acting, I listen to myself and feel that parallel with the unbroken line of physical actions, there is another line living inside me, drawing another line, that of the human spirit. It arose out of the physical and corresponds to it. But these feelings are still humdrum, and not very tempting. It is difficult to define them or be interested by them. But that’s no great problem. What is good is that I feel noticeable traces of the life of the human spirit in my role’, Tortsov affirmed. The more often I experience the life of the human body as I play Khlestakov, the more the life of the human spirit will be defined and set inside me.

‘The more often I sense these two lines coming together, the more I believe the psychophysical truth of that state of mind, the more I am aware of the two levels. The life of the human body is good soil in which to plant seeds that will grow into the life of the human spirit. Sow more of these seeds.’

‘How?’ I did not understand.

‘Create the magic “if”, given circumstances, imaginative ideas. They will soon come alive and merge with the life of the body, prompting physical actions and providing a basis for them. The logic and sequence of living actions helps strengthen the truth of what you are doing. In its turn, belief promotes experiencing.’

Tortsov repeated the physical actions on the list many times. I did not have to correct or prompt him as he remembered the sequence and proper order of the physical actions.

After he had done this two or three times, he said:

‘I am beginning to have a sense of logic and sequence, and, beyond them, the truth of the actions they produce. If only you knew how good that feels, how important that is!’

Doing this physically, Tortsov did not seem to realise that his genuine, productive, logical actions were psychological as well, without his willing it, being born within and expressing themselves in his face, eyes, inflexions, his hands. The truth was increased every time he did it and so his belief in what he was doing. Thanks to which his acting became ever more compelling.

I was amazed by his eyes. They were the same and not the same. They were stupid, unpredictable, naïve. They blinked too often because of short-sightedness. He could not see beyond the end of his nose. What was most amazing was that he did not notice what he was doing. Using his facial expression, he conveyed everything going on in his mind wonderfully and intelligibly. He did not make any gestures. Only his fingers worked, all unawares, most expressively. He did not speak words but

here and there came out with funny inflexions, that were also very expressive.

The more he repeated the so-called line of physical actions, or, rather, the inner impulses to action, the more involuntary movements appeared. He started to walk, sit, straighten his tie, admire his boots, his hands, clean his nails.

When he became aware of this, he cut down his involuntary movements or cut them out all together, evidently fearing they would turn into clichés.

The tenth time he repeated the scene his acting seemed complete, experienced and, because of the economy of movement, very expressive. Life with its genuine productive, purposeful actions had been created. I was carried away by the results, and could not stop myself applauding. The students joined in.

This genuinely surprised Tortsov. He stood still, stopped acting and asked us:

‘What’s that for? What happened?’

‘What happened was that you have never played Khlestakov before, never rehearsed it, but went on stage and performed and experienced the role’, I explained.

‘You’re mistaken. I didn’t experience or play Khlestakov and never could, because I haven’t the gifts for it. But I can properly perform the inner impulses to action, the genuine, productive, purposeful actions and the given circumstances the writer and I have created. Even that little gave you the slight sense of genuine life on stage. It was enough for you to feel the logic, the sequence, the genuineness of physical and then psychological actions and believe them.

‘Judge for yourself the strength of my approach to a role starting with simple, physical actions. It’s no accident I insist that you develop the technique of actions without objects and become master at it. When you can do what I did, grasp the role, at the next rehearsal you will play it for the director following the line of physical actions.

‘If the whole company were similarly trained, by the second or third rehearsal you could engage in a real analysis and study of a role, not by intellectually considering every word and move which drains the life out of a part but by the kind of analysis which increasingly gives a sense of the life of a role, which you feel not just with your heart but your body as well.’

‘How do we achieve that?’, the students asked eagerly.

‘By regular, systematic and absolutely correct exercises in actions without objects.

‘For example, I have been on stage a long time, nonetheless, every day, including today, I do these exercises for ten or twenty minutes in different

given circumstances, and always as myself, on my own responsibility. If it were not so, how long do you think I would have taken to understand the nature and constituent parts of each of Khlestakov's physical actions in that scene?

'If the actor does his exercises regularly, then he understands almost all the human actions in terms of their constituent parts and their logic and sequence.

'You must exercise daily, regularly just as singers vocalise and dancers work at the barre.

'Thanks to my systematic exercises on physical actions, I can play any part without rehearsal. You should conclude, on the basis of the demonstration I gave today, that it is very important for the actor. It is no accident that I insist that you pay great attention to these exercises. When you have developed this technique and Stoic attention at all levels, logic and sequence, the feeling of truth and belief as I have through long, hard work then you will be able to do what I did. Then your creative life will appear of its own accord, without the conscious mind and the subconscious, intuition, life-experience, the habit of showing human qualities of stage will set to work and create for you.

'Then your performances will always be fresh, new with the minimum of clichés and the maximum of truth, belief, human emotion, wants and living ideas.

'If you work on stage not in an actorish way, as mere form, stock-in-trade, but in a human way, if you are logically consistent in your reasoning and actions, if you bear in mind all the situations in the role, I don't doubt for a moment that you will know what you have to do. You will feel much that is close to the role. In these individual moments or in a whole scene you will be aware of yourself in the role, the play's atmosphere and some of the character's experiences will come alive in you. Understand that you must behave like the character in the given circumstances and according to his social standing.

'We call this merging with the role *the sense of oneself in the role and the role in oneself*.

'Go through the entire play in the same way, all the given circumstances, every scene, bit, task that is accessible to you at the start. Let us suppose you find corresponding actions in yourself, get used to performing them in logical sequence, from beginning to end. Then you will create some kind of outer life and action, the life of the human body.

'To whom should we attribute these actions?'

'Me!'

'The body's yours, the movements too, but the tasks their inner meaning,

their logic and sequence, the given circumstances are common to both. Where do you end and the character begins?’

‘There’s no way of telling!’ cried Vanya, confused.

‘But don’t forget that the actions you find are not simple, external but justified from within by your feelings. They draw strength from your belief in them and are brought alive by your state of “I am being”, and that inside you there an unbroken line of momentary emotions has subconscious and runs parallel to the line of physical actions. That is the line of genuine *experiencing*.

‘There is a perfect match between this line and the line of the actions of the actor/role. You know that you cannot sincerely, openly when you are feeling something else.

‘To whom shall we attribute these feelings, you or the role?’

Vanya waved his arms in despair.

‘Your head is spinning. That’s good because it shows that much of the role and much of you have become intertwined, so much so that it is difficult for you tell where the actor ends and the character begins.

‘When you are in that state, you come closer and closer to your role and feel it in you and you in it.

‘If you work on your role in this way, you have a picture of what its life is, not as mere form, rationally, but really, physically and psychologically, because one can’t live without the other. No matter if it is at first superficial, neither deep nor filled out, but there is flesh and blood here, and even the mildly apprehensive life of the person/actor/role.

‘In terms of this relationship to the character we can speak of its life and our own but not of a third person’s. This is of great importance when it comes to further, detailed work on the play. Because of it, everything you obtain will find a home, its own shelf, its hanger and will not wander pointlessly round your head without a definite place and not fill your brain as happens with actors who eat up words. In a word, you must make sure you do not approach a new role in the abstract, as to a third person, but concretely, as to yourself, your own life. When this sense of yourself in the role and the role in yourself is drawn into the genuine creative state, bordering on the subconscious, you can begin to study the play and look for the supertask boldly.

‘When you have become virtuosos in our psychotechnique, rehearsals will proceed very easily, they will be planned and fast. The question of the inner, outer and common creative state will be answered. You will be in control of them every minute of your life.

‘When you start to study the play, you must be filled with a sense of its real physical life. I don’t read it to you but tell you the story, the actions as

precisely as I do the given circumstances within which they unfold. I ask you to some extent to perform (in your own words, in addition to the given circumstances) all the physical actions in the play, in other words, roughly follow the line of the life of the human body.

‘You work at home and show me. I correct etc. In this way the life of the human body is created and, say that your creative state is ready, the *small* creative state.

‘My goal is to make you create anew living beings out of yourselves. The raw material must be drawn not from outside but from yourselves, your own emotion and other memories which you live through in reality, out of your wants, inner “elements”, that are similar to the character’s emotions, wants and “elements”.

‘Once again we ask nature for help, the subconscious, intuition, habits, experience, skills, everything that, without our being aware of it, stimulates physical action. How are we to stimulate the impulses to these instinctive, physical and other actions? You know from your work on pauses, “tragic inaction”, that we have to ask the question: “what would I do in real life in given circumstances similar to those in the play?” You trust your inner impulses, mechanical training, the link between the outer and the inner, human requirements, life-experience, in a word, you trust your nature. It better than anyone knows the logical sequence of feelings, the truth of the human organism, which we cannot but trust. All that remains is to listen to it.

‘You know that what matters is not the physical actions themselves but what stimulates them from within.

‘It is in this way that the line, the logic and sequence of physical actions, is created, instinctively and naturally. Pay attention to them and you will understand that a whole group of physical actions can be the result of a single inner urge, want, task, another group, one way or another, acts under the pressure of other causes. Put all these inner impulses, inspired by outer action, and you will obtain the inner, linear logic and sequence of feelings, efforts, wants, stimuli, etc. We guide it by creating this or that scene, act, play and the inner life of a role.

‘These are the “home-grown techniques” we use to indicate the way, as yet undefined by science to create the logic and sequence of feelings.

‘It is essential to define, that is, feel what you, as a human being, would do in real life if you found yourself in the character’s situation, given circumstances. You will be guided by your own human feelings, your own life-experience. All unawares, as a result of your own flair, truthful physical actions come to you.

‘Write down a list of physical actions you would perform, personally, if

you found yourself in the character's situation. These external actions prompt your own human feelings. Do the same thing with the role, as written, that is write down the list of actions the character performs in the play. Then compare the two lists, or, so to speak, lay one list on top of the other, as though making a tracing to see if they match.

'If the play is well written, if it is drawn from real human nature, human feelings, experiences, if your list was also suggested by your own nature so that in many, and, in particular key, basic moments there will be a match. These moments when, as a human being, you merge with the role are moments when you are united by feeling. To find yourself, if only partially, in the role and the role, partially in you, is a real achievement! That is the beginning of fusion, of experiencing. In the remaining moments in the role when the actor is not aware of himself, there are some signs of human nature, because a well-written part will be as human as we are, just as we sense another human being.'

. . . . 19 . .

Tortsov spoke to us once again of the psychotechniques for creating the life of the human spirit and through that the life of the human body. He explained his ideas, as always, through a comparison:

'Have you ever travelled? If so, then you know the changes that take place during the journey both in the traveller and outside him. Have you noticed how the train itself changes along the way, inside and out according to the countries through which it speeds?

'As it pulls out, the carriage seems new and gleaming with frost. Its roof is covered with snow, like a clean table-cloth. But inside it is dark because the winter light can hardly get through the frosty windows. Your head is full of gloom. You think of those you have left behind.

'The swaying of the train, the throb of the wheels lulls you. You feel sleepy.

'Two days pass. You are going south. Outside, everything is changing. The snow has started to melt. Through the window you see a different countryside. It is raining. But it is warm in the carriage because the heating is still on. The passengers change: other accents, other talk, other clothes.

'Only the railway lines don't change. They seem to stretch out endlessly, as do the telegraph poles.

'Two days more and further changes. The carriage rattles over sandy ground. The roof, the sides are covered in swirling dust and, all around, everything is shining in the sun, that is as warm as spring; opening buds, the smell of the fields, the heart is happy.

'On the far horizon there are the outlines of hills. Babbling brooks

turning into spring streams. A storm. Heat. Nature comes alive again. Wonderful air and fragrances. Ahead of us summer, heat, the sea, holidays.

‘But the rails go on and on. And the track. Are they what matter? They are needed only insofar as they carry us forward.

‘It is not they but what is round them or inside the carriage that interests you as a passenger. Moving along the track you come across more and more new places, receive more and more new impressions. You experience them, they delight or depress you, momentarily altering the passenger’s mood, transforming him.

‘It is the same on stage. What replaces the rails? What are we to do with them? How do we move along them right through the play?

‘At first it would seem that the best thing would be to use genuine, living, human feelings. Let them lead us. But the material of the mind is elusive. It cannot be firmly set. We cannot make solid “rails” out of it. We need material that is more “material”. The most appropriate for that purpose are *physical tasks*. They are performed by the body which is incomparably more solid than our feelings.

‘When the rails have been laid, get aboard and set off for new lands, i.e. the life of the play. You will move forwards, not staying on the spot, or thinking with your head. You will be actively doing things. It is only in this way that you can judge the life of the play and understand it in depth. Everything will hang on its proper hanger in the wardrobe.

‘The line of physical actions extends unbroken, like the railway track, secured by rigorous tasks, which we need as the iron road needs its nuts and bolts for the passenger. Just as it travels on the rails through different countries, the actor moves through the whole play using physical actions, through the given circumstances, the “I am being” and the figments of our imagination. We, like the passengers, find our way through many different situations, which create many different moods.

‘In the play, the actor meets new people, the characters, his fellow actors. He lives a common life with them, which stimulates corresponding experiences.

‘But you can’t pin them down! That is why, initially, so as not to get lost in the complicated twists and turns of the play, we must hold tight to the clear line of *physical actions*. We need it not for its own sake but as a well-established track along which we can move through the life of the play in a definite way, as though on rails.

‘Just as the passenger has no interest in the rails along which he is moving and the countries through which the iron road has been built, so in our own art we are not interested in physical actions themselves but the inner conditions, circumstances which are justified by the eternal life of

the role. We need a beautiful imagination to bring the life of the character alive, i.e. feelings, which are created in the heart of the human being/actor. We need compelling tasks which rise up before us the length of the play.

‘But how are we to find this unique truthful path among so many others that are false? The actor is faced, as at a railway junction with many different ways (experiences, images, ham acting, actors’ tricks, self-display, etc.). Take the right track and you will reach your goal. Take the wrong one and you will find yourself bogged down in playacting and posturing. It is the same as sitting in a railway junction and not in your carriage and finding yourself in some remote town and not Moscow. It is not easy to tell which the junctions are, but it is even more difficult to find the right track for each role that leads to genuinely creative acting. They, like the rails at a junction, stretch ahead, diverge, join, cross, intersect. Don’t forget you can fall from one, the true, into the other, the false.

‘To stop that happening, follow the clear track of physical actions. Don’t forget at the junctions where several tracks meet the track laid down by an experienced, well-trained “pointsman”.

‘This is the role we have to ascribe to the feeling of truth. It should always guide the actor along the right track.

‘. . . In moments of tragic experience on stage, the last thing you should think about is tragedy and feeling, but rather simple physical actions. That are justified by the given circumstances.’

Tortsov fell silent. A pause.

Suddenly, in the silence, Grisha could be heard grumbling:

‘Congratulations. Now we know all about lines of communication in art’, he said almost inaudibly.

‘What was that you said?’, Tortsov asked.

‘I said, with respect, that real actors don’t ride around in trains on the ground, they soar in aeroplanes above the clouds’, Grisha declaimed heatedly, a little hammy.

‘I like your comparison’, Tortsov said. ‘We’ll talk about it in the next class.’

. . . . 19 . . .²

‘So, our tragedian needs an aeroplane to soar above the clouds, not a rain running along the ground’, Tortsov said to Grisha, as he came into class.

‘Yes, I do!’, our ‘tragedian’ confirmed.

‘Unfortunately, before you can take to the air, the aeroplane has to travel along the runway for a certain period of time’, Tortsov noted. ‘So, as you

can see, to soar into the clouds you need the earth. Pilots need it just as actors need the line of physical actions in their unseen journey into the subconscious.

‘Or perhaps you can fly up above the clouds in a straight line without a runway? It is said engineering has made that a possibility but our technique still does not know how to get directly into the subconscious. If you fly upwards in a whirl of inspiration, then you can fly your “creative aeroplane” above the clouds vertically without a runway. The trouble is, that doesn’t depend on us and we can’t make any rules. All we can do is prepare the ground, lay down the rails, i.e. create physical actions that are strengthened by truth and belief.

‘As you can see, in our own field, we must not forget the “earth”.

‘With an aeroplane flight begins the moment the machine leaves the ground, and lift-off begins for us where real, or even ultra-naturalistic life ends.’

‘What did you say?’, I asked so I could manage to write it down.

‘What I mean is’, Tortsov explained, ‘I use the word ultra-naturalistic to define the mental and physical state which we consider to be wholly natural, and in which we can firmly believe in a natural manner. It is only then that the deepest secrets of our heart open wide and scarcely discernible hints, nuances, the special air of genuine, natural, deeply-seated feeling, which is so easily alarmed, rise to the surface.’

‘That means that feeling emerges only when the actor sincerely believes his physical actions and natural self are normal and truthful.’

‘Yes! Our deeply hidden secrets only open up when an actor’s inner and outer experiencing work in accordance with the laws laid down for them, when there is absolutely no forcing, no deviation from the norm, when there are no clichés and conventions, etc. In a word, when everything is true up to very extreme of ultra-naturalism.

‘But all you have to do is disturb our nature in the slightest degree and that is enough to kill all the elusive subtleties of subconscious experiencing.

‘That is why experienced actors with a well developed psychotechnique are afraid of any dislocation, false feeling or false physical actions on stage. So as not to alarm their feelings, they do not think about inner experiencing but focus their attention on the life of their human body. The life of the human spirit arises naturally through that, both consciously and subconsciously.

‘It is obvious from what I have said’, Tortsov summed up, ‘that we don’t need the truth of physical actions and belief in them for the sake of realism or naturalism, but so that they can evoke the psychological experiencing of the role naturally, automatically, so that we do not assault our feelings,

but rather preserve their virginity and purity, so as to convey the living, human essence of the character we are playing.

‘That is why I advise you not to lose contact with the ground when you fly upwards, or with physical actions when you fly into the world of the subconscious’, said Tortsov to Grisha, putting an end to the argument.

‘But it is not enough to fly upwards, you have to know where you are going’, Tortsov continued. ‘There, in the subconscious, as in the highest spheres of inspiration, there are no tracks, no rails, no point-masters. It is easy to go astray and take the wrong direction. How are we to find our way in this unknown world? In aviation they send out radio waves to guide pilotless planes that fly in inaccessible areas.

‘We do something similar in the theatre. When feelings fly into areas that are not accessible to consciousness, we work on our feelings obliquely, using stimuli and decoys. They contain something like “radio-waves” affecting our intuition, provoking a response from our feelings. We will talk about that in good time.’

I didn’t write down the end of the class because it was disrupted by a useless argument with Grisha, who, in the absence of Rakhmanov, was too noisy.

... 19 ..

Today’s class was devoted to an analysis of Tortsov’s work on the role of Khlestakov.

He explained:

‘People who do not understand the meaning of the line of the life of the human body laugh when you explain that a series of the most simple physical, real actions can give an impetus to the birth and creation of the superior life of the human spirit. They baulk at naturalism. But if you derive this word from “nature”, you realise that there is nothing compromising about it.

‘Besides, as I have already said, what matters is not the small, real actions but a whole series of human qualities which prove a helpful impetus in creating physical actions.

‘It is these qualities, that confirm the significance of the technique of creating the line of the life of the human body that I want to point out today.

‘I shall use the experiments I made in our previous class on the role of Khlestakov.

‘I begin with those personal qualities which form the basis of my technique for creating the life of the human body.

‘We know what they are and so I will only remind you of them.

‘We perform physical actions with an object, material about which we display emotion, wants, logic, sequence, the feeling of truth and belief “the elements of our state of being”, the “I am being”, out of which the line of the life of the human body is created.

‘You saw that neither I nor Kostya could make an entrance as human beings or as actors, not having found a whole series of imaginative ideas, given circumstances, the “I am being”, etc., as a justification for a simple physical action beforehand.

‘You also saw that other simple physical or other kinds of actions required us not only to invent those ideas but also to break scenes down into bits and tasks. We needed logic and sequence in our actions and feelings, we had to discover the truth in the, create belief, the “I am being”, etc. But, to do that, we didn’t sit at the table, with our heads in a book, we didn’t divide the play into bits, pencil in hand, we got up on stage and did things, looked into the facts, into our own nature to find what was helpful.

‘In other words, we did not analyse our actions coldly, with our heads, theoretically but approached them practically, using life, human experience, habits, our artistic and other kinds of flair, intuition, the subconscious, etc. We looked for what we needed to fulfil physical and other kinds of actions. Nature came to our aid and guided us. Look into this process and you will find it was an *inner and outer analysis* of ourselves as human beings in the life of the role. This process is nothing like the cold, cerebral study of a role which actors usually take at the beginning stages of work.

‘The process of which I speak is carried out simultaneously by all the feelings, emotions, inner and outer forces of our nature. This is not a theoretical but a practical enquiry for the sake of achieving a real goal by physical actions. Occupied as we are by our immediate physical actions we don’t think, we are not aware of the complex, inner process of *analysis* which takes place inside us naturally, imperceptibly.

‘So, the new secret, the new aspect of my technique for creating the life of the human body consists in the fact that simple physical actions, properly performed on stage, oblige the actor in accord with his own motives to create imaginative ideas, given circumstances, the “I am being” etc.

‘If one simple physical action requires such a huge effort on the part of the imagination the whole line of the life of the human body needs a whole, unbroken series of ideas and given circumstances throughout the play.

‘This is only possible by detailed analysis carried out by all our creative forces. My technique stimulates that analysis naturally, spontaneously.

‘I wish to stress this new, opportune quality of spontaneous self-analysis.’

Tortsov was not able to complete his examination of his work on Khlestakov and promised to finish it in the next class.

. . . . 19 . .

Coming into class, Tortsov explained:

‘I shall continue my investigation of the technique of creating the life of the human body.

‘So, to answer your simple question (“what would I do if I were in Khlestakov’s situation?”) I had to visualise, understand, feel inwardly all the “ifs”, given circumstances and other imaginative ideas relating to the life of the character.

‘For that I needed to call on almost all the elements (emotion, consciousness, wants, imagination, the feeling of truth and belief etc.). I also needed artistic flair, intuition, life-experience, live habits, the subconscious etc., in a word, my whole artistic personality.

‘What are the ways to set our creative nature to work? You know that you must give it and your creative subconscious free rein.

‘Here, too, my technique can be of help.

‘Just as you are drawn towards physical actions so you are drawn away from your own subconscious forces. In that way you grant them freedom of action and draw them into creative activity. In other words concentrate your attention on creating “the life of the human body”. In this way you grant your nature total freedom, which will help you, without realising it, create, stimulate, animate, and justify your physical actions.

‘The workings of nature and the subconscious are so subtle and profound that you do not even notice them when working.

‘When I was experimenting with Khlestakov, starting with physical actions to create “the life of the human body”, I was unaware of what was going on inside me. I naively imagined that physical actions created themselves, and that I was directing them. But it turned out that they were only the external, reflex expression of the life, the creative work that, unawares, was being carried out by my subconscious forces.

‘It is not within the capabilities of consciousness to carry out that hidden work and so what seems beyond us, is done by our nature. What persuades nature to do this work? My technique for creating “the life of the human body”. It brings into play by normal, natural means subtle forces of nature not susceptible calculation. That is what I wish to draw attention to.’

The students, including me, listened to Tortsov's explanation but did not know how to make themselves go from physical actions to the creation of the life of the human body. We asked for a more specific technique.

Tortsov answered as follows:

'When on stage, as you create, and fulfil the physical actions, and adapt to the object of your attention as the play requires, think only of expressing what you want to convey as clearly, truthfully and vividly as possible. Address yourself completely to making your partner think and feel as you do, visualise what you are talking about, see with your eyes, hear with your ears. It is important that you should really want that. Whether you succeed or not is another matter. It is important for you to want that, for you to strive to achieve it, and believe that you can. Then your attention is entirely focused on the designated physical action. Meanwhile, your own nature, freed from scrutiny, will accomplish what a conscious psychotechnique cannot.

'Hold fast to physical actions. They grant actors of genius, creative natures, freedom and protect feeling from attack.

'This new aspect on my technique consists in its helping the creative human being/actor to extract his own living material that is similar to the role.

'This material is the natural approach to creating the living heart of the performer as a human being.

'Our nature performs this process quite normally, naturally and for the most part subconsciously.

'The new, opportune aspect of this technique is that it evokes the "the life of the human spirit" through "the life of the human body" and obliges the actor to experience feelings, similar to the character's.

'Thanks to this the actor comes to know the psychology of the character through his own awareness. It is no accident that in our terminology "to know" means "to feel". The desired result is not achieved by cold, intellectual analysis but by the workings of creative nature.

'This circumstance is a particularly fortunate feature of my technique and I draw your attention to it.'

'The next circumstance, the basis of my technique is the easiness of the physical tasks in our first approach to a role.

'They should not force or exceed an actor's capabilities, they should be easily reached, natural and follow the laws of human nature.

'That is why in my first approach to Khlestakov I didn't try to create a

new character (which is impossible). I only wanted to answer the question precisely and in human terms: what would I do personally if I found myself in a situation similar to the character's, Khlestakov's?

'A role which the actor does not feel at once should be approached not from the inside out but the outside in. That is the easiest way at first. That way we are dealing with a visible, tangible body and not with elusive, unstable, capricious feelings and other elements of the inner creative state. Using the unbreakable link that exists between the physical and the mental life and their mutual relationship as a basis, we create the line of "the human body" so that we can inspire the "the human spirit" naturally.

'Think: create the simple life of the human body, which is easy to reach, and, as a result, you will suddenly feel the life of the human spirit. Look for this human material, which the author brought to the role from his own life from other people's natures, in yourself. That's quite a trick!

'This is all the more important because in our kind of art we are not looking for acting conventions but for living, human material. That can only be found in the heart of a creative artist.

'Did you notice that when I was aware on stage of my inner impulses to action as Khlestakov, I in no way forced myself inwardly or outwardly, and did not tell myself what to do. More than that, I tried to get rid of the old clinging clichés of traditional "classical" acting.

'What is more, for a time I guarded against the writer's views and deliberately did not open the book. I did all that to stay free and independent, so as to approach the role in my own way, prompted by my own creative nature, my subconscious, intuition and human experience, etc.

'Nobody helped me but in cases of extreme need I turned willingly to others, to the writer, the director, if they were at the rehearsals.

'I would gratefully have accepted any advice, any information, any practical help in answering the question I have asked myself and would use it immediately, but if that advice were inimical to me, I would have rejected it so as not to force my own nature. In the early stages I even avoided general discussion about the play as without interest.

'The actor needs to hold fast to the right elements and all the accessible physical actions. I start with them, or rather, the inner impulses towards them.

'In time, when I have got more deeply into the role, I myself will ask for the most diverse views about the play. But, initially, when no real base has been established, on which I can rely, I am wary of anything that will distract me from the point in hand and complicate my work.

'Understand the importance of the fact that the actor himself initially out of his own needs and requirements, his own motives seeks outside help

and instructions and that this help is not forced on him. In the first instance he keeps his independence, in the second he loses it. The creative material of the mind, derived from others and not from personal experience is cold, cerebral. It is not art of his organism.

‘By contrast, his own material immediately falls into place and sets to work. The things he draws from his own nature, his own life-experience and which find a response in his heart cannot be strangers to him. The things that are his are his and do not have to be manufactured. One is, it springs up spontaneously and calls for expression in physical action.

‘I will not say again that all these “personal” feelings must unfailingly be similar to the character’s. Neither will I explain that the combinations of human feelings are, like the combinations of notes in music, inexhaustible. Do not fear a shortage of living, human material.

‘The better to appreciate what I have recommended, compare my method of approach with the one used by most artists in theatres across the world.

‘There the director studies a new play in his study and goes to the first rehearsal with a production plan.

‘On the other hand, many of them do no study at all and rely on their experience.

‘We all know that these “experienced” directors establish the line of the role in one fell swoop, as mere form, using their skill, and ingrained habit.

‘Other, more serious-minded directors, with a literary bent, dictate the intellectual line of the role after long, minute work in the quiet of their study. The line is true but has no appeal and so is of no use to the creative artist.

‘Finally, there are directors of exceptional talent who can show actors how to play their roles. The more masterly their demonstration, the greater the impression on those watching and the greater their enslavement to the director. Having encountered such a masterly interpretation of a role, the actor wants to play the role just as it has been shown him. He has no way of escaping from the impressions he has received and will clumsily try to ape his model but he will never be able to reproduce it. It is a task that is beyond him. After a demonstration of this kind the actor is stripped of his freedom and his own opinions. They, they should be kind to actors and adapt to their needs.

‘In all the cases I have mentioned, the director’s power over the actor is inescapable, since they are forced, against their will to use what is not them or what they have been shown.

‘True, talented actors sometimes overcome the director and the obstacles he presents but I am not talking about that since the exception is not the rule.

‘Every actor should give what he can and not run after the creatively impossible. A poor copy of a good model is worse than a mediocre original.

‘As far as the director is concerned, all we can advise them is not to force actors or tempt them to do the impossible, but to lead them to discover what they need to fulfil simple physical actions. They have to whet the actor’s appetite.

‘To avoid the dangers I have indicated, I suggest you adhere to the line of the line of the human body, which is your saviour. This avoids disruption and leads to the life of the human spirit.

‘So, I have explained to you, what, on the one hand, happens in the majority of theatres, and, on the other, what constitutes the speciality, the secret of my technique of *preserving the freedom of the creative artist*.

‘Compare and choose.’

‘Let us sum up our work by examining my technique.

‘We must look for the results in the actor’s once he has created the life of the human body and spirit of a role. Many of you succeeded, either by chance or with the director’s help to establish the correct *inner creative state*. But, as I have already said, that is not sufficient to bring all the “elements” alive, to lead to the study and analysis of the play and the role with your whole self, not just with your head. That state needs to be informed by a *real sense of the life of the role and the given circumstances*. That produces a wonderful transformation, a metamorphosis in the creative actor. You know that in practice and for the moment I can only talk about it by hints and examples.

‘Listen to me.

‘When I was young, I was attracted by the life of the ancient world. I read about it, talked with experts, collected books, postcards and I thought that I not only had but had a sense of the period.

‘But then . . . I happened to be in Pompei and trod the same earth the ancient people had walked upon. I saw the narrow streets with my own eyes, went to the ruined houses, sat on the same marble slabs on which heroes rested, handled those same objects they once touched and for a whole week felt the life of the past mentally and physically.

‘As a result all my reading and study fell into place and came alive once again in my own time.

‘Then I understood the enormous difference between nature itself and postcards, between feelings for life and bookish understanding, between

mental pictures and physical awareness, between the cold and the dead and the living, warm approach to the study of the period.

‘Almost the same thing happens in our field in our first approach to a role.

‘Superficial knowledge gives flimsy results, no better than those achieved by studying the period through books, at a distance.

‘After our first acquaintance with a writer’s work our impressions, which are often patchy, momentary, often very vivid, invisible, setting the tone for later work. But individual moments, that only follow the story-line, without a mutual inner link do not provide a feeling of the whole play. You will not know that until you feel its life, not only mentally, but physically.

‘But if you do not only have an idea of it in your mind but perform actions physically that are similar to the role and the given circumstances then you can understand and feel the life of the character not only in the abstract but as a living human organism.

‘If you go right through your role following the line of the life of the human body, and thanks to that, feel the life of the human spirit, then all the individual feelings fall into place and acquire a new, real significance.

‘That mood is the basis for creative work.

‘Then anything that comes to you from the outside, from the director or others, does not rattle around your head, like some overload, but falls into place, or is thrown out.

‘This is done not with the head alone, but with all our creative forces, together with the elements of our creative state on stage, combined with a real sense of the life of the play.

‘I taught you how to create a real sense of the life of the role not only mentally but physically. You do that, as you now know, is achieved through simple, available means.

‘This awareness arises of its own accord in the inner creative state previously established, combining with it to form the so-called *small creative, working state*.

‘It is only then that we can proceed to analysing and studying a role, not with a cold heart, with our heads, but with the participation of the elements of the inner creative state and the active help of all the creative forces, mental and physical of our creative apparatus.

‘I accord great significance to what we feel in our first approach to a new work not only with our head but our heart, until the moment when a human-being/actor’s subconscious and intuition are free and fresh.

‘The parts of an actor’s heart, his human wants, thoughts, endeavours go to make up the heart of a role.

‘When working in that way each stage character the actor creates, comes alive and achieves individuality, its own colour. Such precision is only available to the actor who has created the character himself.

‘In my demonstration as Khlestakov, I momentarily felt I was inside him. This changed when I discovered traces of the role in myself. That was the case when I suddenly felt free to take a tit-bit from the hawker’s tray. That means that Khlestakov’s instincts were lying hidden in me. I found one of them and it proved useful for the entire role. As I groped my way further forward I found other points of contact with the given circumstances of some of the other characters. These moments increased in number until they formed the unbroken line of the life of the human body and spirit. Then, when the first period of experiencing was over, I maintain that if I found myself in Khlestakov’s situation and given circumstances that I would behave in the real world exactly the same way as in the life of the human body I had created.

‘In that situation, approaching the “I am being” there is nothing to fear. With such a solid base, it easy to control both your physical and mental nature with the risk of going wrong of losing your footing. If things fall apart, it is easy to mood. With a firm base, in the “I am being”, you can assume any characteristics you want out of pure habit. With the help of the given circumstances and the logic of feelings, by combining the material you already have you can create the external characteristics you want. If the internal and external traits are based on truth they will inevitably produce a real, living person. In this way, various kinds of material, put into a retort, produce a new, third being, a living offspring. Other people’s opinions do not confuse or break your independent views.

‘I have revealed a whole series of features and options in my technique for creating “the life of the human body”. It automatically analyses the play; it automatically captures our creative nature with all its major inner forces which suggest physical actions to you. It automatically stimulates living human material from within. It helps you, initially to guess at the overall atmosphere and mood of the play. All these new, highly important options make my technique even more valuable practically.

Today there was an interesting discussion about Tortsov’s new technique of approaching a role through physical actions in the green room.

Not all the members of the company, like many others, accepted this innovation. Many are backward-looking, firmly committed to the old ways, not open to the new.

‘It is easier for me to talk to you trained actors staring backwards’, said Tortsov. ‘You know what an actor feels like in an established role. Students do not know that feeling. Now, dig deep into yourselves and recall any one of your roles which you have played many times and is set, and tell me, what are your concerns, what do you prepare for, what do you foresee, what tasks, actions attract you when you go on stage from the dressing-room to play a well-known role?’

‘I’m not talking about those actors who create the score of their role out of mere stock-in-trade “tricks” and “games”. I am talking about serious actors, creative artists.’

‘I think about the most immediate task as I go on stage’, one of the actors said. ‘Once I have fulfilled it, that a second arises, and when I have done that I think about a third, a fourth, etc.’

‘I start with the throughaction. It rolls out before me like an endless highway at the end of which I can see the shining dome of the superobjective’, said another elderly actor.

‘How do you work towards your final goal?’, asked Tortsov.

‘By logically fulfilling one task after another.’

‘You perform actions and that leads you nearer and nearer to our final goal?’, Tortsov pressed him.

‘Of course, as in any score.’

‘How do you visualise these actions in a role you have experienced many times? Are they difficult, complex, elusive?’, queried Tortsov.

‘They used to be, but finally they led me to ten very clear, real, comprehensible, accessible actions which you call the chart or the fairway of the play and the role.’

‘What are they? Subtle, psychological actions?’

‘Of course. But by dint of being frequently experienced, and because of the unbreakable link with the life of the role, the psychology has to a large extent taken on flesh through which you can reach the essence of feelings.’

‘Tell me why this is so’, Tortsov insisted.

‘I imagine because it is natural. Flesh can be touched; it is to hand. Do something in logical sequence and feeling goes into action of its own accord.’

‘Then’, said Tortsov picking up on his words, ‘what you end up with, simple physical actions, is what we start with. You yourself said that external action, the life of the human body is the most available. Wouldn’t

it be better to start with that, with the whole unbroken line with the entire "the life of the human body". You say that feeling followed action in a finished properly created role. Yet, in the beginning, in a role that has still to be created, feeling also follows the line of physical actions. So why not lure it out from the very start. Why wear it out? Why sit round the table for months and drag dormant feelings out of yourself? Why force it to start to live without actions? Go on stage and do something, i.e. what is easiest to hand. After that whatever feeling is available at the time will emerge naturally in an unbreakable link with your body.'

Then Tortsov began to explain the theory of his technique which we now know well and is so much clearer and more comprehensible after we have mastered the logic and sequence of actions and the skill of working with actions without objects.

It seemed strange to me as a student that older actors should not understand, and find it so difficult to grasp the simple, normal natural truth that Tortsov was proposing.

'How can it be', I thought, 'that it is only now that the older members of the company have only just come to a truth that we students have known for three years?'

'The pace of work, the length of the productions, the repertoire, performances, understudying, replacements, concerts, rubbishy work all clutter up an actor's life. You cannot see through it any more than you can through a smoke screen what is happening in art, in which you fortunate people are immersed in school', said one young pessimist, who was heavily concerned with the repertoire, to me.

And yet we students envy him.

3

NOTEBOOKS 1936–1937

INDIVIDUAL EXTRACTS

‘You know that the essential is not the physical actions themselves but the situation, the given circumstances, the feelings which give rise to them. What is important is not that the tragic hero dies but the inner reason for his death. There is an unbreakable link between stage actions and the reason for them and their origin. Or, in other words, there is complete unity between ‘the life of the human body’ and ‘the life of the human spirit’. We always use it in our psychotechnique. That is what we are doing now.

‘Using our own nature, our subconscious, instinct and intuition, we produce a series of interlinked physical actions. Through them we try to understand the inner reason for them, their origin, individual moments of experiencing, logic and sequence and feelings, in the given circumstances. When we have understood this line, we also understand the physical actions. This knowledge is not intellectual but emotional in origin, which is very important since we know from our own awareness a fragment of the psychology of the role. But we must not act the psychology of the role as such or the logic and sequence of feelings. And so we start with physical actions that are stable and manageable, holding fast to their strict logic and sequence. Given the fact that this line is indissolubly linked with another, inner line of feeling, we can use physical actions to arouse emotion. The line the logic and sequence of physical actions becomes an integral part of the score of the role.

‘You probably know from your own experience the link between physical action and the inner causes, impulses, efforts it causes. This is from the outside in. Verify this link, go over the line of the life of the human body many times. On that way you will not only consolidate the physical actions but what prompted them. A few of them may, with time, enter your consciousness. Then you will use them at your own discretion, free to stimulate those actions that are naturally linked to them. But you cannot know thoroughly many of these inner impulses, probably the most valuable. The conscious mind can destroy the inner impulses of the subconscious.

‘How are we to deal with the question: which of the inner impulses should we use and which should we put on one side?’

‘Don’t touch this question. Leave it to nature. Only she can deal with this process which is beyond our conscious mind.

‘As far as you yourselves are concerned, get help from what my technique tells you. Don’t follow the line of inner, emotional impulses that know better than you what should be done. Follow the line of the life of the human body.’

‘Go on stage, establish the inner creative state and start to communicate.

‘Follow the laws of nature, don’t leave out a single, logical, sequential moment. Don’t forget to probe the other people present with you with your eyes to understand what their mood is and how to influence them. Remember the right direction, create a link, or, if necessary, a hold.’

We soon created the inner creative state and then with Tortsov’s and Rakhmanov’s help began to communicate following the laws of nature, logic and sequence.

But this mood cannot be maintained without tasks and actions. Tortsov understood this and hurriedly gave us what we had not grasped. He said:

‘Imagine you are playing a scene from Hamlet when he makes his first appearance. Kostya can play Hamlet, Leo – Claudius, Varya – Gertude, Pasha – Marcellus, Vanya – Polonius.’

‘With pleasure!’

‘I am following the line of the lead character’, Tortsov continued. ‘Remember the content of the chosen scene. Hamlet has returned after a considerable absence. He left his mother and father in the best, most loving relationship. Now, on his return, he learns that there has been a fatal change. His beloved father has died, his adoring mother is already married to the villainous Claudius, the new king, whom he does not

know. Both are happy. They have forgotten Hamlet's heavy loss, that is, the former, goodly king, husband, brother and father.

'Play this scene for me, adjust the link again and the right kind of communication with your new partner, bearing in mind your own tasks that are similar to Hamlet's.'

'What are these tasks?'

'Are you really not clear what a son would do in Hamlet's situation? Anyone would want to understand, interpret and assess what had happened.'

'Of course that is the most immediately important moment of communication. What do we need to do then?'

'First, you must find out where you are, try to feel the overall mood, invisibly probe everyone's heart to discover what it is from their eyes, adapt to them so as not to frighten them, but draw them to you, create the link and communicate. But everyone in the room in the castle conceals his real mood, especially when faced with Hamlet's searching eyes. His amazement and resentment can be seen in his eyes, heard in his voice, can be seen in his face, trouble his conscience. This happens every time the appalling present reminds him of the beautiful past. All those present can feel it, cleverly put on a face, alter their mood, to parry the probing eyes of a young son who is wounded to the heart.

'Go through the whole part in the same way, following the line of natural communication. As a result not only that element of the inner creative state will come alive but all the other elements that you need for that mood.'

'Oh! Why?'

'Because, if you have established the line of communication, then inevitably the line of adaptations arises of itself. But for adaptation and communication you need the line of objects and concentration. We also need the line of emotion memories and our experience of them so that we can communicate with each other. This is not conveyed all of a piece but in parts, in bits and tasks. All these moments must be well-founded and for that you need imaginative ideas. Without truth and belief they are, like all the other elements, powerless. For communication you need inner and outer action. They, like the other elements, are powerless without truth and belief. And, where there is truth, where there is belief, there is also the "I am being", there is nature and the subconscious.

'You feel that all the actions that have been indicated are performed for the sake of the objects on stage, the living characters. This kind of action is essential because it is related to the life being portrayed on stage. The audience comes to see . . .

‘Where do we look for these actions?’

‘In the play of course’, Vanya suggested.

‘The actions in the play have been laid down by the writer and not by roles that have not yet come alive and we need the living actions of the human-being/actor, playing the role, which are similar to the character’s. How are we to produce them?’

‘How are we to summon them if they just won’t come? Nothing will work’, Vyun complained.

‘You’re mistaken. First, don’t forget that when you are given the part there is no living character. For you there is only one, yourself in the given circumstances of the person you are called on to create.

‘It is easy for a person to count on himself. Just say to yourself: “What would I do if I were in the given circumstances of the play?” and answer honestly.’

‘Bravo! I can see for myself that you have hit it and that my trick worked’, said Tortsov joyfully.

‘What trick?’, I was confused.

‘That through my questions I directed your attention on your own emotion memories and other sorts of memories.’

‘But what were they directed towards?’, I was still confused.

‘To other people’s, alien, dead feelings that were quite unknown to the character . . . This role, this character comes alive once you have invested it with your own feelings. Or, in other words, when you have felt yourself in the role and the role in you. That is something we achieve systematically, gradually and logically. [The task] is to understand my technique for the first approach to a new role, protecting it against any kind of pressure or any breach of the natural laws of our creative process.

‘Another goal is for you to know and feel the work the writer has done and live, albeit a little, the life he has created and follow his creative path. Then you will understand and appreciate his writing better. You will suffer the birth-pangs of every detail, the search for the right words which the actor appreciates too little on stage.

‘Telling the plot of a new play episode by episode I gradually conveyed to you the whole story of what we are going to create.

‘You will also then look for the physical actions out of which the episodes are made. Now that you have mastered the logic and sequence of these physical actions in abstract exercises in “training and drill” it will not be difficult for you to understand and fulfil my tasks.’

‘Once he has his copy of the play, the actor opens it and starts to read his part to the point of stupefaction, until he and the words are worn to shreds and lose all meaning for him.’

‘Why does he do that?’, someone asked.

‘Because he doesn’t know any other way of approaching a role. While this martyr reads his role he forces himself into the book. He is physically drawn to it. He tenses his whole body, clenches his fist, his teeth, contorts his face, goggles his eyes and wheezes with the effort.

‘Other actors with no systematic approach to a role or the technique of mentally visualising a character (or any actor they have brought in to read the role to him). More than the first actor the second agonisingly struts about to get into the role and bring himself to life. If you want to understand and feel what he goes through, imagine you have a stuffed dummy before you and you try to get inside it, squeeze yourself in despite the fact that it is sewn upon all sides, that it is not your size, and is either too small or too big for you.

‘Out of despair because of his fruitless martyrdom, the actor tries to find help by working in common at the table.

‘Now imagine another approach to the role this time unforced.

‘With such an approach you don’t have to squeeze yourself in anywhere, no one crams your head but you reproduce, as yourself, only what is indicated in the book, what you are able to do. Start with what is most easy, with physical actions. For example, the script says that the man you are playing, before the curtain goes up fills his suitcases with his things. Where and why he leaves is also clear from the play.

‘If you use what you have mastered through physical actions without objects it will not be difficult for you to fulfil the author’s directions and motivate them with your own given circumstances drawn from the play by your own imagination.

‘More than that, you know from the script what the character you are playing tells someone concerning his departure. In so doing he expresses this or that thought to which he receives this or that reply. You write these thoughts down and replay them with your partner up to the actual performance in your own words in the same sequence as they are listed. The logic and sequence of this dialogue will be recalled as the logic and sequence of your physical actions.

‘So, you go through the play in terms of actions and thoughts selecting those which you are able to manage as yourself. Do you have the feeling that you now have two unbroken lines: physical actions and thoughts (psychological actions)? Soon you will feel the logic and sequence of what you are doing and saying on stage, familiar to you from life and your

belief in it. That is a great victory. From that moment on you can feel the ground beneath your feet.

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Instead of our usual class we were taken to the theatre to a rehearsal and sat in the stalls under Rakhmanov's supervision.

This is where we can learn discipline, this is where we can learn to create the right mood for work!

Tortsov took the rehearsal sitting at the director's table. He was the same as he was with us at school, but he was surrounded by quite a different atmosphere, full of respect for the authority of the master and willing submission to him. Thanks to that, the whole tone of the rehearsal was different from our classes in school.

If great actors behaved like this towards him, what were we supposed to do at school?! Evidently we were still so stupid that we still did not understand or appreciate everything he had given us. Grisha was a great help as Grisha seemed to me with his endless protests. How I sympathised with Rakhmanov who fought with undisciplined students in Tortsov's presence. How I understand and approve his strictness towards us. Up till then strictness seemed superfluous to me but now I think it is essential. In my opinion Tortsov tolerated our behaviour and did not always approve of Rakhmanov's strictness. Wasn't it because he wanted conscious, not formal discipline and preferred natural respect for his great authority to mere strictness? If that is the case then he reached his goal today. Not only I, and others and even Grisha, sitting on his seat felt and understood as I did.

What a wise teacher Tortsov is! How ashamed I am today of myself and my fellow students! Despite the fact that the play was far from ready, that the actors did not know their lines and not all of them acted in full voice, despite the partial set, the rehearsal and the well-known actors made a great impression on me. The set, the experimenting, the disagreements, the breaks in the acting also helped me to a deeper understanding of how actors create the line of physical actions.

I cannot say the same of the given circumstances and the supertask of the play which seemed to me to lack clarity. That was compensated for to a certain degree after the rehearsal by the director's explanations and Tortsov's individual notes that would properly sketch out the given circumstances, individual tasks and the throughaction and his production plan.

We students left the rehearsal, our heads full. This would not have happened if we had just read the words of the play, as is usually the case.

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In today's class we performed physical tasks in accordance with the human body. This required lot of rehearsing. Many of us, including me, were mere copies of what we had seen our colleagues do in rehearsal. But copying is not creating. Before you can discover what is yours, you must get away from what is other people's. So, watching rehearsals proved not only very useful but also harmful.

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Today we played the plan of physical actions for the first time. It required a great deal of concentration to arouse real, logical sequential 'entrances' for each new task. Getting into them it was difficult to stop and not play what we had started right through. It was even more difficult to catch ourselves out overacting and understand that, despite seeming to follow the line of feeling, genuine experiencing, that had been replaced by 95% overacting, which must be rejected.

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Today we, as Tortsov put it, polished the whole of the plan of our roles on bodily lines.

I, for example very conscientiously, not as mere outward form, did it eleven times. That was tantamount to rehearsing it eleven times.

The difficulty in this process is to do things as yourself all the time. Here and there you stray into simple external, mechanical action that is not justified from within.

Did the life of the spirit take shape in us? It seemed to me *yes*, and I began to merge with it, but when Tortsov heard this he stopped me and explained:

'The physical line of the living human body and its movements is based on the apparatus of embodiment, which is comparatively crude. As regards the life of the human spirit, it is created out of elusive, capricious, unstable feelings, which are barely perceptible when it comes into being. In comparison with other muscles of the body that produce movement and action, feeling is like threads of gossamer.

'How many of these threads have to be combined to contend with the strength of crude muscles? How many times must the actor go through the process of experiencing for the inner line to be strong enough to dominate the muscles and the body completely? Therefore, strengthen the line life of the human mind as much as you can before using it to guide the life of the human body. The few threads you acquire cannot outweigh a rope, but, on the other hand when a thousand threads are wound together they haul as well as an ordinary thick rope.

‘That is why for the moment you should forget the line of the spirit. It is created and grows in strength gradually, invisibly, spontaneously, independent of our wishes. The time comes when it draws you imperiously towards it with the same strength that no ropes made of muscles can counter. And so, in order not to stand in the way of nature and her invisible, inner workings, go on doing what you are doing now, in performance, too, and roll out the plan of the life of the human body. Anything you can do to deepen its meaning makes the given circumstances surrounding the body more intense, more compact, more complex or makes you think of the basic goal of your creative work, the supertask and the best it can achieve by the throughaction. By intensifying the atmosphere in which physical actions occur, making the goal more complex, you get deeper into the line of the life of the human body getting ever closer to the life of the human spirit and naturally merging with it.

. . . . 19 . .

Today we tried to transfer the plan of physical actions and the life of the human body we had created in class to the stage. They cleared the main stage for us. The sets, furniture and props were put to one side as they are when actors only are rehearsing. They themselves were not there but their understudies were.

Because of the unfamiliar, disbanded sets for the first few minutes we lost the life of the human body we had and its plan, which we had firmly rolled out in class. This upset the students but Tortsov calmed them, saying:

‘Give yourselves time to get used to the new setting and without forcing, calmly, gradually direct your attention on what should be of interest to you in your role. In short, perform your physical actions as best you can, productively and appropriately.’

But not only did we did not manage that very quickly but even approach starting to do things simply, not in reality but ‘as it were’. Only after this external, mechanical memory of the line had rolled out did I manage to direct my attention first to physical actions and then to the major reason for performing them.

At first we were not given any *mise-en-scène* or transitions. They were left at first on our own observation, the interdependence of our tasks, our creative wants and actions. They occurred in agreement with what we needed to fulfil, to choose the most convenient places, transitions and *mise-en-scène* for us. This was not easy and took some time. I found many such transitions, got lost among them and could not decide on anything.

‘Stay like that for the moment’, Tortsov said to me. ‘Let what you have found “stay over night”. Then it will become clearer what is most important to you and what occurred spontaneously.’

... 19 ..

Much of what, in Tortsov’s expression ‘stayed over night’ was lost but some of it was set. Tortsov helped me and others to link what we had discovered with the acting of others, with the play, the common idea and the production. What was as yet undefined Tortsov suggested I look for, motivated by tasks, the line of physical actions, the life of the human body and, above all, the supertask. But what I had discovered was still not permanent until a new ‘stay over night’.

Today, Tortsov examined, praised or criticised the appropriateness, productiveness of our physical actions, and their logic and sequence. Some new additions and omissions in the given circumstances made us change the line of the life of the human body. The changes were introduced into the score and once more ‘rolled out’ with the help of genuine moments of inspiration and new tasks and bits and the common plan of physical actions in the scene we were rehearsing.

When the life of the human body had been established and confirmed it was easier for us to repeat it but many, myself included, began to want to do things not as ourselves, on our own responsibility but on someone else’s that we wanted to portray. Having noted that, Tortsov became very upset and energetically urged us not to make mistakes and not to lose ourselves in the role because when you lose the balanced beauty of the creative act and experiencing and replace it with overacting that can eliminate all your previous work and turn the role into stock-in-trade and cliché.

‘Genuine, living characterisation arises of itself in such a way that you will know nothing about it. Those of us watching in time will tell you what came of your merging with the role. You continued to do things as yourselves on your own responsibility. As soon as you start thinking about the character, you cannot refrain from overacting and representation. So, beware.’

... 19 ..

We rehearsed on stage again today. We had to work for a fixed time between day-time work and the evening’s performance.

Tortsov explained mainly that now that the elements, condition, material, indications had been given us and that, therefore, nothing prevented us doing exercises in the common (working) state we had created.

True it comes from the correct genuine embodiment of the line of the physical tasks and actions. Nonetheless, that does not prevent us verifying our state and its individual components separately.

‘To make matters clearer, I will illustrate this process myself.’

4

THE APPROACH TO A ROLE

Notes

- 1 *Relate* the plot (broadly, not in too much detail).
- 2 *Play* the external plot in physical actions. Enter a room. Do not do it if you do not know where you come from, where you are and why. Therefore the student asks what is the justification [for his actions], the external, rough facts of the plot. Justification of the rough physical actions by the given circumstances (external, rough). The actions drawn from the play are insufficient. Invent in the spirit of the work: what would I do 'if' here, today, now . . . [finding myself in circumstances similar to the play].
- 3 Exercises on the past, the future (the present is on stage): where I have come from, where I am going, what has happened between entrances.
- 4 *Relate* (in greater detail) the physical actions and the plot of the play. The given circumstances, and 'if' more subtly, more detailed more deeply.
- 5 *Temporarily define* in approximate terms the rough, outline supertask. (Not Leningrad but Tver or even a small stop along the way.)
- 6 On the basis of the material acquired, the creation of an approximate, rough, outline throughaction. Constant question: What would I do 'if'?
- 7 To do that, divide into the largest physical bits. (Without that there is no play, these large physical actions).
- 8 Fulfil (act) these rough physical actions using the question: What would I do 'if'.

- 9 If the large bits cannot be grasped, for a while break them down into medium-sized or if need be small and very small bits.
Study the nature of physical actions. Strictly observe the logic and sequence of the large bits and their constituent parts, unite them in a complete, large action without objects.
- 10 Creation of the line of logical, sequential, organic physical actions. Write this line down and consolidate it in practice (follow this line many times, play it, set it firmly; get rid of anything superfluous – 95%! Proceed with truth and belief. The logic and sequence of physical actions lead to truth and belief. Verify this through logic and sequence and not by truth for the sake of truth. Logic and sequence, truth and belief set in the context of ‘here, today, now’ are now even more firmly grounded and set.
- 11 The logic, sequence belief and truth within the here, today, now are further grounded and strengthened.
- 12 All this creates the state of ‘I am being’.
- 13 Where you have the ‘I am being’, there you have nature and the subconscious.
- 14 Up till now you have been using your own words. *First reading.* The students and actors latch onto what they need, struck by individual words and phrases. They should write them down and incorporate them into the script alongside their own spontaneous words.
Within a short time there are second, third and fourth readings with further notes a further inclusion of your spontaneous words. Thus, gradually, at first like oases here and there, whole long periods in the role are filled with the actual script. The remaining blanks are soon filled with the lines themselves, their feeling, style, language and phrasing.
- 15 Study the script. Fix it in your minds but do not speak it out loud so as not to let yourself gabble mechanically and create a line of (verbal) tricks. Do not set the *mise-en-scène* either so as not to admit the line of (parrot-learned) *mis-en-scène* to combine with mechanical gabbling.
Keep on playing; verify the line of logical and sequential actions, truth, belief, the ‘I am being’, nature and the subconscious. When you justify all these actions, new more subtle given circumstances, deeper, broader, universal throughactions arise of themselves. Keep retelling the content of the play in ever greater detail. Imperceptibly the line of physical actions is justified by more subtle psychological given circumstances, throughaction and supertask.
- 16 Continue acting the play along the established lines. Think about the words but replace them with *tumtitumming*.

- 17 The proper line of the play has been indicated by justifying the physical and other lines. Consolidate them further so that the script remains subordinate to it and is not rattled off mechanically. Continue acting by tumtittumming but, at the same time work along the lines of the subtext you have verified. *Relate in your own words: (1) the line of thoughts, (2) the line of mental images, (3) explain both these lines to your partner so as to establish communication and the line of inner action. These are the basic lines for the subtext. Consolidate them as firmly as possible and maintain them.*
- 18 After the line has been consolidated at the table, *read the play as written, sitting on your hands and convey all the lines, actions, details and the score you have worked out as accurately as possible.*
- 19 The same thing at the table, with your hands and body free with a few impromptu moves and *mises-en-scène*.
- 20 The same thing on stage with impromptu *mises-en-scène*.
- 21 Work out and establish the set (with four walls).
- 22 Work out and note down the *mise-en-scène*. Put up the set and bring the actors into it. Ask where you would start to make a declaration of love, or where you would persuade your partner, talk to him heart to heart etc., where it would be best to go to hide your embarrassment. Let the actor do all the physical actions and moves necessary to the play. Look for books in the bookcase, open a window, light a fire, etc.
- 23 Verify what you have planned and the *mise-en-scène* by opening up one of the walls.
- 24 Sit at the table and conduct a series of discussions along literary, artistic and other lines.
- 25 Characterisation. Everything that has been done has created the inner character. The outer character should emerge of itself. What if it does not?

Do everything that has been done before but with a gammy leg, with short or long speech, with a certain placing of the legs, hands and body according to familiar habits, mannerisms. If the external characterisation does not arise spontaneously graft it on from the outside.

Part II

Historic documents 1885–1923

5

NOTEBOOKS 1885, 1911

In 1885, at the age of 22, Stanislavski set out for the first time his approach to a role.

1885

- 1 The temperament of the role.
- 2 To what nationality or period it belongs.
- 3 The physiological aspect of the role.
- 4 The psychological aspect of the role.
- 5 Relationship to other roles.
- 6 Age.
- 7 Maturity.
- 8 The type of role (*emploi*).
- 9 The most recent performance of the character.
- 10 The author's intention.
- 11 Other characters' opinions concerning the role.
- 12 The most outstanding passages in the role.
- 13 The outward appearance of the role.

By 1911, Stanislavski, who had generally been a director-dictator, had developed a concern for the independence of the actor as a creative artist. He set out the conditions for that independence.

1911

It is a mistake to think that artistic freedom means artistic licence. That is the freedom of the fool. Who is freest of all? The man who has personally achieved independence, since that is won, not given. Independence that is given does not grant freedom, since that can be very quickly lost. The man who frees himself with no outside help, who is more knowledgeable, more able, is fully self-reliant, and has his own opinions, who is ready for every trial and tribulation, that is the man who is truly free. This is the actor who has felt the role better than the writer, analysed the play better than the critic, studied the play better than the director, since no one else really knows his talent, his inner self, his expressive means, the actor who has developed a virtuoso technique, who has trained his body, voice and face, and who has understood the theory of art, painting, literature and everything else an actor needs to know, he is truly free.

6

WORK ON A ROLE: SALIERI 1915

In 1915 Stanislavski appeared in Pushkin's 'minor tragedy', Mozart and Salieri. It caused him a great deal of trouble until he could find the throughaction. Stanislavski also examines the problem of what he was later to call 'the line of the day'. His notes are an early example of his approach to a new role.

I was given the role of Salieri in Puskin's *Mozart and Salieri*. And so I had to undertake one of the most difficult tasks for an actor.

How and why was I to approach it?

Nemirovich says:

'A seed that falls into the earth puts down roots but itself dies. So it is with a writer's work that is planted in actor's mind and also dies. Instead of the writer's work disappearing into the actor his own creative activity, which is similar to the writer's is born. This is heart of the heart, flesh of the flesh of the play and yet is totally independent of it, although born of another man's, the writer's idea. By "idea" I do not mean the literal text but the symphony of feelings concealed behind it, that are the *raison d'être* of our art.

'And so we must first of all be drawn to the idea behind the work and grow with it and the process of merging with it must be full and deep so that someone else's feelings, that have been grafted onto us become our own, our friends, from which we can never be separated . . .'

IN PRACTICE. HOW TO CREATE A LIFE (A ROLE)

The actor who plays Salieri should create not only the fragment of the character's life the writer has provided, which we see on stage, but also its entire past, that is merely hinted at by a word here and there.

He must, long before he plays Salieri, create his entire life, his real feelings in all the details he can remember. He must know what Salieri's childhood was like, who his family, his brothers, sisters, friends were. He should see in his mind's eye the church where the young Salieri first heard music and wept for joy. He must recall on which pew, on which sunlit or cloudy day, in which atmosphere, this first encounter with art took place. He must know and recall the situations, the people, the furniture, the light, the mood he was conscious of at every important moment in his life.

What is the nature of the actor's creativity?

He creates using his own feelings, memories, his own body. Feeling and the body bring the inner and outer aspects of the role together while the imagination sketches out the character's entire life that is creates the appropriate atmosphere that shapes (forms and develops) the heart of the role.

How is the supposed life of a character to be created out of personal feelings and how are we to strengthen belief in this life and affective memories of it?

For example, the actor should approach his role by recalling as Salieri did:

When as a child there came from up above
The music of the organ in our ancient church
I heard, I listened and I wept sweet tears
Despite myself.

The actor must know and remember how Salieri early on denied pleasure, made mere craftsmanship the basis of his art, treated music like a dead body and judged harmony in terms of algebra, etc. How he first worked for three days in a silent cell and burned his work.

Can you convey all your own feelings, torments and turmoil in the writer's own words if you do not have images and memories, similar to the character's, in your head? Without them the play, the role are dead as the essence of art is to convey the life of the human spirit. These words do not come to the writer automatically but as a result of highly complex, old memories and a combination of personal feelings and a knowledge of the conditions of life itself and how they arise. Only after experiencing

himself envy and scorn can the writer find the right words for Salieri. The actor must put himself in Salieri's shoes and feel both . . .

The actor must follow the same creative path as the writer, otherwise he does not discover his own feelings which bring the dead letter of the role to life. He cannot find the right inflexions, stresses, gestures, movements, actions. But how is he to turn his feelings into Salieri's?

He has to find them in yourself.

First he has to create Salieri's childhood.

The actor's own memory should provide the necessary material for that. When and how people once seen should reappear and become his family as a child. In just the same way let him see the house, the rooms, the streets, the school in which he gave up his lessons for art, the church where he first heard and fell in love with music, the old fortepiano, on which he like a craftsman develops 'the obedience and dry fluency' of the fingers, where he first surrendered to the joy of his creative dreams, the mysterious Isora, with her fatal love and the poison, his honour and glory, his meeting with Mozart and the birth of jealousy, the poisoning which has already been shown on stage.

Only with such a store from his earlier life can it achieve its full meaning on stage.

These are the roots from which the flower grows. We do not need to see them. This is the ink in which the pen is dipped, the palette from which the colours are taken, the source of life itself.

SALIERI'S THROUGHACTION

- 1 An evil jealous man. Straight to the goal: hate Mozart condemn and criticise everything about him. The result is theatrical evil.
- 2 Look more closely at jealousy. I want to be first and so reject Mozart although I have nothing against him.
- 3 The most important thing for Pushkin is the challenge to God. To fight God.
- 4 Resentment against injustice and hence the wish (concealed) to stopped being oppressed and insulted.
- 5 Love of art – rescuing art.

The essence of my theory is that the actor should not repeat the forms (adaptations must be unconscious) and must remember and feel the *essence*, the content of the role the known tasks.

7

WOE FROM WIT 1916–1920

From 1916 to 1920 Stanislavski drafted an article on Griboiedov's comedy. It was never completed. This was his first attempt at a full-scale exposition of his method of creating a role, in this case Chatski. It was the method he followed until the emergence of the Method of Physical Action in the late 1920s.

There are four principal phases in our work on a role: getting to know it, experiencing it, embodying it, making it effective.

READING THE PLAY

This is the period of preparation. It starts with a reading and may be compared to the first meeting between sweethearts, lovers or spouses.

This moment is all important. First impressions are virgin, unsullied. They are finest spur to artistic élan, which is crucial to the creative process.

Virgin impressions are unpredictable, immediate. Often they mark deeply all the work the actor does thereafter.

They are not planned or premeditated. They have not been passed through a critical sieve, but spontaneously put down deep roots in the actor's mind, his heart, his being, and often become the core, the embryo, of the character to be.

They are seeds. And whatever changes might be made subsequently, the actor cherishes whatever survives of them, he clings to them, even when he cannot develop them further. The enduring strength, depth of these virgin impressions means that actors must pay special regard to them

when first coming to a role. They must try, on the one hand, to create the conditions which open up a proper understanding of what they are and, on the other, rule out anything that blocks or taints them.

I cannot specify at the beginning of the book how first to approach a role. There is still no agreed terminology in which we can speak to actors about their art and technique. For the moment I can only give hints and warnings concerning our first reading. Some of them are directed to actors who hear the lines read for the first time, others to those who read the script for the first time themselves.

Let me start with the actors. They must understand that first impressions require, above all, the proper mood, the right mental state. They require inner focus for, without it, there can be no creative process and, in consequence, no capacity to receive new first impressions. Actors have to create the right artistic atmosphere for the first reading, so that the mind can be opened to hitherto unknown impressions, and they must succumb entirely to these impressions. In a word, they must be in the proper creative state. Moreover, they must establish the right conditions, choose the right time and place for the reading to happen. They must arrange for the reading to have a certain ceremoniousness, that alerts the mind. They must be physically and mentally alert. They must make sure that nothing impedes the free flow of the new impressions their mind receives. And so they should be aware that one of the most dangerous impediments to fresh, virgin impressions is any kind of preconceptions. They stop up the mind as a cork stops up a bottle.

Preconceptions mostly arise from other people's prejudices which they foist on you. At the beginning, when our own approach to the play and role and our own ideas have still not been concretely defined, it is dangerous to accept other people's ideas, especially when they are wrong. They can distort an actor's own naturally emerging feelings and approach to a new role. And so, when starting work, after first getting to know the play, the actor should try, as far as possible, to avoid outside influences, the tyranny of other people's opinions, that might lead him to adopt preconceptions. They will distort his own virgin impressions, his spontaneous feeling, his will, his mind and his imagination. He should talk as little as he can to other people about his role, he should talk about other roles so that he can see clearly the circumstances, mental and physical, in which the characters live.

If an actor feels that he needs other people's opinions, then, initially, let him answer his own questions, since only he can justify his feelings to others without putting his own, individual approach to the role at risk. For the time being, he should say nothing, keep his feelings, his psychological

material, his thoughts about the character to himself until his own feeling and approach to the play and the role have been concretely defined. And only with time, when his approach to a role has been established and has matured, can he make wider use of other people's advice and opinions without risk to his artistic freedom and independence. The actor should remember that his own opinion is better than someone else's however good, the more so since the latter is void of feeling and only clutters up his head. He should feel the play initially as it makes itself felt.

All the care taken at the first reading is essential to allow first impressions to appear and develop freely and naturally.

Since, in actors' speak, to understand means to feel, during his first acquaintance with the play and the role, he should give free rein not only to his intelligence but to his creative feelings. The more he brings the play alive with the warmth of his feeling and the thrill of life, the more the cold words on the page will arouse his feelings, his creative will, his intelligence, his affective memory, the more it will awaken his creative imagination with visual, auditory and other images, pictures, affective memories and the more his imagination will colour (illustrate) the writer's words with fantastical patterns, the hues of his own unseen palette, and the better it will be, later, for the creative process and for the coming production.

It is important for the actor to find the right point of view from which to see the play – the writer's.

When this happens, the actors are carried away by the reading. They cannot control the muscles of their face which force them into expressions which match what is being read. They cannot control their movements which occur spontaneously. They cannot sit still and move closer and closer to the person reading them the play.

As to the person giving the first reading, a little practical advice needs to be addressed to him.¹

First, he should avoid giving too colourful a reading, which might impose his own personal view of the characters and the play. He should limit himself to giving a clear exposé of the basic idea of the play and the broad lines of its internal development using the techniques which are used throughout the script.

The play must be presented simply, clearly with a full understanding of its fundamentals and its meaning, the main thrust of its development and its literary merit. The reader should suggest where the author's work comes from, the thoughts, feelings, or experiences which caused him to take up his pen. The reader should push and pull the actor along the main line of the play's development in terms of the life of the human spirit.

He should learn from experienced men of letters so that he can immediately seize the 'kernel' of the play, its basic emotional development, the idea of the life of the human spirit itself. For indeed, experienced men of letters, who know the basic features and techniques of a work of literature, can grasp a play's structure (outline), its central core, the feelings, thoughts, which led the author to take up his pen, right away. They analyse a play with a master's hand and make a proper diagnosis. This ability is of great use to an actor but it should not be allowed to stand in his way, but rather help him look into the heart of the play. The remainder of what the first reader needs to know will be explained in the rest of this book.

It is a great, good fortune when an actor, from the very first reading, grasps the essence, the thought, the feeling of the play as a whole. Then it is better for him to forget all he has learned about this or that method, rule or system and put himself in the hands of creative nature. But this is rare. We cannot count on it.

Why is it that some passages, come alive at once because they have been warmed by our feeling while others are only coldly imprinted on our mind? Why is it with the first we feel some kind of vague excitement, a rush of joy, tenderness, elation, love while with the second we remain indifferent, cold and our heart says nothing?

Because passages that spring to life are immediately akin to us, like well-remembered feelings, whereas the others are foreign to us as actors.

Subsequently, to the extent that our knowledge and closeness to the play is not complete but only in patches, which gradually widen, join together and fill the entire role. Just as the rays of the sun peep through the shutters into the darkness only giving pools of light but afterwards, when the shutters are open and they grow and join, the room is filled with light banishing the darkness.

It can be the case that the play has not been understood after one or a number of several readings either by either the heart or the head. Or it can be that our impressions are one-sided, that is, the heart is captured but the head remains creatively detached and protests, or, on the other hand, the head says yes and the heart says no, etc.

We rarely understand a play after one reading. It is often achieved in many different ways. There are plays whose quintessential meaning is buried so deep you have to dig it out. The ideas are so complex, that they have to be worked out. Their structure is so chaotic or elusive that it cannot be understood all at once but only in parts, anatomically, by studying each of its parts in detail. They are a puzzle which we find dull until we manage to solve it. These plays have to be read not once

but many times. Each new reading must be guided by the one before. Given the play's complexity, we must take even greater care to avoid taking a wrong step that could exacerbate the already difficult problem of study.

However, first impressions can be deceptive, erroneous. Then they are as harmful to the creative process as true impressions are helpful. Moreover, if our first impressions are truthful, they are a sure guarantee of success and excellent beginning for future work. If, on the other hand, they are erroneous, then the damage to our later work will be huge, and the stronger these impressions, the worse the harm will be.

These circumstances underline the significance of our first acquaintance with a role, and indicate that this important moment deserves incomparably more attention than it normally receives.

Unfortunately, not all actors realize the significance of first impressions. Many do not treat their first acquaintance with a play with sufficient seriousness. They approach this important stage in their work in an off-hand way since they do not even consider it to be the start of the creative process. How many of us prepare for the first reading? In most cases it takes place without thought, anywhere, anyhow, in a train, a carriage, during the intervals of a performance, not only so that they can get to know it but to choose an effective part. Naturally enough one of the most important moments in the creative process, our first acquaintance with a role, is lost. This lost is irreparable since the second and subsequent readings are already deprived of the elements of surprise that are necessary for our creative intuition. You cannot repair a false impression any more than you can regain your lost virginity.

What are we to do when you have not understood a play at first reading, or only passages in it and maybe wrongly?

Then the actor has complex, creative psychological work ahead of him, which we shall discuss in the course of this book.

ANALYSIS

The second phase in the long period of preparatory work I shall call *analysis*. Analysis is the extension of the process of getting to know a role.

Analysis is achieving a full understanding, knowing the whole through a study of its parts. Like a restorer, analysis surmises the whole work by bringing the individual moments of the play and the role to life.

The word 'analysis' is usually taken to imply a rational process. It is used for literary, philosophical, historical and other studies. But, in the arts, rational analysis in and of itself is harmful since, often, because of its

intellectual, mathematical, cold character it does not inspire us but, on the contrary, kills our artistic impulses and creative enthusiasm.

In our art, the intellect is ancillary.

The artist needs a different kind of analysis from the scientist or the critic. If the result of scientific analysis is *thought*, the result of artistic analysis must be feeling. It is not the intellect that creates in art, but feeling. It plays the leading role, it takes the initiative in the creative act. So it does in the process of analysis.

Analysis is getting to know, but, in our language, to know means to feel. Artistic analysis is, above all, the analysis of feelings conducted by feeling.

Acquiring emotional knowledge through feelings, or analysis, is all the more important, since only through them can we reach the unconscious, which, as we know, constitutes nine tenths of every human being or a role. It is, therefore, their most important part. And so, the intellect is only a tenth part of a life or role, whereas the other nine, the most important parts, can only be known through creative intuition, artistic instinct and superconscious feeling.

Our creative process and a large part of our exploratory analysis are intuitive. More than anything else the fresh, virgin impressions we receive at the first reading are direct and intuitive. It goes without saying we need to give them primacy of place for analytical purposes.

The creative goal of exploratory analysis consists in :

- 1 Studying the writer's work.
- 2 Searching for the inner and other kinds of material for creative purposes to be found within the play and the role.
- 3 Searching for the same material in ourselves as actors (self-analysis).

The material under discussion consists in living, personal memories drawn from our five senses, contained in an actor's affective memory, from knowledge he has acquired which is stored in his intellectual memory, from his experience of life. Need I repeat that these memories must always be similar to the feelings in the play and the role.

- 4 Preparing the soil in your own mind for the birth of the creative urge, both consciously and, mostly, unconsciously.
- 5 Searching for creative stimuli that will produce new bursts of creative fervour, new aspects of the life of the human spirit in those passages which did not come alive immediately at the first reading.

Pushkin demanded the 'truth of the passions, feelings that seem true in

the proposed circumstances' from a writer. And so, the purpose of analysis is a detailed preparatory study of the *proposed circumstances of the play and the role* so as, through them, to feel what Pushkin required in the next phase of the creative process.

How, in what way are we to begin our exploratory analysis?

Let us use the one tenth of ourselves given over in art, as in life, to our mind so as to arouse superconscious feeling and make it active and then, when that feeling is expressed, try to understand where it is going and without its being aware, direct it along the right creative path. In other words, let subconscious-intuitive creative activity occur as a result of conscious, preparatory work.

The unconscious through the conscious that is the watchword of our art and our technique.

How then are we to use that one tenth part of us, our mind, and apply it to art? The mind reasons this way: the best friend, and the greatest stimulus to intuitive feeling are *artistic fire* and enthusiasm. Let them be the first things we use in the analytical process. And let us not forget that they are at their widest when we first encounter the play. The superconscious grasps what is not accessible to the eye, the ear, the conscious mind, or the most refined sensibility.

Analysing though fire and enthusiasm is the best means of discovering, both in the play and in ourselves, the stimuli which in their turn spark off the creative act. With fervour comes understanding; with understanding comes greater fervour. Each arouses and supports the other. Analysis is necessary for knowledge and knowledge is necessary in the search for artistic enthusiasm fervour and this is necessary to arouse our intuition and that is necessary to start the creative process. And so first of all we need to analyse the feelings aroused by creative enthusiasm that spontaneously appeared on our first encounter with the role.

To do that you must give creative fervour full scope and then try to pin it down. After the first encounter the actor should revel in, prize those passages in the role that can arouse his enthusiasm and spontaneously spring into view or and find an echo in his heart from the very outset.

There are many such passages in a good work of art that can arouse his enthusiasm. They can attract by beauty of form, style, the shape of the words, the sound of the poetry, the inner character, and its outward appearance, the depth of its feeling and thought, the story, etc. The actor's heart is open and sensitive to artistic beauty, to what is noble, moving, interesting, happy, funny, frightening, tragic, etc. An actor is immediately drawn to the writer's masterstrokes that occur throughout the play either on its surface or deep down. All these passages have the power to set off

bursts of artistic fervour. Actors should read the whole play or parts of it thoroughly, remembering those passages they like the most, looking for new pearls and moments of beauty in the writing, imagining what their own and other roles or the staging will be. And yet for all his enthusiasm the actor should not, insofar as he can, lose his own creative independence and freedom from anything that could lead to preconceptions.

The way must be left open to every new impulse to run its length. In other words you must use your creative intuition to the full and a means of exploration.

That is what happens in those parts of the play that come alive spontaneously at first reading.

But what are we to do in those passages which do not miraculously and instantaneously produce intuitive understanding and artistic fervour? They must be analysed so that we can find challenging material that can arouse them, for they alone can evoke living feeling and stir the human spirit to life.

So, after the first, spontaneous creative impulse has run its course, we have to turn to the analysis of those parts of the play that did not come alive at the outset. To do that, we have, with a new play, to look not for its defects, as most Russian actors are fond of doing, but its artistic merits, for only they can arouse our creative enthusiasm and artistic fervour. The actor should, first and foremost, take care to see and understand what is beautiful. That is not easy, little practised by our fellow-countrymen who always want to find fault. It is easier to see and criticise the bad than to understand the good. And so we must take as a our guiding principle: once a play has been accepted for production, we must only speak good of it.

Where are we to start and how are we to fulfil the difficult task of bringing dead spots to life?

When feeling is silent we have no alternative but to turn to the nearest source of advice and help, our reason. Let it do its duty as an ancillary. Let it explore the play in all directions; let it scout out new paths for our main creative forces, intuition and feeling. Let feeling, in its turn seek out new stimuli to feed our enthusiasm, fire up our intuition, which then reaches out even further into areas of the human mind that are inaccessible to consciousness.

The more detailed, varied and deep that analysis is, the greater the chances of finding stimuli to arouse our creative urge and provide more living matter with which to create unconsciously.

When you look for something you have lost, you turn everything upside down and, more often than not, find it where you least expect it.

The analysis of the play is pursued, so to speak, in length and depth down each individual section, layer by layer, starting with the obvious, to its very heart, turning the soil over in those places that previous analysis has not touched, look for seeds of creative ardour, and plant them in the actor's mind. That is the ultimate goal of analysis.

Plays and roles exist on many levels.

- 1 First of all, the external level of facts, events, the plot, the play's structure.
- 2 Linked to this is the level of everyday life – (a) social, (b) national, (c) historical.
- 3 The literary level – (a) ideas, (b) ethics and other lines. In their turn each of these lines comes under various headings (a) philosophy, (b) ethics, (c) religion, (d) mysticism, (e) society.
- 4 The aesthetic level – (a) theatricality, (b) staging, (c) dramatic structure, (d) decor, (e) expressive movement, (f) musicality, etc.
- 5 The inner, psychological level – (a) creative desires, aspirations, inner actions, (b) the logic and sequence of feelings, (c) inner characterisation, (d) aspects of the mind and its make-up, (e) the nature of the character, etc.
- 6 The physical level – (a) the basic laws of the human body, (b) physical tasks and actions, (c) outer characterization, i.e., the typical, the external, make-up, mannerisms, habits, dialect, costume, the usual laws of the body, gesture, gait.
- 7 The actor's own personal creative level – his state of mind in a role.

These levels are not equally important. Some are essential to create of the life and heart of a role. Others are secondary, filling out the character's behaviour, inner and outer.

They are not initially accessible to feeling. Many of them have to be approached bit by bit. They come together in our creative imagination and then provide us with both the inner and outer life and form of the play and the role. They hold everything that is both accessible and inaccessible to our conscious mind.

The conscious levels of the play and the role are like geological strata, with sand, clay and rocks, etc., which form the earth's crust and which go down deeper and deeper. And there, at the very heart, as at the earth's core, with its molten lava and flames, unseen human instincts and passions are raging. This is the realm of the superconscious, the life-giving centre, the sacred 'I' of the actor/human being, the birthplace of inspiration. We are not conscious of them, but feel them with all our being.

So, analysis proceeds from the formal, written text, which is accessible to our conscious mind, to its essence, which the writer has embedded

in his work, and which, for the most part, is only accessible to the unconscious. We go from the periphery to the centre, from words to meaning. And thus we come to know (feel) the circumstances the writer proposes, so that, thereafter, we can feel (know) the truth of the passions or, at least, emotions that seem true in a living situation. We go from another man's fiction to living, genuine, personal feeling.

I start with the external circumstances and, first address the dialogue, so that I can select the outer, then the inner circumstances the writer offers us. For conscious analysis, and, subsequently, the exploration of the facts, it is not feeling, that is inaccessible and difficult to define, which matters to me, but the facts of the case that the writer offers, which can give rise to feeling in a natural manner. But we are far from being able to grasp all the facts immediately. Instinct engraves those facts whose meaning we grasp immediately in our memory. Other facts which we do not sense immediately which, remained undiscovered and uncorroborated by feeling, pass unnoticed, unappreciated, forgotten or dangle in the air, each one apart, and clutter up the play.

I recall, for example, my youthful impressions of first reading *Woe from Wit*. One of the most important moments and facts in the play at once etched itself indelibly in my memory. Chatski's exile and his final speech made such a sharp impression that I learned it immediately. Other moments and facts simply hung in the air and seemed superfluous, boring and held up the action of the play and it took a great effort on my part to make myself read them and come to terms with them.

One such was the very opening of the play. It seemed incomprehensible to me. For example, it was difficult for me to find my way in terms of time and place through the action. It was difficult for me to accept and justify the facts. How to accept the parting of the lovers, Sofya and Molchalin and their duet in a room which I did not recognise – a salon, next to the most private room in the house, i.e., her room. As we all know, in old houses, reception rooms were in one part and rooms for the family in a quite different part with the children's rooms, the elders' bedrooms, etc. That was where Sofya's room should have been.

I could neither understand nor justify the early morning duet, Famusov's arrival and the fact that he took the chiming of the clock for music and his unexpected flirting with Lisa, in fact the whole exposition of the play. This all seemed to me artificial and theatrical. It was all a muddle. I could not find anything truthful or living. That prevented me from accepting and consolidating my first impressions of the play.

The same thing, or almost, re-occurred on the first reading of other plays.

What are we to do when that happens? How are we to find our way through the external facts? Nemirovich-Danchenko suggests a very easy and clever way to do it. At the start of conscious analysis it helps us not only to discover the facts themselves, to sort them out, and carefully come to terms with them, to find their meaning and how they relate. We tell the story.

But it is not easy to put all the facts in order, as on parade, each in its proper place, logically. It is difficult to reveal the overall picture, the dramatic situation but the inner life of the characters. Initially it is not possible to tell the story better than the summary of the plot, be it a play or an opera, on the posters.

This account, of course, does not work. No matter. Let the actor rather learn now to tell the story of the play through the circumstances. That obliges him to go to the heart of the facts and their inner links. After the initial approach, he should let him only fix the facts and their sequence and only their outward, physical links in his memory. If you write out the facts of the play in this way, you manage to record one day in the life of the Famusov household. That is the here and now of the play, the facts of its existence.

I intend to do this with the most popular of Russian plays.

Let us suppose that we are analysing Griboiedov's *Woe from Wit* and are writing down the facts.

They are:

- 1 The night-time tryst between Sofya and Molchalov until dawn.
- 2 Dawn, early morning. There is a duet for flute and piano in the next room.
- 3 Lisa sleeps. She is supposed to be keeping watch.
- 4 Lisa wakes, sees it is dawn, asks the lovers to separate. She presses them.
- 5 Lisa puts the clock forward to frighten the lovers and alert them to the danger.
- 6 As the clock strikes, Famusov, Sofya's father enters.
- 7 He sees she is alone and flirts with her.
- 8 Lisa cleverly puts him off and persuades him to go.
- 9 Hearing the noise, Sofya enters. She sees the dawn and is amazed at how quickly her night of love has passed.
- 10 They do not have time to part before Famusov confronts them.
- 11 Amazement, questions, outrage.
- 12 Sofya cleverly gets herself out of trouble.
- 13 Her father allows her to leave and leaves with Molchalov to sign some papers.

- 14 Lisa scolds Sofya who is downcast by the prosaic nature of daily life as opposed to the poetry of her night.
- 15 Lisa tried to remind her of Chatski, who apparently is in love with her.
- 16 This angers Sofya and makes her yearn even more for Molchalin.
- 17 Chatski's unexpected arrival. His delight, their meeting. Sofya's embarrassment, a kiss. Chatski's bewilderment, charges of coldness. Memories. Chatski's affectionate banter. Declaration of love. Sofya is withering.
- 18 Famusov re-enters. His surprise. His meeting with Chatski.
- 19 Exit Sofya. Her sly remark about being out of her father's sight.
- 20 Famusov questions Chatski. His suspicions about Chatski's intentions with regard to Sofya.
- 21 Chatski's passion for Sofya. His sudden exit.
- 22 The father's bewilderment and suspicions.

Here we have a précis of the facts of Act One. If we use this model for the following acts we have a summary of the life of the Famusov household on the day in question.

All these facts constitute the present.

However, there is no present without a past. The present arises naturally from the past. The past is the roots from which the present grows. The present cannot be judged outside its relation to the past.

Try to imagine your present without a past and you will see that it immediately wilts like a plant cut off from its roots. An actor must always be feeling the *character's* past trailing along behind him. The past before the play and the role can be found in the play.

There is also a past behind the level of daily life which must also be understood (felt) . . .

There is no present without a past neither is there one without a vision of the future, without dreams, hints of future prospects.

A present without a past or a future is like a middle without a beginning or an end, a chapter of a book that has been accidentally ripped out and read. The past and dreams of the future are the basis of the present. Even at the level of daily facts there are dreams of the future, of events you anticipate, you want, you create. Some are waiting for marriage, others for death, others for a departure, others for an arrival etc. What does Griboiedov say about them?

The direct relationship of the present with the past and the future fleshes out the life of the human spirit of a character and provides the basis for the present. When he relies on the past and future of a character, the actor appreciates its present more.

So, the past and the future are necessary to make the present more intense.

The present is the transition from the past to the future. Facts that are not supported by the past and the future are left hanging in the air.

Often the facts stem from an everyday way of life and so it is easy to use the external facts which create that life to dig deeper into the social level. At the same time, the social circumstances must be gone into not only using Griboiedov's own words but in critical commentaries and articles and historical studies from the last century of life in the 1820s.

THE SOCIAL LEVEL – EXTRACTS FROM THE PLAY

- 1 Molchalin and Sofya's night together. What does it mean? How did it arise? The influence of a French-style education and novels? The mawkish ideas, the languishing, the softness and tender-heartedness of a young girl and at the same time her moral looseness.
- 2 Lisa watches over Sofya. We must understand the danger she runs, her loyalty and devotion. She could be sent to Siberia or made to work in the fields.
- 3 The elderly Famusov flirts with Lisa while at the same time giving an impression of monk-like behaviour. An example of the Pharisaic morals of the time.
- 4 Famusov's fear of any kind of *misalliance* because of Princess Marya Alekseevna.
- 5 Marya Alekseevna is the senior member of the family. Fear of her strictures. One could lose one's good name, prestige and even position.
- 6 Lisa's devotion to Sofya. She favours Chatski. She will be ridiculed if her charge marries Molchalov.
- 7 Chatski returns from abroad. What does travelling home all that way by stagecoach entail?

We must not, however, forget that everyday life is important only insofar as it reveals the life of the human heart and the truth of the passions. The heart is linked to the everyday and the everyday to the human heart.

So when studying the everyday we must not only understand what people do but how they feel, why they live in one way and not another.

As we dig wider and deeper into the life of the play, we come to the literary level. Of course, we cannot come to terms with its value immediately but only as our study advances. Initially, however, we can understand its form, its verbal expression, its style, its verse.

We can dissect a play so that we can see its skeleton, its anatomy we can

admire the harmony of its parts, the elegance, ease and logic of the way it unfolds, the theatrical value of its action, its typical features, its expressiveness, the ingenuity of its exposition, the intricacy and selection of the facts, the development of the action, the dexterity in creating the characters with their past and hints about their future.

We can appreciate the author's skill in inventing motives, reasons that precipitate this or that action that reveals the inner essence and the life of the human heart. We can contrast and judge the suitability of the outer form to the inner content.

Initially, we can only study the central idea of the play in broad outline and then gradually dig deeper into its essence.

Finally, we can gather material at the social, ethical, religious and philosophical level.

Who is Famusov? He is not an aristocrat. His wife is. After 1812, aristocrats left for Paris. Others lived in St Petersburg but landowners lived in Moscow. Famusov is a bureaucrat.

All this material can be gleaned from Griboiedov's play and from innumerable critical commentaries.

It is easiest to start with the outside, to understand the outer structure (acts, scenes, the individual details which make up its parts), finally, the whole framework.

Understand the development of the outer action. Observe how the parts are come together and divide.

Understand the central idea of the play (consciously for the time being). Judge how the social, national, ethical, historical, religious aspects of life in the 1820s we have studied are reflected in the play. Judge motives and cause that produce this or that action. Judge how the thoughts, ideas, customs are given living form in the play.

LITERARY ANALYSIS

Style: weigh up the beauty of Groboiedov's language, the ease of his verse, the sharpness of his rhythms, the cleverness of his words and inventiveness.

Judge the overall style. Gradually, reaching logically or in other ways the basic idea (supertask) and the throughaction by which this idea is brought to life. Why did the writer take up his pen (his starting point)?

Going even deeper, we reach the aesthetic level, the theatrical (stage), directorial, pictorial, dramatic, bodily, musical substrata.

All these levels can be studied by means of the written word but only in

broad outlines. In other words, you can extract and note down what the writer says about the décor, the setting, the layout of the rooms, the architecture, the lights, grouping, gestures, actions, manners. Then, you can listen to what the director and designer have to say about them. You can look at all the material that has been assembled for the production. Then you can take part in selecting material by going with the director and designer to museums, art galleries, in old homes of the period. Finally you can, on your own look at magazines, engravings, etc. In a word, you can study the visual, bodily, architectural, artistic sides of the play for yourselves.

STUDYING THE PERIOD (the daily side)

Museums: furniture, sculptures, tapestries, all kinds of objects. Note the primitive follies, Chinese rooms for example, etc., or sentimental feelings for a small ivory fan.

Study old houses: Khomyakov's² (many of its contents date from the 1820s). The large reception rooms are separated from the smaller rooms in which the family lived. The reception rooms are cold, unheated but the family rooms are small, warm and low. The architecture: different heights of the ceilings and storeys. One reception room with windows on both sides is the height of two floors of family rooms. Reasons for the nooks, the corridors, the cubby-holes, etc., windows with no fan-light (for the heating and household economy).

Visit Leontiev's house.³ Admire the elegance of the setting and the objects. Suites of rooms with sculptures, objets d'art, and furniture along the windows. Visit the palace in Ostanska. In Archangel (another kind of palace) study the period of Catherine the Great as it survived into the 1820s . . .

It is not enough to look at all these houses. You have to feel you are inside them, live in them in your mind, be alive to them.⁴

Exhibitions of paintings, illustrations, engravings, daguerreotypes, portraits, caricatures; newspapers, fashion sketches.

The aesthetic level: let us start with the pictorial side. Where the action takes place (*intérieur*, landscape).

The placing (the architectural half) is the most important for the actor at work. What does it matter to me to have pictures by Raphael hanging behind me? I do not see them. I have been placed downstage, near the prompter's box, which is the worst thing for an actor (Salvini 7 minutes, Duse 4.)

Simov, a director-designer, arranged every corner of the stage according to the mood of every scene. Everything immediately fell into place. Admire the intricate lines and walls of the castle (architectural half) of the way in which furniture and *objets* were arranged at the time.

The purely pictorial side. It is not good when the palette is poor. There is no pleasure for the eye. It is not good when the palette is too glaring so that the eye is distracted from the essentials: the writing and staging of the play. The actor cannot overcome visual impressions, especially if the colours are not arranged so as to suit the basic meaning of the play. [. . .]⁵

Now let us turn to another important moment in getting to know the play.

I am going to call the third phase in this important preparatory work the process of *creating the external circumstances and bringing them to life*. If in the second phase of our getting to know the play, i.e., through analysis I have merely established the bare facts, now I have to get to know their essential meaning, what lies behind them, or within them.

The material which we have achieved through conscious analysis is considerable but it is arid and lifeless. For the moment it is only a list of facts about the past, present and future set down in the play itself and in critical commentaries, in a word, it is a *report of the given circumstances of the play and the role*. There is no genuine, living, real knowledge in such a purely rational acquaintance with the play, the facts and the events. They are only dead, ‘theatrical’ actions. Our attitude towards them is casual. ‘Theatrical’ facts, events and circumstances, naturally, only produce a ‘theatrical’ attitude towards them, and an actorish state of mind, convention, lies, not the ‘truth of the passions’, ‘feelings that seem true’, in other words, the opposite of what Pushkin wanted. With such an external attitude to the ‘given circumstances’, you cannot begin to understand what those words mean.

To make our dry, raw material fit to use, we need to bring its essential meaning alive. We must transform the dead, theatrical facts and circumstances into something living, that is something that gives life. We must change our attitude towards it, from the *theatrical* to the *human*. We must breathe life into a dead, factual report of events because only the living can create the living, that is the genuine, natural life of the human spirit. We must bring the dead material of the play alive to create the writer’s *given circumstances* out of them.

This can be done by using one of the most important creative forces in

our art: artistic imagination. This new creative element lifts us out of the world of reason into the world of artistic reverie.

Everyone lives a real, genuine life, but they can also live in their imagination. The actor's nature is such that very often his imaginary life is more enjoyable, more interesting than the real one. The actor's imagination has the ability to get close to someone else's life, transform it into his own, discover exciting qualities and traits they have in common. It can create a make-believe existence by its own taste and so is always close to an actor's heart, stimulating it. It is a world that is beautiful, full of material for his own creative process, and akin to his own nature.

The actor creates his imaginary world through his own free will and the creative energy stemming from the raw material in his own mind, which has, therefore, an affinity to his own nature and not derived by chance from the outside. He creates it out of the facts and circumstances he has established in accordance with his inner wants and impulses, and not in spite of him through a malevolent fate and chance, as often occurs in real life. All this imaginary life more dear to the actor than his own existence. Doubtless because artistic fantasies find a truthful, warm echo in his creative enthusiasm.

The actor must have the power of invention and cherish it. That is one of the most important artistic abilities. There can be no creative act without imagination. Only its appeal or artistic fantasies, can arouse living, creative striving, a living, artistic upsurge from the innermost recesses of the heart. A role that has not passed through an actor's imagination cannot be appealing. The actor must be able to apply his power of invention to any subject. He must be able to create an imaginary life out of any kind of material that is suggested to him. Like a child, he must be able to play with any toy and take pleasure in it. Sometimes, these toys (fantasies) are ones he has chosen from the passages in the play he likes most, using his own taste and feeling. So, naturally, they delight him even more, and take over his will to create.

The actor is absolutely free to invent, providing he does not stray from the writer's basic ideas or his theme.

What do we mean by the creative work of the imagination, and how do our fantasies unfold? The world of fantasy and the imagination is multifaceted. First of all, we can visualise, with our inner eye, a multiplicity of images, living beings, human faces, how they look, the countryside, the material world of objects, things, the situation, etc. Later, he can hear inwardly a multiplicity of sounds, melodies, voices, inflexions, etc. He can have all kinds of feelings suggested by his recollections (affective memory). You can cherish and relish all these visual, aural or other

impressions. You can observe them passively, from the outside without making any attempt at positive action. In a word, you can be your own audience. I will call this kind of imagination *passive*, as opposed to *active*, which we will discuss later.

There are visual and aural actors. The first have a sharper inner eye, the second, a sharper inner ear. For the first kind, of which I am one, the easiest way to create an imaginary life is through mental images. For the second type it is through sound.

I will start with the passive. For this, I choose the path which is easiest for me by being an audience, through the visual. I try to see the inside of Famusov's house, that is the scene of the action. The material I gathered during the process of analysis concerning architecture and furnishing in the 1820s now comes in very useful.

Any actor who has the power to observe and recall his own impressions (pity on him if he has not), who has seen much, studied much, travelled (pity on him if he has not!) can imagine himself in a house of the 1820s, Famusov's time.

We Russians, and, especially, we Muscovites, are familiar with such houses, if not wholly, then in part, as vestiges of the past we received from our forebears.

In one of them we have seen, let us suppose, an entrance hall with a main staircase of the period. In another we recall the order of the columns. In a third, a Chinese dresser. Elsewhere, we are drawn to an engraving showing an *intérieur* of the 1820s. It reminds us of an armchair in which Famusov might have sat. Many of us still have old pieces of needlework, embroidered with beads and silk. Looking at them we are reminded of Sofya and think: she did perhaps embroider something here in the backwoods, in Saratov, where she could only 'grieve woefully before her sampler or the calendar of the saints'.

The things we have recalled during the period of analysis and at other times, in other places be it of real or an imaginary life we have created fall into place, and restore in our minds an old mansion of the 1820s.

After a few sessions of this kind we can mentally build the entire house, we can see it, observe its architecture, study the layout of its rooms. Imaginary objects find their right place and gradually make everything seem closer, familiar and everything combines to create the life within the house which comes into being unconsciously. If something does not seem right, or is boring, we can build another house immediately, or change the old one or simply repair it . . . an imaginary life is good in that there are no obstacles, no delays, nothing is impossible . . . You can have anything that pleases you, anything you want you can have in an instant.

The actor observes Famusov's house, standing apart, several times a day, as an audience and examines its slightest details. Habit, which is our second nature, does the rest. It is highly significant in the creative process by fixing our imaginary life like a photograph. Famusov's house is thus created in our minds.

But looking at an empty house is boring. You want people . . . Your imagination will try to create them, too. First of all the setting slowly creates them. The objects often reflect the minds of those who built it, the people who live there.

True, initially, our imagination does not show us these people, their appearance, only their clothes and their hairstyle. With our inner eye we see how these clothes without faces move about. Instead of proper faces, our imagination gives us a broad sketch. And yet, one of the footmen emerges with extraordinary clarity. With my inner eye I can clearly see his face, his eyes, his behaviour. Could he be Petrushka? Tosh! It is that cheerful sailor I met when sailing out of Novorosiisk.

How did he come to be in Famusov's house? Amazing! But that won't be the only surprise in the actor's imagination. Other characters we see along with Petrushka are still amorphous, lacking in personality and individual traits. They are only shown in terms of their social position, their role in life: father, mother, daughter, son, governess, butler, manservant, housemaid, etc. Nonetheless, these shadowy people complete the picture and help us establish the overall mood, the whole atmosphere inside the house and who so far have only been accessories in the general picture.

To examine the life in the house in greater detail we can half-open a door of this or that room and penetrate one half of the house, let us say, the dining room and its adjoining services. We can go into the corridor, the pantry, the kitchen up the stairs, etc. Life in that half of the house at mealtimes reminds us of a seething anthill. We see how the maids have removed their shoes so as not to spoil the master's floor, running in all directions with dishes and plates. You can see the butler's livery but not his face as he grandly takes the dishes from the pantry staff tasting them with all the manners of a gourmet before handing them to his master. You can see the lackeys' livery and the scullery hands dashing along the corridors and up the stairs. One of them as a joke, gives a maid a hug as he passes. After the meal, everything falls quiet and you see everyone walking on tiptoe as the master is sleeping. His thunderous snores echo down every corridor.

Then you see the real-life costumes of the guests, the poor relations, the godchildren who come to call. They are taken to Famusov's study to kiss the hand of their benefactor and godfather. The children recite verses

specially learned for the occasion and the benevolent godfather gives them gifts and treats. Then they all gather for tea in a corner or a drawing room. Afterwards, when they have all gone home and the house is quiet once more, I see Carcel lamps being carried into all the rooms on large trays. You can hear them being turned up, the grinding of the keys, ladders being set up to place the oil-lamps in the chandeliers and on the tables.

Then, when it is dark, at the end of a long series of rooms, you see a point of light, moving from one side to the other like a will o' the wisp. They are lighting the lamps. These will o' the wisps create a warm glow in all the rooms. Children run down the corridors, playing before bed. Finally, they are taken to the nursery. There is only a woman's voice in a faraway room singing a song with excessive sentimentality to a fortepiano. The old people are playing cards. Someone is droning out French; someone else is knitting in the lamplight.

Then comes the silence of the night. You can hear slippers in the corridor. Finally, someone, for the last time, someone slips by in the darkness and everything settles down. Only the distant sound of a late carriage arriving, the cry of the night watchman, telling the hours, can be heard in the street . . . 'All's well, all's well'.

This was how the general mood and style of Famusov's house were established in my imagination; its life in general, in broad terms without any detailed traits of the inhabitants, with no individual personalities. I am the only one to see of the picture of the daily life of the period. I have created in my imagination. I observe as an outsider, passively, without taking part in someone else's life.

So far, the circumstances of Famusov's household have not gone further than daily lifestyle. To convey its inner life you need people and, apart from myself, a chance listener and Petrushka, the manservant, who has curiously come to life, there is not a living soul in the house. In a vain effort to put life into these people, moving about in costume in that phantom house, I try to place my own head on the shoulders of one of these walking costumes in the place of an empty blob. The operation succeeds. I see myself in the costume and hairstyle of the period as I pass through the house – the hall, the rooms, the salon or the study. I see myself in the dining-room, sitting next to the real-life costume of the hostess and I rejoice that I have been privileged to occupy such a place of honour or, on the other hand, I see myself at the far end of the table, next to Molchalin, feeling snubbed.

Thus, in my imagination, I feel an affinity for these people. This is a good sign. Of course, it is a semblance, not true feeling, but nonetheless very near it.

Encouraged by my efforts, the next experiment is for me to put my head on Famusov's or Mr X's or Mr Y's and others' shoulders. But putting heads on shoulders does not always bring a character alive. I try to remember myself as a young man, with my rejuvenated head on Chatski's or Molchalin's costume and, to some extent, I succeed. In my mind, I put on various kinds of make-up and put my painted face on the shoulders of various characters, trying to see the occupants the author has suggested and this is successful to a certain degree, but is not essentially useful. Only Skalozub's costume and my imaginary, made-up face gives any kind of hint of a real-life character.

Then I recall a whole gallery of living, familiar faces. I look at all kinds of pictures, engravings, and photographs etc. I experiment with these living and dead heads and it is always a failure, if you leave aside the theatre's box office man who wears N's costume perfectly and also a head in one of the engravings that looks like 'that consumptive' who 'hated books'.

The failure of my experiments with other men's heads convinces me that this kind of imaginative work is futile.

I realized that it was not a matter of seeing the make-up, the costumes, the look of the members of Famusov's house, as a passive spectator, but in feeling their actual presence. It is the immediacy of characters, not seeing them or hearing them helps us to feel they are actually real. I also understood that you cannot be aware (feel) this immediacy by delving into the lines at your desk, you have, mentally, to get inside Famusov's house and meet his family yourself.

How are we to effect this transformation? Through the artistic workings of our imagination.

However, for now, I will deal with another important aspect of the workings of our imagination, the active rather than the passive.

I can be the audience of the things I imagine, but I can also be a character in it, that is mentally take part at the very centre of the imaginary circumstances, the conditions of a way of life, a setting, objects etc. I do not see myself as an outsider but only witness what is going on around me. In time, when this impression of 'being' has grown stronger, you can become a lead character in the conditions around you and mentally begin to be active, want something, strive for something, achieve something.

That is the active aspect of imagination.

After that, the fourth phase in the major creative period of getting to know the play begins.

This I call the period the *creation of the inner circumstances* of life in the Famusov household, in contrast to the previous period when the actor was

only concerned with the outer circumstances of his role. When we mentally create the inner circumstances, we can analyse, understand and bring that life alive through feeling. This moment in the process is a continuation of analysing creative material and bringing it alive. Now the process penetrates below the realm of the external and the rational into the realm of the internal, the mind. There, the process of getting to know the play proceeds through the activity of the actor's own creative feelings.

The difficulty of this process is that now the actor comes to know the role not from books, words, rational analysis and other conscious means but his own impressions, genuine feeling and life experiences.

To do that you have to place yourself at the very centre of the Famusov household, live there, and observe yourself from the outside like a spectator, as I did earlier. That is a difficult and much more important psychological moment in the preparatory period. We have to concentrate very hard on ourselves.

This highly important moment in the creative process is called in actors' jargon 'I am being' i.e., I mentally start 'to be', 'participate' in the life of the play. I begin to be aware of myself in the thick of things. I begin to merge with all the circumstances the writer and the actor have proposed, to have the right to be there. That right is not granted immediately but only gradually. Here are some of the ways.

I try to change places, from an observer to a character in Famusov's family. I cannot say that was succeeded right away, but I managed to see what there was around me, not myself as my own object. myself as an object but only now I am seeing the rooms, the setting, the phantom residents not from a distance but close to. When, in my mind, I move from room to room, I have the feeling I am going through the house. I am going through the door, up the staircase, opening a door to a suite of reception rooms. Here I am in the drawing room and open the door to the anteroom. Someone has blocked the door with a heavy chair, which I push aside and go further into the room . . .

That's enough! Why fool myself? What I am feeling as I move around is not the creative working of a live imagination, not a genuine sense of being. This is mere self-deception, forcing myself and my imagination. I am only forcing myself to have emotions, I am not aware of my own being. Most actors make the same mistake. You must be extremely precise and rigorous when assessing your sense of 'being' on stage. We must not forget that the difference between a genuine sense of the life of a role and some simple, chance, imaginary sense is enormous. The danger of such false illusions is that it leads to forcing and the stock-in-trade.

However, during my unsuccessful wanderings through the Famusov house there was the lone moment when I genuinely felt it existed and believed in it. That was when I opened the door into the anteroom then instead of closing it, removed the big chair and felt the small hint of its physical existence, its weight. At that moment, for a few seconds I felt the truth of real 'life', which vanished as soon as walked away from it and once again was moving in space, as though in the air, amid undefined objects.

Then, for the first time, I understood from experience the exceptional importance of the *object* in establishing the creative state of 'being' ('I am being'). I repeated my experiments but, for the moment, only with inanimate objects. In my mind I changed the furniture and objects around in various rooms. I carry objects here and there, dust them, observe them. all these experiments help strengthen the feeling of being ('I am being').

Encouraged, I try to go one step further, to have the same sense of immediacy with living, not dead objects.

Who is it to be? Petrushka, naturally, since he is the only living face in a house of phantom people and real-life costumes. I meet him in the corridor with the staircase that leads up to the girls' rooms.

'Is he waiting for Lisa?' I think to myself and wag my finger at him but he smiles his charming smile. At that moment I not only feel that I am there in the situation I have created in my mind but am acutely aware how the world of objects around me has come alive. The walls, the air, the things are bathed in living light. Truth in which I can believe has been created and, at the same time, my sense of being, ('I am being') has been strengthened and I am filled with the joy of creating. It would appear that a living object makes us even freer to create being ('I am being'). It was absolutely clear to me that this state of mind does not arise of its own accord (*an und für sich*) but through a sense of the object, preferably an animate object.

The more I exercised my mind in creating living objects, met them, felt how near they were to the real world itself, the more convinced I was of a new requirement: to be in a state of 'I am being' what is important is not only physical form, appearance, face, body, mannerisms, but the inner self, the mind. And I also understood that when relating to others, you need not only to understand their psychology, but also your own, and the nature of your relationship to them.

That was why my encounter with Petrushka the sailor was so successful. I felt I knew him, his real self. I met him as we were sailing from Novorosiiki. I felt a relationship with him. It is accident that I talked at length with him during the storm. People open out in moments of danger. I saw the sailor as Petrushka not because of his face but some affinity with

who he was. I wanted to say of him, ‘How could you not like this sailor?’, and, similarly, ‘How could you not like Petrushka, the footman?’. I recognised the sailor in Petrushka for the charm they both shared.

That was why it was so easy to place the sailor’s head on Petrushka’s living body. As I placed it, at the same time, unbeknown to myself, I slipped a heart I knew into the footman’s body. Was it because of that that it was so easy for me to place my head on a real-life costume and really feel my own heart beating inside it? I also understood that it was easy for me to feel a relationship with Petrushka and not only be aware of his but also my own heart, and that this was important for us to be able to relate.

After this discovery it was a natural consequence to face the question of the recognition (sense), using my personal experience, of the hearts and minds of the members of Famusov’s household and above all my relationship to them. I found this a difficult task. To be aware of the nature of all the characters was tantamount to writing a new play. My talents do not reach that far. They are much more modest. If only I can meet living, human souls in Famusov’s house. They do not have to be exactly as Griboiedov wrote them. I acknowledge that I do not believe that my heart and mind, my imagination, my whole nature can be unaffected by my preparatory work in creating living objects in Famusov’s household.

I believe that vital features of Griboiedov’s characters can be seen in the living objects I have created. To learn how to meet the living objects within the circumstances of Famusov’s household, I make a series of mental visits to the members of his family, relatives and friends, so that I can mentally knock on the door of each of them individually.

Fresh from the first reading, naturally, I want most of all to meet those of its members to whom the author has introduced me, most of all I want to go to the master of the house, then its young mistress, Sofya, then Lisa, Molchalin, etc.

So I go down a familiar corridor, trying not to stumble over anything in the half-light. I count to the third door on the right. I knock, wait, and open it cautiously.

Thanks to an ingrained habit, I quickly come to believe in everything that I do, and in the imaginary being my imagination has created. I go into Famusov’s room and see him in the middle of it, in his nightshirt, intoning the Lenten hymn, ‘Correct my prayer’, waving his arms like a conductor. Opposite him is a small boy with a face contorted and tense from his dim-witted efforts to concentrate. He is singing in his thin little child’s treble, trying to learn and remember the words of the prayer. His eyes are shiny with tears. I sit to one side. The old man is not in the least

embarrassed at being half undressed and goes on singing. I listen to him with my inner ear and seem to begin to feel the presence of a living object i.e., I begin to feel him physically close. However, this sense of a living object does not consist in feeling his body, it is more important to feel his heart.

Need I say that this cannot be done physically? There are other ways of doing it. People communicate not just by words, gestures, etc., but mostly by the invisible rays of their will, that go from mind to mind. Feeling understands feeling. There is no other way. Now I try to understand and feel the heart of the object, its shape and, most important, define my relationship to it.

I try to direct the rays of my will or feeling, parts of myself and try to receive parts of his mind. In other words, I do exercises in 'transmitting and receiving' [see *An Actor's Work* Chapter 10]. However, I cannot take anything from him or give him anything while Famusov does not exist for me, he is still inanimate. Of course he does not exist, true! But I know his role in society, as the head of the house, I know his kind, his class, but not in any detail. Then my experience of life leads me, reminds me because of his outward appearance, mannerisms, ways, his childlike seriousness, his profound reverence for the litany that here we have the familiar figure of a good-natured, amiable idiot, who is, at heart, a common serf.

That helps me find the right relationship to him in myself, even if I have not yet felt who the object really is. Now I know how to take his ways, what he does and how to approach him. My observation of him keeps me busy for a short while, then it becomes boring. My attention wanders but I quickly take myself in hand and concentrate, but my mind wanders off again and I leave him as I can do nothing more with him. Nonetheless I believe my experiment has been successful and, thus encouraged, I move on to Sofya.

I run across her in the hall. She is dressed and hurriedly putting on a fur coat to go out. Lisa is fussing round her, helping her to button up her coat, running around with all the tiny packages her mistress will take with her. Sofya is preening herself in front of the mirror.

'Her father has gone to the ministry', I reason, 'but the daughter is hurrying down to the Kuznetski bridge, a fashionable shopping centre to the French shops to look at "hats and bonnets and pins and needles" or "bookshops and cake-shops", or, perhaps, "for other reasons".'

But the result is the same; the object has given me the feeling of being alive ('I am being'), but I cannot hold onto that mood for very long and my mind quickly wanders, then concentrates again and finally in the absence of anything to do I leave her.

I must admit that these excursions and meeting, however cursory, have been enjoyable and I set off towards Molchalin. While, at my request, he is writing out a list of all Famusov's relatives and friends, whom I intend to visit, I feel fine. I enjoy the official way Molchalin shapes his letters. But when he has finished, I feel bored again and go to pay my calls.

In our imaginary life we can go anywhere we like uninvited. Nobody objects, they all receive us. First of all I go to the middle of nowhere, to the barracks, and the very model of a military man, Sergej Skalogub.

From Skalogub, on my way to Khliostova, I mentally go to Tugoukhovski. I see his entire family just as they are getting into to their six-seater carriage to go to church for vespers. In my mind I get into this enormous coach and am already being thrown from side to side. That was when I understood what spring frost was like in old Moscow during Lent. That was when I remembered poor Amfisa Khliostova and realised for myself how difficult it was 'at sixty-five to drag myself' to see my niece.

Torment!

The hour struck, she quit Porkovka, tired out,
Night – the world is dead!

The prince, the princess, six little princesses, me – nine in all! I felt like a sardine in a tin as we were in a 'six-seater'.

Luckily we were soon at Pokrivka and I jumped out of the 'six-seater' near Amfisa's house. The honourable lady-in-waiting was sitting, surrounded by her housemaids, struggling with monograms. Opposite her was a little, black girl, and a dog Amfisa is teaching tricks to the dog and Russian songs to the girl while Matrioshka, Grushka, Akulinka, dressed in traditional Russian aprons, screech out the refrain of the song, in response to the shrill piercing tones of the black girl. Amfisa's amusement and warm-hearted smile enliven everyone. She explains to me, interrupting her singing for a moment that she has to laugh after a meal. That 'rams down' her food and, and, as she said, aids her digestion unexpectedly. Her jests and warm-heartedness are replaced by offensive abuse and a box round the ears. I did not linger very long, as there was nothing for me to do and I quickly got bored.

From there I went to Sagoretski, Repetilov to the Gorichs – 'Is he Turk or Greek, a Blackamoor with spindly legs?'. All you have to do is leave your home mentally and there are no limits to your powers of observation as an artist. Everywhere I feel the presence of living objects, their living hearts and minds and I can communicate with them, if need be. And every time this reinforces my sense of being, but, unfortunately, a new

acquaintance cannot hold my attention for long. Why should that be? The answer is very easy. All these encounters had no purpose. They were mere exercises in the sense of the physical presence of objects.

It was sense for sense's sake, but you cannot live with and be concerned with physical sense for very long. It is quite another matter if those visits had another purpose, even if it was merely external. I start with the simplest of experiments, i.e., with inanimate objects. I return to the anteroom and look for the best place for the armchair which blocked the door and which I remember as being important. I imagine it as identical to other chairs taking pride of place in other rooms. And, as I fulfil my task, I feel I am at the very heart of Famusov's house. I feel the nearness of the objects, I become one with them. But once my task is accomplished, I feel I am left dangling again, the ground has been cut from under my feet. And so I try to fulfil another, more complex task. To that end I go to the ballroom and say to myself, 'Soon it will be Sofya's and Skalogub's wedding and I have been asked to organise a large wedding breakfast for a hundred people. What is the best way to arrange the seating, the china, etc.?'

All kind of questions arise: for example, the colonel of the regiment will be there and, maybe, his whole staff. They will all have to be placed in order of rank, so no one will be offended by not being near the place of honour: the young couple. The same arrangement applies to the relatives. They too may take offence on their side. Having gathered such a number of people together, I cannot find places for them all and that worries me. What if the newly-weds were at a table in the centre and the other tables were arranged in a circle around them? Such an arrangement would increase the number of places of honour significantly.

The *greater* the number of places, the easier it will be to seat them by rank. I took a long time settling this question and if I lose interest in it, there is always something else: preparing the meal but not for Skalogub but for Sofya and Molchalin.

Then everything would be different. Marriage to a secretary would be a *misalliance* and so the wedding would have to be simpler, only for close relatives and not all of them would deign to attend. There would be no generals since Molchalin's immediate superior is Famusov himself.

My head is teeming with new patterns of response. I no longer think about the presence of objects, nor of a sense of being ('I am being'). I *am*. My head, heart, will, imagination are working just as they would in real life. Encouraged by my experiment, I decide to do the same thing, but not with dead objects, in my mind, but with living objects.

And so I go back to Famusov, who is still teaching the little boy to sing a hymn and still conducting in his nightshirt.

I decide to provoke the old idiot. I sit at a little apart and, as it were, take aim on him and find some excuse to tease him

‘What’s that you’re singing?’, I ask.

But Famusov does not deign to reply, perhaps because he has not quite finished his prayer. But now he has.

‘A very fine tune’, I quietly murmur.

‘That’s no tune, my dear man, but a holy prayer’, he insists.

‘Oh, excuse me, I forgot . . . When is it sung?’, I ask.

‘Go to church and you’ll find out.’

The old man is already annoyed but I find it amusing and goad him even more.

‘I would leave, as I can’t stay long’, I say gently. ‘Why is it so hot in here?’

‘Hot?’, the old man retorts, ‘Isn’t it hot in the pit of hell’.

‘That’s another matter’, I reply even more gently.

‘Why?’, Famusov demands taking a step in my direction.

‘Because in hell you don’t need clothes, you are as God made you’, I say trying to seem like an idiot. ‘You can lie around and steam yourself, as in a Turkish bath but in church they make you sweat it out in a fur coat.’

‘Oh, you . . . with you one can fall into sin.’ The old man decides to leave lest he should laugh and ‘rock the foundations’.

The work I have been doing seems so important that I decide to confirm it by sensing the hearts and minds of living objects. To that end I start my calls again, but this time with a definite purpose: to announce the marriage of Sofya and Sgalozub to Famusov’s family and friends. I am successful once more, but I do not always feel the mind of the living object with whom I am in contact equally sharply. And so my sense of being alive (‘I am being’) grows each time.

The more my work progresses, the harder, the more complex my ultimate goal, and the circumstances within which I have to operate, become. A series of events arises. For example, I imagine Sofya being sent away to the depths of the countryside, to Saratova. What is her secret fiancé, Molchalin, to do? Looking for some means, I even consider abducting her as she travels out into the wilds. Another time I take on the role of her defender in the family’s court, after she has been found with Molchalin. The judge is that bastion of convention, Princess Marya Alekseevna. It is no easy matter to argue against this terrifying representative of family traditions.

Another time, I am present at the unexpected announcement of Sofya’s engagement to Skalogub and . . . I shoot him. All these improvisations convince me that to create a sense of being alive (‘I am being’). Simple

action is not enough; you need a purpose. Once you begin not only to be, to feel, you are part of an imaginary life, but you are also acutely aware of other people, and your relationship to them, and theirs to you. You come to know their joys and woes.

We meet at the heart of life itself, momentarily becoming one, going on together to meet events, meeting them face to face, striving, fighting, succeeding or failing, aware not only of our own lives but of our relationship to others and to the facts.

When I manage to engage totally with my imaginary action and my battle with forthcoming events, I feel as though a miraculous change has taken place . . .

Then I understand the real value of inner circumstances. They are made up of my personal relationship to external facts, my inner life and links with other people. If the actor masters the creative state, a sense of being alive ('I am being'), a sense of the living object and can behave in a genuine manner when meeting phantom figures, he can create and bring the inner and outer circumstances of the life of the human spirit alive, i.e., complete the work we initially set out to do. The facts and people may change. The actor may be offered new facts other than the ones he has devised. His ability to bring them alive will be of great service to him in his later work.

The moment of inner transformation marks the end of the creative period of getting to know the play. That does not mean, however, that the actor will not have to develop his work further. The analysis of a role into individual, ancillary moments, creating and bringing alive the situations the writer has suggested, the inner and outer circumstances the actor has filled out with his sense of being alive ('I am being'), which is essential, and the constant re-evaluation of the facts will continue to develop and deepen until the actor is fully in touch with his role.

What then does this initial phase with all its activities provide us with?

- a getting to know a role;
- b analysing it;
- c creating the external circumstances and bringing them alive;
- d creating the internal circumstances and bringing them alive.

What are the results? This period has prepared the soil in the actor's mind, as it were, turned it over for the birth of creative feelings and experiences. Conscious analysis has brought the writer's given circumstances to life so as to bring forth naturally the 'truth of the passions'.

Next comes what I shall call *appraising the facts*. It is essentially only an extension, or rather a repetition of what has just been done, the result of

an inner transformation. The difference is that earlier experiments were performed *ad libitum*, about the play, around the play, on various themes, whereas now we have to deal with the play as the writer saw it.

I take them in progressive order, since I, as Chatski, had to know (feel) the whole of the life of the Famusov household and not just the parts of it directly connected with my role.

There is a direct connection between internal and external circumstances. Indeed, the inner life of the characters, which I am now creating, is inherent in the facts of their daily life and so, in the facts of the play. It is difficult to take them separately. Digging beneath the facts, the plot, going from surface to centre, from form to content, we unconsciously arrive at the inner life of the play.

And so we have to revert to the external facts, but not for their own sake, but for their essential, hidden meaning, for the deep, inner life of the play. We need to see the facts from a new angle, from a new awareness of being in Famusov's home, a new 'I am being'. [. . .]

So as not to overload our experiment, our demonstration, I will only spend time on the important acts, setting aside the smaller ones, something which, of course, should not be done when working properly.

First, I turn to the romantic rendezvous between Sofya and Molchalov. To do this from a personal point of view I put myself mentally in the place of the actress playing Sofya and start to live, to feel I am in the world of the play. In that state of mind ('I am being') I ask myself, 'What are my mental circumstances, my personal, living human thoughts, wishes, ambitions, good points and failings might have made me, were I woman, feel towards Molchalov in the way Sofya does?'

This was what happened in response:

'The amorous extra', I tell myself, 'is a self-seeking underling'. Everything inside me wells up in revolt against him. There is no possible circumstance that could make me feel towards him, even were I a woman, as Sofya does. Of course, were I a woman, I might not find either feelings or memories, or affective material to experience the role of Sofya and I would have to refuse to take part in the play.

Meanwhile, however, my imagination had not lain dormant. It had imperceptibly surrounded me with the familiar external circumstances of the Famusov household. It made me live Sofya's life. It tried to thrust me into the heart of the facts, so that once at the centre my own will, my own feelings, my own reason and knowledge of life would force me to judge how significant and important they were.

And, indeed, living in the play as I was, feeling it as I was, I had once more to consider the facts and the events the author had provided. Looking

at them from a new point of view, my imagination began to look for some justification, some inner explanation, an approach from the heart. My imagination, as it were, homed in on everything around it in that new life, in the author's given circumstances.

'And what if', it mused, 'Sofya had been so contaminated by her upbringing and French novels that she would like a nonentity like Molchalov, a servant for a lover?'

'It is revolting! Sick!', my imagination exclaims, 'what could have inspired such feelings?'

'Perhaps in the very revulsion they evoke?', my intelligence responds.

'And Chatski', feeling protests, 'can he love someone as perverse as Sofya? Inconceivable. That would ruin his character and the play.'

Seeing that this is not the way to reach my heart, my imagination looks for other ideas, other circumstances to produce other reactions.

'But what if Molchalov' my imagination enquires, 'were really someone exceptional, as Sofya sees him – poetic, kind, affectionate, considerate, sensitive and, above all, manageable?'

'Then he would not be Molchalov but someone else, someone nice', my imagination teases.

'So be it', my imagination agrees, 'but could you love such a man?'

'...?', – feeling has quit.

'Besides which', my imagination insists, giving feeling no chance to recover, 'one must not forget that everyone, and especially spoiled women, are entirely self-regarding, and so they have to seem to be what they would like to be but, in fact, are not. If you play this game on a daily basis for your own sake, how much better it is to play it for someone else, especially if he, like Molchalov, sincerely believes everything people want him to believe.'

What pleasure for a woman to appear so good, so noble, so poetic and so humiliated by all! How pleasant to feel sorry for oneself, and excite pity and enthusiasm in others. The presence of an audience pushes you on to more acting, a wonderful, new role, more self-regard, especially if that audience, like Molchalov, can give heartening responses.

'But this version of Sofya's feelings is arbitrary and goes against Griboiedov.'

'Not at all. He wants Sofya's self-deception and Molchalov's blatant lies', my mind concludes.

'Don't trust what the teachers say', my imagination says even more strongly, 'trust your own artistic feeling.'

Now, when the fact of Sofya and Molchalov's love has been appraised and justified in my mind, it comes alive. I feel it. I believe it to be true. The

analysis of feelings has fulfilled its first duty and has created the external circumstances of the play that are highly important for me in the role of Chatski. More than that, now that Sofya and Molchalov's secret love is a living fact, many other scenes become clear, for example, Sofya's dreams about Molchalov, her passionate defence of him in different acts of the play: in the scene with Lisa (Act 1), in the scene with Chatski (Act 3). It also explains her distress in Act 2, when Molchalov falls from his horse and her reproaches to him for his carelessness in the same act. Her revenge on Chatski and her pain of her disappointment with Molchalov in the last act. In a word, the love-story between Sofya and Molchalov is the story of the circumstances that militate against them.

Their love story is like a current of electricity, a telegraph wire that runs through all the other parts that have been brought alive.

But suddenly Famusov comes in and discovers the lovers' meeting-place. Sofya's situation is difficult and I cannot but feel anxious when I put myself mentally in her place.

When you come face to face with a tyrant like Famusov in such a compromising situation, you need a bold, unexpected way out to throw your opponent. Then you have to know your opponent and who he is. But I still do not know Famusov, save one or two hints picked up at the first reading. The directors and other actors playing the role are no help, since they do not know any more than I. All I can do is define the character for myself, his individual traits, the way his mind works. So, who is he?

'A bureaucrat, who owns serfs', my brain responds, remembering my lessons at school.

'Fine!', my imagination responds, all on fire. 'That means Sofya is a heroine!!!'

'Why?', my brains asks doubtfully.

'Because only a heroine could stand up so calmly and boldly to a despot', my imagination responds, excitedly . . . Here we have a clash between the old and the new! The freedom to love! A modern subject!'

Were it not for the calm voice of reason, imagination would have taken us off into worlds Griboiedov himself would never have dreamed of.

However, imagination's passionate tirade did not set feeling alight.

'In my view', this replies calmly, 'Sofya is simply shaken by seeing Famusov, and clumsily tries to extricate herself with the story of the dream.'

The imagination finds this prosaic response to its romantic outpourings disappointing, but a second later puts something else together to tempt feeling.

What if Famusov only looks fierce on the outside to maintain order in the family, the values of his class and keep in Princess Marya's good

books?', my imagination muses. 'What if he is a nice old duffer, tetchy but easy to calm down?'

'Oh, that's a different matter! . . . Then the way out is clear. A father like that is not difficult to deal with, especially since Sofya is shrewd "no more, no less than her mother, my late wife",' our brain confirms.

Now that we know what to do with Famusov, it should not be difficult to find ways to justify other scenes in which he is concerned and discuss them. For example, Softya's account of her dream when Famusov enters (Act I) etc.

Having found the key to the first two important scenes, it is easy to understand the next scene, the bitter prose of the morning after the sweet poetry of the night. We must work on the following scenes in the same way. We must give the right value to Chatski's return, her friend, almost her brother, almost her fiancé, once her beloved, always bold, fiery, free and in love with her.

He has returned from abroad after many years of absence, something unusual in those days when there were no railways and travel was by heavy coaches sometimes taking months. Unluckily for him he did not arrive when he was expected. Sofya's embarrassment is all the more understandable and her need to put on a good face and hide both it and her guilty conscience. Finally, her attacks on Chatski are understandable because of his unjust remarks. Remembering Chatski's position as a childhood friend and her present coldness towards her former friend, we can appreciate the change in him, the bewilderment. On the other hand, if we put ourselves in Sofya's shoes, after the romantic rendezvous, full of poetry, after the prosaic scene with her father, we can understand and forgive Sofya's irritation with him and the bad impression his mordant witticisms produce in contrast to Molchalin's supine compliance.

If we put ourselves in the place of the other characters, Sofya's relatives, we can understand them. Can they really tolerate the liberal views and ways of a westernised Chatski? Can they, who live in a society that has serfs, fear words that seem to strike at its very foundations. Only a madman could talk and act as Chatski does. Seen against this background, Sofya's revenge against her former friend appears all the more clever, the more remorseless when she makes them believe he is mad. Only if we put ourselves in Sofya's shoes can we appreciate the force of the blow to her self-indulgent pride when Molchalin's insulting duplicity is revealed. We have to live in our minds the life of serf-owners, experience their habits, their customs, their style, to understand, that is to feel the full force of Sofya's boundless indignation and her pain at the shameful way Molchalin is sent packing, as though he were a common servant. We need to put

ourselves in Famusov's place in order to understand the intensity of his anger, his outrage, his need for vengeance, and the horror in his last line: 'Ah! Dear heaven! What will Princess Marya say?'

As a result of using your own life-experience, all the individual facts, the external and internal circumstances come together in ten to fifteen hours, and you understand (that is, feel) how exciting, how full of surprises, this day in the life of the Famusov household the author has chosen can be. It is only then that you understand the special quality of Griboiedov's play, that is often forgotten in most productions: the heart of the play, the energy, the tempo. Indeed, in order to cram in and account for the plethora of facts, that have been given greater depth through your own knowledge as they unfold over four acts, i.e., the time the performance lasts, the action must have pace, the actors must be alert to what is happening. Moreover they must feel the underlying tempo of the hearts and minds of the denizens of the Famusov household. This is often forgotten in the theatre, especially in routine academic interpretations with booming actors' voices.

The more an actor has seen, observed and understood, the greater his life-experience, his live impressions and memories, the more he feels and thinks, the broader, more varied, and richer his imagination will be, the fuller, the deeper his appreciation of the facts, the more strongly the external and internal life of the role and the play will be created. By systematically exercising the imagination daily on an identical subject, all the given circumstances become habitual in this imaginary life. In its turn, habit creates an alternate self, an alternate, imaginary world.

Now that all the facts have been assessed not only by my head but, more importantly, by my heart, I suddenly notice that I understand much on the inner lives of the characters more closely, and that facts that had seemed theatrical have become living and real. So having begun our analysis with dull, dry facts, I have brought them alive without noticing it and have achieved a genuine understanding of the Famusov household.

Indeed, what a difference there is between the dry, impersonal account of the facts after the first reading and my current appraisal of them. Previously the facts had seemed to me to be theatrical, external, the simple storyline. Now they had become vital events in an endlessly exciting day, full of real thought, with the flavour of my own life.

Before there had just been a flat stage direction: enter Famusov. Now it contains an inherent danger for the two lovers who have been found out: Softa is threatened with exile to 'the back of beyond in Saratova' and Molchalov in [Tver] where he will be 'buried alive' for the rest of his days.

Before there was the simple stage direction, 'Enter Chatski'. Now we have the return of the prodigal son to the bosom of his family and his reunion with his beloved after many years of waiting. How much imagination, how many lived internal and external circumstances, how many individual, living inner bits, how many living desires (the actor's own), how many living feelings, idea, images, efforts, actions are now contained for me in that bare stage direction and in every word of the script!

Now that the facts have been tested out by my personal experience in a state of *being alive*, the facts, the external and internal circumstances of the role, etc., begin to be genuine and not alien, theatrical as before. My attitude towards them has imperceptibly changed and I begin to think of them as real and live in their world. Now that Famusov's household takes on a definite meaning I understand them not in parts but as a continuous whole, a concatenation of events. I have a personal relationship with them. In brief, the actor begins to understand the inner meaning of the household, the individual goals and ambitions and the pattern they come together to form. Then the facts and the plot are inseparable from the whole, the context

In conveying the facts and the plot, the actor unwittingly conveys the play's content, the life of the human spirit that secretly flows, like a stream, under the surface. All we need on stage is the inner content of the facts, the end result of feeling, or those facts which motivate feeling. We do not need facts as such, facts as entertainment. They are harmful because they distract us from the life of the human spirit.

The secret of appraising the facts is that it binds people mentally together, makes them act, struggle, prevail over other people and fate, or succumb. That reveals their wishes, their goals, their life-story, the relationship of the actor, the living organism in the role with the other characters in the play, etc., that is, it clarifies the psychological circumstances of the play which is what we are looking for. So what does it mean to appraise the facts and events of the play? It means to discover the hidden thoughts behind them, the psychological essence, the degree to which they are significant and effective. It means to dig deep into the external facts and events and discover other, more important facts that lie hidden in the psychological event, that, perhaps, had their origin in the physical facts. That means following the development of the psychological events and feel the degree and character of their effect, the characters' intentions and ambitions, understand the psychological pattern of the individual characters' story-lines, the way they clash, meet, part, converge, diverge on their way to their life's goal.

In a word, appraising the facts means knowing (feeling) the nature of

the human soul. It means making the facts the author has created one's own. It means discovering the key to unlock the hidden life of the character you are playing, that lies beneath the facts and the words.

It would be a mistake to appraise the facts and events once and for all. It is essential for further work to go back over them again to achieve greater enrichment. We have to appraise the facts all over again every time we work. Man is not a machine; he cannot feel a role the same way every time, be stirred by the same stimuli. He feels the role differently every time, and sees the facts that are forever fixed in the play differently from yesterday. The minute, imperceptible changes in the approach to the facts are often the greatest spurs to new creative activity. Their strength lies in the fact that they are new, unexpected and fresh. You cannot quantify what motivates the actor each time he re-appraises the facts. The innumerable, complex, random influences of weather, temperature, light, food, the combination of outer and inner circumstances to one degree or other influence the actor's mental state. In return, the actor's state of mind leads to a re-appraisal of the facts each time he is working. The ability to use the ever-changing complexity of random events, to stimulate his inspiration through an appraisal of the facts is an important part of an actor's psychological technique. Without it, an actor can tire of a role after a few performances, lose contact with the facts and the living events and their inner meaning.

It would be a pity if the audience understood the facts better than the actor. There would then be a rift between them. It is a pity if the audience feels the facts more strongly than the actor, or if the actor undervalues, or overvalues them and so destroys a sense of truth and balance.

THE PERIOD OF EXPERIENCING

I shall call the second creative period the *period of experiencing*.

If the first period can be compared to the courtship and marriage of young lovers, the second can be compared to the consummation of that love and the fruits of that union.

Just as the first period was preparatory, the second is creative.

The first prepared the soil for the period of experiencing, planting the seed of life into the dead spots in a role.

The first period prepares, as Pushkin said, the proposed circumstances, the second, again according to Pushkin, the truth of the passions, the heart of a role, its structure, the idea of the character, real human feelings, the life of the human spirit, the life of the role as a living organism.

So, the second period – *experiencing* – is fundamental to the creative act.

The conscious process of experiencing is organic, based on the mental and physical laws of human nature, the truth of feelings and natural beauty.

How does this organic process arise, and what does the actor's creative work consist of?

Having learned to 'be', to 'get the feel' of the life of the Famusov household, i.e., mentally be inside it as myself, having come face to face with the facts and events, having got close to its members, feeling who they are and entering into direct contact with them, I begin unconsciously to want something, to work towards some end which rises up naturally before me.

So, for example, recalling my first morning visit to Famusov when he was singing, I not only feel I am there with him, in his room, not only feel the presence of a living object and who he is, but begin to experience an impulse towards some immediate goal or task. And so I try to find the right words or actions. I want to bait the old man because I think he is funny when he is put out, etc.

The emergence of creative wishes, endeavours naturally evokes an impulse to action. But that is not action itself. There is a divide between impulse and action. An impulse is an as yet unfulfilled inner desire, whereas action is either an inner or an outer fulfilment of that unsatisfied inner impulse. In turn, the impulse produces inner action (inner dynamism) and inner action produces outer action. But we will speak of that later.

Now, stimulated by creative wishes, goals, impulses to action, having experienced in my mind certain scenes in the Famusov household, I not only feel the immediacy of the object that provoked them, but try to find a way to achieve the appointed goal. Thus, for example, recalling the way Famusov interrupted Sofya and Mochalin's rendezvous, I try to find a way out. First of all I must keep calm, hide my embarrassment, summon up all my self-control, formulate a plan, find a way of dealing with him in his present mood. I target him. The more he rants and rages, the calmer I try to become. As soon as he quietsens down, I feel the need to embarrass him with my innocent, demure, reproachful looks. Subtle adaptations then appear out of nowhere, all the astuteness of a cunning mind, complex feelings, unexpected impulses and urges to action, known only to nature, and which only intuition can stir.

Now I can go into action. True, not yet physically, only mentally, in my imagination, to which I give free rein.

'And what would you do?', imagination asks feeling, 'if you were in Sofya's place?'

'I would have her to put on an angelic expression', feeling replies without hesitation.

‘And then?’, imagination persists.

‘I would have her persist in her silence and look even more demure’, feeling continues. ‘Let her father speak with the utmost bitterness and stupidity, then, when the old man has given vent to all his bile, is hoarse from shouting, exhausted by his emotion and there is nothing left inside except his natural goodness, idleness, need for peace and quiet, when he has sunk into an armchair to get his breath, mopped his brow, I would have her be even more silent and look even more angelic which only the innocent can do.

‘And then?’, imagination asks.

‘I would have her to wipe away a crocodile tear, so her father can see it, and to stay quite still until the old man becomes uneasy and asks her guiltily.

‘Why don’t you say something, Sofya?’

No need to answer him.

‘Didn’t you hear me?’, he insists. ‘What’s the matter?’

‘Yes’, the daughter replies, so demurely, and in such a tiny, defenceless, child-like voice that he is completely disarmed.

‘And then?’, imagination persists.

‘I have myself keep silent and go on looking demure, until [my] her father starts to get angry not because he has caught me with Molchalin but because his daughter is silent and making him look a fool. That is the best means of diverting attention and changing the subject. Finally, taking pity on her father, I tell her with the utmost calm, to point to the flute which Molchalin is clumsily trying to hide behind his back.

‘Look, papa’, I have her say in a demure voice.

‘What’s that?’, he asks.

‘A flute’, I reply. ‘That’s why Aleksei Stapanovich came.’

‘Yes, yes, I see that. But how did he come to be in your room?’, the old man asks anxiously.

‘But where else could it be? Yesterday we were rehearsing a duet. Didn’t you know, darling papa, that we were rehearsing a duet for today’s party?’

‘Yes’, the old man admits cautiously, more and more embarrassed by his daughter’s composure, that seems to prove her innocence.

‘True, yesterday evening we went on working longer than was proper and for that I ask pardon, darling papa.’ Probably she kisses her father’s hand and he kisses her lightly on the head and says to himself, “clever girl”.

‘We had to learn the duet and you would have been upset if your daughter disgraced herself in front of the family and played badly, you would have been upset wouldn’t you?’

‘Well, yes, the old man admits almost guiltily feeling he is being made to look a fool. “But why here?”, he suddenly explodes, trying to look less foolish.

‘Where else?’, I have her ask with a face like an angel. ‘You forbade me to go into the drawing room where the piano is. You said it wasn’t proper for me to be alone with a young man. Besides it was very cold there because there was no heating yesterday. Where could we learn the duet save here in my room with the clavichord? There is no other instrument. Of course I told Lisa to be here all the time so as not to be alone with a young man, and that is why, papa . . . of course, I have no mother to protect me and advise me. I am an orphan . . . Alas for me! I wish I were dead!’

If by some good fortune I could have tears in my eyes, I would end up with a new hat.

And so, with the arrival of wishes, endeavours, impulses to action I can make the transition to the most important thing, inner action, naturally.

Life is action, doing, and that is why our art, created by life itself, is pre-eminently doing.

It is no accident that the words ‘drama’, ‘dramatic art’ stem from the Greek *δραω*. In Greece this refers to literature, playwriting, the author and not to the actor and his art. Nonetheless, we can more or less take it on board. However, it was once called ‘actors’ action’ or ‘facial expression’.

Usually stage action implies something false and external. It is common to think that a work is rich in stage action, when people come and go, marry, divorce, kill or threaten others, when the plot is tight. That is a nonsense.

Stage action is not a matter of coming on, moving about, waving one’s arms, etc. It is not a question of legs and body but of inner movement, endeavour. So, let us understand ‘action’, once and for all, not as facial expression, not as histrionic representation, not as external but as *internal*, not as physical but as *psychological*. This arises out of an unbroken series of states of mind, phases, moments, etc. Each of them, in turn, is made up of wishes, endeavours and urges or inner impulses to action to achieve an appointed goal.

Stage action is the passage from mind to body, from the centre to the periphery, from experiencing to embodiment. Stage action is the drive towards the supertask via the throughaction.

External action without inspiration or justification, that is not prompted by inner movement, only matters to the ear and the eye, it does not reach the heart, and has no meaning for the life of the human spirit.

So, our creative work is above all inwardly dynamic action. Inner impulses (urges) to action, inner action, take on a special meaning. We need to guide them continuously. Only this kind of creative work, based on inner action, is true theatre. So, let us agree that theatre is only what is active, dynamic, in the psychological senses of the word.

By contrast, a passive attitude kills stage action, produces inertia, wallowing in one's own feelings, experiencing for experiencing's sake, technique for technique's sake. Passive experiencing is not theatre. In fact, the actor really lives the role; he feels good inside, happy, at home on stage, he basks in inaction, he wallows in his feelings. Deluded by his sense of well-being, he thinks that he is being creative, genuinely experiencing. But however natural, immediate, persuasive, genuine but essentially passive this experiencing may be, it is not creative, and cannot reach the audience's heart as long as it lacks action and does not promote the inner meaning of the play. Passive experiencing stays inside the actor because it has no reason to make itself clear inwardly or outwardly.

And so, even when it is possible to express passive feelings, moods on stage, they must be revealed through action. In other words, for a passive mood to be theatre, it must be made active.

How is that to be done? Let me give an example. In moments of danger we need to react, and the more energetic, the stronger our nature, the stronger the reaction. But let us suppose that in a moment of danger a man's reaction is weak. That will express his *submissiveness*, his *passivity*. In a word, when we encounter danger, energetic people react strongly and others weakly, or sometimes strongly, so as to avoid the main issue.

There is no such thing as genuine inaction. There can be no passive state without some kind of action. Avoiding active participation implies action. Weak reactions are typical of the passive state.

So, experiencing comes into being when wishes, endeavours and impulses to action arise. They and action itself are new seeds of continuing, future experiencing. Life, in reality and on stage, is an unbroken series of embryonic wishes, endeavours, inner impulses to action that are divided between inner and outer . . . Outer action is a reflex response to an inner impulse. Just as the frequent combustion of a car engine produces smooth movement so the successive sparking of the human wishes develops the continuous movement of our creative will, and produces the flow of our inner life, that is experiencing the role as a living organism.

To arouse creative experiencing, the actor has continuously to spark off artistic wishes throughout the role so that they in turn arouse the right

aspirations. So that, too, can give rise to inner impulses to action, that express themselves in the right physical actions. To do that we have to distinguish inner impulses and urges to action from action itself.

Can an actor live someone else's wishes, either in life or on stage, which do not overlap with his own heart and mind? Can he really occupy someone else's place, feelings, impressions, body, and bring them alive with his own personality in every role?

An actor can submit to other people's wishes, what the writer and the director say, and do it mechanically, yet only experience his own, living, genuine wishes, which he, not someone else, has brought into being and developed. The director and the writer can tell the actor what they want but they must let him work it out in his own terms. For wishes to be alive on stage they must become the actor's own creative wishes and endeavours, born of his own nature. In a word, he can only experience his own feelings.

How are we to stimulate our creative will, our wish for action. They cannot be dictated to: 'Wish!', 'Be creative!', 'Do something!' Our feelings can only be coaxed. Then they begin to do what we want.

One of the most important creative principles is that an actor's tasks must always be able to coax his feelings, will and intelligence, so that they become part of him, since only they have creative power. How are we to attract them? The only way is by a compelling goal or creative task. The task must provide the means to arouse creative enthusiasm. Like a magnet, it must have great drawing power and must then stimulate endeavours, movements and actions. *The task is the spur to creative activity, its motivation. The task is a decoy for feeling.* Just as the hunter attracts birds with a wooden whistle, so the actor uses a compelling task to draw unconscious creative feeling out of the depths of his being. The task sparks off wishes and inner impulses (spurs) towards creative effort. The task creates the inner sources which are transformed naturally and logically into action. The task is the heart of the bit, that makes the pulse of the living organism, the role, beat.

Life on stage, as in the real world, is a series of tasks and the way we fulfil them. They are signals that occur during the entire course of his creative efforts. They show him the way. Tasks are like notes in music, arranged in bars, that, in turn, create a melody, that is, feeling, sadness, joy, etc. Melody, be it in an opera or a symphony, is the life of the human spirit in a role the actor's heart sings.

Where are we to find the creative goals, the tasks to stimulate our creative will and its endeavours? They arise either consciously, commanded by our intelligence, or are born unconsciously, spontaneously, intuitively, through our emotions, that is they are prompted by the actors' living

feelings and creative will. We can call creative tasks that stem from our intelligence, *rational tasks*. We can call tasks that stem from feeling *emotional tasks* and tasks that stem from the will, *volitional tasks*.

Rational tasks, naturally, can only be conscious. They are powerful because they are well-defined, clear, subtle, logical, coherent, philosophical. A rational task which we can fulfil on stage without feeling or will is lifeless, without appeal, un-theatrical and so unfit for creative purposes. A rational task that has not been warmed to life by emotion (feeling) or will reaches neither the actor's heart nor the audience's, and so cannot give rise to the 'life of the human spirit', 'the truth of the passions', 'feelings that seem true'. An arid, rational task cannot inject life into dead words and ideas. It is no more than a barren report. When we fulfil a task like this by intelligence alone, we cannot live or experience; we can only report, and that cannot be creative. A rational task is good in the theatre when it is able to activate an actor's living feelings, his will.

As regards volitional tasks, they are so closely linked to feeling that it is difficult to discuss them separately.

The best creative task is one which grips the actor's feelings immediately as *unconscious emotion* and leads him intuitively to the purpose of the play. Such unconscious, emotional tasks are strong because they are immediate (the Hindus call tasks of this high order *superconscious*), exciting the creative will, unleashing its forward thrust. Our intelligence can only note and appraise the results. Emotional tasks, arising from our talent, our *superconscious*, from inspiration, lies 'deep-down inside'. That is a place where we have no authority. All we can do, on the one hand, is to learn not to get in the way of our *superconscious* creativity and, on the other, find ways, even indirectly, to bring them under control. Often they are, if not fully, then semi-conscious.

Not all tasks can be rationalised without some damage to their basic appeal. There are tasks that are known for their ambiguity. There are also totally *conscious, emotional tasks*. Naturally, this kind of task, is discovered by feeling, is related to it and our intelligence becomes almost the double of our nature. They simultaneously influence our will from two sides, the head and the heart. And yet, rational tasks cannot be compared to emotional tasks which derive their power from the *superconscious*.

Unconscious tasks are born of the emotion (feeling) and will of the actor. Created by intuition, the unconscious, they are then judged and given conscious form.

So the actor's feeling, will and head play an important part in the creative act and the selection of creative tasks. The more they are involved, the more deeply they take hold of the actor's entire being.

However, such a statement is subject to a number of caveats. There are many who consider that the actor creates entirely out of his will, others out of his emotions, others still out of his reason. I am convinced, on the basis of my own personal experience, that our creative activity has three, distinct elements, depending on the moment. Some are emotional in origin, others rational, others volitional.

Each of our psychological drives has its place in the overall process of creative work. Head, heart and will march side by side. So we cannot speak of our mental (psychological) life without reference to the other two. They are 'one in three', inseparable, to one degree or other they are involved in every action. They cannot be considered in isolation, always together. And so, whenever we have to assign a task to one of the functions of our triumvirate we must not forget that the other two are more or less involved in one permutation or another.

Sometimes emotion (feeling) takes the lead and the others barely respond. At other times the head or the will take the initiative and control.

But, apart from these, there are mechanical, reflex tasks, wishes, endeavours and impulses to action. Until now this entire process from the moment tasks, wishes appear to the moment when they are fulfilled has been a matter of consciousness, will and emotion. With time, and by dint of being repeated they become hard and fast; they are automatic reflexes. They seem so simple and so natural that we take them for granted. They just happen.

Do we think about what our hands and feet are doing as we walk or open a door, or eat, etc.? Of course, in childhood, we concentrate hard on taking the first step, using our hands, feet, body, tongue, etc. We come to think of these actions as physiological, mechanical, as easy, and do not think about them. Does a pianist, for example, think about every movement of his fingers as he plays. Does a dancer think about every movement of his hands, feet and body as he dances? But before these movements can become habit the pianist has to practise difficult passages for hours and the dancer has systematically to train his feet, hands and body to master difficult steps.

The same is true of psychologically elementary wishes, endeavours, actions and tasks. Do we constantly think about our effect on people with whom our relations are fixed through our having been so long together? But when we meet these people for the first time, we have to concentrate hard on establishing these relations if they are to become reflex.

Once we have done that, they can be repeated unconsciously, and incredibly easily. There is the muscular memory of the complex combination

of steps in the dance. We are amazed when confronted with the ingenuity with which our mind adapts to the complexity of events and finds a solution.

These reflexes are the result of a series of complex events. They are composed of the tasks which the actor mechanically seeks to accomplish, the wishes which motivate each individual task, endeavours and impulses to action, both inner and outer, etc.

Finding or creating these tasks, motivating the right action, being able to set about them, is one of our major psychological concerns technically.

There are many different approaches to every task. The actor needs to find the one closest to him and the part he is playing, the one most capable of arousing his creativity. How is this to be done? Let me give an example.

Suppose we have to convince Sofya that neither Molchalin nor Skalogub is right for her. If our arguments are cold they are all on the outside, dry, unpersuasive words. They only cause the actor to approach another person physically, as actors say 'to get into his mind', or 'look at the person you are talking to', and yet not be convincing. This is fake, a forgery. It cannot convince an actor his feelings are genuine, or stimulate his creative powers. There can be no experiencing, in the same way that if we do not genuinely experience, we cannot truly believe.

What can persuade me so convincingly that my task is true that I am moved to positive action? The sight of the enchanting, hapless, defenceless Sofya, side by side with the nonentity Molchalin or the oafish Skalogub? But these people still do not exist either in reality or in my imagination. I do not know them, but I know from my own life-experience what pity, fear, shame, the feeling of revulsion at the thought of an innocent young woman marrying an idiot like Skalogub, or a spineless opportunist like Molchalin. This unnatural and ugly union arouses the desire, which we all feel, to prevent an innocent young woman from taking a false step. It is not difficult for that desire to create mental impulses which evoke real, living desires, endeavours and action itself.

What are these urges and impulses? The need to pass on to others our feelings of shame, outrage, fear and pity concerning a beautiful young woman, who is ruining her life. Tasks like these always stir invisible impulses the action on the mind. Something prompts you to go to Sofya, or someone like her, and try to open her eyes to what life is, persuade her not to destroy herself by an unsuitable marriage, which can only end in sadness; we try to find ways of convincing her of our own good will. That leads us to ask her about very private matters. But it is not easy to make

someone look into their own heart but, unless they do, you cannot achieve your goal and everything else is useless.

First, I would try to convince Sofya of my good will towards her to gain her confidence. Then I would try to explain to her as graphically as I could, the difference between her and the oafishness of Skalogb and the petty-mindedness of Molchalin. Great caution, tact and subtlety are needed when talking about Molchalin because she sees him through rose-coloured spectacles. I must make her feel even more keenly how my heart sinks at the thought of what she, an innocent, can expect. I hope my fears for her, which I want her to share, can scare her, make her stop and think.

All our approaches to her must be tempered by the feelings we radiate, the comforting looks we give, etc. Is it possible to list all the physical and mental actions that spring to life in our minds in our efforts to save an innocent girl on the brink of ruin?

I have said enough to clarify the actor's approach to his creative task. Whenever we want to determine what it is, we have to call it something, usually by a noun.

For example, if you ask an actor, 'what do you call the task that now faces you?', he will answer, 'indignation, certainty, calm, joy, sadness.'

The supertask, or, indeed, any task is usually defined in the same way, for example, meeting Sofya, greetings, embarrassment, explanations, doubts, certainty and calm.

Nouns result in mental, visual, aural and other kinds of images of feelings and actions, but not the feelings and actions themselves. They do not have within them the seeds of positive action. They are passive. Once they are there, the actor can express his visual or mental images externally, imitate them, appear to feel them. This results in a certain theatricality, good or bad. A true artist expresses his joy at the meeting, the warm greetings, all the signs of perplexity and doubt. The actor starts to get physically into someone else's mind.

One practical way of avoiding this is to define the throughaction, using verbs. It not only gives rise to an image of action but, to a certain extent, stimulates action itself. Try replacing a noun with the right verb, see what happens to you and you will feel a change. Your feelings become more urgent, spurs to action, hints at ways of achieving it, that is, certain impulses to a dynamic response.

For that purpose I recommend a simple, practical way of transforming nouns into verbs.

When defining an active task, the best thing is to give direction to your will by using *I want*. This channels the will, stimulates the right endeavours. So we have to ask ourselves the question, 'what would I do in

the given circumstances?’ This results in the following answer: I want to run, shout, argue. These are external, physical wants and tasks. But there can also be internal, mental, psychological wants and tasks: I want to understand a misunderstanding, clarify a doubt, create calm, hearten and encourage, etc.

Conscious, unconscious, active, volitional, emotional, rational mechanical (motor) tasks etc., are accomplished inwardly as well as outwardly, with heart and head. So they can be both *physical* and *psychological*.

For example, if I go back to the scene I created in mind of my morning visit to Famusov, I remember a whole series of physical actions which I had to perform in my head. I had to go down the corridor, knock at the door, turn the knob, enter, greet the master of the house and the others present, etc. I could not destroy the truth and burst in.

We are so used to all these essential physical actions that we do them mechanically, like a motor. The same thing happens in our minds.

There we find a similar infinite series of essential, very simple, psychological tasks. For example, I remember another imaginary scene in the life of the Famusov household: the interrupted meeting between Sofya and Molchalin. How many psychologically elementary tasks Sofya had to fulfil, in emotional terms, to calm her father’s anger and escape punishment. She had to conceal her embarrassment, baffle her father with her calm, shame him with her angelic expression, disarm him with her modesty, wrong-foot him. She could not have transformed an angry man by one single movement of the heart, one step, one psychological task, without destroying, killing the truth.

People, to a lesser or greater degree, need the psychologically basic tasks provided by the given circumstances. They are mandatory both for the actor as part of the creative process and for the character he is creating. Otherwise, the physical and mental sense of truth would be destroyed, the belief in what he is doing would be shaken or killed, and you would have mere conventions, tension, our nature both mental and physical is forced. And where there is forcing, life is cut short, and actorish anarchy sets in, tense muscles, tightness both mental and physical, routine and the tricks of the trade, which have nothing to do with the ‘life of the human spirit’, the ‘truth of the passions’, ‘feelings that seem true’. On the other hand, an almost pedantic respect for all natural, familiar, physical and psychologically elementary tasks, wants, endeavours, inner and outer actions, by their own momentum, their familiar logic are conducive to living feelings and experiencing.

A drowning man, whose heart and lungs have stopped, has to be

artificially resuscitated. The other organs begin to work automatically; the heart begins to beat; the blood begins to pulse through the veins, and at last by their own natural momentum, they revive his spirits. This bond between the physical organs is innate. Thus, a premature baby, who cannot yet breathe, can be artificially induced to perform a series of movements that stimulate its reflexes, and stir it to life.

The same reflexes, the same familiar logic of tasks are used while experiencing is still gestating.

This, by its own momentum, produces life, i.e., experiencing the role.

So it is not only fulfilling physical and psychologically basic tasks that is important but their step-by-step sequence and logic.

And so, when looking for exciting, creative tasks we must meet the most elementary requirements of our mind and body by fulfilling them precisely. The actor is confronted by them from the very start, as he makes his entrance, as he meets the other characters for the first time.

Everyone needs psychologically elementary tasks both in the natural world or when living a role as a human organism. This need, shared by the actor as a person and as a character is the first blending of the performer and the role.

Furthermore, the tasks must not solely be part of the actor, they must be similar to the character's. For this to happen, the actor must use his life-experience, put himself in the character's place, so as to understand the way it lives, if not in the real world then in the world of the imagination which is stronger, more compelling than reality itself.

To do that, he must create for himself the life of the character, mental and physical and, as Pushkin puts it, create the 'proposed circumstances', the 'truth of the passions' which constitute the human spirit of a role. When he feels he is at the centre of these fictional circumstances, moving through them, he creates the character's living goals and endeavours, its feelings, or, as Pushkin so happily expresses it, 'the truth of the passions' that create the life of the human spirit in a role.

Using these reflexes, which are second nature, and natural needs, the actor blends with the passions of a fictitious life, and feelings similar to the character's coming to life within him.

Then he starts genuinely to *experience* the role.

Thus, in selecting creative tasks the actor is first confronted with physical and psychologically elementary tasks.

Both have to be linked in some way, by the gradual logic of feeling. It does not matter if this logic has its lapses. Music, which is the epitome of harmony, has its moments of dissonance. We must be consistent and logical in selecting and performing our tasks on stage. We cannot jump ten

floors up in a building. We cannot, by a single act, mental or physical, overcome every obstacle and be convincing, or fly from one house to another to meet someone we want to meet. We need an interconnected, logical sequence of both kinds of tasks. We have to leave the house, take a cab, go to someone else's house, go through many rooms, find the person we know. So, there are a whole series of actions we need to perform before we can meet someone.

By the same token, when we are trying to persuade someone we have to carry out a series of tasks: we must attract his attention, get the feel of him, understand his state of mind, adapt to him, try out a series of ways to convey our thoughts and feelings so that we influence him with our own experiences. In short, we have to fulfil a series of psychological tasks and physical actions to convince someone of our thoughts and influence him by our feelings.

It is not easy to sustain all physical and psychologically elementary tasks precisely on stage so that they correspond to the wishes, endeavours and actions of the character. Actors only adapt to the inner life of the role while they are speaking their lines. Once they fall silent and hand over to another actor, in the majority of cases they break the thread of the character and fall back into their own lives and feelings and, when it is their turn again, take their cue and bring a broken life back together again.

This stopping and starting breaks the logical sequence of ever-changing feelings and makes experiencing impossible. Can you bring a role to life as a whole, with all its delicate feelings, Chatski, for instance, if his feelings are continually interlaced with the actor's own feelings that have nothing to do with the character? Three for Chatski, six for the actor, then six for Chatski, two for the actor.

Imagine a chain made up of gold and iron. Three gold links, six iron – then six gold, two iron, etc.

When we break up the links in the chain, and alter them, we attack life, the very nature of feeling, the character itself and the actor, too. Those passages in a role which are not informed by creative tasks and experiences are a dangerous invitation to actors' clichés, theatrical conventions and other tricks of the trade.

Here is a law actors should always remember.

If you force yourself mentally and physically, then feelings are chaotic, when there is no logic or sequence you cannot have genuine experiencing as an organism.

I put myself in the place of the actor playing Chatski and try to understand which of the physical and psychologically elementary tasks arise in a

natural manner, spontaneously when I begin to ‘feel’ I am ‘living’ at the centre of events in the Famusov household (‘I am being’).

There I am (for the moment as myself, without Chatski’s thoughts and feelings) just back from abroad. I have not gone to my own house, but, in a heavy four-horse carriage, drive to the place that is almost a second home to me. The carriage stops. The coachman calls to the porter to open the gates.

What is it I want at that moment?

A I want to get to see Sofya as quickly as possible. I have dreamed about it for so long.

But there is nothing I can do. I sit helpless in the coach waiting for the gates to open. From sheer impatience I tug at the window cord that has annoyed me throughout the journey.

The porter arrives, comes to the carriage window, recognises me and hurries. The hinges creak, the gates open and the coach is about to go in but the porter lingers. He comes to the window with tears in his eyes and greets me.

a I have to be affable and greet him.

I do all this patiently so as not to offend this old man who has known me since I was a boy. I have to listen to familiar memories of my childhood.

Now, finally, the coach crunches over the snow, reaches the main door and stops.

I jump out.

What should I do first?

a¹ I must rouse the sleepy Filka quickly.

I take hold of the bell-cord, pull it, wait, ring again. Roska, the mongrel dog is whimpering and rubbing my legs.

While waiting for Filka:

a² I want to greet the dog, pet my old friend.

The main door opens and I run into the hall. I am immediately engulfed in the familiar atmosphere. My heart is filled to overflowing with old memories and feelings. I stand still, tearful.

Filka greets me with a horse-like whinny.

a³ I have to be affable with him, exchange greetings.

I patiently fulfil this task so as finally to see Sofya.

I go up the main staircase and am already on the first floor. I run into the major-domo and the housekeeper, who are struck dumb with surprise at our meeting.

a⁴ I must be affable with them. I have to ask about Sofya. Where is she? Is she well? Is she up?

I go through a succession of familiar rooms.

The major-domo runs ahead.

I wait in the corridor. Lisa rushes out with a little shriek. She plucks me by my sleeve.

What do I want at that precise moment?

a⁵ To achieve my goal as quickly as possible, see my dear childhood friend, almost my sister.

And finally I see her.

Now my first task – A – has been fulfilled through a series of tiny, almost exclusively *physical* tasks (getting out of the carriage, ringing the doorbell, running up the stairs, etc.).

Another major task spontaneously springs to life:

B I wish to greet her, hug her and exchange pent-up feelings with her. However, that cannot be done in one go, with one movement of the heart. I need a whole series of small tasks that can create a major task.

b First of all I want to take a close look at her, see how she has changed while I have been away.

Girls change between fourteen and seventeen. They can be unrecognisable. That is what has happened to her.

At seventeen you've flowered, with a special glow
You're peerless, charming, that you know.

I thought to meet a young girl and now I find a young woman.

I know from my own memories, my own personal experience the overwhelming feeling of bewilderment people have at such moments. I remember the awkwardness the embarrassment when faced with the unexpected. But all I have to do is detect a known feature, a flash of the eyes, a movement of the lips, a familiar smile and I instantly recognise my darling Sofya. A momentary shyness passes. Brotherly affection returns and a new task is spontaneously born.

b¹ I want to convey all my feelings in a brotherly kiss.

I rush to clasp my friend, my sister. I hug her so hard I almost hurt her, to make her feel the strength of my love.

b² I must woo her with my eyes and words.

And once again, I fix upon my target looking for soft words, and radiating my warm feelings towards her.

But what do I see? A cold face, embarrassment, a touch of displeasure. What is this? Am I dreaming? Or is this perplexity because she is surprised, or, maybe, love?

A new task emerges.

C I have to understand the reason for my friend's coldness.

This can be accomplished through a series of independent tasks.

c I have to make Sofya admit what it is.

c¹ I must shake her composure by my probing, reproaches and clever questions.

c² I must win her attention . . . etc.

But she is clever. She hides behind an angel face. I feel she could easily convince me, albeit fleetingly, that she is glad to see me. The more so since I want to believe it too, because I want to pass onto another, bigger, important task.

D To question her about herself, her relatives, friends and how she lives.

This task is accomplished through a series of small tasks: d, d¹, d², d³, etc.

But Famusov arrives and interrupts our friendly tête-à-tête. Task E then emerges and is accomplished through a series of small tasks: e, e¹, e², etc. Then come F, G, H and their own constituent tasks, that cover the play, until I reach the final task, Z:

Z)

Away, away! From Moscow I depart,
Never to return, and scour the earth
To find a place to nurse a wounded heart

To carry out this final, major task I must:

z Order the servant, 'My carriage, my carriage'.

z¹ Exit Famusov's house quickly.

As I selected and performed these tasks in my mind and the inner and outer circumstances, I spontaneously felt the will towards something, wants. Wants stimulated creative goals, which in their turn begat inner impulses (urges) to action, action resulted in embodiment and that produced a creative act. All these wants, endeavours and actions resulted in

a legitimate, creative moment in the life of a role with its central task, A. A second such independent moment arises from a^1 , a third from a^2 , etc.

In their turn, a , a^{1-2} form a bit with task A at its centre. By the same token, if we examine their inner meaning, all Chatski's wants from the moment he enters Famusov's gates to the moment he meets Sofya, we see one major task, which we can define as *getting to see Sofya*.

Then all the tasks b , b^{1-3} come together to form another major task, B, which we can designate as *greeting a dear friend, a sister, wanting to hug her and exchange feelings*.

Tasks c , c^{1-3} constitute a third major task, bit C, which is *the reason for her cold reception of me*.

The minor tasks, d , d^{1-2} , etc., constitute the fourth bit, D – *questions about Sofya, her family, friends, her home life in Moscow*.

Tasks e , e^{1-2} form bit E, tasks f , f^{1-2} the bit F, tasks g , g^{1-2} G up to the final major task, Z, which is defined in the script:

Away, away! From Moscow I depart,
Never to return, and scour the earth
To find a place to nurse a wounded heart.

In their turn the bits $A + B + C + D$ create an entire scene, which we can designate as *the first meeting between Chatski and Sofya*.

$E + F + G + H$ are another scene, *the interrupted rendezvous*.

$I + J + K + L$ and then $M + N + O + P$ the third and fourth scenes.

Big scenes then create an act and acts merge into a play, that is a major part of the life of the human spirit.

Let us agree to call this the *inner score of a role*. For the moment it is composed of physical and psychologically elementary tasks determined by the actor's inner life and experiences.

I have adopted this term from music where the score of an opera or a symphony is made up of individual elements, notes, bars, phrases, determined by the composer's own sensibility or the living people he has created.

Chatski's score (with a difference here and there) is clear to anyone in a similar situation, as to any actor experiencing the role. Anyone coming back home, reliving memories of returning from abroad, would, literally or mentally, get out of his carriage, go into the hall, exchange greetings, etc. That is essential physically.

We must be precise and logical in performing physical and psychologically elementary tasks every time we are being creative in performance.

Thus, when a new character starts a conversation we must give him our full attention. On making an entrance we should not make straight for the place, unthinkingly, the director has indicated but choose the place or go to it because it is fitting and we are used to it. Gogol said, ‘The actor knows the play too well, he must forget it’. After we have laughed or wept loudly and our breathing is irregular, we must not cut the moment short, but take the time to get our breathing straight. These small, and, at first glance, mundane details assume great importance in creative work.

Otherwise, we cannot believe in the truth of what we do, and, without belief, there can neither be experiencing or genuine creative work.

We must understand all the tasks set out in the score, even if, for the moment, they are only physical and psychologically elementary. They are superficial and so can only stimulate the periphery of the body, the outer manifestation of the mind, that is they barely touch the heart. Nonetheless, they arise out of living feeling not cold reason. They are prompted by the actor’s own artistic instinct, creative sensitivity, personal experience, customary behaviour and human qualities. Each of these tasks has its own gradual, logical progression. They can be considered as natural and living. There is no doubt that a score, created in this way, brings the actor/human being closer (albeit, for the moment, only physically) to the life of the character he is playing.

For the actor’s task to become part of his own nature, and merge into the character, it must be similar to the role’s.

To divide the script and the role into major tasks, and if feeling cannot understand them immediately in all the depth and fullness of their meaning, and if major tasks cannot find a proper basis for every moment in the score, then the major tasks have to be divided into ever small tasks that can be studied separately.

With time and frequent experiencing in rehearsal and performance, the physical, psychologically elementary score of a role becomes automatic, a matter of habit. The actor has become so used to all the tasks, their sequence that he cannot think about or approach a role in any other way than by the line laid down by the score. Habit makes him approach the role correctly, at every performance.

Habit plays an important role in creative work. It fixes its results. As Vladimir Volkonski puts it so felicitously, it makes what is difficult regular habit and regular habit easy, and what is easy is beautiful. Regular habit also becomes second nature, a second reality.

The score automatically stimulates the impulses and urges to such physical action if not the physical and psychologically elementary actions the actor has within him.

Now the physical and psychologically elementary score of the role is complete. Does it respond to everything the actor's own creative nature requires of it?

The first requirement is that the score should have *irresistible appeal*, the only spur and motive for creation, and a living task that has appeal which is the only way to escape from the capriciousness of the actor's feeling and will.

There is no doubt that the physical and psychologically elementary score and the tasks out of which it is made, does not have all the necessary qualities to have creative appeal for an actor every time he performs. I admit that when I am looking for and selecting tasks they do not always appeal to me. No wonder. They are external. They only excite the periphery of the body, touch my feelings and the character superficially. It cannot be otherwise, since my efforts only skimmed the surface of the facts and events and the physical and psychologically basic level and only partially touched the deeper levels.

This kind of score, and the feelings it encloses, do not reflect an important aspect of the life of the human spirit, the essence of the play, the way in which a role is both typical and individual. Anyone could do what the score indicates in terms of physical and psychologically elementary tasks. They are common to us all, and so cannot specifically characterise a role which must always be individual.

Physical and psychologically elementary tasks are necessary but have little appeal for the actor or his creative intuition. That kind of score can point the way but it cannot arouse the urge to create. It does not bring the actor alive and so is short-lived. Deeply intense, compulsive [compelling] feelings are needed to fire the actor's will and intelligence and rouse him to be creative. Only that kind of score can give life, only the operation of such deeply vital tasks can endure. So, the actor's subsequent work will be to find tasks that regularly arouse his feelings and invest the physical score with life. It should not only excite the actor by its physical truth but by its inner beauty, its joy, bravado, humour, sorrow, horror and poetry etc. We should not forget that creative tasks and the score should merely arouse mundane but passionate compulsions, wants, effort and actions. And so when the task lacks any appeal, it cannot do what it should. We cannot, of course, say that every task we perform is good and right for the score, but, on the other hand, neither can we say every cold task is wrong.

Chatski's arrival, with its major and minor tasks, is only of interest because of its inner meaning, motivations and causes. It is they that drive his life. Without them you cannot show who he is. Without them the tasks are empty.

Let us try to give them depth and play Chatski, leading him along his hidden undertow that is nearer to life, to us, to the centre of our hidden 'me', as actors and characters. How do we do that? Perhaps we should modify the tasks and the entire external physical and psychologically elementary score? But do the externals we need cease to exist when we dig deeper into the score? No! Physical tasks, facts, actions, once they are accomplished, become content. The difference lies not in physical but psychological life, in the overall mood in which the task and the score happen. A fresh mood will colour these physical actions, fill them with new, deeper content, give them a new basis and motivation. I call this change of mood the *inner tone*. In actors' jargon this becomes the *core of feeling*.

So, when a score is given depth by facts, tasks they stay as they are but the inner motives, the impulses, the psychological urges, the psychological point of departure, which create the tone, and give the tasks direction, change.

The same thing happens in music: notes make melodies; melodies make symphonies. Both can be played in different tonalities: D major, A major, etc. They can be played in different rhythms and tempi: andante, allegro, etc. In the major, and in a brisk tempo a melody has bravura, a triumphal air. In the minor, in a slow tempo it becomes sad and lyrical. So, for example, you can have the experience of returning home with all its physical and psychologically elementary tasks in a calm, happy voice, or the sad, anxious voice of a patriot, or as a lover who says of himself:

Some seventy leagues I've rushed, for five
And forty sleepless hours, scarce alive
Without a soul to keep me company,
With falls and spills, through storm and snow.

Now there is a new task. I take the score as it stands and give it depth. I ask myself, what would change, grow or shrink if, like Chatski, I were coming back home, not in his current mood, but as an intense patriot? In other words, I try to experience the same physical and psychologically elementary score as a patriot, or a lover, or a *free man*.

I try to adopt the tone of voice of a lover and use it to shed light on the physical and psychologically elementary tasks of the role.

This lover's passion sheds light on the deepest recesses of the actor's own heart. It lends a completely different colour, a deeper meaning to the role. I try to effect the same change of voice in Chatski. I introduce what Pushkin calls 'the proposed circumstances'. I take Chatski as being deeply in love with Sofya. Let us suppose that he has returned not as a friend but hopelessly enamoured of her. What has this new voice changed and what is still left?

Whatever his passions, an exile, on his return, has physically to wait for the gates to be opened, ring the bell, wake the servants, greet the household, etc. In short, he has to perform almost all of the physical and psychologically elementary bits in the role. The essential difference lies not so much in the physical tasks as in the way they are carried out. If he is calm and has no deep feelings, he is patient and careful. If he is a prey to his emotions, if he gives in to his feelings he will approach his tasks quite differently. Some of them will be glossed over, meld or be swallowed up in a major inner task. Other physical tasks and bits become sharper because of a lover's impatience.

The line between physical and mental tasks collapses. When a man is in the grip of passion, he forgets about physical tasks, he performs them unconsciously, mechanically. In life we rarely think about ringing doorbells, opening doors, greeting people. We do it unconsciously. The body is driven by habit, the heart lives its inner life. This apparent division does not break the link between body and soul. It arises from the fact that the centre of attention has shifted from the outside to the inside.

Thus, the physical score which the actor has mechanically perfected, acquires greater depth, is enriched by new psychological tasks and bits. It now has greater inner subtlety, a new, as it were, psychological score. How, in practical terms, are we to create it? There is no quick way. We need preparation. We need to understand the nature of the emotion we are playing, in this case, passionate love.

We must follow the course of human passions. We must learn what human love feels like, in all its parts. We need a framework, a canvas on which our creative feelings can, consciously and unconsciously, embroider the mysterious, intricate patterns of passionate love. How can we know, feel what that is, what can guide us in creating its complex pattern?

It is not within my competence to define love scientifically. That is for the professional psychologist. Art is not science. As an artist, however, I must draw my material and knowledge from life and science, but at the creative moment I live my own feelings, memories, old and new impressions, my

intuition . . . I turn to them at all important moments in my creative life. I do not alter my ways; I do not confuse art and science. Many do, but I am not one of them.

I do not need a scientific study of love. I need an overall, concise emotional map, on the basis of which I can seek out what I want in my heart, not in my head.

It must guide me and point the way forward creatively by establishing a more subtle, psychological score for Chatski.

This is how I apprehend the nature of passionate love: I feel that every passion, like plants, has a seed which grows roots which end in leaves and flowers. Do we not speak of the 'roots of passion', or say 'passion grows', that love 'blossoms'? In a word, when in love, I feel a whole series of events: fertilisation, growth, flowering, etc. I feel that the development of passions follows the same path as nature, that this process, as in our own physical and psychologically elementary life, has its own logic that must not unwittingly be interrupted. All an actor has to do is force his own nature, substitute one feeling for another, destroy the logic of his own experiences, the successive moments as they change and succeed each other, one by one, and distort nature and the shape and form of human passions and the result is psychologically crippling.

To what can we compare this? To a man who has a hand where his ear should be and an ear where is hand should be, etc.? You cannot call such a freak a man, or take an actor's feeling as living, real, human emotion. You cannot, with impunity, use force against natural emotion or it will exact revenge without mercy.

Light is now shed on the score by our knowledge of a human passion: love for a woman. The tasks, the emerging emotions, grow stronger, more compelling than simple physical and psychologically elementary tasks. What are a lover's tasks, yearnings and actions?

Many consider that human passions, love, jealousy, hate are one single emotion. It is not so. Each passion is complex, made up of infinite divergent feelings, sensations, idiosyncrasies, moments, experiences, tasks, actions, attitudes. They are not only infinite and diverse, they are often contradictory. Love has elements of hate, contempt, adoration, indifference, ecstasy and dejection, confusion and insolence, etc.

Just as in painting, the most subtle hues are not obtained by just one colour but from the combination of many colours. For example, white in all its infinite shades is a blend of all the primary colours: red, blue, yellow. Green is made by blue and yellow. Orange and its half-tones is made by red and yellow, etc.

In this sense, human emotions can be compared to a heap of beads.

Its overall colour is created by an infinite number of beads of the most varied hues (red, blue, white, black). Blended together they create the general colour (grey, pale blue, yellow, etc.). It is exactly the same with emotions; the combination of individual, highly distinct and contradictory moments, experiences, feelings, moods, etc., creates the passion as a whole.

This can be seen in the following example: a mother beats her darling child who has almost fallen under a coach severely. Why is she so angry and hates the child as she beats it? Because she loves it passionately and is afraid of losing it. She beats it so that it will never again play up and put itself in danger. Momentary hatred exists side by side with her enduring love. And the more she loves it, the more she hates it, beats it.

Not only the passions themselves but their constituent parts are a blend of contradictory experiences and attitudes. For example, one of de Maupassant's characters kills himself because he is afraid of a duel. His bold, decisive act is the result of his wavering, his cowardice his trying to avoid the duel.

We can, therefore, conclude that the constituent parts of human passion are numerous and divergent.

In every human passion from its birth, growth, to the moment of its transformation from seed into flower, the same human emotions, feelings, moods, etc., can occur. They can be brief or prolonged. Can we really spell out all the individual moments and moods which, in one form or another occur, one by one, in a complex human passion like love?

Every role is a blend of its parts which create a single homogenous passion, the character as a whole. Let us take the role of Chatski.

This role and, in particular, Chatski's love for Sofya, is not exclusively made up of moments of love, affection, but of many other diverse, contradictory experiences and actions which combine to make love. What does Chatski do in the course of the play? Which actions make up his role? How does his love for Sofya manifest itself? First, he rushes to see Sofya on his arrival. He observes her closely, trying to understand her coolness. He reproaches her, then jokes mocking her family and friends. Some of his remarks are quite sharp. He thinks a great deal about her, is wracked with doubt, eavesdrops, catches her at the moment when she is about to betray him and runs away. Yet there are only a few lines in the play devoted to declarations of love. Nonetheless, all the elements and tasks I have listed fully establish Chatski's love for Sofya.

The actor's psychological palette, his score, which is designed to portray human passions, must be rich, full of colour and varied. When he portrays any of the human passions, an actor must not think of the passion itself but of the feelings that go to make it up and the greater

the scope he wishes to grant it, he must look for varied and contradictory emotions, not a homogenous passion. Extremes extend the range of human passions and the actor's score. So, when you play a good man, look for his bad side; when you play a clever man find when he is foolish. If you play a bad man, look for his good side.

One way to expand human passion is to use the method already mentioned. If the colour or the constituent parts do not appear spontaneously, you have to seek it out.

First, for example, I try to recall the variety of human passions, moods, sensations, etc., that pass through my head. I try to find their place, their origin, their justification in the long chain that creates love. Need I say that passionate love easily finds its place as do joy, sorrow, bliss, torment, ecstasy, torture, calm, excitement, in silence, boldness, cowardice, shyness, vulgarity, subtlety, energy, ire, frankness, weakness, bad temper, equilibrium, trust and mistrust? Any man who has lived can find the right place in this long chain for all these experiences, feelings and tasks. Often lovers pass from cynicism to arrogance and over-confidence when they feel success is in sight and to dejection when they feel they have lost, etc.

Normally, human passions are not born, do not grow, explode in a matter of a minute but gradually, over a long period of time. Dark feelings imperceptibly, bit by bit invade brighter ones and vice versa. For example, initially Othello's heart is radiant with love. It is like polished metal reflecting the rays of the sun, when suddenly dark stains appear. They are the first seeds of doubt. Their number increases and Othello's sunny, loving heart is stained with evil feelings, which grow and spread until, finally, his heart is murky, almost black. Earlier moments hinted at increasing jealousy; now we are only reminded of his tenderly confident love in rare moments. These moments finally disappear and his heart is engulfed in darkness.

In the same way, a barely perceptible black patch appears in a white carpet of snow, shining in the sun. It is a harbinger of spring. There comes a second and a third and, in a short space of time, there are patches of black everywhere. Slowly they spread until they cover the entire surface. And only places, here and there, where the snow has not melted, shine in the sun, recalling the brightness that once was. Finally, they disappear and only the black earth can be seen.

But a black heart can gradually and imperceptibly turn white and pure, just as white snow can gradually cover the black earth. Single snowflakes start to gather on the ground, then spread until they have made a white carpet that covers it. Then, only patches here and there remind us of the black earth. Then, they disappear, too, and everything is white and shining in the sun.

However, there are times when passion is totally overwhelming. Romeo was instantly overwhelmed by his passion for Juliet. Yet, who knows, had he lived, would he not have suffered the same fate, experienced the many difficult moments and dark feelings that are the inevitable concomitants to love?

In the theatre, mostly, we find the very antithesis of human passions. Actors fall in love instantly, or turn jealous at the first opportunity. Many of them naively imagine that human passions, be it love, jealousy or miserliness can be planted like a bomb inside. There are actors who specialise in a particular passion in the most primitive way.

Remember the stage tenor, pretty, effete, with hair primped like an angel's. His speciality is love, only love, posturing pretending to be in a reverie, endlessly clutching his hand to his heart, rushing around, portraying passion, embracing and kissing the heroine, dying with a mawkish smile, asking for final forgiveness, in a word, playing every basic convention of acting love. If there are passages that do not have anything directly to do with love, moments of ordinary human life, the lover or the tenor leaves them out, or tries to use his own speciality which is stage love, with its dreams, yearnings, display and posing, etc.

What do dramatic actors or baritones, who rarely have to portray jealousy, do? They are just jealous. The same is true of the man of reason or the noble father,⁶ or operatic basses whose job it is to sing men of hate, plotters, or noble fathers who protect their children. And they do it non-stop.

Their approach to love is naïve, one-sided, one-track. Love is always love, jealousy always jealousy, hatred, hatred, grief, grief, joy, joy. Everything is flat and monochrome. Black is black on black, white is white, etc. Bad men are all black, good men all white. Every passion (love, hate, jealousy) has its own colour, like house-painters who paint a fence in one 'colour'. That is how children paint. The sky is bluer than blue, green is green, the earth is black, tree-trunks brown.

Actors, all unawares, do not experience passions, do not fulfil the appropriate tasks, are not genuine in what they do but only play the end results: love, jealousy, hate, anxiety, joy, excitement, etc. In consequence there is acting 'in general'. Actors love 'in general', hate 'in general'. They convey complex human passions by the most simplistic signs.

Having no interest in the passions themselves, they often ask each other:

'How are you going to play this scene?'

'With tears, laughter, joy or alarm', the other actor replies, not realising that he is thinking only of external results, not internal action. He often has to puff himself up to get what he wants. But just sit and will yourself

to feel alarm, love, jealousy and all you will get is bodily tension and twitch.

Nothing can be played at will. You cannot choose the wants, the inner tasks, moods, actions and their results. You need a long series of wants that, once combined, constitute love, jealousy and disdain. You cannot choose the wants, the inner tasks, moods, actions and their consequences. You need a whole series of wants that go to from love, jealousy, disdain.

But actors are impatient. Often they convey the end results not of one but many passions simultaneously, instantly. They want to love, be jealous, be anxious and agitated all at the same time . . . When you want to fulfil all the tasks instantly, you fulfil none of them and because you are in an impossible situation, you fall victim to tension. You cannot live several tasks all at once on stage. You have to perform them one by one, that is to say, at certain moments the actor succumbs to love, at others to anger with the one he loves, and the stronger his love, the greater his anger. At other times, he is almost indifferent, etc.

If he is to avoid the errors I have just mentioned, he must know the nature of the human passions, the map which is to guide him. The better the actor knows the human heart, the more he studies human feelings in his free time, the deeper he will get to their true meaning, the more detailed, complex his score will be.

He needs to know nature so that he can feel the nature of the human passions better, know how they are born, grow and die. He must know how they develop, step by step, their scope and pattern.

I use my own life-experience to try to examine the principal stages in the development of love, to establish, for example, the pattern of my feelings. Of course, there is much that is common to us all, the quintessence of love.

The roots from which love grows are simple, but, subsequent, closer attention to them either suddenly or gradually inspires love. This sharpens observation and curiosity.

Only once the score has been established, with love as its key, can Chatski's love for Sofya be conveyed, and it will only be his once it has been checked against the script and adapted to it i.e., when it has been developed according to the events in the play, and parallel to the development of love in the play, when the words acquire the appropriate foundation. Now we have to go back to the script to select tasks and bits in the logical sequence of Chatski's developing passion. Here is what this work entails.

We have to be able to dissect the play, extract the bits, tasks and factors

that go to make up human passion, and examine them in relation to the pattern we have created as our guide.

Let us compare all four scores, all in different keys, in the role of Chatski: the physical and psychologically elementary tasks of a friend, a lover, a patriot and a free man.

What is different and what is the same? Here is an example.

Obsessed by the desire to see Sofya as soon as possible, Chatski the lover greets the porter, Filka, the major-domo, and the housekeeper fleetingly, mechanically, only half aware of what he is doing. But, as a friend, all these bits and tasks are performed meticulously. Thereafter, the lover does not have time to inspect familiar rooms. He is so intent on his goal that he rushes up four flights of stairs. In his score as a friend on the other hand, everything is done slowly and deliberately. The patriot's mode is broader, includes an even greater number of bits, which are dominated by a love for all Russians.

Now the score is not only broader but deeper and incorporates the earlier modes of the friend and the lover.

The deeper it is, the nearer it comes to the heart of the matter, to the actor as a man, the stronger, the more passionate, penetrating he is, the more he brings together the individual tasks, bits, passages, the more meaningful, and concentrated the parts of a role become.

So, the number of tasks and bits in the score is fewer but their quality greater.

This example clearly illustrates how the same physical and psychologically elementary tasks are experienced in ever differing, deeper modes and come closer to the actor himself all the while he is being creative.

First the feelings of a lover, then of a patriot, then of a free man take hold of me and start to be my own, like the script, The score is like a triple fur lining that warms the actor's heart at every moment, without exception denying access to actorish habits, that hang in the air and have no warmth. Now the score grips, excites all the forces of the mind, the emotions, the will and the intelligence which are the principal drives of our psyche.

All these scores take root in me and with time and habit become my own as a creative artist, the basic elements of the work that is gestating unseen within me.

The possible combinations of these human elements, together with the many feelings, moods, inner and outer circumstances are infinitely varied. They create a broad range of experiences, which, whether the actor wills it or not, like a rainbow, show feelings to be the basic colours of the

spectrum. Then the most simple feelings acquire a depth and fundamental importance for the actor. The score that has been felt in every key grips us and goes ever deeper.

Gradually as the score acquires greater depth we can go to the very heart of our feelings which we call the *moral centre*, the *secret 'self'*. There human feelings live as they truly are in nature. They are purified in the crucible of human passions and the weak, the accidental are burned away and only the actor's basic human elements remain.

There, at the very centre, all the remaining tasks fuse into a supertask. This is the quintessence, the universal purpose, the task of tasks, the distillation of the role. The supertask gathers together all the ideas within the individual bits. In fulfilling this, you fulfil all the tasks, the bits, the quintessence of the role. If you accomplish this single all embracing, central supertask, you reach all that is most important, superconscious, ineffable in Griboiedov's life, the reason he took up his pen and the actor his role.

In Dostoievski's novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*, the supertask is his own search for God (the search for God and the Devil in the human heart). In *Hamlet* it is to understand (know) the meaning of life. In Chekhov it is the yearning for a better life ('to Moscow, to Moscow'). In Tolstoi, it is the perfection of the self, etc.

Only artists of genius can totally comprehend (feel) the supertask that is embedded within the play and is the writer's own. Lesser talents must be satisfied with less. They cannot fully take on the meaning at the centre of the role, the supertask. They cannot embrace the sum of feelings as their own, in one overarching supertask, but have to break it down into smaller tasks, peripheral to the centre.

However, major tasks include a great number of living feelings, images that have deep meaning and vitality. So, a single supertask in the actor's centre naturally creates and reveals a thousand small tasks at surface level. The supertask, the basis for the actor's and the character's life, and all the small tasks like an unavoidable consequence and the way they are reflected inform the life of the human spirit on stage i.e., its entire life.

As a small, magic reel of film, when exposed, paints a large picture, created out of an infinite number of lines, splashes of colour, shadows fills a whole screen, so the all-embracing supertask is nearer the real nature of the task.

However, the creative supertask is not the creative act itself. An actor's work consists in a continuous drive towards the basic supertask and the actions that fulfil it. I call this essential feature of the creative process the *throughaction of the play and the role*.

If, for the writer, the throughaction translates his own supertask in his work, then, for the actor, the throughaction it is translated by the active fulfilment of that same supertask.

So, the supertask and throughaction is the basic creative goal, the creative action that contains, accumulates, and unites the thousand individual tasks, bits and actions in a role.

The supertask and the throughaction are the essence, the arteries, the nerves, the heart-beat of a role.

The supertask is the seed, the throughaction the central theme of the play. They are the compass that guides the actor's creative endeavours. The throughaction is like an undercurrent that produces waves, an invisible inner action revealing itself in an outer action.

The throughaction is the deeply embedded link which unites the separate bits, a row of beads, a set of pearls.

They are the goals inherent in our nature, our secret 'self'. Every play, every role has its own supertask and throughaction, that are the quintessence of a character as in every work of art. We must look for the roots of the throughaction in the nature of the passions, in the actual religious, social, political, aesthetic, mystical and other feelings, the innate virtues and vices, the good or bad origins customary to man that secretly guide us. And whatever happens inside us, or in the world outside us, everything derives its meaning from the mysterious, often partly unconscious link to the main idea, the innate drive, the throughaction of the life of the human spirit.

Thus, the miser, for example, looks everywhere for the secret link to his search for wealth, the ambitious man to his craving for honours, the believer to his religious impulses, the art-lover to his aesthetic ideals, etc.

Often the throughaction emerges in life and onstage unconsciously. Only later when the life of the human spirit has appeared is its basic goal, or supertask defined, secretly, unconsciously drawing to itself the efforts of the human will.

We know from the biographies of great artists that, in their youth, they frantically searched for the meaning of life, what they were aiming for. They stumble across it in some theatrical man of action or other, or in performance and, all at once, their innate purpose, their living supertask and throughaction becomes clear. Every genuine artist goes through an agonising period of doubt during which the supertask and the throughaction are apprehended but not comprehended. Often the hidden meaning of the play and the role, the supertask and the throughaction are revealed by chance.

Stray from the throughaction and you are lost. Take, for example, the last act of *The Lower Depths*. Eighteen years ago it was built on binging in a doss-house. This error, this false opinion, made it impossible to live to convey the thoughts and ideas in the play and gave a false idea of the pleasure of drink. That made it odious to me. From sheer habit everything was made to fit it, and everything followed its own momentum. Eighteen years ago I was wrong, but today, at the beginning of the act, which I did not want to play, I try to find a new approach, a new incentive. Why is binging one of the external circumstances and not necessary? The truth lies elsewhere. Luka bequeaths a love for his fellows. Satin is seized by this. He is not a drinker; his concern is a new feeling of pride. I decided to eliminate all excess tension. I freed my muscles. I concentrated. Physical tasks and thoughts responded in a new way. I played splendidly.

If we want to appreciate the significance of the supertask and the throughaction we must ask ourselves: what it would be like without them. Then the individual moments would forever be isolated with nothing basically to link them together. [. . .] They create anarchy. They lose all logic and sense and destroy each other. Watching them, the audience says: I remember each individual task but, in general, they looked like the antics of someone deranged.

And so, if we list the tasks in the way actors mostly live them, and especially Chatski, we have, more or less, the following score:

Task A. I run in gracefully and fall to my knees.

Task B. I show off my voice with my first line, 'It's day, and you're afoot and I am at your feet'.

But let us try for a moment to imagine the following score:

Task A. I want to see Sofya as soon as possible.

Task B. I want to meet her quickly so I can go home and change.

Task C. I do not wish to ring for Filka as I have seen Roska.

The door somehow opens and I go in to reminisce with Filka, as he is the key to the details of past events.

I desperately want to see Sofya and inspect every corner of the house.

I run to her room so that the people in the stalls can see me.

I do not look at Sofya but try to pose before a mirror.

Can an actor have any sense of truth with such a score?

Can the audience understand the supertask and the throughaction of such histrionics?

Incoherence, woolliness, a jumble of actions do not create the life of the human spirit but hodge-podge and anarchy. Normal life requires order, logic, gradual progression in different feelings and experiences. The supertask and the throughaction provide that. They constantly guide the work of the author, the director, the actor in their creative work, and all those involved in the production. When you stray from them, you get sprawl and superfluous detail. The throughaction is defined by its being active. It permeates the entire play, prompting our endeavours, our actions at each and every moment. So, not only the supertask but also all the simple tasks in the score must have the power of attraction that produces the drive towards those tasks and, subsequently to the participation of the mind.

So, the *process of experiencing arises from the conscious score of a role, the supertask and the active fulfilment of the throughaction*. It consists in performing the score in the most profound way, psychologically speaking.

However, all these efforts, movements, actions, in life as on stage do not go unopposed. They inevitably encounter counter-actions, other people's endeavours or actual events, obstacles and other difficulties.

Life is one long battle, lost or won. And so, on stage as in life, we find a series of counter-throughactions, facts, circumstances, etc. This battle produces tragic, comic and other kinds of conflict.

The score, by dint of being repeated frequently, with insufficient care and attention, easily loses its meaning and becomes *mechanical* (motor activity), a cliché. The task wears out, loses its particular flavour and its appeal and needs to be replenished; more and more it needs the imagination to create new tasks every time creative work is undertaken.

The task must lie within the actor's capabilities. Otherwise, it has no appeal but frightens and confuses feeling that runs away and hides in the recesses of the mind thus producing crude clichés and stock-in-trade. When the task is at the same level as familiar feelings, the actor performs truthfully. But when he sets himself a task that is beyond him, something removed from the life of the human spirit, natural experiencing stops short and turns into physical tension, spurious emotion, overacting, emoting, clichés and the stock-in-trade.

The same thing happens when there are doubts, hesitation. They weaken or totally destroy the wants and strivings of the creative will.

Doubt is the enemy of art. It blocks the path to experiencing, destroys it and produces the stock-in-trade. And so, we must defend the task, guard it

against anything that diverts the will from the essential nature of the creative act, the main line of its development, and weakens its efforts.

That does not mean that the task must be rigid. That only makes creative work arid. The task must be meaningful, not too narrow and not too broad.

THE SUPERCONSCIOUS

Having exhausted all the conscious, technical approaches to creative work, the actor reaches a point beyond which human consciousness cannot go. That is the point where the unconscious and intuition begin, inaccessible to our intelligence, accessible only to feeling, not to thought but to creative experiencing, not to our crude technique as actors, however well-developed, but only to our artistic nature.

People are accustomed to attribute far too much importance, in life and on stage, to everything they can consciously see and hear. Yet only one tenth of our lives is conscious. Nine tenths, all that is most stimulating, important and beautiful, are in our sub- or superconscious.

Professor Elmer Gates⁷ says: ‘ninety per cent of our mental life is subconscious’.

Maudsley⁸ asserts that ‘consciousness has no more than a tenth part of the functions attributed to it’.

The superconscious elevates the human heart and so it should be prized and protected in our art. If that is so, we can hardly reconcile ourselves to the fact that when we are creating the life of the human spirit on stage only a tenth part can be assigned to our consciousness and nine tenths of the most important and stimulating moments of the unconscious have been banished forever from the stage. You cannot extract the quintessence of the life of the human spirit.

Such a splintered life is an abortion. It is like a work of art with the finest passages cut out. It is *Hamlet* without ‘To be or not to be’.

Unfortunately the all-important superconscious is often forgotten in our art because most actors restrict themselves to superficial experiencing and the audience is satisfied with purely surface impressions.

However, the essence, the prime source of creative work, is hidden deep in the actor’s mind, at the very centre of our psyche, in the elusive superconscious, the well-spring of life, the heart of our nature, our secret ‘self’, inspiration. That is where the most important creative material lies hidden.

This is unattainable and will not surrender to the conscious mind. It has to be approached with extreme caution. It is created out of an artist’s

nature, his intuitive longings, creative premonitions, hopes, moods, visions, shadows, feelings, turbulent passions, moments of ecstasy, and inspiration. They can neither be defined in words, nor seen, nor heard, nor consciously understood.

Can, indeed, the conscious mind reach all the nuances of the human heart, for example a complex mind like Hamlet's? Many of its subtleties, shadows, visions, hints at feelings are accessible only to our unconscious, creative intuition.

How are we to reach them? How are we to get deep into the role, the actor, the audience? It can only be done with nature's help. The key is the actor's nature as a human being. It alone knows the secrets of inspiration and how to reach them. Only nature knows the magic of creation, without which the dead letter of a script cannot be brought alive. In a word, she is the sole creator in the world that can create a living organism.

The more subtle the feeling, the more non-real it is, abstract, impressionistic etc., the more it belongs to the superconscious, nearer to nature and further away from the conscious mind. The non-real, impressionism, stylisation, cubism, futurism or similar subtleties, or the grotesque begin when experiencing and feeling reach their full, natural development, when nature is freed from the tyranny of reason, from the power of conventions, preconceived ideas, forcing, and engages with its own superconscious initiative (intuition), where ultranaturalism ends and abstraction begins.

So, the only way to the unconscious mind is the conscious mind. The only way to the superconscious, the unreal is through the real, ultranaturalism, that is through nature and its *normal, unforced, creative life*. It is unfortunate if the abstract, or stylisation, or impressionism or other refined forms of experiencing and embodiment proceed from the intellect, thought, external, fashionable, sophisticated forms and theorising.

The result is crude, external, technical, bogus, caricature, posturing. Everything is out of joint. Cleverness is too crude a means to convey the superconscious. That requires a genuine creative state, nature. Ludicrous and pitiful are those who try to rival her and their own, theatrical, apparently superior personal life, outside time and space, that is only beautiful in its artificiality. I will not commit myself to such insolence and rival nature, but submit to its creative initiative, try to help it, or, at least, not get in its way.

Indian yogi, who work miracles with the sub- and superconscious give practical advice in this field. They approach the unconscious through consciously preparatory methods, from the physical to the mental, from the real to the unreal, from the naturalistic to the abstract. We actors should do the same. All the preparatory work we do on ourselves and the role is

directed to preparing the soil for genuine, living, natural passions, for inspiration that lies dormant in the superconscious. So, we can only speak of those areas when the actor has complete technical mastery of his superconscious and stops basing everything on a gift of the gods, the random 'flash of inspiration' which, in the opinion of many, besides the actor, is needed to create the creative mood. Inspiration is very spoiled. It comes when everything is ready, and the least alteration in its habits frightens it and drives it into the secret recesses of the superconscious.

The superconscious starts where reality, or rather, ultranaturalism (if we derive this term from nature) ends. So the actor, before he starts thinking about the superconscious and inspiration, should take care, once and for all, to establish the right creative state on stage so that nothing else is possible. He must absorb all his technical skills until they become second nature. The given circumstances of the role must also become his own. Only then will inspiration, which is highly sensitive decide to open its secret doors. But if it feels the slightest pressure, artificiality or lies that deform its creative nature, throwing mind and body out of joint, killing the sense of truth and belief, disrupting its mood, its creative state, it heads for its secret recesses and hides behind its seven seals.

All this happens because *the superconscious stops where artistic conventions begin.*

Those who approach the superconscious directly, and try technically to copy those outward forms of things only accessible to intuition, fall victim to the other extreme, vulgar stock-in-trade, not inspiration. They have their own kind of 'inspiration'. But this is not to be confused with the superconscious. What can be worse than crude, histrionic, rough-hewn impressionism, stylisation or other fashionable -isms that spring from a cold intellect, crude stock-in-trade and surface imitation. But how beautiful these '-isms' are when they are the spontaneous, creative children of the superconscious, and inspiration.

Just as an axe cannot make a fine sculpture, so simple actors' technique cannot convey the subtleties of creative nature.

The practical advice the Indian yogi gives us as regards the superconscious is: take a handful of thoughts and throw them into the sack of the subconscious. I never bother with them and so you (the subconscious) do it. Then go and sleep and when you wake up ask, 'Is it done?' 'Not yet.'

Take another handful and throw it in, etc., and go for a walk and when you return, ask, 'Is it done?' and accept the results.

How often, when sleeping or walking, do we try to remember a forgotten memory, or an idea, a name or an address and say, 'the morning is wiser than the evening'? And, indeed, on waking, we see and are amazed by what we had been looking for. It is no accident that we say, 'Sleep on it'.

The work of our subconscious and superconscious is not confined to the night, when we and our bodies are at rest, or during the day, in the hurly-burly of everyday life, when we encounter the thoughts and feelings of others. But we see nothing, know nothing because it happens outside our conscious mind.

So, to make contact with our superconscious we need that 'handful of thoughts', which provides the material for our work.

What are they, and where do they come from? They are the things we know, meetings, experiences we have had, memories, everything that is contained in our intellectual, affective, visual, aural, muscular and other kinds of recall. That is why it is so important for an actor to regularly restock his mind. That is why he must study, read, observe, travel, be up-to-date with social, religious, political matters. These are the handful of ideas he throws into the sack of his superconscious. We must not hustle it. We must be patient. Otherwise, the yogi says, we are like a foolish child who plants a seed and keeps digging it up every half hour to see if it is taking root.

Unfortunately, actors cannot be patient. As soon as they get a part, they try to play it, and despair when they cannot do it straight away. Failure is attributed to a lack of talent, since, in the theatre, which is stuffed with conventional wisdom, quick results are considered a sign of talent. This view is advanced, not without an element of self-interest, by impresarios and the duller part of the audience, who have no conception of art or the psychology of the creative act, forgetting that Salvini took ten years to prepare Othello and that Duse spent a lifetime in ten roles. Aldridge and Tamagno were only known for their Othello, while Shchepkin never played *Woe from Wit* or *The Government Inspector* without reading the whole play through with the whole cast on the day of the performance.

The creative superconscious is so subtle and the feelings it arouses so elusive that they cannot be pinned down in the usual form of words used for tasks, endeavours and inner action. We need another kind of definition for it. We need symbols. They are the key to the lock of our affective memory.

The second major period, experiencing, is over. What did it bring?

THE PERIOD OF EMBODIMENT

I will call the third period, the *period of embodiment*.

If the first period was the meeting of future lovers, and the second, the consummation of their love and pregnancy, then the third is the birth and growth of a new being.

Now that we are inwardly rich and emotionally alive, we have something to share with others. Now when wishes, tasks and aims have been created we can start to embody them and for that we need both inner, mental, and outer, physical, action, that is we must speak, behave so as to convey our thoughts and feelings in words or actions or simply perform purely physical, external tasks: walk, say hallo, present objects, drink, eat, write – and always to some purpose.

Sometimes, rarely, the life of the human spirit, as set down in the script, finds spontaneous expression in the face, words and actions. That is too much of an exception to be relied upon. We have, much more frequently, to arouse our physical selves, help them to embody what feeling has created. Let me give an example.

Let us suppose I have been cast as Chatski and I go along to the first rehearsal, arranged for today, after a long series of preparatory sessions in which we analysed and experienced. Aware of the impending rehearsal, I want to prepare for it. I said you cannot do that in the cab on the way. But why should I not use the most natural of impulses to creative work? Where shall I begin? Tell myself I really am Chatski? Futile. An actor is constitutionally unable to accept such a blatant lie. All it does is destroy truth and lead me astray, and dampen my artistic enthusiasm.

You should never set yourself an impossible task and put yourself in an impossible situation. Faced with coercion, our nature stops working and only gives us clichés and stock-in-trade. So, you cannot change into someone else. There is no miraculous transformation.

We can change the circumstances we portray on stage. We can believe in a new supertask, accept the throughaction, combine our lived experiences one way or another, establish a new logical sequence, develop new habits, new ways of embodying, change our patterns of behaviour our outside, etc. Does that mean the actor is always himself in every role? Yes. The actor always works in his own right, reborn in each new role without his being aware. And now, as I drive in the carriage I want to be transformed into Chatski and stop being myself. I will not even try to detach myself from reality, as I am not afraid to admit that I am not going to Famusov's house but to the theatre, to a rehearsal. What is the point of telling yourself something you cannot believe? It is much more to the purpose to perform living actions towards our creative end. Living action gives life to thoughts that seem like truth.

Fictional but plausible given circumstances, rooted in a real situation, come to life, live. Actors are more inclined to believe a living fiction because it is often more exciting and artistic than reality itself. [. . .] How am I to merge the fictitious circumstances of the role with the real world

around me? How can I begin creatively to be, to exist in everyday reality? How am I to justify the circumstances of the role? First I have to establish that mood which we call 'I am being'. But this time I have to establish it not in my mind, but in my imagination, in reality, not in Famusov's imaginary home, but in a cab.

It would be futile for me to tell myself that I have just returned from abroad after a long absence. I would not believe such a story. I try another approach so as not to coerce myself or my imagination but to go the natural way towards the mood I want. I try to weigh up the fact of my return from abroad. I ask myself, do I understand (artistically feel) returning home after a long absence? To do that I have to make a new assessment and broaden and deepen the fact of my return. I have to compare it to similar instances in my own life, my own life-experience. It is not difficult. I have returned to Moscow from a long absence abroad many times and gone to the theatre in a cab. I remember perfectly well the joy of greeting friends, my pleasure in the theatre, Russian people, my native tongue, the Kremlin, the uncouth cab-driver, 'the air of one's homeland' that is so 'sweet and pleasant'. After the hurly-burly of abroad, Moscow seems so warm and welcoming, like taking off one's tail-coat and patent shoes and putting on a loose dressing gown and soft slippers.

That sense of peace at being in one's home is even stronger if you imagine that the journey was not made in a comfortable sleeping-car but in a shaking coach with changes of horses. I remember how it felt. I remember the staging posts!! The gawpers!!! The horses, the drivers, the luggage, the waiting, the shaking, the aching sides, back and neck, the sleepless moonlit or dark nights, the marvellous sunrises, the unbearable heat of the day and the wintry nights. In short, all the pluses and minuses of travelling in a coach!

If it was difficult for me to travel for a week, what if, like Chatski, I had been travelling for months!

What joy it was to be back! I feel that now, in the cab to the theatre. Chatski's words suddenly come into my mind:

Some seventy leagues I've rushed, for five
And forty sleepless hours, scarce alive
Without a soul to keep me company,
With falls and spills, through storm and snow.

At that moment I understood the feeling behind those words. I understood, sensed, what Griboiedov must often have sensed when he wrote those lines. I understood that they were shot through with the apprehensions of

a man who has travelled much, leaving and returning to his country. That is why these lines are so full of warmth, profound and meaningful.

Warmed by patriotic feelings, I try to answer another, more difficult question. ‘What did Chatski feel when he, like me, went to see Famusov and Sofya?’ But I am already uneasy, as though I were going off balance, afraid of forcing myself. How am I to guess someone’s else’s feelings? How do I get into his skin, put myself in his place? I strike the question out and change it to another, ‘What do men do, like me now, when they are in a cab, on their way to meet their beloved after a long absence’?

Then the question does not frighten me but seems cold, vague, general. And so I try to make it more concrete and put it this way, ‘What would I do if I, as now, was in a cab going not to the theatre but to see *her*, whether she is called Sofya or Perepetua?’

I want to emphasise the difference between these two versions of the same question. The first asks, ‘What would *someone else* do but now it is a matter of *personal* feeling. Such a question is nearer to me, and so is more living, warmer. For me to decide what I would do, if I were going to see *her*, I must feel the power of her appeal.

Everyone has his *her*. Sometimes she is blond, sometimes brunette, sometimes sweet, sometimes harsh, but always beautiful, alluring, someone you could fall in love with every minute. I, like everyone else, think of my ideal, and quite soon familiar feelings and impulses are aroused.

I try now to place her in Famusov’s house in Moscow in the 1820s. Why should she not be Sofya and at the same time some girl Chatski had imagined? Who could tell which is which? So, I will do it my way. I start thinking about Famusov and the atmosphere into which I have to pitch my [beloved]. And, as I do so, the huge amount of material I have accumulated during my preliminary work on experiencing comes alive again. The familiar life of the Famusov household, both mental and physical, comes together again in orderly fashion and surrounds me on all sides. I feel I am at the heart of it, I start ‘to be’, ‘to exist’. Now I can tell, hour by hour, what will happen today. I can give meaning to my journey and justify it . . . It does not matter that I am not really going to the Famusov house. It is enough that I know the reason why. And to understand means to feel.

Meanwhile, however, I feel a certain unease which I wish to dispel. Something is preventing me from seeing *her* in the Famusov household, and trusting my imagination. Why is that? On the one hand I, she, people, the cab, the streets are of our time, on the other, there are the 1820s, the Famusov family. Do we have to be in that period to experience the eternal, ever-youthful feeling of love? Does it matter for the life of the human spirit that the cabs had different springs, different drivers, that

the passers-by wore clothes of a different cut and the watchmen carried pikes? That the streets looked different, that the houses were better built that there were no such things as futurism and cubism? Yet the quiet side-street, with old houses either side, down which I am riding have scarcely changed since then. The same sad poetry, the same absence of people, quiet and calm, as far as love is concerned, has even been made up of the same elements, whatever the streets or the clothes.

I pursue the answer to my question as to what I would do if I were going to see *her*, and the circumstances in which she lives, and feel the need to dig deeper into myself among the urges and impulses that are beginning to emerge. They reminded me of the anxieties of love, the lover's impatience. I felt that if these feelings grew any stronger it would be difficult for me to stay in my seat and I would be pushing my legs against the wall, to try and make the driver go faster and get to *her* sooner. I felt a physical surge of energy. I felt the need to direct it somewhere, gear it up. I felt that in my thoughts the driving force is a concern with the question of how I was to meet her. What was I to say, do, to make the meeting memorable?

Buy flowers? Sweets? How low! Is she some kind of tart to whom I have to take flowers and chocolates at our very first meeting? What can I think of? Something from abroad? That is even worse. I am not some tradesman who will treat *her* immediately as a lover. I blush to have been so low, so prosaic. Yet how am I to meet her, greet her properly? Give her my heart, lay myself at her feet?

It's day! and you're afoot
And I am at your feet.

Chatski's words spontaneously burst from me. I could not have imagined a better meeting.

I used not to like Chatski's opening lines, but now I do, I need them, and even the kneeling that goes along with them no longer seems theatrical but natural. Now I understand the emotional sense, the impulse that guided Groboiedov when he wrote those lines.

And yet, if I am to lay myself at her beautiful feet, I must feel worthy of her. Am I good enough to offer myself to her. My love, my trust, my eternal adoration for my idea. Are they pure and worthy, but what about me?! I am not handsome enough, poetic enough! I want to be better, more sophisticated. I involuntarily straighten up, put on a better face, find a more attractive stance, tell myself I am no worse than the rest and, to prove it, compare myself to the passers-by. To my good luck, they all seem misbegotten.

Looking at the passers-by, I inadvertently strayed from my original object and started to look closely at the streets, what they were like, from the point of view of someone returning from the West. That is not a man sitting at the gate but a pile of fur. His has a shiny metal plate on his head like the eye of the Cyclops. He is the typical Moscow gate-keeper. Dear God, little better than a savage from North Siberia!

There we have a Moscow policeman! He is jabbing the sides of a poor, shambling old nag which cannot haul a cartload of wood, with the end of his scabbard as hard as he can. There is shouting and swearing, a whip being brandished. That is exactly the way he could break the back of the owner, a dirty, trembling ragged creature. This is Asia! Turkey! And we are just uncouth country bumpkins dressed up in Western clothes. I am reminded of the sturdy English shire-horses with their manes and fringes on the Trubetskoi monument to Alexander III in St Petersburg. I blush once more from the comparison with Westerners and my heart sinks. How will cultured Westerners view all this?

I found the emotional sense, the impulse, for every one of Chatski's words just as the author had when he was writing. When we start to look closely again at things so familiar we have forgotten them, the old begins to make a deeper impression than the new and unexpected. That is the case with me now. I put a pair of glasses on my short-sighted eyes and see and understand things I had wanted to forget forever. And once again I feel the wounds in my heart that will never close: the contempt for my homeland, the longing for a better life, the hatred of stagnation, ignorance, the lack of discipline, the laziness of the Russians, the awareness of the strength and talent of the Slav race, the hatred towards all who deform life and hinder its progress.

In short, the closer I look at things I have known and forgotten along the way, the more I see these reborn impressions through the prism of a man returning from abroad, and the more I feel like a patriot.

I understand that it was not bitterness, but sickness of heart, an immense love of Russia, a profound understanding of her worth and her imperfections that made Chatski castigate those who ruin her life and stand in the way of her progress.

And now, from the narrow gap of the gates of a neighbouring house, a huge coach emerges with the icon of Our Lady of Iversk on it.

'Oh! That's the Tukokhovskis' six-seater', my mind tells me. 'That is the kind of coach in which Amfisa Khlistova spent "an hour on her way from Pokrovka" to Famusov's ball.' She had, probably, the same kind of postilion, the same bare-headed driver, holding on to the rails so as not to fall

off. In those days, drivers were bare-headed. That was the kind of vehicle in which Chatski returned from abroad.

The carriage fell into a deep hole, leaned to one side and seemed stuck in the mud. Then I had to think again of my journey with many changes of horses and the deep meaning of the words

Some seventy leagues I've rushed, for five
And forty sleepless hours, scarce alive
Without a soul to keep me company,
With falls and spills, through storm and snow.

Seventy leagues in one fell swoop, that is no joke! You must love Sofya very much, long for her, to rush to her without a thought for your aching sides. Yet almost feel nothing. But I have some idea of what it feels like, prompted by something in my head.

'Oh, good day to you', I say mechanically and bow to someone without thinking.

'Who is that? Oh, yes! A famous pilot and racing-driver.'

Is that an anachronism? The whole illusion should be dispelled by it. But no! I repeat, the essentials lie not in the period, a way of life, but in the feelings of a lover returning to his country as a patriot. Can he not encounter a racing-driver?! However, strangely, I did not feel my bow was my usual one. It was somehow different. Would Chatski have bowed that way?

Stranger still! I felt some sort of artistic pleasure in this chance greeting. How did it happen? My arm just made a kind of movement, apparently by chance. Or, perhaps, it happened because I did not have time to think about the gesture my creative nature provoked immediately. It would serve no purpose to recall that gesture and try to fix it in my memory. It would either never happen again, or recur spontaneously, unconsciously, not just once, but frequently until, finally, it becomes a regular feature of the role I am creating. To help this, I should not recall the bow itself but the overall mood which gave rise to it and evoked, for an instant, an awareness of the external character, which perhaps had already formed inside me and was waiting to find an outer form.

That is what happens when you recall an idea or melody you have forgotten. The more you try, the harder it runs away from you. But if you can recall the place, the situation, your overall mood at the time, it comes alive in you again. I began to recall the situation in which my bow spontaneously occurred, the carriage with the icon, the pothole, my bow to the pilot, my thoughts about the anachronism. However, the bow was not

repeated. Perhaps the promptings of my inner impulses were too weak. My thoughts were interrupted by cab was already at the theatre and has stopped at the stage door.

I get out and go into the theatre with the feeling I am ready for rehearsal. The facts have been weighed, I feel 'I am being'.

Now I am in the theatre, in the rehearsal room, sitting at a large table. The reading begins. We read the first act. The director frowns; the others sit with their eyes glued to their books. Bewilderment, embarrassment, perplexity, disillusion. No one wants to go on. The script is a hindrance. There is no vital reason to look at it or read it.

Feeling needs to live apart in and for itself but words that are spoken separately, as themselves, or grouped in sentences are a hindrance and seem irrelevant. Up to the reading, we had been convinced that we had our roles so deep inside that all we had to do was say the lines and the rest would follow.

What an unexpected disappointment! It has not only broken but destroyed our belief in ourselves and the truth of all the work we have done. We sit there as though we had been doused in cold water, and think, more or less: where has everything we looked for so hard in the quiet of our rooms and during sleepless nights, gone to? I, for example, had felt recognised, seen with my inner eye the look, heard with my inner ear the sound, had a premonition, mentally and physically, of my invisible character and the life of the human spirit. Where had all this gone? It has been broken into tiny fragments and there is no way to put them back together again.

How annoying I had brought all the riches of my mind with me and now I feel like a moneyless beggar; my heart is an empty shell. Worse still, I feel instead of the treasures of my heart have been turned into routine, tricks, worn-out clichés, a strained voice, unnatural inflexions. I feel that instead of the order and harmony I felt earlier when working at home, I am now subjected to muscular anarchy and actors' habits which I cannot control. I feel I have lost the score it took me so long to create and that I have to start all over again. When I first read the play, I felt like an accomplished master, now I feel like a raw apprentice. Then I could play the clichés confidently and was master of the stock-in-trade. Now I am hesitantly trying to live and embody the role like a student. What has happened?

The answer to this agonising question is very simple. No matter how long an actor has been working, such moments of helplessness, birth-pangs are inevitable. He can escape this kind of failure, torture and creative doubts which we are all experiencing now. And however often he has

felt this mood, it is always terrifying, desperate, irremediable while he is in its power.

No kind of experience, no fine words will convince the actor that the inadequacy of previous readings is inevitable and normal. Actors always forget that the creative process of experiencing and embodiment is not sudden, using one method, but gradual, in several steps and stages. First, as we have seen, the role is experienced and embodied in the imagination, in sleepless nights, then, more consciously, in the calm of the study, then in closed rehearsals, then, for a small audience of strangers, then in a series of public dress rehearsals and, finally, in countless performances. And every time it is done anew.

This long and complex process represents the actor's labours: the birth, growth, sickness, development and maturity of a role.

So, now comes the question: how are we to recreate anew in closed rehearsals, the work that we did at home? The best way to start is with exercises. The director quietly and gently explains, as we should expect, that the reading demonstrated that we are not yet ready for Griboiedov's text as such. It is wrong to muddle, exhaust the lines prematurely. He suggests we cut the readings short.

The words in a play, especially one of genius, seem a clearer, more precise, concrete expression of the writer's invisible feelings and thoughts and of the characters in his play. So behind every word of a work of genius lie feelings or thoughts that gave rise to it, its justification. We do not need empty words, like empty shells, empty concepts. They are harmful. They clutter up a role, blur the outlines. They are to be jettisoned.

Until the actor can fill the words with living feeling, to justify them, they are a dead letter and useless.

There are no superfluous words in a work of genius. They are all essential. There are as many of them as are needed to convey the supertask or the throughaction. There is not one superfluous moment. There are no superfluous feelings and, consequently, no superfluous words. The actor's score should not have superfluous feelings either, but should be needed only insofar as they embody the supertask and the throughaction. Only when the actor has created a score and a character is Griboiedov's masterpiece ready to receive his contribution. [. . .] A work of genius demands a score of genius. Until that happens, there are too many or too few words, too many or too few feelings.

If many of the words in *Woe from Wit* seem superfluous, it does not mean, of course, that they are poor but that the score is still rough and needs to be tried out on stage, in action. It is not enough to discover secrets, feelings, thoughts; they have to be brought to life. Many masterly

discoveries are lost because the man who found them cannot implement them as masterfully as he conceived them!

It is the same with us. Not a few great actors run aground because their creative initiative does not put in an appearance. It is not enough to experience a role and create a score; it has to be conveyed in an aesthetically theatrical form. If the author has found a form of words to suit this, and it is realistic, then it is better to use it. A masterpiece is condensed, but that does not prevent it from being profound and meaningful. The score should be equally condensed. And so should the means of its embodiment. Only then, when the script has been purged of anything superfluous, when striking words convey the essence of its meaning and its metaphors, when one or two words model whole images, when clear rhythms, polished ideas convey the writer's ideas, can a masterpiece achieve the best form for an actor.

When an actor measures up to a masterpiece, the words proffer themselves of their own accord and lie easily on the tongue. Then the play is at its best, essential, in the easiest form for verbal embodiment, for the actor to express his own creative feelings, his inner score. Then someone else's words become the actor's own and the play his best score. Then Griboiedov's unusual verses and rhythms become essential not only for the pleasure of the ear but for clarity and finish in conveying feelings, experiences and the score as a whole. So, in music, flourishes and *staccato* provide finish to phrases and complete melodies. This occurs when the score [matches] the author's masterpiece, when all the feelings, tasks, creative impulses and urges which create the life of the human spirit are not only fully understood but begin to live, purged of anything superfluous, are strung together in the throughaction, like a set of pearls, in that logical order when not only the mind but the body have become used to them.

In most cases the lines become necessary to the actor in the next period when all the inner material has been accumulated, crystallising in an orderly succession of moments and the embodiment of the role finding specific, characteristic means of physical expression for a given role.

We are not there yet. In this period, the first reading, the bare text is merely a hindrance. The actor cannot weigh it up fully enough, or deeply enough. While we are still looking for a way of physical embodiment and the score has not been tried out on stage, superfluous feelings, and ways of expressing them are still inevitable. The words seem inadequate and we fill them out with 'ohs' and 'ahs', 'look', etc.

Moreover, with our first steps, in the initial phase an actor is immoderate, uneconomical using anything that can convey his creative feeling:

words, voice, gestures, movements, actions, facial expression. He uses anything if only it can bring to light what has been growing and maturing inside. It seems to him that the more varied his technical means, at any given moment, the wider the choices, the richer, the more meaningful the embodiment will be.

But in this period when there is no real order, when we are looking for ways to achieve embodiment, that does not always start with voice and speech. Not only the writer's words but our own words are too concrete to express young, as yet green feelings in the score.

The director was right to break off the readings. It would have been coercion to go on with them. The unsuccessful readings were cut short and we were asked to go over to exercises on chosen themes. They are preparatory exercises on embodying feelings, thoughts, actions and images similar to the feelings, thoughts, actions and images of the role. They must be highly varied and systematic. With their help, passing step by step from one set of circumstances to another, we become aware of the nature of each feeling, that is its component parts and its logic.

Initially, we must act out all the chance wants and tasks that emerged inside the actor when he began the exercise. They should be the first step in revealing not the minimal facts of the play but the reality that surrounds the actor as he rehearses. They should indicate the most immediate task and the supertask of the exercise. However, we should not forget the author's given circumstances and the actor's experiences of the role and the play in the Famusov house in the 1820s. It seems to me it would be difficult for the actor to let them go. He has implanted them so strongly in himself in the period of experiencing.

Thus the actor begins 'to be', 'to exist' in the reality that surrounds him, which he now is aware of not only mentally, in his imagination, but also of the past, present and future of his role, with inner impulses akin to his character's.

But how are we to do that? I have to form a link with the world, the circumstances about me: the greenroom of the Moscow Art Theatre and the rehearsal which is taking place in the circumstances of the Famusov house in the 1820s, Chatski's life, or rather, my own life as a lead character with a past, present and future. That is not difficult for me to do mentally and emotionally. But how can I live that life in the present world? How can I make sense of my being in the Moscow Art Theatre? How am I to justify the circumstances of this rehearsal? How can I obtain the right to be here, in this room that has no physical link to a life like Chatski's?

This new creative task brings all my psychological drives, will,

intelligence and emotion into action. This new task is for the imagination. It has already started.

‘But why does Stanislavski, as Chatski, not have friends among the members of the Moscow Art Theatre?’, my imagination muses.

‘It would be strange if he did not’, my intelligence asserts. ‘People like Chatski cannot but be interested in art. If Chatski lives in the 1820s, he has to be in the circle of the Slavophiles, patriots who were actors, including Shchepkin. If Chatski were alive now, he would be a frequent theatregoer and have friends among actors.’

‘But how are we to connect with his presence, here and now, immediately after his return from abroad?’, feelings ponder.

‘Does that matter for this exercise? I could return today, yesterday, or the day before’, my imagination suggests.’

‘But how did Sofya get here?’, feeling persists.

‘Is she a problem? Say she isn’t here’, imagination concedes.

‘But what happens without her?’, feeling contends.

‘Then she arrives’, imagination soothes.

‘Yes let’s say so . . .’

‘Now, how do we deal with the anachronism?’, feeling worries, ‘how do we link Chatski with this room, which is *art nouveau*?’.

‘Is that so dreadful? It’s all to the good! Criticise, ridicule, laugh at these stupid incidentals just as Chatski ridiculed anything trivial’, imagination replies.

‘Why go into so much detail if it prevents you from getting close to Chatski and creates new problems? An actor should be submissive. He should be able, like a child, to play with all his toys, use everything reality suggests’, his intelligence concludes. ‘But would it not be better to look for anything that brings him close to the role?’

In response to this suggestion, creative feeling contains itself and says nothing against the wise words his intelligence has spoken.

‘Who are these people’, feeling asks more quietly.

‘The same as in the real world, actors from the Moscow Art Theatre’, imagination explains.

‘No, to me the person sitting opposite me is not an actor but “a swarthy-looking man with legs like a crane”⁹ intelligence replies with a touch of malice.

‘So much the better. Yes, he is like the “swarthy-looking” man’, feeling concedes.

Having found the similarity to the ‘swarthy-looking man’, I feel quite pleased, because, I fear, the actor sitting opposite me does not seem likeable. Chatski would have looked at him in the same way.

I seize on this nascent feeling that brings me closer to Chatski and greet the ‘swarthy-looking man’ swiftly in the same way that Chatski with all his elegance, would have done in foreign drawing-rooms.

But I am severely punished for my haste and impatience. All the specific theatrical clichés for polite behaviour and good taste are just waiting for the chance to pounce out on me. My elbow sticks out when I shake hands, my arm is bent and I drawl, ‘ssssopleasdtoseeyousssir’. My walk is affectedly casual. Every theatrical commonplace gathers on all sides and works on me.

Rigid with shame, I hate my fellow-actor and myself and decide not to make any more movements. I sit a long time, rigid and unmoving and calm myself down with the words, ‘It’s no matter. It’s normal. I should know what comes of haste. Until all the thousands of gossamer threads, the creative wants, have been spliced together to form heavy cables, I shall not be able to deal with an actor’s tense muscles, that stupidly create anarchy as soon as you let them. I have to wait until my creative will is stronger and subjects the whole body to what it decides to do’

While I am thinking all this, my ‘swarthy-looking man’, my colleague is overacting totally, as though to demonstrate the terrible results of muscular anarchy.

As though to reproach me, with great gusto, self-assurance, false chic he does everything that I have done, as if he were my mirror. I feel as though we have suddenly landed on the stage of some cheap provincial theatre. I freeze with embarrassment, shame and fear. I cannot raise my eyes, I do not know how to remove my hand from his, how to escape his actorish self-confidence. And he, to make matters worse, goes on happily cavorting in front of me, dragging his ‘crane’s legs’, playing with his imaginary monocle, pronouncing his Rs like a Frenchman, at the back of the throat, like a provincial actor in a society role. He prances about like an idiot, yaps instead of laughs, smiles a doggy smile, cleans his nails so as to be elegant, plays endlessly with his watch-chain, adopts the most banal theatrical poses, changing them every second like a kaleidoscope. He speaks such mindless nonsense which clearly shows that he does not need the words themselves but just their sound.

‘Yes . . . of course . . .’ he babbles, ‘what is one to say . . . in a certain manner. Eer . . . Do you know what I think? Yes! In my opinion, there can be no doubt that human life . . . er, is short, like . . .’ He rummages in his pocket as though he were looking for toothpick. ‘Here’s a toothpick. Yes . . . er . . . that is undoubtedly quite out of place . . .’

The longer, the more stupid his babbling, it becomes like delirium. The ‘swarthy-looking man’ becomes more and more unbearable and I want

to tell him how I dislike him. How can I do that? With words? He would be a offended. With hands, gestures, actions? Fight him? No. All that is left is the eyes and the face. Out of necessity I turn to them for help.

Not for nothing are the eyes called the mirror of the soul. They are the most sensitive of our organs. They are the first to respond to the manifestations of our inner and outer life. 'The language of the eyes' is most highly expressive, subtle and immediate of languages and at the same time the least concrete. Above all the 'language of the eyes' is the easiest. The eyes can say more, and more forcibly than words. At the same time, it does not give offence because it only conveys the general mood, the general nature of the feeling and not concrete thoughts and words to which one can easily take exception.

At that moment I felt that as the nascent feelings had not yet achieved clear, concrete physical form, it was better to start with the eyes and the face.

In the first period of embodiment, nascent feelings are conveyed by the eyes, face and facial expression. I understand that in that period it was important to set aside actions, movements and words so as not to provoke anarchy which ruins all the threads barely nascent wants and creates muscular anarchy. As I see a way for my feelings to emerge, and having freed myself from the need to embody, to perform at all costs, I suddenly find I am free from all muscular tension, and am completely calm and no longer feel like some image-making machine but like a man. Then everything around me becomes normal and natural. I sit quietly and observe the antics of the 'swarthy-looking man' and smile inwardly, no longer wanting to hide my feelings but give them free rein.

It is at this point that the rehearsal is broken off. An employee enters with a sheet of paper. It is an address for some jubilee. All the members of the company have to sign it. While the paper is passed from hand to hand, I keep looking at the 'swarthy-looking man'. He sits there, looking important, expecting the paper to be given to him to sign but somehow it comes to me first.

Surrendering to an unkind thought, as a joke, and with manufactured deference, I allow him to go first. He accepts my courtesy as the most natural thing in the world, does not thank me, and pompously begins to read the address. Having signed it, he sets aside his pen without offering it to me. His lack of manners annoys me, but I remember the exercise and decide to use my moment of anger for my own creative purposes.

Chatski would not have been put out by such a 'gentleman', I thought; he would have despised him.

I hurried to sign the address, to run after the ‘swarthy-looking man’ who is going towards the exit, and, like Chatski, laugh at him. But, on my way, I am stopped by another of my colleagues, who is very fond of big thoughts on small ideas.

‘You know’, he booms in his bass voice, ‘I suddenly had the thought,’ that the writer deliberately called the character I play, Skalozub (Toothy). Obviously he had the habit . . .

‘. . . of showing his teeth’, I suggest.

I have little patience with slowness of mind in the theatre. It irritates me. It is dangerous and sits ill with talent. And my colleague has talent and is no fool.

Two things can occur at the same time: being clever in life and stupid in art. A sharp response is already on my lips, but I again think back to the exercise, to Chatski, and that once again suggests that he would have treated a fool differently. I bite my tongue.

‘It occurs to me’, I say, to tease him, ‘that Griboiedov must not only have found a name that typified Skalozub but also names for all the other characters. For example, Khlyostova [Wasp] because the responses are always stinging. Tugokhovski [Hard of Hearing] because that is what he is. Zagoretski [Hothead] because he quickly flares up. Repetilov?! Because his role needs repeated rehearsals. Tell the actor he is lazy. And don’t forget me. Why do you think Groboiedov called me Chatski?’

As I leave him, I have the impression that my dim-wit is thinking hard about my question. Of course, Chatski would have expressed himself more wittily than I, but the interchange between him and the fool seemed similar to the one I had had with my colleague.

However, I thought, I had, without realising it, spoken almost as Chatski would, and have spoken very simply, without any clichés. Whereas a half an hour ago the real words of the script were of no use to me.

The secret is that between our own and someone else’s words there is ‘a vast distance’. Our own words are the direct expression of our own feelings whereas someone else’s words are no more than a hint of feelings to come until they have been made our own. We need our own words in the initial stages of embodiment since they help us draw out living but as yet unembodied feelings.

As long as experiences and inner actions are private, they need neither words nor physical movements. We would have to force them so as, no matter what the cost, to evoke them in outer action.

However if the writer’s lines are not needed yet, that does not mean we will not use them later. On the contrary, his lines will soon become very important. [They] are an aid to facial expression and movement during

the process of embodiment. But even our own words express more precisely feelings, thoughts and experiences that are already concrete.

The embodiment of the experiences of a role is easier to achieve using the eyes and facial expression. What the eyes cannot do will be settled by the voice, words, inflexions and speech. They are strengthened and clarified by gestures and movements which point them up. Physical actions, finally, complete them and embody the endeavours of the creative will as facts.

Thus, the life of the human spirit is reflected in the eyes and the face. 'The language of the eyes and the face' is so subtle that it conveys experiences, thoughts and feelings through barely perceptible, elusive movements of the muscles. Feelings must be fully and directly subordinate to them. And so, any mechanical muscular tension of the eyes and face, whether it arises from confusion, turmoil, tics or other pressures, ruins everything. Gross muscle cramps completely distort the subtle, elusive language of the eyes and face. And so, initially, the actor's work consists in protecting extremely subtle visual and facial apparatus from any voluntary or involuntary forcing and muscular anarchy.

How are we to do that? By using counter-habits that are gradually and naturally mobilised by systematic exercises. The secret is that you cannot eradicate a habit without putting something more truthful and natural in its place. And so the best thing is to substitute a good habit for a bad one. Thus, for example, replace tension and cramps with the habit of muscular release.

After the eyes, unwittingly, because of their proximity, the motor centres begin to work. They stimulate feeling and the face with all its expressions. They are less subtle and eloquent than the eyes to express the superconscious but the 'language of the face' is much more concrete. Besides it is eloquent enough to communicate the sub and superconscious. The workings of the face are more concrete than the radiation of the eyes. They have more to do with the muscles and so are more dangerous when they are chaotic. In facial expression, for the same reasons, clichés are the danger. Just as with muscular tension, we must fight hard against them. Tension and clichés distort feeling beyond all recognition. We have to fight against tension and clichés to maintain the link with inner feeling and be its subtle, direct expression.

As the separate tasks, bits and the score become clear, after the eyes and face, the natural need to satisfy the wants, the yearnings of our creative will arises spontaneously. The actor automatically takes action. Action naturally stimulates the movement of the whole body, our walk, etc. And the body undergoes the same demands as the eyes and face: it must

respond to the same subtle, elusive sensations of the mind and speak eloquently about them. The body must defend itself against arbitrary force and muscular tension which destroy the expressive subtlety of the tongue and our flexibility of movement.

In the body there is much more of substance, many muscles and so many more opportunities for tension and clichés, and so we must engage in the struggle against tension and clichés to make it subservient to our inner life. That is one of the reasons why the physical manifestations of a role must be held back until the end of our work, when the inner aspect of our role is secure and not subservient to our means of expression: eyes, face, voice, the body itself. Then directly guided by inner feeling the clichés become less deadly.

The body should only go into action when it no can longer be held back, when, after the eyes and the face, it feels the essence of the feelings it has experienced and the inner tasks to which they gave rise, the need to satisfy the wants and yearnings of the creative will in physical actions and tasks comes spontaneously alive. The body starts to move, to take action. It is unfortunate if you cannot subject the body to the authority of the will. It is unfortunate if the body descends into chaos, if it is vague or crude or general in its interpretation of the urges feeling produces. All the pernicious clichés step in, distorting or killing the subtle, gentle elusive impulses of feeling, which takes refuge in its secret places, refusing all creative effort and surrendering to the crude power of bodily muscles.

When fighting against clichés and tension we must not forget that censorship leads nowhere. We must conquer the bad with the good, that is, not ban but inspire the body by working on the manifestations of artistic feeling in all their beauty. If we restrict ourselves to saying no, one example of tension and clichés will be replaced by ten others. It is a law that clichés fill a vacuum, like weeds in an open space.

Gestures in and for their own sake are an attack on inner feeling and its natural expression.

Once the most important, the most subtle means of conveying the life of the human spirit, through the eyes, the face, has been exhausted, we can turn to the voice, sound, words, inflexions, diction. No force is needed here. Initially the score must be conveyed in our own words. For that, we need a proper series of exercises on the eyes, face, voice and tasks for revealing the score.

The writer and his play, if it is good become essential. The actor finally understands that there is no better form than the one the writer has prepared to express the score of the will and the actor's inner feeling. And so,

if he experiences the role along the lines the writer has indicated, it is easier to express his feelings and the score with words and voice.

He must study the right way to deliver the lines using his voice, his inflexions in accord with the writer's score.

Not everyone can do that. Some actors only play the words; they are in love with their voice and the sound the words make. That is not the same as loving the tasks contained in the score. Other actors are able to live very well in parallel with the script. They need the words as one kind of sound or other, so they can use them to express a general feeling. Their feelings flow and grow in parallel with the lines. The script is just a hindrance, it is superfluous because they only speak the lines mechanically and scatter them like beads. What matters to them is to live a series of fixed, general experiences. This can be done in parallel with the script.

Every word we speak on stage must be meaningful, important and necessary. They are worth their weight in gold. Superfluous words are empty sounds that have to be removed from the script, like jettisoning ballast, since they merely clutter up the role and restrict the process of experiencing. Certain words are more suited to convey thoughts or feelings and should be meaningful, important and clearly coloured by the actor's own feelings. These words should not be outwardly expressed by external stress (pecked at selectively), but they must be enriched by creative feeling, yield to the essence of our feelings with particular care and love. To take such words away is like robbing a living man of his soul.

Each word has a soul. It is apparent in the vowels, sounding out clearly out of necessity. It is unfortunate if all the vowels, all the phrases are spoken with equal importance, clarity, sharpness and meaning. The result is like the beating of a drum.

If the writer must turn the actor into his closest collaborator, the actor must turn the writer into his closest aide. This coming together stems from the soul of the words and the script, which we have to feel and experience, convey and reveal in the sound of the words.

Face, eyes are the more abstract, general expression of feelings. Words are more definite. And so, as the score crystallises into ever more concrete tasks, bits and endeavours, the greater the need for words becomes.

We can convey much behind and between the words with our eyes, face and psychological pauses. And so in conveying everything that is conscious, defined, concrete, particular, felt, material, words become a necessity. They are even more necessary when conveying thoughts, ideas which need to be conveyed individually and concretely. But there is also danger of tension and clichés in voice and speech. Vocal tension distorts

sounds, delivery, inflexions making them inflexible and crude. We must fight hard against vocal tension and clichés so that voice, speech and inflexions are still fully dependent on inner feeling and are its direct, precise servant.

The body, an actor's whole physical apparatus, must be in perpetual contact with his mind and creative will and subservient to them. It is unfortunate when the body takes the initiative and muscular anarchy, bad actors' habits and conventions set in, destroying the natural process of embodiment.

The automatic habits of a tense actor's muscles and body are strong, tenacious, stupid. They are like an idiot friend who is more dangerous than an enemy. External expressive techniques with their automatic clichés are rapidly absorbed and enduring. Man's muscular memory, especially the actor's, is highly developed whilst affective memory, the memory of feelings, physical sensations is highly elusive.

Feeling is a fine-spun thread; the muscles are a rope. A thread cannot beat a rope. A large number of them have to be spliced together. It is the same with actors. In order to subject his physical apparatus with its crude meaning muscles to subtlety of feeling he must splice a complex, tight cord out of feelings, emotions and experiences, which are adapted to the role and similar to it.

It is unfortunate if there is a disjunction between the mind and the body, feelings and words, inner and outer actions and movements.

It is unfortunate if the actor's instrument, his body, is poor and distorts feeling. The same thing happens when a melody is played on an instrument that is out of tune. The truer the feeling, the more directly it is conveyed, the more regrettable it is to be out of tune.

The emotional score must not only be precise but beautiful in body and sound, colourful, harmonious. Creative embodiment must be artistic, elevating, exciting, beautiful and noble. You cannot show what is noble by what is vulgar, what is beautiful by what is ugly, and so, the more subtle the feeling, the better the instrument that conveys it must be.

A bad street fiddler does not need a Stradivarius. The most ordinary violin will convey what he has to convey. But Paganini's 'Stradivarius' is essential to convey all the subtlety and complexity of his genius. And the richer and more meaningful an actor's creative work is, the more beautiful his voice must be, the more perfect his diction must be, the more expressive his face must be, the more expressive his movements must be, the more refined and responsive his whole physical apparatus must be. Embodiment in the theatre, as with any form of art, is only good when it is not only authentic but reveals the content of a work artistically. Form

must match content. And if there is failure, it is not the fault of the form but of the content that produced it.

The most important of all is not to throw your physical apparatus, face, voice, gesture, body, out of joint. So we must not break the direct link between the body and our inner life, our wants, voluntary impulses, the life of the human spirit.

Up till now we have been speaking about conveying and embodying the character's inner score which contains the essence of the role. But there is also the outer character, the living organism, the body, which we have to express through make-up, the typical voice of the character, its manner of speaking, its inflexions, that is, in speech, in a characteristic walk, mannerisms, movements, gestures and actions.

If the mental image of the character itself suggests the outer character and it is embodied in a natural manner, guided by feeling, so much the better. The outside is felt and conveyed both consciously and unconsciously, through intuition.

Conscious means of embodiment consist in the creation of the outer character by the muscles, helped by the imagination, the inner eye and ear, etc. The actor tries to visualise the look, the costume, the walk, movements etc., of the character he is playing. Mentally he looks for examples in his visual and other kinds of memories. He recalls what the people he knows look like. He borrows this from some and that from others. He puts them all together into the look that haunted him.

However, not all actors can find in themselves and their memory the material they need. Then, all they can do is look outside. Like the painter or a sculptor they look to nature for an example. They scrutinise the lives of the people they meet in the street, in the theatre, at home, or go to look for them, where, according to their rank or class soldiers, painters, civil servants, merchants, peasants, etc., gather together. They are not often successful in discovering the material they need by chance. What are they to do if luck is not with them? Every actor must gather material, enrich his imagination when creating the look of a character; the make-up, the shape, the way of moving about. He must gather up (collect) photographs, engravings, paintings, sketches of make-up, typical faces, pictures or descriptions in literature. It is this kind of material that, when the imagination runs dry, gives him a nudge and stimulates his affective memory, reminding him of things he had once known but had forgotten.

If that is no help, then he needs to find new methods that give him a shock to arouse his dormant imagination. Try to sketch the face, the shape you are looking for, the facial features, the lips, the brows, the wrinkles,

the silhouette, the cut of his clothes, etc. This sketch, just a few strokes, creates a combination of lines, like a caricature, typical of the character's appearance.

Having found the sketch, you must transfer its features to your own face and body, actors often find the material they need in themselves. They try out every possible way of arranging their hair, of holding their eyebrows, contract various muscles of the face and body, various ways of looking at things, walking, gesticulating, bowing, greeting, behaving. All these attempts either accidentally or consciously provide a hint of what the character will look like.

An even clearer indication is given by trying out make-up. You put on a whole series of wigs, stick on a series of beards, apply all kinds of colours and styles to find the right complexion, wrinkles, shadows, highlights until you stumble upon something quite unexpected. Once it has come alive, the mental image of the character recognises its own body, appearance, walk and mannerisms. We have to do the same thing with costume. First, we look in our visual memory then at drawings, photographs, paintings and then in our own lives. We make a sketch, try to put on all manner of cuts and shapes, put them together, change the style until, either by chance or design we find what we are looking for or something no one could have expected.

The walk, movement, habits can be seen in life, in our imagination or are found in ourselves. This can occur consciously through our visual or other kinds of memory, or either by chance or intuitively, unconsciously . . .

8

THE STORY OF A PRODUCTION 1923

This novel, drafted at the same time as My Life in Art, is concerned with the contrast between two directors: Tvortsov and Remeslov, Tvortsov (later to become Tortsov), the Creative artist, and Remeslov, Mr Stock-in-Trade. This is mirrored by the contrast between two actors Chuvstvov (Heart) and Rassdumov (Head).

This novel marks the beginning of the transition from the approach adopted in Woe from Wit towards the Method of Physical Action. It also marks Stanislavski's decision to abandon formal exposition to some kind of semi-fictional form, ultimately the diary of a student, An Actor's Work.

There was a notice in the green room today stating that our next production would be Griboiedov's *Woe From Wit* to be staged by our own principal director Tvortsov and a new guest director, Remeslov.

The latter's name was well-known from his work in the provinces. And so, many members of the company welcomed him. But others regarded him with suspicion and were surprised that someone who knew so little of our methods could be entrusted with a major production such as this. They spoke to Tvortsov about this error of judgement, but their arguments and warnings had no effect on him as he was convinced that fate had sent him the energetic assistant he had long been waiting for.

At another performance shortly after that, when the green-room was teeming with actors in costume, a happy, lively Tvortsov appeared in the company of another gentleman. Everyone immediately realised that this was Remeslov. He was dressed to the nines. He was wearing everything a

good actor's wardrobe can provide. A huge tie-pin, probably a gift from a benefit performance, a golden rosette in the lapel of his tail-coat which had a chain hanging from it with all kinds of baubles – also gifts from his audiences. A watch with a leather strap, a monocle and gold pince-nez, a fashionable jacket, patent leather shoes such as are worn with evening dress, thick red gloves and a hard hat in his left hand. He was dumpy, small rather than of medium height, a chubby face and cheeks, thick lips, stumpy legs, bright fair hair fashionably pomaded, a red beard cut short and shaved at the edges. He was rather too affable to his inferiors and too stiff and starchy towards his superiors. His face bore all the signs of the vulgarity of provincial 'society'. Judging by his grandiose appearance we expected a few opening words from him that, for us, would be quite out of place backstage. I think Remeslov was aware of this and so broke down his prepared speech into short sentences that he delivered differently here and there, according to the people he was addressing. I heard how, when making sociable compliments to one, he said:

'I feel like a traveller who has found a safe haven in the promised land.'

He told another that he felt close to the lighthouse of art.

He told a third that we, the actors of the Art Theatre, were the 'free children of a free art'. Tvortsov was the 'beautiful sun of the Russian theatre'.

This flowery language smacked for us of something rather studied.

This unfortunate tone made a bad impression on us. We were perplexed since Tvortsov, a man of refinement, could not accept this bad taste.

Soon we came to know Remeslov not only for his negative but for his positive side. He was an energetic colleague and an excellent manager. Thanks to him, within three days of his arrival the decision to mount *Woe from Wit* was finally taken and we had our first meeting.

It would have been pointless to have a reading of a play we all knew very well from our schooldays. And so we arranged a discussion of the play with invited guests – friends of the theatre and prominent people. One of these 'lions' was Professor A, an expert on Griboiedov. The whole of the theatre gathered in *corpore*, not only actors but clerks, heads of department, stage-hands, wardrobe workers, technicians, etc. Happy faces everywhere . . .

Our new arrival's hand could be felt everywhere, in the lay-out of the foyer where the discussion was to take place, the placing of the furniture, the decoration of the large table and the whole order in which the speeches were to be delivered. The actors immediately felt Remeslov's experienced hand and obeyed. They answered the bell and took their places. The principal director, Tvortsov, took the place of honour, the management

were beside him and a solemn silence ensued. Finally, Tvortsov rose and delivered a few opening words:

‘Today we have a great celebration’, he said, ‘one of our dearest brothers in art, Griboiedov’.

Thunderous applause.

‘With him he has brought his closest friends: Aleksandr Chatski (applause), Famusov (applause) with his daughter, his secretary and his relations, Amfisa Khliostova, Prince and Princess Tugoukhovski, various poor relations and all his friends, Repetilov, Zagorepki, and the Turk or the Greek “with legs like a crane”.’

Each of the characters of *Woe from Wit* was greeted with applause but that did not apply for very long to the other named guests. It seemed as though they had tumbled out of their carriages and were overjoyed to meet the actors in such a convivial atmosphere.

‘Receive our guests’, Tvortsov continued after the hubbub had died down, ‘offer them your greatest gift: the flowering of your artistry. Let each of you take one of our dear guests under your wing. It matters not whether you are the first or the last among us. When you walk in the Easter-night procession in church, does it matter whether you are carrying a large banner or a small wax candle? In our theatre there can be no big or small roles, no leading actors or walk-ons. It is the heart of Griboiedov’s old Moscow that should live in us. If the writer has not provided you with words, make them up and live them in crowd scenes, upstage or in the wings. If you have no words, live silently, on feeling alone, exchange looks, radiate your artistic will. No matter, provided you create a character and live at the same time as us the “million torments” and passions that Griboiedov’s play affords us.’

Thunderous applause drowned out his final words.

The floor was then given to our invited professor, whom Tvortsov welcomed. He was greeted not with loud but respectful applause. All the actors present rose to their feet.

‘I thank the theatre and its actors’, the professor began, ‘for the honour and privilege of allowing me to participate in their new endeavour and the celebration taking place today. I have spent many years of my life studying this great writer and am especially happy to see your enthusiasm and to feel your creative élan and to have a foretaste of the wonderful production that you are currently preparing.’

The professor spoke splendidly for about two hours in a highly interesting manner. He started with Griboiedov’s biography and went on to the history of the writing of *Woe from Wit* and a thorough examination of the existing drafts. Then he went on to the final version, quoting from

memory lines that had not made their way into print, assessing their worth . . . Then he recalled the most important critical commentaries and explained the differences of opinion to be found in them.

Then he presented the principal director with a long list of critical essays on earlier productions, with indications as to where, in which publications, museums, libraries, they could be found . . . he ended his address with friendly, elegant words committing himself to the theatre in the future.

He was greeted with long and loud applause. The actors surrounded him, shook his hand, thanked him and said, interrupting each other:

‘Thank you! Thank you! You have given us so much! We are grateful to you!’

‘You said so many important things’, said a second.

‘You have been such a great help’, interrupted a third.

‘If we wanted to gather up all this material we would have to spend years in museums, look for books and read them end to end, to find one or two important lines in thousands of pages’, a fourth said in gratitude.

‘And then, still not gather all the material!’, a fifth exclaimed. ‘In about two hours you have explained everything written about Griboiedov to us, exhausted all the libraries and the books.’

More than any of the other actors, Rassudov had been struck to the heart. We call him the ‘chronicler’ because he keeps a secret diary of all rehearsals, performances and lectures. He has already taken down the list of books and recorded the recommended essays.

When everything was quiet and the actors had taken their places, the principal director stood up again and turned to address a few short words to the professor. He thanked him for the valuable, scholarly help he had given us in our new endeavour and for the aesthetic pleasure he had provided both in the importance of what he had said and the elegant form of language in which he had said it. Tvortsov then addressed his final words to the actors:

‘The cornerstone has been laid. We have been fired by an enthusiasm that goes beyond the ordinary. It is in that mood that I send you home. We have reached our objective for today. Your enthusiasm will say more to you than anything we can do after the professor’s brilliant address. I congratulate you on the work begun and say farewell until our next discussion.’

As we stood up and prepared to give our youth full vent, Remeslov cleverly seized the moment and stopped us with his forceful but quiet, highly authoritarian words:

‘The next talk’, he said loudly and clearly, ‘will be tomorrow at 12 in

the foyer. The whole company must be there. There will be no further written announcement. I ask you not to leave the room without having signed the book.'

'Here's an experienced director', I thought to myself, 'he knows how to talk to actors.'

Chairs were cleared, voices were raised. Some went with the professor, others hurried to sign the day-book, others still exchanged views on a successful lecture.

In the midst of this lively atmosphere, the thoughtful, almost morose figure of Chuvstvov, one of our most talented actors, appeared. Surprised by his face, I went up to him.

'What's the matter?', I asked.

'I'm terrified', he answered.

'Of what?'

'The professor', he replied in the same, serious voice.

'How did he do that?', I continued.

'He said so much there's no pleasure left in the role.'

I burst out laughing.

'No, don't laugh. I'm serious. How much talent you need to do even a part of what he said in two hours! And how hard it is and I'm scared and worried about even starting work, and now there's you. We have such a load of information on our backs and we are told: "God be with you! Bon voyage!". Don't think I'm joking, I'm deadly serious.'

'And yet', Rassudov replied, 'we need to know all that and be guided by it in our work.'

'I don't know. Probably. I'm not very educated. But they shouldn't talk about it now, as we begin, not tell us so much now, but later, gradually, when we feel the ground beneath our feet. They should talk about something else, a word, a phrase, the quintessence of all this literary learning, come and tell us the secret word, sometimes nothing, sometimes tum-ti-tum-tum, and then go away and I will shout with enthusiasm. I will kiss his hands in gratitude. And then, once we have worked for one or two weeks, he should come back and say one or two wonderful things and then go away again. He should come back after another week and say twenty wonderful things, and, a week after that, forty more. And, finally, when we have completely mastered the role, he can give daily lectures. Then we can use them. For now, I am overawed by the professor's learning and intelligence, my head is bursting and my heart is empty.'

'What is it he wants?! A magical word! Does it come at once? You have to go through agonies before you know what it is', one of his classmates said to Chuvstvov.

'Maybe', he agreed, 'but you must know what the actor's agonies are.'

'That's an illusion', the classmate continued, 'to imagine that the director knows all the magical words for every play. Directors are human. They, like us, approach important words by painful study.'

'They should learn, suffer, get what they want, but not with us, but with scholars in their studies. They should leave us fresh and open.'

'In other words, directors should create for us, suffer the agonies of creative work, while we, actors, should accept what we are given. Is that what you mean?', Chuvstvov was asked.

'Creative agony!!! That's our fate. We have more than enough of that', Chuvstvov said. 'Does creative work mean bewildering us, stuffing our heads? You want to help? Then do what a director should do, don't open a university inside the theatre and stuff our heads with learning.'

Seeing the argument drag on, I reminded Chuvstvov he was performing that evening. Within minutes Chuvstvov, Rassudov and I had left the theatre together. We all live at the same address and always come together. Chuvstvov was excited. Evidently the professor's words were beginning to work in his talented head and would not give his spirit of enquiry any peace.

'What the devil!', he cried out loud, 'my mind is corroded. It's a mess. Before the lecture everything seemed clear and open, but now it's all buried in the earth and protected by mountains of learning. My brains have fallen apart. They came into my mind as though it were a pharmacy, wrote a new prescription according to an old critical tradition and left. But I don't want to be a pharmacist, for God's sake! For good or ill, I want to be me, an actor. I don't want orders, I don't want to live in fear. [. . .] I don't even have the artist who can give me the make-up: this mouth, this nose, these eyes, as in this picture. As an actor they give me nothing but they want the rewards. But don't stand over me, sickle in hand, and don't live in the past. Don't dare talk about results! Don't dare to tell me what to do.'

'What do you want then?', Rassudov asked, stopping in the middle of the pavement, bundling up his books and the case with his diaries that he always carried with him.

'I want a simple interesting little story, something that will characterise the life of the period and its people. I need to understand the social and philosophical mood of the play, I need to fall in love with Griboiedov's verse, his style, his rhythm, his play, his people, his talent, certain passages, the whole play, alongside someone else. I'm interested in the shape of the houses, the clothes, the portraits, the manners, the habits that are part of the 1820s. It's the feel of this life all around me that attracts me, not ideas.'

So, don't frighten me but help me to create the setting and the atmosphere in my imagination as I want, and I will be a happy man. Then I cannot help but live in it, naturally. It may not be very good, but it's mine. So, spare me other people's results, other people's opinions and feeling, and your orders at the moment I am starting. It's like telling a pregnant woman, "give me a beautiful baby boy, with dark hair and blue eyes, who will be tall and is what the customer wants". But what, may I ask, if you get a baby girl red-head not a brunette, with grey eyes, not blue, and isn't big but small?

'Can you command nature? Will she listen to you? Try to give orders to my feelings. Shut up and do what the director, the professor or even Griboiedov says – you will get nowhere. But if you push me with other people's feelings, which I have not produced, fine, I will give you a semblance of feeling, but really feel nothing. I will ham it up and seem to be happy, unhappy or in pain . . . And? Where's the sense? Let's say I trick you, but not the audience. But where's the heart? Ho! Ho ho . . . You can't fool it, brother, it is much subtler, clever than you. Things are bad but no tears appear, are funny but you don't laugh. It's also good if I come near to posturing and mimicry. But I don't get in any way near to what is taught in drama schools: when in pain, raise your eyebrows, twist your neck from left to right, roll your eyes, clutch your left hand hard to your heart as though you wanted to tear it out, put your right hand through your hair and press your head as though to drive the pain out, go tense and angry for no reason, "in general" by tugging at yourself and nothing else. Isn't that the way it is? So, if you don't want me to be false, don't burden me, don't hinder me, I'll find the answer. There is one condition: approach my heart and mind as delicately as you can, don't force me but stir my imagination gently, suggest ideas. As soon as I take them, stop because it means something has come alive inside me which is more interesting for me, which is mine. These feelings and passions can't be rented out. They have to be yours. Who else can do this other than me? Who can feel other than me? It is I who shows them to you and then you can judge them.'

After this heated outburst Chuvstvov fell silent and did not utter another word along the way. We, too, walked in silence, each preoccupied with his own thoughts. We parted at the Gogol statue and went home.

The next lecture was planned for the following day. Before it began we talked about the request by the young designer to show us the sketches for the sets and costumes he had made.

'Why not, if it doesn't take more than fifty minutes?' Remeslov kindly decided in the absence of the principal director.

As we went into the foyer, the young designer collected together

his drawing, large and small, sketches, albums and simple scraps of paper. The designer turned out not to be as young as all that. Gaunt, pale, tall, in a summer shirt with big sleeves and an open neck, a green belt around a waistcoat under a kind of woman's jacket.

He looked, indeed, like a designer of the so-called extreme tendency, had his head not been clean-shaven like a billiard ball. That gave him a bizarre appearance. A frocked priest or a woman in an off-the-shoulder ball gown, with a shaven head, could not have been more extraordinary. His whole manner, gait, and style belonged to ordinary locks of hair instead of baldness, but that did not stop him behaving as though he had a full head of hair.

'You don't know me! I've only just got to know, understand and appreciate myself . . . I am renewing Griboiedov! . . . I am creating Griboiedov! I have my own drama of light! . . . My actors are colours . . . Happy-white, stinking-dark . . . My tragedy is light and shade! My people are ghosts! Chatski the bright, Sofya the wayward, Famusov the old goat, Skalosub the solid oak! Let's begin!! The piping flute, the chiming clock!!! . . . I know what I must have!!! Yes indeed!!!'

He lifted up a large sketch, painted in black, with barely perceptible muddy colours on it, and with no clear outline. The actors fell silent and leaned towards it. At the bottom were the words: 'The sinners' dance, my prologue to Griboiedov's pamphlet, *Woe from Wit*.'

'What is it?', one of the actors asked, pointing to an incomprehensible shape.

'Lust', the designer replied without hesitation.

'Nowhere near', a barely audible voice said next to me.

'And that?', said another actor, pointing to another splash of colour.

'Arrogance', the designer responded without hesitation.

'Spot on', the same voice whispered.

'And that?'

'Stupidity.'

'Just like a photograph', the voice whispered again.

'And this?'

'Gluttony and sycophancy.'

'I knew it', the voice whispered.

The sketches were all then cleared away and everyone sat down again.

'Nonsense but talented', murmured Chuvstvov as he passed by me.

'Wayward Sofya creeping out', the designer told us, holding up a second picture.

Again an almost continuous line of dark colour: a crack in a half-open door beyond which could be seen the gluey green of the 'wayward Sofya's room.

Two heads emerged, a woman's and a man's, dishevelled, pale, ecstatic, with drunken eyes and long thin hands.

'Day and sadness! How swift the passing night!', the designer intoned with all the dreadful sentimentality of the amateur.

Remeslov was alarmed and quickly turned to another sketch, evidently to criticise it.

'It's a secret!', the designer explained calmly, placing his hand over the title.

'Famusov, the randy old goat!', he announced, holding up another sketch.

'God save us . . .', said Chuvstvov in a comic voice to the young students, 'we old sinners are always the same'.

'We don't understand why we should go.'

'Because we don't care!

'Blasphemy', murmured a blond woman as she left.

'And you, mama, aren't you leaving?', Chuvstvov asked an elderly, respected actress.

'What am I to do? I haven't seen it yet', she replied very calmly, taking a cigarette out of her mouth.

'Let's go on . . .'

The designer held up another sketch and showed it to us. It was the scene between Lisa and Famusov on the sofa and series of other drawings that were talented but crudely tendentious, one-sided and unattractive.

In contrast to the many dark sketches Chatski's arrival was depicted in the brightest tones. This strange sketch showed a fine sensitivity to colour and caught the actors' serious attention. The sketches for the ball and Chatski's madness were strong but crude. Amid the dancing semi-animals Chatski 'the bright' was standing in a white suit, with a broken lyre and ragged laurels in a shaft of light. In his right fist he held a whip with which he thrashed the people around him as though he wanted to drive out all the 'dark forces' as Christ drove the money lenders from the Temple.

One of the final sketches, the scene between Lisa and Molchalin in Act 4, produced mutterings of protest. The elderly actress could take no more and left. Other actors, including me, also began to go.

I don't know what happened after that. I only heard that as the designer left the theatre he was singing 'God grant them eternal rest'. Evidently this dirge was directed at the whole theatre and us elderly actors who did not understand the new.

The bell sounded again throughout the theatre and we assembled in the foyer and the talk began. Remeslov took the chair with great dignity as Tvortsov had telephoned to say that he was presiding over an actors' convention which meant he could not attend rehearsals for one or two days.

Initially the conventional members of the company heard everything they wanted. Usually the discussion centred on those with non-speaking parts, the walk-ons. First among them was a very self-satisfied, stupid man who loved loud words as in a political meeting. In Chatski's voice he urged us to castigate the outdated bases of our society that had not changed for a hundred years. He implored us to use Griboiedov's satire to mock high society and the bureaucrats, the worst enemies to social reform. It was only in the light of this noble task that he could see the justification and social significance of producing *Woe from Wit* in a progressive theatre . . . but speaking personally Chatski is nothing like a political speaker with a hefty larynx, a thunderous voice, and a red face. Quoting Chatski's lines, he boomed in the bass and punched the air with his fist.

The next speaker talked almost exclusively of Chadeev.¹ What he had to say bore no relation to the play, Chatski or the production. Its sole purpose was to display his erudition.

The third speaker was boring and pretentious, speaking as one of the 'friends of the theatre'. He was a young, private lecturer, known for the papers he had delivered in various clubs and circles.

Remeslov exercised his right as chairman to speak out of his turn.

'I am present for the first time at one of the lectures at your theatre and I must say I am that I am astonished at the amount of valuable time you waste. If this were the provinces what would the theatre managers do to us! . . . after yesterday's brilliant, comprehensive, authoritative lecture by Professor A it would seem there is nothing more to say. Every question had been answered. Yet today we still go on talking. About what? That Famusov is a bureaucrat, Chatski an accuser, that Lisa is French soubrette, that the whole play is written under French influence . . . Who doesn't know that? It's all a commonplace that does not need repeating. We are losing time. So I suggest we stop talking and start real work.'

'Let's get on with it!', Chuvstvov shouted.

'I agree with Mr Remeslov', the lead actor, Igralov said firmly.

'I support my husband', his wife, also a member of the company stated.

'Me too', said a small, pretty young blonde woman, nobody knew, hidden in a corner.

'Who's that?', the actors, especially the actresses, asked each other.

It turned out it was Remeslov's wife, who wanted to be engaged as a bit-player.

'Oho!', someone called out.

We all exchanged glances.

'Might we know', said Rassudov to Remeslov with exaggerated politeness, 'what this real work is?'

'You may', Remeslov replied, with a hint of condescension. 'First, we verify the part-scripts against the original.² Then I show you the sketches of the sets, costumes and make-up which the designer has made on my instructions, based on the last production I did in Kiev. Then I arrange a series of readings in which I say what I want in the production and my interpretation of the characters. Then I show you my *mise-en-scène*, which you need to remember. Then we have a number of rehearsals on the book, and after that you have a few days to learn your lines, and then we start rehearsing whole acts, at first with only marked-out sets and then with the sets themselves, which will not slow us down, I assure you. Without you present, I take technical rehearsals then we have one, at most two dress rehearsals. I don't like new productions. Then comes the show and the public response.'

Remeslov's plan was received in silence.

'Did our principal director decide to produce *Woe from Wit*?', Rassudov asked after a long pause.

'No', Remeslov answered, surprised.

'In that case', Rassudov continued, 'has he abandoned the principles by which he has been guided hitherto?'

'Not at all', Remeslov replied even more amazed. 'What makes you think that?'

'Your proposed plan of work', Rassudov explained. 'It is the complete opposite of what Tvortsov usually says and does.'

'I have only introduced some minor changes in the way we work', said Remeslov in self justification.

'Unfortunately', Rassudov rejoined, 'they totally destroy our most fundamental artistic principles.'

'You're frightening me', said Remeslov, laughing it off.

'I'm very sorry, but you're frightening us all with your proposals.'

'Would you mind explaining what you find frightening?'

'With great pleasure', Rassudov replied courteously, 'but I fear it will take us away from the subject in hand.'

It was decided we should clear up the misunderstanding before proceeding to further work. The floor was given to Rassudov who can speak better than any of us on the basics of the method of our principal director

and leader, Tvortsov. It is no accident that he always keeps his journals with him and frequently notes down Tvortsov's thoughts, advice and aphorisms in rehearsal, class or discussion.

He began with gesture of doubt: he raised his shoulders, rubbed his hands together helplessly, pulled a wry face and said in a subdued voice:

'How can I explain in a quarter of an hour things we have been studying for years and still have not really understood. I can only tell you a thousandth part of what you need to know concerning this question . . . But will this really help us understand one another? . . . Where shall I begin', he said to himself, rubbing his forehead with his fist . . . 'With what?. The subject is so broad so vast', he continued in a whisper, planning what he was going to say.

'You see', he said, turning decisively towards Remeslov, 'you can experience a role every time you re-create it. That is the art of *experiencing*. You can experience a role once or twice at home to note the bodily form of the emotion you are expressing and then reproduce it from memory mechanically, without feeling. That is the art of *representation*.'

'I know. Salvini writes about it in his letters, as does Coquelin in his books', Remeslov hastened to reply to show off his erudition. 'There's nothing new in that.'

'Are we only able to talk about what's new in art?', Rassudov asked. 'I think in the art we practise, creating the life of the human spirit in all its beauty, we will always find something new because the area with which we are concerned is so huge. However, let us not stray from the subject. Not only can you experience or represent a role, you can simply state it, using long-established methods of "acting". That is *stock-in-trade* that, unfortunately, is widespread in the theatre. We only recognise one of these approaches, the art of *experiencing*.'

'So do I, otherwise I wouldn't be here', said Remeslov, dramatically. 'A true artist must always experience.'

'Funny to hear such words coming from you after what you said earlier', said Rassudov in astonishment.

'How so, funny?'

'This way', Rassudov explained. 'You expected us to learn the lines parrot-fashion before we had brought them to life and made them our own. Then you expected us to learn your *mise-en-scène* which had nothing to do with our feelings. Then you expected us to go on stage and follow your orders. You expected us to understand the roles, their nature, their psychology, their meaning not the way we felt them, but the way you wanted them. The make-up and costumes, about which we knew nothing, came to us ready-made from your last production in Kiev and

were foisted on us here in Moscow literally before the play had been cast. In a word you are coercing us as actors, and that frightens feeling and kills experiencing. And, to crown all, you proclaim yourself a disciple of our kind of acting and a pupil of Tvortsov, who rejects any kind of forcing of the actor's nature.'

'I'm only suggesting the same as all directors do in every theatre in the world,' said Remeslov in self-justification.

'Except in ours', Rassudov stated firmly.

'In that case, would you kindly explain what a director does in your theatre?', Remeslov asked with a hint of irony.

'He is a midwife, who is present at the natural, normal birth of a new being – the role', Rassudov explained in a firm voice.

'If that is what you want', Remeslov said in a comic tone, 'I suggest you become a father.'

'It is at your peril that you disdain the role of midwife, which is both difficult and honourable', Rassudov tried to persuade him. 'It isn't easy to work in conjunction with creative nature. It isn't easy to help her in her miraculous, creative activity. Oh! How much it costs to understand, to *feel* the laws that govern the genuine, normal biological creativity of our nature. In our kind of art to understand is to *feel*. How much it costs a director to learn how to use the organic nature of the actor in a thoughtful way, not to infringe its laws, how much it costs to learn how to stimulate the desire to create in other people, in actors, and steer their creative work along the right lines.'

'The time has come to understand that in our kind of art it is the actor's nature, his intuition, his superconscious that creates, not people, not me, not you, not our feeble, insignificant, helpless stage technique nor our behaving like puppets. How can we compete with nature?! "Art, creativity is not playacting, not artistry or virtuoso technique but a completely authentic, creative process by our mental and physical nature"', Rassudov read Tvortsov's words from his journal. 'Compare our creative process with any other natural process and you will be astounded by the similarities among them. For example, the actor's creative process, like any other creative process, can be viewed as insemination, fertilisation, mental and physical formation, the emergence of will, consciousness, mental faculties, traits, habits, resulting in birth. That is why we talk about the actor "giving birth to a role".'

'Might I ask, in this process, what daddy and mummy do?', asked Remeslov, sarcastically.

Of course, this silly joke was hugely successful and evoked a whole series of like answers and a whole discussion about the parental relationship between writer, actor and director. Finally, we decided that the author

was daddy, since he inseminated the actor, the actor was mummy since he fertilised the author's seed and, as it were, conceived, and from that came a living being. The poor director, to Remeslov's discomfort, once again assumed the role of midwife, matchmaker since he brought the author and the actor together. Heaven knows how spicy the discussion might have been had not Rassudov hastened to introduce an analogy between the creation of a role and the workings of nature.

'We suffer something like birth pangs', he continued to demonstrate, 'and various periods of growth. There is the moment of birth in the glare of the footlights, childhood, adolescence and maturity. There is feeding and nurturing and illness as it grows. In a word', Rassudov once again quoted from his journals, 'each theatrical creation has its own life, its history, its nature, and its living, so to speak, *organic mental and physical elements*. It is a living, *organic creation*, in the image of a man, and not a dead, worn-out theatrical cliché. It must be convincing, it must make us believe it is, it must be *there* in nature, *live* in us and with us and not *seem to be*, recall, represent reality.'

'So', quipped an angry Remeslov, giving everyone a meaningful look in expectation of success, 'one fine day an actor goes to rehearsal and in the evening goes home with a newborn Hamlet or Othello that he takes by the hand. At the end of his career he is surrounded by little old men like himself. They are all his creations and have grown up with him.'

Remeslov broke into a self-satisfied laugh, but this time he laughed alone.

'Yes!', affirmed Rassudov quite sharply. 'An actor does not live his life alone but together with every role he has played. In his own life the actor ceases to be himself, he becomes part himself in a special kind of being. Tvortsov says this:

'The result of an actor's work', he again quoted. 'is a living creation. It is not a copy of a role, point for point, as the author wrote it. It is not the actor himself, point for point, as we know him in life. It is a new being, born both of the actor's own character and the part he plays. The new being is heart of their heart and flesh of their flesh of the writer and the actor. It is a being born of the laws of nature, of the coming together of the actor as a human being and as an artist. We may, or may not like it, but it is, it exists, and cannot be other than it is.'

'How can that be? What if what you create doesn't correspond to the author's or the director's ideas?'

'You cannot correct something the actor has created naturally in separate parts. You cannot rework it according to your own taste', Rassudov explained. 'You cannot [as] Agafya Tikhnova [wanted] in *Marriage*³ add

[Nikanor Ivanovich's lips to Ivan Kuzmanich's nose]. You have to create something new, seek out new organic elements in the actor's mind and the role, and combine them into a new turn of mind which will give you something nearer to the author's and director's ideas.'

'That's a maternity home not a theatre!', Remeslov cried. 'It's amazing that you need nine months to put on a single play. That you don't rehearse as the Americans do from yesterday to today.'

'What can we do?', Rassudov replied, to bring a new, organic being into the world, a role, you need the *fixed period set by nature*. 'Conceiving and giving birth to a child is like sowing and reaping; it needs its own allotted time. You can't create a role and its true meaning in four, or ten or forty days' rehearsal. Any more than you can conceive and give birth to a child in a month any more than you can sow and reap in a few hours. Only with a generous period of time, set by nature, can you genuinely experience a role. And without experiencing there is no creation, no art.'

'How do you start work?' asked Rassudov almost harshly.

'I'm sorry, but at the beginning, with clowning and bravado', joked Remeslov

'And that is?', continued Rassudov firmly.

'What? With a reading of course, if the play is new and nobody knows it', Remeslov replied somewhat roughly.

'Are you a good reader?', Rassudov asked.

'You're inviting me to be immodest', Remeslov said coquettishly. 'People in the provinces have always approved my reading but as for the capital, I'm just a little provincial director!'

'I expect, when you read, you try to give a final, clear image of the roles as you understand them, and try to understand the overall mood of the whole play which you have already experienced', Rassudov continued.

'Of course, I try to explain the play in terms of the way I intend to present it. And, I am told, this has not been without success in the provinces', Remeslov boasted.

'That's bad!' Rassudov unexpectedly concluded.

'Bad?!', Remeslov cried, transformed by doubt in the question mark.

'Not for you, of course, but for art, for us, the actors', Rassudov explained.

'Bad because I read well?' said Remeslov bewildered. 'Does that mean if I read badly that would be good?'

'No it doesn't "mean" that at all', Rassudov explained calmly. 'It is bad

that you don't stick to your own business, that you have already created the roles and the play at the first reading. Creating roles is not your business. That's for the actors. Yours is only to give information about the play. It is bad if you read as an actor and good if you give a literary account of the play, without revealing your opinions. It is bad because you express your own interpretation, depriving the actors of their freedom and independence. Bad because from the very start you force yourself on the actors' minds, their will, their intelligence and establish a 'preset idea' about the creative work that is about to begin. Prejudgment, whatever form it takes is the greatest obstacle to creative freedom. Authentic creation must be free, individual, the actors' own, and particular to every character. Taking director's orders is not creative freedom. You, like a tyrannical father, dominate actors like wives and lovers, not as they think and feel, but as you do. A forced marriage is always dangerous.'

'I never force anything', said Remeslov heatedly. 'I suggest my interpretation.'

'That's even worse', said Rassudov. 'Actors are lazy. They want it on a plate. They cannot bear the pangs of creative work. Their bread does not nourish. It is a mere show of how the role is to be played. It is recall, cliché and . . . frankly, stock-in-trade. The role, from first to last, is totally preset with no possibility of change. Not only that, small preset details prove dangerous to the actor's normal, natural creative process.'

'What do you mean, preset?', said Remeslov astonished. 'Is what the director tells us preset?'

'Yes', said Rassudov unexpectedly, to Remeslov's surprise. 'What the director says when it is not appropriate to the creative actor, not drawn from the essential meaning of the play or the role, stems from wilfulness, self-satisfaction, arrogance creates his living feelings and experience, not the actor's. Director's orders merely create prejudice to which the actor cannot relate but which he accepts with a heavy heart or merely adapts to out of creative laziness and adapts to externally and mechanically. How many misshapen performances, how many ruined roles arise from an incorrect first encounter with the play, which . . . do not reveal the heart of the play nor its basic idea or feeling giving rise to creative work and the author's work itself, not what should attract an actor to the creative task before him. The first reading, in most cases, engages the actor not by the basic elements in the play but only by details with which he can deal, or a simple event like a good reading, the director's fascinating ideas about décor, costumes and staging, or the effectiveness of individual roles and the setting.'

‘Look’, Rassudov explained. ‘Your plan of work is suited to the simplest form of directing. And you want to turn that into art? What! We can call it art but no pure, creative acting can flower within it.’

‘Why?’, said Remeslov bewildered.

‘Either you create, or we do’, Rassudov explained. ‘Either you take the initiative and we are clay on your hands, or we do the creating and you merely help us. What else is there? You pull one way, towards theatrical display, and we, towards psychological depth. So doing, we can only destroy each other. Turn the art of acting into stock-in-trade and art itself is lost. A combination is possible. Understand that directing as you see it bears no relation to acting, particularly as we see it. Our acting requires us to experience continuously. Your directing and our acting are mutually and lethally destructive. When you are working at an artistic level we have to go along with the stock-in-trade and forget our own initiatives. And woe into you if we actors want to create ourselves. Then nothing will remain of your staging, *mise-en-scène*, sets, costumes. We require something else, something our art wants, and you would have to give in, of course, except if you should you fill us with enthusiasm and draw us to you.’

‘Why? What is the reason we can’t work together?’ Remeslov wondered.

‘Because your plan leaves no room either to excite artistic enthusiasm and delight, or for the process of organic creation itself.’

‘What’s lacking in my plan?’

‘Any effort on your part as a director first to acknowledge what we have created naturally in our own minds, a desire to understand and come to love, along with nature’s organic creativity and, having done so, to use your techniques as a director to help us as actors to show the audience the results of our creative work in an artistic form. Or, you can show us your work, give us time to get into it, to be drawn by it, to come to love it, to give birth to it and live it. Then it will reach the hearts of the audience in the most natural way.’

‘Why can’t we try to go along together and help each other?’, wondered Remeslov.

‘No, we can’t go along with you’, Rassudov stated categorically. ‘Our paths are different. With you we go backwards. You aren’t our friend and don’t help us. You are our enemy because you force, repress and cripple the actor’s nature. You use us for the sake of your own success. You exploit us, and we will never give you our creative heart.’

'Please, tell me what you have against me. I can admit my errors', said Remeslov in self-defence.

'It's not you, not you', said Rassudov in his excuse. 'It's the way you direct. The most you can get from us is obedience. You want our routine technical experience, our knowledge of the stage but you never require creativity or experiencing. All you do get is histrionic, stock-in-trade excitement, which we evoke mechanically. Any one of us, at any second, can arouse that for no reason at all by our own animal energy. We can blush, blanch, burst out laughing, or into tears to order. True, the laugh isn't very funny or the tears very sad. We feel no sorrow; we don't believe in our tears so how can we ask for sympathy from an audience? People who weep are considered stupid. We laugh to order, for no reason, "in general". Laughter for the sake of laughter . . . The stock-in-trade actor does not perform the particular, only the general. Tell one of our friends to stand there, raise his arms on a certain word, get angry here and elsewhere blush, weep, shout or die and, rest assured we will do exactly what you pay us for. We won't, of course, do it as yourselves, at our own risk. We have enough technique for posturing and actors' emotion, stock-in-trade clichés, habits to keep the audience awake and not bore them. We will listen to you about everything. Stock-in-trade actors are used to being pawns in the director's hands. They love it when they are shown how a certain role should be "done". Only don't expect experiencing from them. They don't like it because it is impossible in your routine way of working.'

'Why?', wondered Remeslov.

'Because in your plan of work there is no room for experiencing, no material or time for it to happen.'

'That's nonsense, be it said', protested Remeslov.

'I'm sorry but the psychological material out of which the essential character is made comes from you not the actor, from your mind not his. Of course, for you material you have gathered is exciting. But for me, it is dead and alien. Moreover, you don't give me time (a lot of time) to make it my own. You don't even let me gather my own material. Of course, it is easy for you to live your feelings which are similar to the role's. But can I do that in your orders and what is more feel your feelings without preparation? It's the same with the interpretation of the role, the mise-en-scène, the make-up and costume. It's all foreign to me, not me, I'm no more than a beautiful clothes-horse.

'Your situation is quite different. Nobody pushes you; you, as director, have enough time to concentrate, dig into the role and inside yourself, find what the role needs within yourself and make the writer's ideas

your own. Who gets in your way, in the quiet of your room, with the help of your designer, critics, professors, artists, books, sketches, and stops you preparing the production for years, so that you can then bring to us your finished, finalised work? It is your creation. You have the right to call it your creation. So that, when you demonstrate your fine directorial work and show us how we are to experience and give body to something you have been creating for years, you, undoubtedly, show us your own genuine art, your own living experiencing and embodiment. And we actors will applaud you with all our hearts. But the audience doesn't see that wonderful moment when you create. You don't let them in to rehearsal. The audience sees something else, precisely because we have not succeeded in creating something of our own, but have outwardly copied you in performance and very consciously but coldly demonstrated your *mise-en-scène*, your ideas as a director, which are foreign to us. We deliver the script and the roles clearly revealing your not our interpretation. Of course what you have done, your dictatorial role is great and comprehensive. You have created the whole play on your own – and we? What's left for us? You took the whole creative process on yourself and asked us to help with stock-in-trade. You made us a go-between for you and the audience, commissionaires. Our humble thanks for such a role. But we don't want it!

'Tvortsov is a director, too, and highly independent and markedly individualistic, and yet you feel able to work with him', said Remeslov bewildered.

'Tvortsov's quite another matter. We go hand-in-hand with him, side-by-side. He is teacher, psychologist, philosopher and philologist. He, more than anyone, knows the nature of the actor's mind and body. He knows the honourable and difficult role of the midwife who helps nature create and he has dedicated himself to it. When needful, he knows how to step aside. But, at the same time, all his talent, life-experience and knowledge are always put at our service as actors. He sacrifices himself to art. He himself is a wonderful actor. He knows that the most important person in the theatre is the actor. *He knows that only through their success can you penetrate the hearts of a large audience and plant in them the seed of the writer's work that the actor with the director and the author warms to life.*

'Tvortsov understands that a sumptuously visual *mise-en-scène*, painted sets, dances and crowd scenes delight the eye and ear. They trouble the heart, but do not go deep, as an actor's experiencing does. That is what our

art is about. It fills the theatre with invisibly transmitted feelings, intentions and thoughts that secretly move the audience. It is these, not the directing, that join the actor's and the audience's innermost hearts. This miraculous work of the superconscious is only made possible by the wizardry of nature and not our puppet-like technique as actors or your directing. "Make way for nature, book in hand", exclaimed Tvortsov often. It was no accident that he loved to repeat the following aphorism, "Just as you cannot make a delicate wood-cut by hacking with an axe so a crude actor's technique cannot replace or perform nature's wonders". The most important thing in the theatre is the creator, nature. That is why Tvortsov dislikes director's theatre so much and prides himself on being a midwife or nurse. Tvortsov is one of us, you, the showman, are not. We love him, we give him our whole heart as actors. Learn from Tvortsov, work with him, then we will come to like you and we can go forward together.'

'Dreadful!!!', whispered Remeslov barely audible and turned away apparently to hide his face. 'Take all the stock-in-trade actors in your hands and you will be the one and only creator-director among them. Go ahead boldly with your plan and you will be right. Don't allow any time for discussion. When stock-in-trade or talentless actors start to think on stage, don't expect anything special. They should accept you as a tyrannical but talented creator-director. They should not create independently but merely reflect creative talent. It will be better than their clichéd, talentless daubing. Put all these unknown geniuses in their place and you will be doing something useful.'

It was clear that the discussion would come to nothing and that Remeslov had nothing new to say except repeat all the tired-out expressions used in such circumstances. As for Rassudov, equally, he repeated what we had often heard from Tvortsov. The debate dragged on, but I had a performance in the evening, so I went home. Then I remembered one of Tvortsov's favourite expression which he used to end his words: 'You listen to me but you don't hear. It is difficult to listen and hear, look and see properly!'

I ran home, ate and got back to the theatre in time for the show. Once in my dressing-room, I lay down on the couch, tired out after running home and back. But I couldn't sleep because next door, in the green room, the actors were talking too loudly. Someone was telling stories, and that stopped me sleeping. And, on the other side, in Rassudov's dressing-room, the debate with Remeslov continued.

'Aren't they shattered after the discussion?' I thought.

However, it turned out that Rassudov had gone home and Remeslov had gone with him and they had eaten together and they had gone back to the theatre together.

‘Evidently’, I thought, ‘he has been bought by Remeslov’s learned quotations from the “journals” and that had made the two of them friends. They had spent from one to six arguing with each other on the same subject. That’s a record!’

Loud applause from the green-room once more attracted my attention. They were honouring the ‘masterly Nyrov’, another fellow actor, who specialised in performing pot-boilers. He was explaining the financial advantages of what he did. Unfortunately, I couldn’t quite hear his new project which he was evidently proposing.

‘I can’t explain to you’, yelled Rassudov.

‘First, not you but Misha’, Remeslov corrected him.

‘Misha, I can’t explain everything Tvortsov has taught us to you in ten minutes.’

‘So, it’s first names already’, I thought. ‘Between one and six!!’

‘Listen to me’, said Rassudov in preparation for a big speech.

‘Wonderful’, I thought, ‘a lesson from Rassudov is good for insomnia.’

‘What do we need to grow fruit or a plant?’, Rassudov began. ‘First you have to clear the ground, find the seed, plant it and water it. It’s the same with us. We have to clear our thoughts and feelings. Then we have to find the seed of the role and the play, plant it in the actor’s mind and then water it so it will not wither.’

‘I understand’, said Remeslov, paying attention.

‘The seed from which the role ripens, the seed the writer’s work produces stems from the thoughts feelings and favourite dreams that made the writer take up his pen, the actor fall in love with the play and draw him to his role. Tvortsov sums this up with the word *supertask* which must be thrust into the actor’s mind so that, so to speak, he becomes pregnant by it. Nemirovich-Danchenko defines this creative process as gospel truth.’

I could hear Rassudov rustling through his ‘journals’ so he could read: ‘From St. John’s Gospel: “verily, verily, I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit”’. In that regard Nemirovich-Danchenko says “We have to sow the seed of the play in the actor’s heart”’, Rassudov quoted from his notes, ‘like a seed in the earth. As it dies, the seed puts down roots from which a new plant grows and, for us, a new work of art’.

Afterwards I heard nothing of what Rassudov said.

Rassudov's drug did its work. I drifted away, lying on the couch, from everything around me. Or, on the other hand, they drifted away from me. I didn't follow through! Neither Rassudov or Nyrov existed any more. I was only conscious of words and bits of sentences that came into my head from Rassudov's dressing-room.

' "The unconscious through the conscious", that is our family the crest, the emblem of our belief, our watchword.'

I vaguely tried to understand what 'unconscious' meant and soon forgot about it, because another sentence flew in from the green-room on the right.

'The audience are like rats. The louder the racket the more they run towards the noise. It's the same with theatre-goers. The bigger the crowd, the more they want to see the show. The theatre can't cope with everyone who wants to be there. It should not bow to their demands. That's the truth! Dear God! If I had 4,000 roubles, I would . . .

'The unconscious is like a cloud of grey dust pierced by little points of light that lead the way somewhere . . . Tall, thin men in fur coats line the way . . . in the narrow crack, probably, of Nyrov's kind of theatre . . . There was a noise and I awoke to the sound of applause and Nyrov's stupid laugh. Someone was saying that 90 per cent of our work was unconscious and only 10 per cent conscious.' Another voice, apparently Remeslov's, quoted some scholar, 'Nine tenths of our mental life is unconscious'.

I liked that dictum and tried to remember it. I decided to get up and write it down, but stayed where I was and turned on my other side. Then, once again, 'the unconscious through the conscious', . . . 'emblem of truth' . . . *the unconscious through the conscious*. I suddenly felt clear as I woke up for a moment. How simple, how good!

'What do you base your creative work on?', they asked us. 'On the subconscious and artistic inspiration', we answered without hesitation. 'Inspiration!?! You want to create it to order?! That's a gift the gods deny us, it comes from on high to men of genius. We don't work on inspiration but only prepare the proper ground for it, that mental state in which inspiration can most easily come to us. That work is within our power. That is why we say, "the unconscious through the conscious". *Consciously* create the right state in the actor and then *unconsciously, or subconsciously* inspiration will shine down on you. That is what Tvortsov teaches. How simple! Understandable! But try and ask any of the quasi-intellectuals in the theatre, "How do you think we, his sinful disciples, are to be classified, as intuitive and inspired or as technical, stock-in-trade?" "As technical, of course", the expert cried, "Tvortsov works on his role down to the finest detail and so he is technical".'

‘So who, in that case, is the actor who works on inspiration? Someone who creates a role in two or five rehearsals? Someone who cobbles a role together? Do the gods shine on him? Does he suddenly see the light and create the play all at once? That’s the filthiest kind of stock-in-trade, you know!’

‘Enough!’, the experts objected. ‘They genuinely blush, go pale, weep and laugh.’

‘Those are actors’ tears, not salty just watery.’

‘Enough! Really! They are inspired, genuinely moved’, the experts responded categorically.

‘You can pump water and chop wood like one inspired.’

‘Whatever you say to these idiots, they will always repeat what has been spoken in their ears, once and for all, by talentless critics in minor newspapers, namely, “Tvortsov is a technical, a jobbing actor with unbridled energy, an intuitive actor who works on inspiration”. What stupid nonsense!’

‘What!!!’, Rassudov yelled in the green-room, as though it were intended for me. ‘Shakespeare, Griboiedov, the painter, Ivanov, Tommaso Salvini require years, demand years to complete the real creative process each and every time they work. But your provincial genius, Makarov-Zemlianski can complete the whole process in ten rehearsals. One thing is clear: either Makarov-Zemlianski is as great a genius as Salvini, or what Makarov-Zemlianski does has nothing to do with Salvini.’

‘I’m not comparing Makarov-Zemlianski with Salvini, I’m only saying that we provincial actors work fast but no worse than you here in the capital.’

“‘Oh! These misbegotten, premature performances”, Tvortsov often shouts to us, when he sees this kind of stock-in-trade. “Who needs these miscarriages and premature births?”’

A salvo of laughter from the other side of the wall drowned out the argument. Nydov was recounting his adventures as an impresario, how he had played with the same company in two different towns on the same day. One part of the company began the performance in one town and went to another town with the same play. At the same time, the other half came from another town with their play after they had finished their performance there. The posters announced: ‘An evening of *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet*. A double tour of two stars from Moscow: Igralov as Hamlet and Yuntsov as Romeo’. Naturally both plays were cut.

‘Yuntsov’, I thought in amazement, ‘he did our second year and never had a lead role in the exams. And now he’s a provincial star as Romeo?! Has our lead actor, Igralov no shame?’

'The joke is', Nyrov said quickly, 'however much we tried, we had to keep the intervals short. And here comes the worst! The problem was the itinerary. We could only go in one direction. We had to fill the gap. I was playing the Ghost in one town, K. and Sasha in another, S., but, you see, didn't arrive but stayed to sing songs and entertain . . .'

'Wait', someone said, confused, 'did you say that the ghost of Hamlet's father was in S. while the whole play was being performed in K. . . . is that what you are saying?'

'Well, yes', Nyrov confirmed.

'So, who played the Ghost in K. if Sashka was still in S. ?' said the questioning voice.

Nyrov gave a long, idiotic laugh.

'Who?', he choked. 'The deacon from the neighbouring town. He was a numbskull, brother mine. Straight from the bowels of the earth, the other side!'

'Where did you find him?', Nyrov was asked.

'On the train. For forty-five roubles.'

Nyrov once again burst into a long laugh.

'He used the same notes as in the mass for the Tsar. "Farewell, farewell, remember me". "Remember me"', he repeated mimicking priestly tones, shouting higher up the scale as deacons have for centuries.

'But then there was trouble. He was still shouting after the Ghost had left the stage. The sound was there but the actor wasn't'.

'Which actor?', everyone wondered.

'The deacon was hidden backstage', Nyrov explained, 'we couldn't let him be seen. He was fat with a limp.'

'So who went on instead of him?', Nyrov was asked.

'I won't tell you', said Nyrov, shaking with laughter. 'The fireman. He marched as though he were on parade and saluted Hamlet. Word of honour! Although we told him not to, he did it all the same!'

It was impossible to hear anything more because of the din. The laughter quickly subsided and in the stillness Rassudov's and Remeslov's voices could be clearly heard.

They were arguing about Pushkin. To prove that Pushkin was not in favour of truth but conventions in art, Remeslov quoted the lines usually cited in such disputes:

The power of base truths is dearer to us
Than all-uplifting lies.

And then:

I shed salt tears upon a dream.

Rassudov maintained the opposite, that Pushkin demanded truth, not the small truths he called ‘the power of base truths’ but other, large truths, truths of feeling we have within us as actors, that are purified by art. In support of his argument, he quoted Pushkin again, as is usual in such cases:

Truth of the passions, feelings that seem true in the proposed circumstances, that is what our intellect requires of a dramatist.

‘That is the basis of our art’, Rassudov stated, ‘here is a ready-made plan for our work. First create the “proposed circumstances” and automatically the “truth of the passions” will emerge from the superconscious.’

‘That’s fine, that’s good! Long live Pushkin!’ An enthusiastic voice broke out. That was Chuvstvov who had found his way somehow into Rassudov’s dressing room.

‘And what do you call “feelings that seem true and the truth of the passions”?’ Remeslov asked.

‘How can you not understand!’ said Chuvstvov angrily. ‘If “the truth of the passions” defines total, natural, immediate feeling then “feelings that seem true” they are not genuine feelings and experiencing, but feelings near to them, or, rather, living memories of them.’

‘Tvortsov is also prepared to accept the presentation of the true-seeming in acting when it is displayed prompted by feeling’, Rassudov explained.

‘No, no, I don’t agree’ said Chuvstvov heatedly and then, having thought, added, ‘although . . . on the other hand when you can’t genuinely live, experience the role, that is give the ‘truth of the passions’, then, in my opinion, devil take you, represent ‘feelings that seem true’ but not in a stupid way, as God made you, but intelligently, truthfully, convincingly, guided by your own living feelings, always having living truth in view. Then you will achieve an approximation to that truth, so to speak, that is close to the truth, the true-seeming.’

‘It’s enough to send you crazy’, continued Chuvstvov enthusiastically. ‘We seek and wrack our brains but Pushkin decided a century ago what we have to do and how we should begin our work.’

‘With what?’, Remeslov asked.

‘What do you mean “with what”? The proposed circumstances. That I understand as deep inner feeling. Truth of the passions will not arrive until you understand the proposed circumstances’, Chuvstvov explained. ‘First we have to know everything related to the life-situations in the role and the play. Please, we ask you kindly, tell us.’

‘But what are the proposed circumstances?’, Remeslov asked.

‘That’s what you don’t understand!’, said Chuvstvov angrily.

‘And?’, Remeslov insisted.

‘The proposed circumstances are the whole story of the play and the role, the lengthy chain that is the life of a role’, Rassudov explained. ‘It is the rooms, the house, the social conditions, the period, the customary outer aspects of life!’

‘The play and the role?’, Remeslov enquired. ‘Like what?’

‘These are all trifles. There are much more important inner circumstances. Oh the subtlety of them’, once again Chuvstvov savoured Pushkin’s aphorism like a gourmet. ‘There you find your own personal life and an awareness of other people’s lives, for example, wives, children, brothers, sisters, servants, master, the high and the low, the whole of society, the world! All these inner currents, both yours and other people’s, living threads, ideals, aspirations are interwoven, join and part, wander, become entangled, fight, make peace, and all these threads make a web, like the finest lace, the circumstances of the psychological life which envelop the actor.’

‘So they are invisible and unconscious threads. How can we consciously wind them together?’, Remeslov wondered. Evidently Chuvstvov’s wild enthusiasm had left him cold.

‘What?’, Chuvstvov yelled triumphantly. ‘And what about the unconscious through the conscious? You forgot that! So start with the conscious. Tell me as compellingly as beautifully as you can about the external circumstances Griboiedov has provided. I will listen to you, explore what you tell me, be drawn by it. I will compare it with my own personal experience of life or with other people’s circumstances that I have happened to see and observe. These last will become ever closer, dearer and finally come together until they are mine. Once I have lived the writer’s proposed circumstances, then the director can tell me his own circumstances which he has out into his production plan and which complement the writer’s. I, as an actor, contribute my own much more engagingly beautiful circumstances, drawn from my own real or imaginary life. Then comes the designer with his sketches, sets and costumes, then the lighting man and the props man. I take them all on board, I make them my own, live them,

get used to them. Once they all come together as one, then they create the “proposed circumstances” of which Pushkin speaks and once you believe in them you have to create the character’s situation out of them, and having believed in them place yourself in the centre. That is when you feel as though you are in a bath in the midst of the waves of all these inner and outer circumstances and the superconscious begins to create, the truth of the passions.’

‘But how?’, asked Remeslov with interest.

‘At the very moment that the actor begins to believe in the proposed circumstances he has created, the “truth of the passions” emerges automatically out of somewhere. It is there in the blink of an eye, “greetings”, it says, “this is me!” “Greetings”, you answer, “you dear, longed-for, immeasurable joy”.’

‘But what am I to do as a director if it is not the “truth of the passions I want?”’

‘Then you shout, “That’s not it”. It’s living, it’s genuine but that’s not it! It’s not the truth of the passions I need. You have the right to say that. Things are clearer from the side. Oh dear! What a business. It means that somewhere the actor has blundered. In what circumstances did the mistake arise? Is there something he missed, overlooked, didn’t take account of? Start all over again. Change everything. Make a new mix. Create new conditions that will create a new “truth of the passions” or “feelings that seem true” in a natural manner. It is hard work so everyone must help me as far as they can. The director and I should search for the mistake and when we have, he can draw me in another, truer direction.’

‘But how?’ Remeslov asked intently.

‘How? Certainly not by a lecture’, Chuvstvov explained. ‘Take an idiot, say, to a museum or to an old house where I can breathe in the air, smell with my own nose what the director wants. Or he should bring me pictures, photographs, be amusing, make up anecdotes or whole stories about things that never happened but could have and accurately outline what he was talking about.’

‘Listen to what I am saying’, Remeslov said with great clarity, ‘if any provincial tragedian out of Bobruisk were to hear you, we poor directors would have to give up.’

‘Give up, yes!’, Chuvstvov quite cheerfully ‘What you say is true. It would be unfortunate if your tragedian were to hear these words. He would take his ranting, his affectation, his twitching, all out of joint, for “the truth of the passions” and “feelings that seem true” every time.’

‘And he’d be right’, Remeslov added, ‘for him, his posturing would not

be out of joint but his natural state. In his own mind he is right to call his posturing the “truth of the passions”.’

‘He is sincere in his theatrical posturing. Do you remember Tvortsov’s favourite example?’, Rassudov said to Chuvstvov.

‘What example?’, asked someone with interest.

‘About a dying actor’, Rassudov explained. ‘An actor Tvortsov knew was dying in poverty in a corner somewhere. Tvortsov went to see him and found him in his last moments. And what happened? It was painful to see how the actor postured tragically in the face of death, clutching his hand to his heart, fingers spread wide, as is usual in costume drama . . . He rolled his eyes dramatically . . . He rubbed his fevered brow with his hand as Komissarzhevskaja once had. He groaned, as tragic actors always do in the last act to mark the end of the performance. The dying man was credible and beautiful. He could not actually posture in death, but his muscles were so deeply accustomed to it, that artificial acting was for ever and always natural to him and could not be abandoned in the moment of death.’

The first bell rang before the performance. I was on in a quarter of an hour and I had barely started my make-up, put on my wig and beard or got into costume or prepared for the performance. There was a terrible rush and as always in such cases everything went wrong: the makeup didn’t take, the bottle of spirit-gum fell over, and all the things I had carefully set out beforehand were in a muddle and I couldn’t lay my hands on them – tie, gloves, shoes. I was at the fever-pitch every hapless actor feels before a show, but now it was a nightmare. This was the first time it had happened, since I am known for my punctuality, but I held the show up for ten minutes.

When the curtain went up, my head was still spinning from the rush. I couldn’t make myself concentrate, I couldn’t stop my heart beating and messed up the words. Finally I controlled myself and habit did its work. I found the familiar mood of the role; my tongue began mechanically to gabble long forgotten words that had lost their sense. Hands, feet, my whole body began to function independently of my consciousness and will. I calmed myself and began to think about other things. It is much easier in an old, tired role to think about them than the true meaning behind the words. The true meaning had become superfluous, boring, had lost its edge, had become threadbare after a long line of performances. You have to make it fresh every time you recreate. For that you have to be mentally alert and that is difficult. In the long-lost days of my youth as an

actor, I thought that technique consisted in making acting a mechanical habit, I thought that the divide when acting was a sign of experience, dividing the professional from the amateur, helplessly dependent on the words, feelings, thoughts in the action and the stage directions.

The scene I was playing gave me time to think about other things. There were many moments when I just gave the cue and then was silent. What was important was the pauses, but I didn't use them for the role's sake but for my own – what I was to do in the intervals and the breaks between the scenes that followed. I recalled that I had a business meeting with a critic from some trashy newspaper and later an admirer, a formidable old lady with pretensions to the aristocracy. Both meetings were going to be boring so I thought about how to end them as quickly as possible.

The most important thing the old lady wrote about was a mere trifle and I could see her arriving, removing layers of warm clothing, how she would make a long preamble and finally reveal the truism that it was an actor's sacred duty to love pure art.

'I love it, too', she would add. 'Were it not for my husband's position in society, I could be an actress – and a good one, too.' Then she would ask me for a free ticket to the next public dress rehearsal.

Foreseeing what an unnecessary nuisance it would be, I fixed our meeting for the shortest break between the scenes.

'She won't stay long', I thought to myself. 'It will be much harder to get rid of the critic. I feel he wants an interview.'

'What do you think about cooperative creation?'⁴ he asks.

How trite!

Suddenly I stopped because I had dried up. The mechanical film in my memory had broken down; I had forgotten both what I had to do and what I was saying out of unconscious habit, as well as the play, the act and scene that I was doing. There was a huge blank hole in my memory and everything disappeared into it. Momentary panic took hold of me. To understand where I was and what I was doing, I had to make a long pause, take note of the situation around me, recall which play and scene I was in. Then I had to pay attention to the voice of the prompter, my saviour, who was hissing with all his might to bring me back to consciousness. One word I could catch, one familiar gesture and everything fell into place, and my carefully drilled performance went like clockwork.

During my next moment of silence I reflected on what had happened and realised that the previous moment of silence had been no accident and that forgetting my lines had, over time, become normal. I also felt that the pause and the habit of thinking about what was going to happen later or home life, even the moment of panic had, so to speak, been 'rehearsed

in'. This unexpected discovery threw me into confusion and on my exit I started thinking about it.

Where in me were the 'truth of the passions' or 'feelings that seem true'? Where were the 'proposed circumstances' Pushkin talks about? At that moment I felt the profound importance of those simple words for the art of the actor. I understood that Pushkin was unmasking me with his remarks. I went to the assistant director's cramped little room next to the stage. Of course, I first told the stage manager where I was going.

I try to test myself with something fresh. *What circumstances* had I lived through in the scene I had just played? It was the beginning of the play. I had just faked and pulled faces. My only concern had been to make my voice sound plaintive to get the audience's interest and attention before my big speech.

And there was another moment when I recalled my character's late wife. There again I had postured and pulled faces. My sole concern had been to stare hard at a fixed point and sing one or two phrases from her favourite song. When I had done, I stared at myself as though I didn't know where I was. Then I understood the meaning of a comment that had been made to me: that I tended to overwork these pauses. Later I speeded up my lines, worked myself up into a meaningless, theatrical, external mechanical state that arose from sheer animal energy and the muscles. And yet I had really felt the scene and lived all the writer's proposed circumstances. But years of routine, stock-in-trade acting, had led me to work out 'circumstances' that had nothing to do with art. So, there were different kinds of circumstances, some living, and human, others routinely theatrical.

'I have to talk about that', I thought.

But the worst thing was that I had been able to think about the critic and the old lady while I was acting, I thought to myself. But professional control, confidence and calm are not coming completely out of character. Why did I think about what was going to happen afterwards during the silence? Did the silence interrupt the continuity of the role. I thought quite wrongly about personal matters not only when I was silent but when I was saying my lines. Previously when I was playing a role there had been an infinite line of living moments, but now. . . . Where had those former, living, beautiful, genuine circumstances that drew me and helped me create the 'truth of the passions', genuine feeling in my most famous roles disappeared to? All the present histrionic circumstances did was stimulate mechanical habits. I flushed behind my makeup when I realised that the 'circumstances' I was living in my best roles were purely personal and had no connection with the writer, the play I was in or with the living human being I was portraying, nor finally with the art I professed.

I was full of self-doubt.

Is that the kind of actor I am? I thought I was someone quite different – original, adventurous, natural. It meant that the many hundreds of times I had played that role over the years, day-in, day-out I had looked as I had today. And at the same time in my own self-assurance, my awareness of my own superiority I had condemned others for that kind of acting. I had condescendingly accepted the plaudits of my foolish admirers as my right. What did I write on the photographs and albums I signed? I remembered an incident that had occurred in my dressing-room a few days before the performance of which I write. A coarse-looking young woman had run in to see me. Greatly overwrought, she had tried to say something but couldn't, and, quite unexpectedly, grabbed my hand and kissed it and rushed out like a thing possessed. When I recovered, there was no trace of her but I could not suppress a smile of pleasure because I realised how great I was!! How ashamed I now felt for that smile. Now I recalled with respect the accusations my hostile critics had always levelled against me for my self-confidence and bad acting that I had only just recognised in my performance.

The assistant director cautiously scratched the window of my kennel. I went on stage and performed no better and no worse than usual. I couldn't change my performance in any way; it was so deeply ingrained in me. However, in view of the thoughts I had had during the short breaks between scenes, I started to watch and criticise my diction, my inflexions, my movements and actions. But my tongue still went on just saying the lines and my body and muscles repeated the gestures I had learned.

'Irina and idea rummaged around a long time'. What did that mean? Which idea?, I asked myself. I was talking nonsense. I should have said, 'Irina and I rummaged around a long time.' I couldn't phrase the words properly, respect the logical pauses, my stresses were false. I wasn't talking like a Russian but a foreigner. [. . .]

'This is no accident', I thought. 'It's not just today, I've always said that line with the same inflexion and the same mistake. And I let myself do it at the most profound moment of the drama for the character I am playing.'

'The same senseless, ingratiating gestures as always!! Too many even to count!!'

And what about the business with the sheet of paper I was folding and twisting in my hands out of fake turmoil and helplessness? When it happened spontaneously, it was good. And now? How badly it had gone wrong. It was now an absurdity. And how lovingly I showed it off!!

And feeling? Where had the feeling I had just evoked during the business with the sheet of paper gone? I couldn't find a trace of that genuine creative feeling.

As an actor I am just one antic after another. This is the line the role follows. This is the throughaction and supertask as Tvortsov calls them.

'Enough is enough! Away with all these antics. I will live the true meaning of the role!' I decided to simplify the bit of business with the [paper] so as to concentrate better on feeling but I could find none and almost forgot my lines.

I tried to refresh my role by improvising moves but as soon as I started I felt the lines becoming shaky. It was clear that I could not get away from my histrionic habits and the series of antics that formed the basis of the role with impunity. Still less could I find the true line again. It had disappeared without trace. I had to feel more creatively to retrieve what I had lost. Then I had to hold on to one antic after another and build the role with them. My misfortune redoubled in that I lost all taste for it and could not play with any kind of self-assurance. The ground had been cut from beneath my feet and I was left dangling.

Having no solid base, I felt I was being drawn into the auditorium. I had a new angle from the other side of the footlights. Previously I had navigated through feelings, thoughts, habits, even antics that related to the role. My circle of attention had been on stage and only bordered on the house. Now the centre of the circle has moved into the auditorium. I either watched the audience or watched myself through their eyes. As to the life of the role and the play, they were out there somewhere and I knew nothing of them. So, I went through the motions, watching myself, criticising every step I took, and as a natural consequence, killed all immediacy and, at the same time, analysed my mechanical, unconscious performance and made it conscious. In other words, I cut the branch on which I was sitting and destroyed the very basis of my role. I lost all my self-assurance and confidence; the colours faded; my antics lost their edge. I turned into something grey and vague and felt, on my exit, like a miserable failure.

The old lady and the critic did not turn up and I decided not to spend the time before my next entrance alone but with others so as not to think too hard about what had happened. I went to Rassudov's dressing-room, drawn by the voices heard.

The tiny room was full of actors, sitting on window-sills, pipes, the floor and against the door or the wardrobe mirror. Rassudov presided as ever in his chair. Chuvstvov sat on its arm. Remeslov sat alone before them, as in the dock, nervously playing with his pince-nez at the end of a gold chain.

'What I am saying is that the life of the human spirit is essential on stage', Remeslov [stated].

‘In that case, you’re repeating yourself’, Rassudov replied.

‘Why?’, Remeslov wondered.

‘Because the life of the human spirit’, Rassudov explained, ‘is created by the living human impressions it has known: genuine feeling and experiencing.’

‘But you don’t believe that living human feelings can come alive under the gaze of a thousand pairs of eyes, in the disturbing, confusing conditions creating in public implies. You yourself said this was impossible and so you had rejected experiencing forever. This is a refusal of genuine, living feeling; this is bringing external, bodily, actorish actions onto the stage – representation.

‘Yes, representation but I use it to represent the character’s feelings’, Remeslov [stated]. ‘Igralov says that he also represents the form and passions of the role.’

‘But he doesn’t refuse experiencing at home in his study, but you won’t even do that. Your concern is not with inner feeling, only with its outward results, and then only with its physical form, not its essential inner only its outer meaning. All you do is represent the external results of fabricated, non-existent feelings.’

‘That’s what all actors do’, Remeslov [asserted] ‘but won’t acknowledge it. Only a genius experiences.’

‘Let’s say that is so, although I don’t agree with you’, Rassudov [continued] ‘but to ape feelings rather than naturally embody them, we have to observe the form of embodiment in nature, that is ourselves or someone else.

‘Where are we to find anything to copy as original as nature itself? Don’t we have to count on seeing all our models, all the raw material we need to be creative in life itself every time we play a role?

‘There is only one way to do that: experiencing and embodying the feelings in a natural way.

‘But you have rejected experiencing once and for all.

‘How are we to guess at the external bodily shapes of pretended feelings if we have not experienced them? How are we to recognise the results of non-existent experiences? We have found a simple way to do that.’

‘Which?’ Remeslov [asked].

‘The actors of whom you speak’, Rassudov [responded] ‘have formulated individual, fixed methods for portraying every possible feeling and passion in every possible circumstance in every role that they can encounter in their professional practice. These external, conventionalised methods tell us they are the result of non-existent experiences.’

'Which methods are you talking about? Where do they come from? I just don't know what you are talking about', Remeslov said heatedly.

'Many of them', Rassudov replied calmly, 'are derived from the tradition of their predecessors, others from talented contemporaries, others the actors create themselves.

'Actors latch onto them quickly because they are centuries-old habits in the theatre and create mechanical school of acting. The tongue learns to deliver the lines, the hands, feet and the body to move according to traditional moves and what the director tells them. The dramatic situations lead to the usual habits. All the mechanics are drilled into the muscles and become second nature; that extends not only to the stage but also to human nature and life itself.

'The problem is that these eternally fixed expressions soon wear out, fade and lose any hint of an inner life from which, perhaps, they once stemmed. They have turned into mere physical jerks, mere clichés, which have nothing to do with human feeling or our living hearts and minds. A whole array of these clichés creates a kind of acting ritual, which accompanies a mere delivery of a role. Clichés and ritual greatly simplify an actor's task.

'Methods and forms become part of life itself greatly simplifying the lives of the untalented. For example, for those who cannot believe there is piety; for those who cannot command there is protocol; for those who have no dress sense there is fashion; for those who cannot be creative there are conventions and clichés. That is why those who govern us like pomp and circumstance, and tradesmen respectability, fops' fashion and actors' theatrical conventions, clichés and all the results of histrionic behaviour. Opera, ballet and particularly neo-classical tragedy are full of them where they try to convey the complex, turbulent feelings of the hero by the well-established clichés they have acquired.'

The warning bell dragged me from my thoughts. It summoned actors who were late to the stage. I was obliged to go and continue with my unwelcome stock-in-trade.

'Laugh clown, laugh'⁵. How shameful to go on stage all empty! How sickening to do something you no longer believe in!

The assistant director was waiting for me before my entrance.

'You'll soon be on', he said firmly yet almost gently and kindly. 'Excuse me for ringing the bell but no one was here that I could send, and I couldn't leave my place.'

‘People are feeling sorry for me’, I thought, ‘so there must be a reason. They’re concerned for me. I’ve long been concerned for them! The stage-hands and props-men feel sorry for me, too. Why are they staring at me?’

I felt bitter. But that was not naïve self-regard but rather broken self-confidence.

It is a mistake to think that we actors are full of pathological self-regard. Of course, some are. But most of us are afraid and lack self-belief. It is not crankiness but terror that puts us on our guard. We are afraid we won’t be able to do what is expected of us. We are afraid of losing faith in ourselves and without that it is frightening to appear before a full house. It is like being plunged into cold water, the same as I had to go on immediately without thinking. I quickly opened the set door went on and encountered the black hole of the proscenium arch that opened up before me like the gigantic jaws of a monster. It seemed to me that I was feeling the breadth and depth of that terrible void filled with human bodies. It stretched out before me like a bottomless pit and I could not but look into it. My vision became more acute, stronger, longer. It was amazing how far I could see. Someone in the back row had only to stir, or bend forward, or unfold a handkerchief, or look at his programme or turn his head away from the stage, and I *latched onto* it trying to discover the reason for it. Of course that distracted my attention from what I was doing, I felt ill at ease, I was no longer at home and turned to display. Determined come what may to be successful.

I realised how awful and difficult it was to go on stage and be subject to the throng. Perhaps at first I felt it was as good to make an exit as it had once been to make an entrance.

I decided not to stay alone because I was beginning to panic. I needed to see the people in Rassudov’s dressing room once again.

The act was over. After the one scene he was in, Rassudov had returned to his dressing-room. With his crumpled, powdered face he was looking short-sightedly at Remeslov, powder bowl and puff in his hand, listening attentively.

‘You say, that the purpose of our kind of acting is to create the life of the human spirit on stage and express it in artistic form. Why just the life of the human spirit and not of the body?’

‘Because the body is the mirror of the life of the human spirit’, Rassudov explained, waving his powder-puff not realising he was scattering powder

everywhere. 'The essence of the creative act lies not in the body which is merely the servant of the role.'

'The body has its own life which is very significant', Remeslov argued.

'I don't question that. Let every man serve Mammon in his own way but in art, with rare exceptions, the body is only needed in so far as it expresses the life of the human spirit.'

'I can't agree', Remeslov contested.

'Then', Rassudov explained, 'there is nothing more to say. Let others dedicate themselves and their art to outward beauty that is not justified from within. Let them create beautiful outward, effective, physical forms, we won't want to come and see them. But neither Tvortsov nor I, his pupil, want to devote one moment of our lives to them. And so, when you talk to us, you must understand that the life of the human spirit is the fundamental *sine qua non* for us.'

'Ah! In that case, I say no more,' Remeslov added. 'But Ivanov, the famous critic from Kiev says . . .'

'I know!', Rassudov stopped him. 'You can overwhelm me with clever quotations. They are myriad, many of them from Oscar Wilde and our contemporaries in the theatre.'

'Art, like any abstraction, provides a good opportunity for clever sayings, bold theories, vivid comparisons, cruel jibes – even about nature herself – startling conclusions, profound utterances, but they are essential to those who express them rather than to art itself. Clever quotations tickle the vanity, boost self-approval, flatter the speaker, because they are evidence of his exceptional intelligence and subtlety. They have a great effect, as we know, on dilettantes, but the speaker risks nothing. Who can prove them wrong in practice? The pity is that if you try to transfer everything written or spoken about art to the stage your disappointment will be complete. They are beautiful words rather than practical ideas. They dizzy the head, prevent the growth of art and the actors lose all sense.'

'Art does not lie in nature but in man', over-subtle critics say, 'considering themselves above her.'

'And what is man?', I ask them, 'if not part of nature?'

'Man with his physical and mental apparatus for the creative act, his genius, his sense of inspiration etc., etc., is the highest, most elusive manifestation of nature's creative powers. Man is subject to her cast-iron laws.'

'This is especially true in those areas not accessible to the conscious mind, for example creative intuition, the functioning of the super-conscious. What can those over-subtle critics do there? Precious little. They can't create, only appraise and apply what nature has made. They can

develop them with the talent nature has given them. But we poor sinners, like the self-regarding critic “must first learn to see the beauty in nature, in ourselves. in others and in the role”, says Tvortsov or, as Shchepkin says, “learn to take our models from life”.⁶ But what can the critic do?

‘He can supply his own creative nature with interesting ideas and material and develop them with the talent nature has given him.

‘All we can learn to do is not stand in nature’s way but help her to some extent in creating the life of the human spirit.

‘We can learn to understand her, see what is beautiful in her, study her laws, examine her constituent elements, take what is beautiful from her and put it on stage in a living not conventional form. That is extremely difficult, and pray God our technique will be good enough.

‘Where can we find our own, special kind of beauty that will outclass nature? How can we match her? It would be senseless to depart from the real and the natural.

‘Tvortsov is great in that he knows full well that nature is all and he is nothing. That is why he has abandoned any idea of competing with her and tries to create an inner (mental) and outer (physical) technique that will not itself create but will help nature in her mysterious functioning.

‘Tvortsov develops the little our conscious mind can do with great energy. But the rest he leaves to nature. “She is the book”, he says.

‘Tvortsov finds people who do not understand this simple truth ridiculous.’

‘Not wishing to appear ridiculous in his eyes, I won’t reply, although there’s much I could say’, [Remeslov stated].

‘Only one tenth of an actor’s performance is conscious, nine tenths unconscious or superconscious.’

‘What?’, said a bewildered Remeslov. ‘Does the outer characterisation appear spontaneously, unconsciously?’

‘Yes, often it is prompted from within and then is manifested in the walk, the movements, the mannerisms, habits, clothes, make-up, the whole appearance . . .

‘A character is a living *organic* creation made in the image of a man and not some dead, tired theatrical cliché.’

Igralov who had been shifting uneasily in his chair, frowning, could bear it no more.

‘Do you seriously believe’, he said heatedly and somewhat theatrically, ‘in this celebrated *organic* creation on stage? It’s an illusion, a story, a figment of the imagination!

‘I know because I have seen your organic experiencing. There is the

actor on stage, all introspective, navel-gazing, rigid so self-absorbed that he can't speak, move, forcing out one word a minute which is barely audible at two paces, convinced he is experiencing with considerable depth.'

'Let the idiot pray to God, he'll beat his brow', Chuvstvov interjected.

'What's this organic experiencing? Don't try it just try to act well.'

'No', said Igralov, trying to stop his uninvited supporter. 'Experiencing be it genuine or even organic, is essential in the quiet of the study, but not in the public gaze when you need to show the results of private work, present them.

'You must be creative at home and show the results on stage.

'But let us suppose for a moment', he continued, 'that genuine experiencing and real embodiment were possible on stage during performance. We could not use them because they are damaging to art.'

'Damaging?', many enquired.

'Yes', Igralov affirmed, 'they are not *stageworthy*.'

'How so?'

'They are too subtle, too fleeting to be seen in the large space of a theatre.

'For inner experiences and passions to become *stageworthy*, they must be embodied viably, clearly, visibly in the space that divides actor from audience. They must be heightened, enacted so as to be clearer. You must use your technique to act them artistically. In short, you need a certain measure of theatricality, underlining, which is part of acting. You must understand that we are not just talking about the clarity as actors to make the action clear, we need it even more when it comes to the inner character, the passions which we can neither see nor hear. Only by observing theatrical form can we convey, if not genuine feeling, its bodily manifestation, which we have defined during our preparatory work.

'What is important on stage is not actual experiencing but its visible results.

'When we are being creative in public, it is not important what the actor experiences and feels but what the audience feels . . .'

'A character in a play must be convincing, he must arouse belief in his being. He must *be*, exist in nature, not merely *seem*, *appear*, *represent existence*.'

'Being?! A strange expression', said Remeslov. '"Exist in nature", "represent existence". That is incomprehensible and clumsily put.'

'I don't think so', Rassudov affirmed.

His face was blotchy with anger and confusion.

'Gogol talks about this very aptly in his letters to Shumski and Shchepkin', Nevolin almost whispered as though to excuse himself. He was very amusing when he was flustered, not knowing what to do with himself,

sticking his fingers in his collar. He did it very strongly and with great concentration.

Rassudov looked at him hard and asked impatiently:

‘And what does Gogol say?’

‘Any actor can represent but only a real actor can be.’⁷ Once again he became flustered and started to backtrack. ‘Perhaps it isn’t so . . . inappropriate. But it seemed to me . . . that it was. I’m sorry . . .’

He was frightened and fell silent but Rassudov once more bent over his notebook and started reading in a deep voice that contained a hint of displeasure.

Someone tapped me lightly on the shoulder. It was Nevolin. He, too, was on that evening and we were to make our entrance together. He nodded towards the door as if to say it was time to go. My heart heaved but I took myself in hand.

‘Are you all right?’, he asked gently as we went on.

‘I’m not myself’, I admitted unwillingly. ‘He’s noticed’, I thought to myself.

Once on, again I felt lost in the vast expanse of the stage and the auditorium.

Apart from the mood on the stage itself, I could feel the influence of life backstage and the mood of the set of the preceding act. We actors not only see the front of the set but also the back. It has its shape and structure, its mood, that are often pictorial and very surprising. Backstage lighting throws strange splashes of light everywhere and creates deep shadows. This all gives an act its own special character. The atmosphere of each act influences the actor as he goes on. Unhappily for me, the memory of the other side of the previous set reminded me of the difficult moments in my career. I had not been good. Worst of all, I had felt nerves and shed tears in the cluttered corridor I had gone down. One look evoked unhappy memories and stage fright. The flats and props reminded me of the past.

‘All I need is to forget my lines’, I thought and was suddenly scared. It’s terrible not to be able to fulfil the most basic requirement in acting. At that moment I knew how an actor feels when he dries up. Recent years have taught me what that is. I checked on myself and went through the dialogue in my head. Happily the words came to my tongue and that calmed me down.

Suddenly one word went and the whole sequence was broken. I searched my mind for the right word but all I could remember was its rhythm.

I tried to replace it with something that sounded similar but to do that I had to recall its overall senses and I couldn't. I began to remind myself of the content of the scene so I could get at its meaning but I couldn't even do that and wasn't able to pull myself together in the empty space. I turned to the stage manager and asked him for the script which he used to follow the play and call the actors. He gave it to me but as soon as I had found the right page he snatched it from me and almost shoved me on because there was a gap. The awareness of that hole in the dialogue frightened and alarmed me. I concentrated hard on my diction and, of course, created problems for it. Usually I would speak a complete line and even run over into the beginning or even the whole of the next one. But this time, out of fear I separated every word and examined it before saying it. Everything went wrong. Habit had been broken and the earlier creative line of feeling was forgotten. It seemed as though there were someone inside me busy looking for every slip of the tongue.

You cannot be when someone is watching your lips. You can't play billiards when someone is talking behind their hand. You cannot say the lines you have learned with nagging thoughts and a voice that keeps whispering, 'Careful! Otherwise you'll get it wrong. You forgot!'. And, indeed, there was that sudden blank in the head and beads of sweat on my head and neck. But, happily, out of habit, my tongue overcame the problem and ploughed on ahead of thought and feeling, that follow the hero who knows no fear.

'Watch out! Don't trip up!', fearful thoughts and feelings shout at him.

Suddenly a halt. A total mess! A blank! A void! Panic! I stood there bewildered, repeating the same thing over and over again. I could see the prompter yelling at me but heard nothing. I couldn't understand what the other actors were whispering to me. I heard them but made out nothing. Not knowing how to save myself, I took hold of the lampshade for some reason. I did it out of helplessness, because I couldn't think of any other way of filling the huge pause. Thanks be to the stage manager who brought other people on early. After that the play went like clockwork. I went upstage and tried not to be seen. My muscles went tight as a rope, I seemed made of wood. My concentration flew off in all directions. The proscenium was once more like a monster's jaws. I could see the thousands. I thought, they were laughing at me, pointing at me, leaning towards each other, whispering secretly, deliberately coughing. One of them left, openly slamming the door. I felt an enormous tiredness, went back to my dressing-room. I turned the key

I lay for a long while like that, like someone on a desert island after a shipwreck. It seemed to me I had lost everything, I felt bereft, naked, that

I needed to rebuild my life, different from the disgraceful past, that I felt ashamed to remember.

The discussion continued next door in Rassudov's dressing room but I couldn't make out the sense. But I did realise that they were trying to explain to Remeslov that his name matched his acting, that what he advocated was not genuine art but jobbery, stock-in-trade.

'Not only he, but I, you, all of us are jobbing actors', I thought. 'Let's hand the stage over to men of genius and the rest of us, myself first, get out. Put us in an office, a shop, the country, to do something useful!'

I lay on the couch, exhausted by emotion.

I was bored with everything and decided to think about something that had nothing to do with the theatre.

'It's said there are no shadows on the moon and that gravity is much lighter. You can jump and stay in the air for a minute . . . Wouldn't that be good?'

I spent a while imagining going around without my usual companion, my shadow. I jumped over a void.

But I soon got bored with that. Nonetheless, my trip to the moon had relaxed me, calmed me down. I lay there and thought of nothing.

Then I started to listen to the argument in the next room.

'What is good on one level is intolerable on another. For example, in our theatres, one or two hundred rehearsals are not sufficient for the tasks we have and the production plan and all the material Tvortsov provides. And the more there are the more the production develops. And so on ad infinitum. But what if a provincial company that was unable to develop a large-scale production were offered millions so they could have two hundred rehearsals?'

'The play wouldn't happen', Remeslov explained proudly.

'You're right. What if I were to see the actors after five or ten rehearsals? The play has been read, the lines learned with almost no need for the prompter, the moves and everything have been rehearsed, the wigs and bows are on. The costumes are what they ought to be. Now they need an audience, a lift, and inspiration will do the rest!!! But there are still 230 or 240 rehearsals to come. What are they to do in them? Go desperate.'

'They take to their heels and run because they'll get no money', Remeslov once again explained with pride.

'But we . . . after 240 rehearsals yearn for a hundred more so as to achieve what the director imagined', [said] Chuvstovov.

'But that's not normal, gentlemen. How much does a play cost? How can you run a business like that?' said Remeslov angrily.

'It doesn't matter. We are what we are, and pay dividends that do not appear in the books', Nyrov snapped. 'The impresarios will be jealous.'

'No. What you want isn't normal,' said Remeslov hotly. 'You can't trample all over a play and a role like that! An actor is such that at moments he needs a full house, elation, emotion, inspiration, an orchestra and gifts.'

'A shot of vodka', someone joked.

'Yes, wine, women and song!'

'Before a show? Have you no shame?', joked another.

'And what about Kean?', Remeslov insisted.

'You provincial actors are all the same', Chuvstvov remarked. 'When you can't give a straight answer, you come out with commonplace, meaningless clichés. Wine, women and song! Inspiration! These are not the right words to use when talking about art and actors. As though that would convince any of us!!! Answer me this: how is it we have 200, 300 rehearsals and you can't?'

'I don't know', Remeslov explained, still twiddling his pince-nez on their gold chain. 'I don't understand how you can get through that number of rehearsals.'

'Then I will tell you', Rassudov intervened. 'The secret is the fact that the director and the actors have dug so deep into the play and the characters that the production expands and 200 rehearsals are not sufficient to transfer everything they have imagined onto the stage. Provincial actors who aren't used to performing plays, just roles, always look for what comes easy, that matches their gifts and style of acting. They are always the same; they always do what they know, whatever has stuck in any role. They colour the role. Is much time needed to find this material and work on the play? Just one or two careful readings. As to the shape of the performance, it is always the same whatever the role. In Act 1 to make an impression, to shine through their diction, mannerisms and voice. In Act 2 to act one scene properly and do the rest on technique. In Act 3, to let fly with all their energy, use every little trick and cliché all their charm, in a word everything that will touch the audience's heart at the climax. In the last act to mingle sentimentality with one or two tears. If the first act is played downstage right where the famous "sofa" is usually placed with an "elaborate screen" behind it then the next scene is played down by the prompter's box and the next scene takes place stage left with the "table and chair" and then you can play down by the prompter's box. You can play scene four on the sofa again' etc.

'You don't need to rehearse since everything is known in advance.'

‘In the provinces you take four rehearsals, but I maintain one would be enough. In the end it is not we but you who waste time in three unnecessary rehearsals and so swamp the play.

‘I’m told that provincial audiences need two hundred new plays and productions, otherwise they won’t go to the theatre. I sincerely wonder that they can sit through a play that has been thrown on in two rehearsals. I wouldn’t last an act.

‘It’s said they won’t watch the same play twice even if the production is ideal. But I know the people in the sticks, who come to Moscow ten times to see us in the same play that has had a resounding success. And I know well-rehearsed companies that are invited to go back to provincial towns with the same play more than five times over.

‘There is one other thing I’ll never understand: why you can hear *Trovatore* or *Traviata* a hundred times while for a philosophical tragedy like Ibsen’s *Brand* once is enough. “But it’s music! You can’t hear it in one go!” To that I answer, “You can’t grasp complex ideas and a profound work of art in one go!”

‘But I understand Remeslov. Rushed work in the provinces is easier than art. Beside which, that’s all anyone can do. You can’t have art when you put on 200 plays a season.’

‘I never put on more than fifty’, Remeslov protested.

‘You hear that?’, said Rassudov quietly turning to the assembly as though to underline Remeslov’s point. ‘What a joke! Only fifty. Yes, with stock-in-trade quantity is all-important, but in art we only value quality. To become a genius and win eternal fame, you don’t need to create a hundred good works, just one masterpiece, be it a picture, a book, music, a sculpture or a role. Griboiedov only produced one great play, Ivanov one picture, Aldridge, Tamano and, yes, Salvini are known for just one role – *Othello*. They all needed years, decades to create it. But what does that matter to us? It’s the quality that counts . . .

‘So, we talk about the quality of a production but Remeslov is only concerned with quantity. We live in different worlds – stock-in-trade and art . . .’

I suddenly remembered the play wasn’t over and I had to go on again. I was seized with terror.

‘Wouldn’t it be good’, I thought, ‘if something awful were to happen and the performance had to be stopped! Or if there were a fire! Or the ceiling were to fall! That would be a way out of an impossible

situation. The play would be taken off for a few days and I would have time to pull my thoughts together and find a new basis for my work. Or be ill so I wouldn't be able to work for a long time! Let others do the work instead of me, I thought angrily, if I'm so bad, without knowing who.

'The best thing to do would be to go away and hide, like Tolstoi – from everyone. Not only I should suffer, but all those responsible for my downfall and hurt in my absence. Let them run around, lost, lose their heads not knowing what to do like me now. Let them try to understand the man they did not then appreciate.

'What nonsense', I thought, hearing what I had said. 'Why look for the guilty party when he's here! I'm the one. They didn't undervalue me, the overvalued me. But, at my very first failure, I took offence, like an ageing girl, looking for someone to blame so as to calm myself. I reached the point where I wanted a disaster because I was bankrupt and unable to beat my fear. I wouldn't pretend to be ill.

'I'm not going on', I decided. 'They can fine me or fire me. It doesn't matter if I give up the stage entirely . . . They'll have to reimburse the audience', I remembered.

'All right! I'll cover the cost.

'But I won't have anything if I leave the theatre and lose all chance of making the money. Besides which, what would Tvortsov say? My friends? The theatre? The town?

'Of course I can't give up the theatre. I can't live without it . . .

'Nonsense. I'll get along very well. I'll get through this last damned performance and start a new life.'

I felt an almost pathological impatience to end this torture as soon as possible, the way a sick man awaits an operation, expecting unimaginable pain or some kind of end. My impatience hurt me and I couldn't stay any longer in the dark waiting for the pain to stop so I left my dressing room and went to the stage. When I got there, I felt even more frightened than before previous entrances, even more lost. I was gripped even more strongly by the feeling of a helpless man put on show, obliged to justify himself and be successful. I was about to go on and suddenly remembered how I had felt when I had dived on my last entrance. But this time I was even too afraid to try out the lines and only remembered I hadn't spoken them, which meant I could forget them.

What was I to do? I rushed out of the backstage corridor where I had been waiting and turned to the props man who happened to be near and whispered to him with a crazy face:

‘Be a good fellow! Help me! Run to the prompter and ask him to feed me every line. Tell him I’m ill. Please! I beg you!’

I soon went on stage. I was immediately confronted with the black hole of the proscenium arch and felt even more helpless and my dependence on the prompter to whom I addressed a beseeching look . . .

Horror of horrors! He wasn’t there!!! It appears that the fool of a props man had called him out of his box up to me on stage and he, who was even more of a fool, had run to see me and, not finding me, rushed back to his box again. Something terrifying happened to me for the second time in my life: a waking nightmare I shudder to think of.

All this was very important for my career, and so I must linger over it, and recall the feeling of terror that has haunted me from the very beginning.

It was a long time ago. I was young and taking part in a concert in honour of Pushkin, organised by the literati of Moscow. It goes without saying that I was the first to arrive, well before the start. Of course, there was a late start and I was on in the third part. I had to wait the whole evening backstage which was wearisome. The veteran actor, O, was suffering the same fate. He was on one or two items before me. I spent most of the evening with him, consoling him. He had just lost his wife, a young comedy actress, tragically, before this event. She had been found on the floor with a strip of curtain round her neck. The amazing thing was that it was not tied, perhaps she had had a panic heart attack as she wound it round her neck. The old actor remembered every detail and wept. At that moment he was called on stage and I went with him to hear how he would read and see how he would prepare his entrance.

‘You’re upset’, I said to him, ‘take the book with you.’

‘No need’, he replied, ‘I’ve spoken this poem a thousand times and could do it in my sleep.’

He went on and was greeted as befits someone well-known. He began to speak with histrionic élan, the way actors used to declaim in the provinces. He stopped after a few lines almost happily. He held the pause calmly with the sangfroid of an experienced actor and tried to remember the word he had lost but he couldn’t recall it to mind. The audience held its breath. Unperturbed, the old actor started all over again.

But he stopped at the fatal word again . . . and lost his head. After waiting a little, he turned to the preceding line in the hope that the forgotten word would come to him out of sheer momentum. He halted at the same word again. Everyone knew Pushkin’s poem from school and so in the auditorium and backstage one or two volunteer prompters appeared who started to give him the word, first in a whisper and then out loud. The old man heard nothing. I passed the book with the page which had the poem in it

to him through a door in the set. He snatched it from me almost rudely and so lost the page. Faced with a startled audience, he began to leaf through the pages. The rustle of paper could be heard throughout the theatre.

Despairing of finding what he was looking for, he threw the book on the chair next to him, adopted a grand pose and began to recite from the beginning.

He stopped again at the fatal word and a buzz went through the house. The poor old man fell silent, wiped the sweat from his brow and went to the door on the other side the set. But it had been nailed shut. He shoved it hard. The set began to wobble but the door wouldn't open. Stifled laughter could be heard in the house. He went to the gap down by the proscenium arch to get out but it was too small and he got stuck. To enormous laughter from the audience, the old man forced himself through the side of the black hole and disappeared backstage.

'How grotesque', a voice said next to me. 'A distinguished old actor comes to a concert like that.' I wanted to say something for him but at that moment some men of letters, who had organised the show, came to me to congratulate me on something. It appeared they had had the opportunity to read the entirety of the poem Lermontov had written on Pushkin's death, that is including the words the censor had at the time removed from publication:

You arrogant offspring of your forebears'
Infamy . . .

'You will free these lines from the prison of censorship and liberate a man of genius', they said, happy for me.

'But I was far from sharing their mood. On the contrary I was cold with fright because I had never read these lines and only knew them from hearsay.

'I can't speak them, as I haven't worked on them', I replied like a schoolboy.

But these liberals put such pressure on me I could no longer object. I decided to read the last lines from the book.

I don't remember what happened after. I'm told I read the lines more or less satisfactorily. But what I lived at that moment for me will ever remain a nightmare.

That awful nightmare happened again in that unhappy performance I make myself remember, but I don't recall how I acted, how the play ended and how the curtain came down out of sheer terror . . .

Evidently, something happened that left me bathed in sweat with

everyone looking askance at me. When the cast gathered for their entrance I felt that my colleagues were afraid I wouldn't be able to speak a word to them. They ran off as soon as we had gone through the exit-door and the broad corridor leading to the dressing-rooms upstairs.

No one said goodbye. I was alone.

'Do they think I'm crazy?', I thought.

Once in my dressing-room, I dropped into the chair of my make-up table and felt destroyed.

'So', I thought, 'this used to be one of my easiest roles to play, it was all a joke.'

'However that may be', I comforted myself, 'the ordeal is over and, in Chekhov's words in *Uncle Vanya* "I shall rest, I shall rest". The end was nigh, not only for this performance but for my career as well. It was clear it was over and that after my failure I didn't have the strength to go through that again. I took off my wig, beard and side-whiskers and threw them angrily on the dressing-table.

And yet I always took great care of the smallest detail of my costume and make-up and anything to do with my role.

Sitting exhausted in front of the mirror, I looked at my face, and the foundation ready for my next make-up to go on. Every role has its own standard look. Sometimes it expresses nothing but, at others, it gives a face something unexpected. I liked what I saw.

'Give up the stage with such gifts', I thought.

I started to feel sorry for myself. I came over sentimental. We actors like to play good parts not only on stage but in life. And the role of an actor who quits the stage at the prime of his life seemed to me a good one.

'I am at my dressing-table for the last time', I thought, trying to be emotional. 'The life of the theatre will go on without me or they'll forget me. Or no, on the contrary, they'll remember me but I'll never come back. They will take on one of my roles and remember what I used to be here.'

I had a vision of a broken life and I almost wept. I saw the stretches of free time that made the theatre so wearisome.

Of course, I would be at the discussion the following day. I couldn't give up without seeing Tvortsov. I would talk to him afterwards or write to him. What a stroke of luck that, owing to Volin's illness, I had five days free. I had time to settle everything. But could I be replaced? Would I have to go on a few times more and suffer what I had suffered?! I couldn't do it!

I went through the names of the members of the company and wondered who could take my place. There was no one. So, I was irreplaceable!

This discovery gave me heart.

I couldn't stay in my dressing-room any longer with such thoughts.

But the unbearable electrician dragged me from my thoughts.

The lights flickered, reminding me that I was staying in the theatre against regulations with the lights on when I shouldn't. I hurried so as not to be in the dark.

The stage-door keeper opened a crack in my door and mumbled something, shut it again carefully and stayed taking the wind-up alarm that hung on my wall near my wardrobe.

Then I went home, undressed, lay down on the bed and tried to understand where the former joy I felt every time I went on stage had gone.

It turned out I got excited every time they turned on the gas to light the stage and the auditorium.

The specific smell of make-up and glue worked its magic on me.

As I lay there in the dark, I remembered the parts I had played.

When I was five I took part in some tableaux vivants – *The Four Seasons*⁸. I was winter with a grey beard made of cotton wool. I was shown how I was to stand, which I did, and everyone stood around very happy! While others were being dealt with, I forgot my pose and had to be shown it again. I took it again and everyone was happy. Finally, at the last minute a candle was lit that was supposed to represent a bonfire and I was strictly forbidden to touch it. And that was exactly why I did touch it as the curtain went up. The cotton-wool caught fire, people shouted and I was whisked away. They scolded me for a long time, while I wept bitterly.

'Even then fate foretold my bitter lot as an actor', I thought, 'today that prophecy is fulfilled.'

My second appearance was also in some tableaux vivants, *Among the Flowers*. I was a butterfly that had to kiss a rose. As the curtain went up, I turned to face the audience and with my wide-open child's eyes greeted my brothers, aunts and grandmothers. That, too, had a rousing success and I felt good.

Then I vividly remembered a rainy autumn day when, as I schoolboy, I left Moscow for the country with a box full of wigs and make-up. The forthcoming performance excited me . . .

I remembered a packed room crammed with costumes and shoes in which the men of our *ad hoc* family company made up.

'Is that really you? Unrecognisable!', we said, full of wonder.

. . . Tiredness prevented me from ending my review of my life as an actor.

The next day I remembered what had happened and realised that my attitude to events had changed. It was less harsh, less despairing. True, my decision to give up the theatre had not changed, but deep inside I felt that it was a temporary one and not to be taken at face value. It could be

that I might go on again. I began to feel a resurgence of self-confidence. Nonetheless, I refused to think about what caused me such panic.

Hands behind my head, I lay in bed a long time, and thought about my future.

What if I were to stay in the theatre but not as an actor. I couldn't do that any more; it was clear I could never make another entrance.

But what if I were to do something that did not involve seeing the audience face to face?

What was I to be then? A director, I thought. But you can't be one right away. First you have to be an assistant, and deal with the stage hands, the props men, the office, the helpers and the extras. They aren't there. You have to replace them at the last minute, save the day, the show must go on.

'No, that's not for me', I decided. 'I have neither the patience nor the restraint.

'I would work in management', I decided but within a minute realised how difficult it would be for me to sit looking at numbers while an interesting new play such as *Woe from Wit* was being rehearsed on stage.

'It would be better to resist this temptation and spend my days in some other office, not in a theatre, and go to the theatre in the evenings with all the rights of advisers and patrons.

'The trouble is', I thought, 'I have no head for figures.' There are people who begin to do calculations and everything's fine. But I always lose money. And if I make a mistake, it is never to my advantage, I always blame myself.

'Better the country', I decide. 'Live amid nature, enjoy the spring, watch the autumn, profit from the summer.

'Yes, yes, to the country, to nature!!', I decided. Country life seemed to me like paradise. Physical labour during the day and the evenings to myself, with a good wife, a family, far from trouble and strife.'

It was easy for me to change one [view] of life for another because in my heart I knew I wouldn't leave my darling theatre for anywhere. Probably under the influence of an almost unconscious decision I suddenly stood up, so that, please God, I shouldn't be late for the talk on *Woe from Wit*.

Going down the street from my house to the theatre it seemed to me that more than ever the passers-by were watching me and I was sure that was because they knew everything and were feeling sorry for me and perhaps even laughing at me. I hasten my steps, head down. Then I remembered the story told me by an ageing beauty: 'When I was young' she said,

'I would put on a new hat, go down the street. I was looked at. I felt young, bold, held my head high and hurried as though propelled from, behind. Not long ago, I put on a new hat, walked down the street, people looked at me but there was nothing pushing me from behind, no one threw papers after me. I began to run as fast as I could as though someone were beating me. But this time not head-high but head hanging low.'

So I hurried to the theatre and avoided people's eyes.

When I arrived and greeted my colleagues it seemed to me they were looking sideways at me as on the previous the evening, feeling sorry for me and shying away from me. I went first to one then to other to prove I was right.

Unhappily my view was confirmed. One of them even asked me:

'And how are you today?'

I was so thrown by this question that I answered:

'Thank you, better.'

My answer merely confirmed his opinion.

Then someone gave me a friendly greeting. I ran to him, shook his hand and held on to it as a sign of gratitude for the kind attention he was paying to me, the outsider.

I greeted Tvortsov. I wanted to know how he felt about me after the previous evening, but he paid no attention to me as he was busy with his pupil, Yuntsov, who had recently joined the school.

'Why not cast the play?', Yuntsov worried.

'Do that and no one will turn up for the talks', Chuvstvov explained quietly, sucking a sweet.

'Why?', the newcomer asked.

'Because that's the way our fellow actors are.'

'But how?'

'Because we are. Cast them and then the whole play takes on a special importance. Don't and they'd rather go for a walk on Kuznetski Bridge. Take note. Now you have a crowd of people, but as you are cast, you are only left with a few real actors among a small group who are not involved in the play because they are second-rate.'

'Why are they second-rate?'

'Because they sacrifice art.'

'And good actors?'

'They sacrifice themselves to art.'

'When do you start casting?', the newcomer asked uneasily.

'When everyone has discussed the play fully, when everyone has been told, in general terms, what they have to do in the work to come.'

'Then you cast?', the newcomer persisted.

‘No, the play has long been cast but not discussed.’

‘The small parts, too?’, the newcomer enquired impatiently.

‘Yes.’

‘And the walk-ons?’

‘Yes.’

‘Oh!’, the student sighed like a child.

‘What’s the matter?’

‘It’s very long.’

‘What’s very long?’

‘Till all these talks are over’, Yuntsov acknowledged.

‘But you go to them, listen and try to do something helpful’ one of the older actors told him. ‘Directors pay great attention to that.’

‘That doesn’t matter if they have already cast.’

‘That means nothing. Often they change the leads at the last minute.’

‘Really?!’. Yuntsov pricked up his ears.

‘Sometimes, in discussion, an actor no one ever considered, suggests a much more interesting interpretation of a role. Then the director changes his plan and casts him in the lead.’

‘Is that how it happens?’, said Yuntsov, astonished, ‘Then I’m off. Thanks and goodbye.’

He ran into the foyer where the actors had been summoned by the bell.

Chuvstvov had told me Tvortsov wasn’t expected at rehearsal since he was chairing a meeting and would not be at the theatre before four, once the discussion had ended. I went to the office and wrote a note in which I requested Tvortsov to see me immediately, that very day, concerning something that was very important to me.

I handed it over and asked that it be delivered when Tvortsov arrived because the matter was very important to him.

Then I went to the discussion, sitting discreetly in the dark, away from everyone. I was almost a stranger in my own theatre. There were many people there, although noticeably fewer than the last time. It came to my notice that the leading actors were sitting at the large table but in the back rows but that small parts, students and minor actors were near to Remeslov’s lectern.

‘A bad sign for Remeslov’, I thought.

Remeslov was much more restrained after the last night’s debate in Rassudov’s dressing-room.

In his opening remarks he acknowledged bitterly that his energetic programme of work had not found favour and so he bowed to the will of the majority but took credit for the positive results of previous discussions.

The futile arguments, speeches and statements of the night before

started all over again. It was unbearably tedious. Actors began leaving one by one. Remeslov was triumphant and deliberately did not stop speakers when they strayed from the subject in hand.

Then Tvortsov hurried in and close behind him, on tip-toe, with exaggerated, histrionic discretion came the old director, Byvalov, who sat some distance away having asked his 'colleague' to be allowed to be present, not without some theatrical affectation. We loved his stocky figure, his large bald patch and his sugary smile behind his close-clipped beard.

After he had listened to one or two boring speakers, it was his turn.

The actors were all ears.

'My God, my God!', he said in sugary, somewhat theatrical tones.

'How many memories are linked to *Woe from Wit!* The desks at school, masters in grubby coats and gold buttons, slates, dog-eared schoolbooks with childish doodles in the margins. Matinees on holidays at our dear, grey Maly.

'I love you, innocent beautiful days of old! I love you, Liza, a cheat with blue eyes and in high heels. Dear little mademoiselle, a soubrette, chirping away. I love you my wanderer, Chatski, operatically handsome, with wavy hair, a fop, a Childe Harold in a dress coat and dancing pumps, straight from your coach. Sweet innocence! I love the way you kneel as Raoul de Nancy in *Les Huguenots*⁹ before Valentin, Duc de Nevers and the high C!'

The actors' faces took an increasingly bewildered expression.

'Is this some kind of joke? Irony? A rhetorical trick?! A demonstration through opposites?', they asked one another.

But the elderly director went on with his apologia for the tradition he had lived and seemed serious and sincere.

'Dear, dear children, Chatski and Sofya', he intoned his memories, 'ever be the same, just as I knew you in my childhood. I love you . . .'

'Stop, stop! Just rest a moment', one of his fellow artists interrupted.

'There's much I don't agree with, but much is welcome', Chuvstov yelled.

I confess that this comment by one of the most talented of our actors made sense even to me, although I am suspicious about these kinds of discussion.

Then came an unbelievable shout, 'Down with the old, up with the new! Down with Byvalov, down with Remeslov'. Actors jumped from their seats, argued, protested, explained and formed a tight circle around Byvalov and Chuvstov.

I frayed a path with difficulty towards them.

'Tell me what's going on, I don't understand', I shouted in Chuvstov's ear.

‘Make a stir’, Chuvstvov yelled back in my ear. ‘Rouse the leadership’, he added.

‘I don’t understand’, I replied.

‘Say anything stupid you like’, he said hastily, cutting through the crowd, taking me with him.

‘What for?’, I wondered.

‘Rouse the lead actors. Until they have spoken, nothing can happen.’

‘Bravo!’, he shouted as he went. ‘Shout “I protest”’, he whispered, coming back to me momentarily.

‘I proteeest. Down with Byvalov’, I yelled.

The elderly director was standing there in a theatrical pose in the middle of the noisy throng and felt as though he were rehearsing a crowd scene, in his usual way, dealing with a large mob which he would soon have under control. To good effect he shouted in that special, exaggerated tone reserved for crowd scenes: ‘Children! I beg a word. Let me speak.’

It was difficult for him to calm the turbulent actors down.

‘What does this mean? Say to yourselves: what. He, the elderly Byvalov, who has grown grey in battle, like a corporal in Napoleon’s army, who all his life with Diogenes’ lantern has always sought for the new, is suddenly dragging us back to the dear, grey days of the past?! Yes, children, that is what I am doing. What am I to do? That is who I am. It means I have become old and stubborn. The children have outgrown me. Judge me, you wild believers, you turbulent innovators . . . builders of a new life.’

Everyone sat down.

‘I’ve long been in the dock’, Byvalov joked. ‘I love the old traditions . . . That’s the way I am’, he continued, with an almost feminine touch of sentimentality, sugaring his rhetoric.

Each of us was long familiar with his game and his thinking, but pretended to swallow his bait, knowing that he was concerned for the common good.

‘I have just heard the voice of wisdom, experience and prudence, and it has vitalised me at least’, said Remeslov after the applause had ended. ‘I thank my colleague with all my heart for his authoritative statement. Gentlemen! How can we treat the achievements of science and art in this way in so – excuse me – frivolous a manner? How can we? A succession of great scholars and critics have studied major works of art. From childhood, at school, they have explained to us their value and beauty, the best actors of the capital and the provinces, like Shchepkin, Sadovski, Miklokravski, Kramolov-Krasnov have forever set their seal on them. Combined, they have created a century-old tradition, but suddenly young

people, who, I do not dispute, are capable, but have not yet distinguished themselves, arrive on the scene and brush everything aside.

'I am speaking, of course, of those who have expressed their audacious opinions in these discussions and who shouted: down with the old, up with the new. But is bad news better than good old? Unfortunately, we have heard nothing from the older, talented actors who created this theatre.

'I have decided to speak to lend greater force to the views of my honourable colleagues, who are steeped in a century-old tradition. Gentlemen, trust their experience. We are dealing not for the first but, perhaps, for the hundredth time, with a work of genius.'

'That's no good', someone said.

'We know better than you how to approach the traditions of the Russian theatre.'

No one, apart from the Igralovs, supported his passionate declaration. And even they shook his hand limply. Remeslov almost ran over to Byvalov and dramatically took his hand. The old director with a sweet but contemptuous smile, head on one side, let him shake it but his eyes were smiling as much as to say: I love tradition.

Rassudov asked to speak. Everyone prepared to listen.

'I don't agree with a word Byvalov has said. *Woe from Wit* is my favourite play', he began. 'I have seen it in every kind of production and with every kind of actor. I have asked an older generation and Griboiedov's contemporaries about earlier productions and am convinced that the play, amazingly, has never fared well on the Russian stage. I maintain that there has never been a production that satisfied the needs of a cultivated audience. At a time when the plays of Ostrovski and Chekhov do well, our best classics – Gogol and Griboiedov – have never been presented in all their beauty, depth and fullness. They have been thrust into tight uniforms which do not fit or suit them and are quite different from what their creators would have wished. They are bursting at the seams because they are too tight to contain everything of genius that had been put into them. Nonetheless, no one dares remove these uniforms from Gogol and Griboiedov because time and custom have forever given them strength and made them tradition. Let us recall the traditional production of *The Government Inspector*, the same production which Gogol branded in his famous letter: '*The Government Inspector* has been performed but my heart is full of darkness'.¹⁰ He is very clear about what the actors should not do and that is precisely what has become obligatory for ever and a day. What is laughable is that these time-honoured traditions which Gogol branded are justified by reference to this letter to this very day.

‘Try to change this false tradition and everyone cries, “vandalism”. We know such experiments very well and remember how they were received.

‘Gogol’s attitude to the revival of old plays was quite different.

‘In his letter to [Aleksei Tolstoi] you will find this idea, “You say that there are no new plays, that there is nothing to put on. Take a favourite old play and do it in a new way, one that contemporary audiences need, and you have a new play”’.¹¹

‘Gogol nudges us in that direction, so that tradition may not be fixed once and for all, while our worthy directors thrust the old mistakes on us.

‘Don’t forget that Gogol and *The Government Inspector* had better luck than Griboiedov and *Woe from Wit*. *The Government Inspector* had one or two great actors and an excellent ensemble. The author was one of them.

‘But Griboiedov died before any of his plays was done. And, after his death, there was no one to replace his orphaned children.

‘True, *Woe from Wit* also had its great actors, but there was never an adequate ensemble or production.

‘Do you know how plays were put on in our grandpas’ and grandmas’ time? For example, in the ballroom scene in Act 3, during the course of the action, the musicians gather in the pit, greet each other, strike matches and light the lamps on the conductor’s desk. The conductor arrives, bows to them, tunes up and on Chatski’s line, “Behold . . .” gives the beat, and the ball which is supposed to be danced “with Sofya at the piano”, has a whole orchestra under it. The first couple for the mazurka was Sofya and Nikiforov, a well known actor.¹² He was wearing the uniform of a theatre manager with blue glasses. Later other members of the cast danced a few steps and after that a ballet with all the characteristic techniques and steps. They danced in *Woe from Wit* at the same time as the *krakoviak* in *A Life for the Tsar*.¹³ So an improvised *divertissement* was introduced into the drama. So, naturally, everyone forgot about Chatski and Griboiedov’s “million qualms”.

‘There were endless encores. Nikiforov repeated the same number ten times to the point of exhaustion. People liked the way at a certain moment he clicked his heels and flicked his leg.

‘Do the admirers of an old, worn-out tradition want us to include an improvised *divertissement* of that kind?

‘Instead of looking back to tired, old traditions; wouldn’t it be better to take Griboiedov into our own hands and look into his heart with our own eyes, without old glasses and courageously, in defiance of all tradition show what is eternal in the play but which we were not shown, that was hidden by the faded uniform of false tradition. That would be something

new, something expected of us. Down with the old uniform. Free the genius from his cell, and nourish him with new, open, beautiful clothes according to his tastes and requirements.'

Thunderous applause, shouts, hand-waving greeted the speaker.

Byvalov also got up and with a treacherous smile shook his hand, but his limp hands on his belly, his head leaning sideways and his sweet, guilty smile continued saying, silently, 'Judge me, children, my dear noisy believers . . . This is who I am. I love you . . .' etc.

The floor was then given to a friend of the theatre, a patron of the arts, who came to rehearsals as an adviser. He was an extremely cultivated man, well versed in literature. He wrote verse and prose and essays on the philosophy of art. Formerly he had acted a great deal in high-society amateur dramatics and had been an eminent lawyer and prosecutor.

'I fear', he began, 'that as an old theatre-goer I have no equal and love tradition. I love it in *Woe from Wit*.

'In our time, lovers of Italian opera arrived for the last act just to hear Tamberlick's, Stanio's, Naudin's or Masini's high C and then went to the English Club to finish a game of piquet.

'And I, too, am free to go to the theatre just for one or two masterly speeches of Famusov's or Chatski's and then leave, because I love Griboiedov's verse and him, too, although I am not worthy to have been his friend.'

'I, too, am in favour of many old traditions, elegant conventions, established techniques, inflexions, stresses tradition has created', said a leading actor in his gentle tenor voice. 'You can't speak verse like prose and *Woe from Wit* is not a realistic drama but a piece of theatre with all the known conventions which it would be to preserve.'

'In the archives', a [voice] again shouted.

The old actor's words fuelled the flames. Everyone talked at once and started to fight. The director could barely keep order.

'Let me speak and don't interrupt', he shouted, holding on to the bell as though as though in danger in a storm.

'I want to hear Griboiedov's music on the stage. I want to appreciate its sound, like the arias in an Italian opera!'

'Griboiedov and Italian opera!', yelled another prominent member angrily. 'What about Chatski's "million qualms"? Don't they count?'

'I'm not saying I don't need Chatski's ideas', the lead actor responded, 'I'm talking about the music of the language we hear in the theatre.'

(The lead actor was not saying what he meant but needed to get the answer he wanted.)

‘So, according to you, what was dearest to Griboiedov was sound and rhythm and that was why he wrote the play?’, another of the actors asked him.

‘I don’t know what precisely drove Griboiedov to write but I do know that rhythm was also dear to him’, the lead actor said unexpectedly quietly.

‘Also’ doesn’t mean ‘above all’, the actor persisted. ‘Rhythm and the music of the lines apart, what else do you like about the play?’

‘Griboiedov’s free spirit’, the lead actor remarked.

‘Fine. Now tell me truthfully have you seen a production that conveyed this free spirit with the necessary shape and form?’

‘There were wonderful actors’, the lead actor replied.

‘Who? Name them.’

‘Samarin, Shechepkin, Lenski Shumski.’

‘Did you see them?’

‘No.’

‘I saw my dear friend, Sasha Lenski’, the old director boomed once again. ‘He was outstanding! Outstanding!’

‘And did he give all the thoughts, ideas and nuances so dear to Griboiedov in a natural manner?’, the actor continued.

‘Who knows what was dear to him?’ With these words the old director led the discussion back to the main issue.

‘What do you mean “who knows?” Can’t you read between the lines?’

‘No.’

‘Then I’ll help you.’

‘Please do.’

‘I’ll try . . . Love of Russia.’

‘Every Chatski that has ever been loves Russia and smashes her enemies, of course he does’, the old director mocked.

‘Does that love merely consist of smashing others?’

‘For me, yes. What about you?’, asked the old director, unaware he was looking a fool.

‘It is the worry, the pain over the wildness and chaos of his country’, someone suggested.

‘I understand, I agree’, the old director said. ‘And then?’

‘The desire to bring all those who stand in the way of progress to a state or reason, convince them of the error of their ways and make them better people’, added one of the small-part actors.

‘I understand that, too, my pretty little blonde, said the old director encouragingly.

‘And there’s the rub’, my friend said. ‘Every Chatski rants, nags away at

his land, tears a passion to tatters, but doesn't love Russia. Rant less and love more and then I'll believe you are Griboiedov or rather Chatski.'

'So what do you want from my friend, Chatski?', the director asked.

Everyone knew his tactics as a director, but pretended not to, and so enabled the discussion to continue on the right lines.

I had to leave before the end . . .

I was summoned to the manager's office.

'How long do you want to be away from us?' asked the senior manager, Roubliov, with a lifeless face and a sleepy voice.

'Until the end of the season', I answered.

'The end of the season . . . yees', he repeated, 'I seee.'

'Oh damn! I wasn't expecting that. We are so fond of you, but you . . .', an old actor cried who was present.

'Valeri Osipovich', the manager introduced him.

'I'm sorry.'

'What is the reason for your request?'

'Reason?! . . . I'm a disaster', I replied with a throb in my voice. 'I've broken a leg, fallen down a hole and have brain damage. I have typhus with every kind of complication!!!'

'Yees, I understaaand. And yet, you're out and about, and, thank God, are looking good and well', he responded with a smile.

'My feet move but my heart doesn't. Please understand! . . . My voice has had a terrible shock. I have mental typhus and a very high temperature. Is the seriousness of the illness and the disaster merely that people can see injury and physical pain? But mental pain, illness and disaster this time are far worse, especially for us, who act not with our feet but with our hearts. If I had a broken leg I could be carried on stage on stretcher and I could say the lines. But I can't go on with a broken heart.'

'My namesake! Brother! Our pride and joy!', shouted Ossipovich. 'And what about Lisaveta Nikolaievicha?', he cried, looking at Byvalov, who was sitting nearby and whose mannerisms he was trying to copy.

'Come to order', the chairman addressed him calmly.

'I apologise', Ossipovch politely responded, leaning back in his chair, eyes averted.

'You understand', I began again turning to the chairman, 'it's not a question of my not wanting to act. On the contrary, I want to very much. It is not easy for me to go through what I am going through. It is not that I don't want to but that mentally I can't. If I were physically incapable, there

would be no discussion. I would give you a brief note, saying, ‘I’ve broken my leg and can’t act for six months’. The fact is that I am unable mentally, invisibly and, because it’s invisible, nobody believes it’s true. That’s what’s so awful!

‘But as far as hidden motives are concerned, I am a practical man without much knowledge. That requires a specialist.’

‘Your view?’, said the chairman to the head of the company, M, sitting some distance away. ‘What do you say to a leave of absence for Fantasov?’

‘He is far too important a figure in our theatre’, he began, ‘for his illness not to have serious consequences for us’, he said flatteringly. I admit I found that rather pleasing, but it didn’t prevent me from seizing the opportunity to settle my accounts with some of the older actors.

‘That’s probably why you let me go on instead of Igralov when he can’t be bothered with a boring role’, I threw at him.

‘I don’t choose the understudies, the director does’, M responded.

‘Order, please’, mumbled the chairman not taking his eyes off the paper he was reading. ‘So, what do you suggest?’, he repeated his question.

‘We have no alternative but to replace him in all his roles as soon as possible. That’s a huge job, since he carries the whole repertoire . . . during the next few weeks of rehearsal, we’ll have to look at all the plays in which Igralov appears.’

‘There’ll be no takings because they’ve been played too often’, someone commented.

‘We’re not doing it for the takings, but so that the theatre doesn’t close. Recall Volin and we could revive his plays, but he is still away on holiday and our situation is critical.’

‘So you see, my fate doesn’t depend on specialists, but on you, a practical man’, I addressed the chairman, losing patience.

‘I unerstaaand’, he murmured. ‘So let practical considerations decide for me. What’s our financial state?’ He said to the chief accountant.

‘On the 28th, costs 501,270, takings 308,274. A deficit of 192,998.’

‘Is that my fault?’, I asked.

‘The whole advance has been used up, even overspent.’

‘Used up’, the chairman repeated, ‘yees, I unerstaaand . . . any other resources?’

‘What resources? The chairman is our only resource.’

‘For the moment leave me out of it.’

‘Namesake! Namesake! Let’s stop this’, said Osipovich wildly.’

‘Order.’

‘Sorry.’

‘I propose that Igralov be given the role of Heinrich¹⁴ and also Rostanev’,¹⁵ M said.

‘What? . . . Igralov as Rostanev?! Is he volatile enough for the role? Has he the energy, the rhythm, the goodness of heart, the lightness, the whole character. Better to take the play off than ruin it.’

‘Yes, it would’, M agreed, ‘but we can’t.’

‘What?! That handsome, vain, cold, cerebral, technical, external actor is suddenly to become a naïve child, the truth-loving Rostanev!! In those places where he forgets about himself and hunts for the truth, Igralov will flirt with the audience and not give us the role but himself in the role. But what galls me most of all is that I’m supposed to sit coldly by and watch what they are doing to things I have created, in which my blood, flows, my pulse beats and my spirit lives.’

‘Are you jealous’, D asked me, having watched me for a long time.

‘No. But hurt by the theatre’s attitude towards me.’

‘What attitude’, I was asked.

‘What do you mean “what”? My roles are being taken from me and divided up before my very eyes.’

‘Yes, they are amazingly ready to gratify your wish.’

‘Mine?’ I was amazed.

‘What else? You wanted leave of absence for the rest of the season, didn’t you? And, for that to happen, you have to be replaced in everything you play.’

I was left speechless.

‘Do you think it’s fun for them to have to change the cast of the best plays in the repertoire and take on the boring work of rehearsing in new leads? It’s no joke to refurbish six old, well-tried plays.’

‘How stupid!’, I was angry with myself. ‘I’m the guilty one, responsible for everything, including my present illness and all I can do is blame others, who are guiltless.’

‘It’s bad when you have to have a second understudy’, D mesmerised me ‘and worse if you need a standby! I think I heard that the directors found it necessary to have two actors alternate as Heinrich.’

‘Two?’, I asked in shock.

‘Yes’, he confirmed. ‘Otherwise Igralov would have to perform every day.’

‘Every day?’, I asked, feeling very guilty towards the theatre.

‘Yes’, said D quietly, adding, ‘when you return to us you will have to play your roles not only once a week but twice, or even a third time. That’s not good because after a long absence you don’t feel at ease or enthusiastic, you are tentative, almost inhibited, and that prevents you from being fully creative.’

‘True’, I agreed.

At this point, the old director Byvalov, shouted in a loud voice, evidently for me to hear:

‘We will have to make two coats out of Fantasov’s, for both understudies, and a special waistcoat for the standby.’

I admit I had not foreseen that my costume would be altered. How I would agonise, as I stood before the mirror for hours on end, looking for the lines, arranging the folds, pulling one leg of my breeches lower, then the other higher. For a moment you have again the line that came and went in a flash . . . You seek after it again and . . . a dagger in my heart . . . the fool of a costume-maker, who always knows better, has incorporated my suggestions and the result is worse than before . . . And there you are again in front of the mirror or pick up a needle yourself. And if you find what you were looking for, my God, what delight!!! And now, in gratitude for all my pains, before my very eyes, they are calmly dividing up my garments and leaving their fate to chance! An actor’s costume is the designer’s sketch. We try to find its line and colours. But suddenly they take it away and cut it up. Why? Because the sketch is too large for the stage! What vandalism! It must not be. Byvalov is mocking me!!!

But greater trials awaited me. U was standing near me. It was clear from his indifferent, sad face that he was far from being prepared to accept serious criticism from me. I could see it in his expression, which did not bode well.

‘Will you let Byvalov use your historic stuff?’, he asked indifferently, without hope, like a gramophone repeating not his own but someone else’s words.

‘Which stuff?’, I asked, almost sharply.

‘Old stuff’, U explained in a flat voice.

‘Like what?’, I interjected.

‘Your old German belt as Heinrich and your sword from *Julius Caesar*.’

‘What? Igralov is taking on Antony?’

I couldn’t stop the flush that spread across my face, head and neck.

‘Had I rummaged around in dirty, dusty junk shops for years to gratify Mr Igravlov?’, I thought, holding back my answer. ‘In my hands, these

wonderful old things became familiar to the audience, and now are to be trivialised.'

'I'll give them to no one, since I use them rarely', I said, cutting the conversation short.

'Fine, then don't. I'll give him mine', poor U said, unusually calmly, shrugged his shoulders and walked away, quietly without emotion.

'Stop tearing yourself apart', said D gently, as though he admired my artistic jealousy, taking me by the shoulders. 'Play all your old parts, but give up Chatski for me.'

'Which Chatski?!', I asked taking hold of him.

'Griboiedov's', he quietly confirmed.

'Have you been given it?', I asked with a quiver in the voice.

'Yes.'

This news was so surprising and joyful for me I was ready to forgive the theatre and the directors everything.

It was a long time since I had played anyone young. It was time after my earlier successes it was good . . .

It's day and you're afoot and I am at your feet.

'It'll be a success!' and was already getting ready for it in my mind.

'Goodbye then', said D taking my hand. 'Behave like that and they'll give it to Igralov. He'll be great with the ladies.'

'Up to D', angry words the scales had been even. It had been as difficult for me to go on playing my old parts as to give them up. But now, when Chatski had come to me out of the blue, one side suddenly rose.

Let Tvortsov decide. Whatever he said, I would do . . .

But Tvortsov wasn't there . . . or in the theatre. The performance was over and I met Igralov, Rassudov and Remeslov in the corridors. They were putting on their coats to go and eat together. They invited me, and I accepted.

'So, basically, I am to stand in a corner and beat you', said Tvortsov almost harshly and completely unexpectedly when, the next day, I went to see him in his office-dressing-room.

'What for?', I asked in astonishment.

'For yesterday', said Tvortsov angrily. 'What kind of actor are you when you can't deal with yourself? Doesn't our technique consist in

being able to go on at precisely 8 o'clock and feel enthusiasm for the play on the posters. But you want to sit by the sea and wait for better weather. Fortunately you have a fragment of inspiration and for a second and a half you become a Mochalov or a Salvini. You are a tragic actor once in a blue moon.'

'What am I to do? That's how I am. If inspiration comes, I come alive, if not, I am empty'

'That's the way painters, writers and composers have the right to think. They can create at home, when they feel like it. For us it's one, two, three! Something happens to you, you think about something, remember something and you shed real tears or laugh a real laugh, naturally, purely, there's no imitation and you don't do it for its own sake but because the character's situation against our will forces us to do so.'

'I can't do that to order', I said stubbornly.

'I know you can't, so learn.'

'That can't be learned.'

'What?!', Tsvortsov bristled. 'Repeat what you said and I wash my hands of you. You're just an amateur. Aren't you shamed to denigrate our art?'

'How so?'

'Because you think art is pure when there is no technique, no thinking, no work. There is no art without virtuosity, exercises and skill. And the more limited the talent, the more they are needed. The rejection of technique with you amateurs arises not from conscious conviction but from laziness and a lack of discipline. But art is above all order, harmony, the discipline of heart and body. How can it be that you, as an actor, don't know something you knew as a child at school, or as a soldier, when they understand what discipline means?'

'Schoolboys and soldiers are one thing, actors another . . .'

'So you think that actors stroll about all day in top hat and kid gloves. Or sit in coffee-houses talking to young ladies and in the evening live the sublime thoughts of a man of genius like Hamlet that were created over ten years by an even greater genius, Shakespeare? But Fantasov is greater than both. He doesn't need ten years, he doesn't need to work, to think or even prepare himself for the role. All he needs is to sit with young ladies and eat nice cakes . . . Inspiration is ready! Incredible. Spend years in school, and as many in the theatre, and not understand the meaning of systematic work and artistic discipline. You should be handed over to soldiers. They'd make you understand discipline.'

'Soldiers are made to be drilled.'

'Not so. They are made to fight and take prisoners. And for that they need discipline and bearing. And what discipline!! And that need must be

stronger than the fear of death. If it were not so they would not be able to bring themselves to face death, overcoming that fear. But discipline forces them towards the enemy, mechanically, despite themselves. It is the same thing in art. If you had artistic discipline and bearing . . . And of what kind?! One that must be incomparably stronger than fear of the audience, and it must not only be conscious but reach down into the subconscious, as automatic habit, then, first, what happened to you on the day before last and, second, you would never have failed in your duty, like yesterday. Your duty towards the theatre and your word is more binding than any contract. All this is lack of discipline. Without it, you can't capture a large audience any more than a soldier can take prisoners.'

'I have the discipline and technique an actor needs when I feel inspired. The most important thing in art is feeling. The rest follows.'

'Whaaat!', shouted Tvortsov, jumping up from his chair and drawing himself up to his full height.

'What I'm saying is that it's a matter of experiencing, feeling the role and then . . .'

'Heelp!!!', Tvortsov's bellow rang through the entire building.

The porter ran to the door, stood waiting a long time outside it, listening to what was happening. Then, suddenly, everything was quiet, as Tvortsov had gone to the other corner of the room and slumped into a chair, trying to calm himself in silence. And I was so shaken by his unexpected outburst, I, too, fell silent, bewildered and did not move.

Finally, when he had calmed down, Tvortsov came to the table where I was sitting, looked at me, offered his hand and said in a dry voice:

'Goodbye. We'll say no more about this.'

'What have I done?', I asked.

'No good trying to explain. You won't understand anyway', he said obstinately.

'All the same . . .', I began.

'When a professional tells another professional that the secret of art lies solely in feeling, experiencing a role then technique and all the rest follows . . . then I say nothing. I am bewildered and throw up my hands. It would have been better had you said', "to act well you have to act well" or, "to walk you have to walk", "to talk nonsense, you have to talk nonsense", "to be inspired all you have to do is be inspired"!!! What's the use of inner technique if not to summon up feeling and arouse experiencing and then, perhaps, inspiration itself? Others like to tell me, "to feel, you just have to experience the role". There are also some who say "It's all a question of grasping the essential meaning", or, "As soon as you live the rest follows" '.

‘For you, you first need experiencing and then technique. For me, once you are living rightly, you don’t need technique. Everything just happens.’

‘That’s what I say, too’, I hastened to justify myself.

‘No. You say something quite different. You wait for chance, experiencing and inspiration. That happens once in a blue moon but for the rest, at other times, you have to be able to stimulate experiencing naturally, at each performance. That’s why we need inner technique. First technique, the experiencing, not the other way around. When a role has been experienced nine tenths of the creative process is complete. One tenth is enough, of itself, to stimulate experiencing.’

‘In that case, I’m neither fit to be a soldier or an actor. It would be better for me to go.’

Word of honour, I had come with the best of intentions of staying, agreeing not only to play my old roles but to do Chatski. But because I could not cause Tvortsov pain, or bear to be looked down on by everyone, something turned to stone inside me. Probably, it was the stake in the heart, a hardening of the arteries. Perhaps it was all traces of actor’s vanity and conceit? . . .

But Tvortsov is unbending in his contempt for the amateur in the worst sense of the word. Once you come into conflict with him, he is merciless and hard.

Sparks were flying and our meeting boded ill. I felt it but something inside increased our irreconcilable hostility. In such a situation you can explain things that have been worrying you for months. You just have to be open.

We didn’t wish to part. We wanted to spill out our bile and make things easier.

Tvortsov opened the door of his dressing-room slightly, called the watchman and told him not to let anyone in. Then he locked it, came up to me from behind, took me by the shoulders and said:

‘Don’t hide your tears from me, just cry.’

I began to weep, of course. Then we hugged and I made his cheeks wet with my tears. He dried them.

I am sure that had I asked him the reason for his behaviour, he would have replied:

‘These tears are pure, blessed, an artist’s.’

Tvortsov put me in his chair, sat down beside me and waited patiently until I spoke. I told him I had always been successful, and that every

performance had been a joy for me until the nightmare of the previous evening's performance, the last in my career as an actor, since I no longer had the strength to endure such agony and had decided to leave the stage.

Tvortsov listened to me as only he can.

'Thank God, the crisis is over. Now everything will be fine', he said, ending my confession.

I admit, I had not expected such a result and looked at Tvortsov in astonishment.

'Are you astonished?', he continued, with a kindly look. 'Let me tell you what makes me happy. You see, before, when you had success with the mummies and aunties and schoolgirls, and, finally with yourself, you were a mere amateur who dabbled. Then, when you came to the theatre and encountered the professional problems of our art, you dealt with them wrongly and, to make things easy for you, developed stage tricks, thanks to which you had the maximum of success with the minimum of creative effort. And then you continued to enjoy your sickness. Finally, yesterday, art gave you a harsh lesson. She is merciless and unforgiving. Now you know that she is not to be played with, or used. She requires only respect and sacrifice. That is why you are starting to study her now. A new period in your artistic life is beginning. You are changing into a really serious artist, and not someone with an amateur attitude towards himself. You will come to love *not yourself in art*, but, on the contrary, *the art in yourself*. You will have less personal satisfaction but you will please the serious parts of the audience more than previously. This change cannot be effected painlessly. Suffering awaits you. More than that, you must come to love your creative pangs because they bring forth good fruit.'

'What should I do now?', I asked.

'This, my dear young friend', he explained. 'First I will arrange a leave of absence, not so you can rest but so that you can work even harder. On the one hand you work on rehearsals for *Woe from Wit* (my heart missed a beat), on the other you will work at school with me as your tutor. There I have started the course twice from the beginning and given two lectures on it. So that you can understand I will teach you face to face. Shall we say this evening?'

Of course, I said yes.

'So, at the school, you will learn to work on yourself. You will establish the right creative state and that alone makes art possible. But at the theatre, in rehearsal, you will work on the role. Now I will teach you how to unearth the psychological material in the play and in yourself so you can create the outward appearance of the character. I will explain in practical terms the laws and nature of the creative process. You will be amazed how

quickly you will regain your self-confidence but, this time, it will be firm, unshakeable, renewed. Within six weeks of hard work you will beg to go back on stage.'

'But how do you think you can grant me leave?'

'That's the most difficult of my concerns', Tsvortsov acknowledged. 'The trouble is, your absence hits our pockets. We have to take several plays in which you appear off. How can that be justified? Your current condition? No one will understand. They will say that, as usual, I am weak and spoil the actors. But the true actor understands what is happening to you and in what way you are a real artist. But who are our real artists? Chuvstov, but then Rassudov, in part, who understands more than he feels.'

'So, I have to start all over again?', I concluded with a touch of bitterness.

'No, you just have to go on learning.'

'Why didn't you tell me I was on the wrong track earlier?'

'Because you didn't ask . . .' Tsvortsov explained quietly. 'There are questions that cannot be discussed until the actor asks them. There was a time when I used to lecture people at every street corner. And what happened? I was avoided like the plague. Now I am more intelligent and keep quiet until the actor feels the need to ask the question.'

'But has no one apart from me asked it?', I insisted.

'Rassudov often asks but it is more for his "annals" than his art.'

'And Chuvstov?' I was curious to know.

'He is not yet mature but is already circling round me and starting to listen. He's still only a possibility.'

'No one else?', I continued.

'No one', Tsvortsov replied evenly.

'The students?'

'They ask but all they can do is hear but they don't listen. That is a difficult art, to be able to look and see, hear and listen.'

'Do you have pupils outside the theatre', I asked.

'No, but there are people who are interested in my studies. I keep them up to date with my work', Tsvortsov explained. 'They help me, they experiment make notes.'

'Professionals?'

'No, amateurs.'

'Why do you throw up your hands as if I were speaking heresy?'

'You know better than I how inattentive actors are and how little they love their art (in contrast to others). They do not talk about it, think about it, study it. They take pride in the fact that they do not have art but inspiration. That makes them special people.'

‘How so?’ I was confused.

‘Because they learn a role and that is all that interests them. Show them how to play a certain role and they will take a thousandth part of what they have been shown and develop someone else’s material according to their own mistakes and habits. They now have a role that will bring them success and they build a repertoire out of other such roles which they can put into circulation. They look for easy success, a comfortable life, stock-in-trade, soon find them and settle down for ever.’

At this time Tvortsov’s lunch was brought to him from home as he had to stay in the theatre to look after the management, including my problems.

I wanted to know the results of his efforts that same day and decided to stay in the theatre and to eat in the theatre’s buffet rather than lunch properly . . .

NOTES

1 *Othello* 1930–1932

- 1 In the text this is the *second* year. This can also be found in other drafts. However it is clear from his work at the Opera-Dramatic that Stanislavski envisaged a three-year course.
- 2 Leading German critic.
- 3 See a similar comparison in the section on *Woe from Wit*.
- 4 *Kean* by Alexandre Dumas, *Louis XI* by Casimir Delavigne, *Ingomar* by François Halma, *Don Cesar de Bazan* by Dumanoir and Dennerly.
- 5 *The Cherry Orchard*.
- 6 Gaev.
- 7 Chekhov played on the different accentuation of 'vishnevyy' and 'vishniovy'.
- 8 All Russians had an internal passport.
- 9 Kharkov, Kiev, Odessa.
- 10 Kyrski, Mtsensk, Lozov,
- 11 Mytishchi, Pushkino, Kuznetsov.
- 12 *Othello* Act 3 scene. See Stanislavski's analysis in the *Othello* production plan.
- 13 See *An Actor's Work* Part I.
- 14 Stanislavski calls this a 'touring' pause, a technical device used by visiting stars to give themselves a momentary breather after a climactic moment:

What tires an actor. Mostly acting on pure force of nature.

While temperament works naturally, there is no forcing. But when force of nature results in forcing, high voltage, then there is strain that is damaging to our organism. And so we must take good care not to base our role on force of nature alone. When that happens, technique helps. Without this relief a difficult role like *Othello* would be suicidal.

Force of nature should be used in certain well-defined passages. Then it can explode. Nothing more can be asked of it without a risk to human nature.

There are more than enough of these passages. They can be compared to a tenor's high C. If there were only high notes in a singer's score, the singer risks ruining his voice. Actors playing tragedy should remember not to abuse explosions and the force of nature.

2 *The Government Inspector* 1936–1937

- 1 *An Actor's Work*, Part I.
- 2 This passage is similar to the advice given to Leonidov in the *Othello* production plan.

6 *Woe from Wit* 1916–1920

- 1 It was customary either for the author or the director to read the play to the cast at the first rehearsal.
- 2 Aleksei Khomyaskov (1804–1860), poet, playwright and philosopher, a leading Slavophile.
- 3 Leontiev, Konstantin Nikolaevich 1831–1891, writer, playwright, philosopher, diplomat.
- 4 These highly personal, autobiographical jottings have been removed from the body of the text:

Here, for example is how I locked myself away in the chateau of Bourbon Russet or the night I spent in the round tower at Maeterlinck's home. Walking through the *refectories* of a monastery at night by candlelight. The bed, cupboards with a washstand, nocturnal noises, clock in the tower, the watchman's footsteps. A few days spent at St Michel. Description of the town, the palace, the cemetery. The cathedral high above, the life of the town, the port. The tide coming in and out. Shifting sands. A pirate's nest, the romanticism of the monastery, etc.

Life in tower in Turin. Description of a feudal castle, built on a rocky island. Water all round, the curious, unequal shape of the streets, houses, squares rooms, etc.

Fyodor Sologub, a medieval man; bed, tights, way of thinking, the point of view of a mediaeval mind . . . His mediaeval-style verses.

- 5 Removed from the body of the text. For example the reds of Gribunin's dressing gown in the production of *Kustodiev*. They were exceptionally strong. You could not get away from Gribunin. We hid it behind a chair, in a corner but it was always prominent covering everything, Pazukhin and the whole idea of the play. If we had needed to put on a revolutionary play in which the symbolic red band had an important role to play, *Kustodiev's* idea would have been splendid.

All the excerpts put together provided important material. But it is not what can be useful in creative work.

- 6 These are standard character types laid down by neo-classical French comedy. In Tsarist Russia, character-types were fixed by imperial decree.

- 7 American experimental psychologist 1859–1923.
- 8 Henry Maudsley, English psychiatrist 1835–1918.
- 9 A quote from one of Chatski's lines.

7 *The Story of a Production* 1923

- 1 Chadeev (1793–1856), philosopher and journalist who protested against the autocracy of the Tsars and the backwardness of Russian society. He was declared insane just as Chatski is in the play.
- 2 At this period, when everything was handwritten, actors were only given parts with their lines in the scenes in which they appeared, and no more than their cues.
- 3 Play by Gogol.
- 4 Some symbolist writers developed the idea of removing the distinction between actor and audience and allowing them to combine to create the performance together.
- 5 *Ridi Pagliaccio*. A famous aria from Leoncavallo's *I Pagliacci*.
- 6 Unattributed quote.
- 7 A misquotation from a letter to Sosnitski. November 3, 1846.
- 8 Stanislavski tells this story in *My Life in Art*.
- 9 Opera by Meyerbeer.
- 10 Misquotation. '*The Government Inspector* has been performed but my heart is full of trouble and fear.'
- 11 Misquotation. 'All plays can be done in a new light and will be loved by everyone, high or low, if only you can stage them properly . . . Take a play that had been done over and over again and stage it as it should be and the audience will come in droves.'
- 12 1824–1881. Played at the Maly.
- 13 Opera by Glinka.
- 14 In Hauptmann's *Sunken Bell*.
- 15 In the stage adaptation of Dostoevski's novella *The Village of Stepanchikovo*.