

Michael Chekhov

November 17, 1937

IMPROVISATION - THE ABILITY TO FILL THE GAPS
OBJECTIVES

Hamlet (M. Chekhov's production -
Second Moscow Art Theatre)

IMPROVISATION - THE ABILITY TO FILL THE GAPS:

Repeat the scene from Hamlet. We are exercising improvisation which means that we are trying to awaken in ourselves the ability to fill the gaps. The improvisation at the beginning is nothing other than a big bottomless gap. We are given some beautiful words, atmosphere, and a succession of events, but between them and inside of them we see always the gaps which we must fill psychologically, with movement and everything. Do the scene on the basis of atmosphere.

OBJECTIVES: Criticism:

It was an effort to fill the gaps, but it could have been much better. Each moment is tremendously rich. Take some new additions. You must interpret the whole scene in the following way: the objective of the court, including the King and Queen and the players is to entertain Hamlet, who is apparently going mad. Therefore, the whole performance for everyone, excluding Horatio, is nothing but a medicine for Hamlet. From this point of view you must fill the gaps.

After a certain time the King and Queen lose this objective because the performance is gripping their souls, and they take another objective which is - "I want to follow this

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performance to know what is in the last moment of it." When they reach this point they are finished. The objective of Ophelia is the same as that of the court - "I want to help Hamlet." Hamlet's objective is - only to understand, to penetrate into the king's reaction - the same is true for Horatio. The objective of the players is to entertain Hamlet and the court, but especially Hamlet who has given them certain moments of the play - the author is present, therefore they must perform so that they will give him new life and activity - to cure him. They may guess what Hamlet is driving at. They can guess this from the scene when he rehearses with them.

I have done this when I produced the play - at the moment when Hamlet showed them what he wanted with the poisoning, and something happened to him, they immediately guessed what he wished, and this brought the players and Hamlet in very close connection. The first time they do it it must be like a ballet, and the second time it is like a tragedy. You must develop these two different themes and the pause in between the two themes.

As Hamlet and Ophelia are one, so the King and Queen are one in another sense - one light composition and the other dark composition. Hamlet's mission is to awaken the Queen from under the spell of the King. You must be more receptive and responsive in filling the gaps, which is the idea of the improvisation. All the suggestions I can give you are only the

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direction in which I want you to fill the gaps, but that is not filling them. You must be able to balance things. Don't forget to think of the play from time to time, and try to understand what the types are, and the depth of the tragedy.