

Michael Chekhov

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FEELING OF FORM
FIRE - FLAME
IMPROVISATION
ATMOSPHERE
CONTACT
SIGNIFICANT SPEECH
STYLE

The Deluge

Old Students and New Students:

We must have an opinion about everything we have seen. Without this we will lose our creative individuality. By trying to develop an opinion we will build our creative ability. To work inside all the time, and to get a certain opinion, this is most essential for us. If you have your own opinion, then listening to others is very interesting and helpful, but if you have no opinion of your own it is not of any interest to you. This does not mean to contradict but to have an open ear and heart, this is what is necessary. You must know what is good and what is wrong - not a vague feeling. It is always better to say what is good and try to give helpful suggestions.

FEELING OF FORM:

In his performance of Hamlet today, Woodie tried to show his part in a certain form which is absolutely necessary for the artist to have - not only the feeling of form when he is receiving, but when he is creating. By trying to find the form he is getting more and more free. Very often we see a thing which happens to the actor when he is trying to get a form, he becomes more bound. In Woodie's case he becomes more

11211
M. Chekhov

November 26, 1937

and more free in his form. \

The more form, the more free you must be. This is the basis we are aiming at in time - to be able to improvise in rhythm, and this is the highest form of freedom. To have the highest feeling of form and through it to become more and more free. Here is form and here is chaos. In chaos you may seem to be very free, but you are not - you are only chaotic. Here is everything in form, and it sometimes gives the feeling that you are bound more and more, because of the form, but in reality it is the highest freedom.

The voice was out of style. The figure and the image and the voice were quite different things. You must find the possibility to incorporate into your voice everything you want to, but first of all you must realize that the voice comes from a different world. In his movements, Woodie had a certain flaming impulse. If you do such a movement, you must use all the means possible to do it and to imagine it so long that this small spark of fire which inspired you, but is not yet a full fire or flame may become one.

FIRE - FLAME:

Actors very often think if they are able to do such a movement it is enough, but the inner and the outer actions must fill and fit each other. Therefore we have to imagine, to imagine so long and so fully that we really get this fire,

M. Chekhov

November 26, 1937

instead of just the idea of the fire. We have the objective which can be used to start this fire. Or concentration; if we are concentrated on the image we will get so much knowledge from it that we will get the fire. If we are really able to radiate we will get this flame. All these points are doors to the things which we need. If the doors are taken seriously, and you really make an effort to take the handle of the door and turn it and open it, you will get the full result of it. If you will use the Method you will get flame, you will get inspiration and form - you don't need to add anything to the Method. But you have to take it with your will, with your desire to get it. With exercise you will get as much as you are able to use.

ATMOSPHERE: Improvisation:

Repeat the toy improvisation - you must penetrate into the inner or psychological life of these beings. Imagine some strange figures, some characters, then look at them in your imagination. Penetrate into their characters, into their will. Take the problem deeper than you have done, through your imagination. The basis was on the ground of atmosphere. Why did I ask you to imagine the bedroom of a child? Each word is giving you the atmosphere, if you want to take it. Bed - that is something for the atmosphere. A room - not a park - a room. If we are able to really hear "A bedroom", it is something

M. Chekhov

November 26, 1937

quite different from the world around us. "Of a child," - again something different. "A small night light," because the child is afraid to sleep in the darkness. Each thing is giving the full atmosphere if you want to take it - this is the question of your will - whether you want to take the atmosphere or not. The toys begin to live and move in a strange, fantastic atmosphere - again another world for the atmosphere. "Nobody knows what happens in the night." - again something for the atmosphere. That means that in receiving the theme, even in its most simple form, you must be able to get the atmosphere out of the composition of two or three words or sentences; how the director speaks.

In our work yesterday we did not take the real atmosphere, we only thought that we had taken it. Again the illusion suggested the reality. You must take the atmosphere from all these suggestions. I appealed to your imagination to build a group of strange figures - the child places the toys before he goes to bed - not when he gets up in the morning. I appealed to your imagination which must penetrate not only into the group you must build, but into the complicated psychology of the child who puts the toys in a certain order. You have not done this in a proper way; you got only the illusion that you were doing it. It is so important to distinguish the real work and the illusion.

544
M. Chekhov

November 26, 1937

CONTACT:

Then I appealed to you to find the contact between the world around you, and with each person, and being led by this most beautiful thing - this feeling of contact - to build a group. You did not do this; you made a small attempt to contact someone - not the real opening of your heart. You will get an uncontrollable feeling if you really do it - you will never be able to confuse this real contact, and as-it-were contact. If you once experience contact you will never again be able to fool yourself. Yesterday you did "as if" contact - as in a dream.

There is one most important aspect in establishing contact - it is a mistake to try to order the other person when establishing contact. You invite the other person to enter your heart; you give him or her space; this is quite a different thing. It is a slight confusion to try to order instead of to invite. It is a mistake for one person to take up an arbitrary position - your positions must be reached through the feeling of contact, and must be flexible. This is what we are trying to develop, this ability to know when - this taste. This is what we are aiming at which is indescribable. It is only a question of the development of this feeling of contact.

Today's work was an attempt to approach things in accordance with the method. To investigate and experiment. Flexibility, that is the only rule. I want you to distinguish

M. Chekhov

November 26, 1937

between the real use of our Method and the illusion that you are using it. Therefore, we will continue with our improvisations.

Improvisation:

On the basis of contact, which means to open your heart and invite the others to enter. Mutual work, this must be the idea for establishing contact. Starting with this simple and very ideal point for finding the contact between you - our mutual work - you must all be psychologically aware of this. Keep this very idealistic psychological contact of doing a mutual task. Realize the difference between having a common task, and being without it. Do this psychological, even spiritual exercise of opening your heart and inviting the others to enter. You may be doing different things, and yet we are able to have a real spiritual contact with one another. This has nothing to do with the physical or soul life of the others, but it is a spiritual connection.

Now, on the basis of a real spiritual contact let us improvise a scene in a square where a juggler is performing his tricks. A big crowd is standing around - it consists of three groups. One group is taking everything as reality and is in ecstasy. Another group is just the opposite - it is quite skeptical. The third group is quite dull and stupid - they only accept the facts without any real conception of them.

M. Chekhov

November 26, 1937

The three groups, based on their individual characterizations, must find the words out of the situation - only words which are really necessary. You must develop the ability to experience words on the stage only as things which are necessary, and not words which are unimportant. We must get the impression that all three groups see the same thing, although the juggler will be only imaginary.

SIGNIFICANT SPEECH: Criticism:

Your words were much more significant than usual, but were not yet significant enough because you have confused two things - murmuring and speaking. You do not yet have the feeling for these two poles, and how to walk from one to another, so that each moment on this scale is something you want to perform. The task was to find the feeling for the significant speech on the stage. Both murmur and speech must be significant, or you may be silent because there is no necessity to speak. The contact was good but not quite free enough, therefore, you were bound to repeat the same things, without any different colors. To keep the contact and to perform the theme, these are two difficult things. When you are able to keep the contact super-consciously, then you will be able to find other colors. We must go through the period when your speech is too pedantic, your bodies too concentrated, etc., so don't be afraid of this phase - it is a very good sign that you are going on.

Let us take another exercise in which we will concen-

M. Chekhov

November 26, 1937

trate entirely on the kind of speech. The scene is a very dull meeting, and we will only sit down and speak. One group suggests to spend the money as soon as possible, and the other to hold on to the money as long as possible. You must have a psychological approach to the text. Don't think that the words written by Shakespeare are always significant on the stage. The better the words and the less well-spoken they are, the less significant they are. It depends upon the psychological basis on which the actor gives his words. The basis of the improvisation is the objective, and the meaning of the exercise is the significant speech.

Let us do an improvisation from a more individual point of view. Take the theme as deeply as possible. If you are given a character try to take it deeper - try to interpret the theme deeper. We have many things to overcome, and one of them is a slight touch of superficial approach to the themes we are working with. For instance, all the Hamlets I have seen have been more superficial than the usual understanding of this role. Even without studying this part every actor has a certain approach to it or to Macbeth. They are hanging in the air sufficiently for us to have some approach to them. We must be more careful about how deeply we take the themes. Today we will do a very complicated psychological theme. Follow it with your actor's activity and take it much more deeply than it is told to you.

M. Chekhov

November 26, 1937

OBJECTIVE: Improvisation:

The scene is a provincial town or village; a doctor lives there and serves the district, very honest and conscientious. There is no possibility of bringing another doctor into this remote village, but his wife is very dangerously ill, and he must be present and look after her for the whole night and day, until the crucial time passes. It is very, very late at night; the doctor is tired and worried because he understands the danger. He listens to his wife's breathing in the next room. Then he hears a carriage and someone knocks at the door. A man enters with a very white face, and begs the doctor to come to his dying wife. The doctor's fight is between his duty, and his need to be with his sick wife. The basis of the improvisation is the objective. The objective of the man is to get the doctor to follow him, while the doctor's objective is to remain there. On this scaffolding you must embroider everything; a very complicated and deep psychology. In the style of drama. Embroider psychological patterns.

Criticism:

As teachers, directors, and students we must learn to draw certain conclusions. The scene could have been taken much deeper than it was - this was the condition. If you imagine the situation, you can see that there are so many possibilities to show good and bad human sides, when the question of two human lives are clashing together. Many colors can be used by

M. Chekhov

November 26, 1937

trying to persuade and by trying to remain. Human drama on the stage must always have a quality of warmth. This is the level of the human heart, which is nothing other than the warmest part of the human being. It is a great mistake to think that drama can be performed or imagined without warmth. In this sense Terrence was too cold. In tragedy you have a fiery furnace on one side, and a piece of ice on the other. But drama is warm, almost flaming, and almost frozen. Drama is a thing which lives in the human heart, which is warm. This is the level of this style.

STYLE:

Let us exercise style in the following way: one group will express hatred and the other group horror.

Criticism:

You must understand that to act a tragedy or a comedy does not mean only to speak or move in a different style, but to feel your body in a different way. The body must be quite different; it must be saturated with many different kinds of activity.

Let us take the scene from The Deluge and work especially for speech. You must have tremendous activity and gesture for a small quiet voice. Never allow your lazy nature to overcome your active nature. That is what I mean by taking the problem deeper.

5241
M. Chekhov

November 26, 1937

Criticism:

In general you are too reserved, but you must distinguish between being reserved, and being without anything. Sometimes it may seem that you are "as if" reserved, but if you ask yourself what is under it perhaps there will not be too much. We must try to open some things in our souls which may be strange to ourselves, but we must try to do this, otherwise we will never show any original things. Everyone on the stage today is so reserved, therefore we are so bored.