

Michael Chekhov

November 1, 1937

ATMOSPHERE  
CONTACT  
OBJECTIVE  
AESTHETIC CONSCIENCE

ATMOSPHERE: Old Students:

Improvisation on Twelfth Night. On the basis of atmosphere, repeat the Tobey Belch scene. Merry England is the atmosphere of the scene. The task is a very difficult one, and that you have not stopped is a very good sign. Secondly, when you were in such difficult conditions you were not lying too much - often very little. This is another good sign, and it gives me so much happiness. And third, the ability to make a cressendo from one atmosphere to another, and to find all the links leading from one atmosphere to the other. When we have this we will be actors of the first class.

We must not require of ourselves to do such an absolutely rhythmical thing yet. It will be the result of our education as actors over many years. But this is the ideal, although it is not so easy to get. We have certain means in our Method which must help us, and we as students will now try to work with great patience to improve, step by step.

CONTACT: Criticism:

What you were lacking in this scene: you were very inattentive to one another. You were sitting in your tower alone, and there was no real contact between you. You must not think that the ideal must be reached at once, that will only

2881  
M. Chekhov

November 1, 1937

depress you, but you must reach a certain height in the correct way. Try to use your ability to concentrate, and establish the real human contact among you. The task is the same from the quiet atmosphere to the unbridled one. You have not taken suggestions from one another, because of the lack of contact and the lack of confidence in yourselves. Everyone gave suggestions, but you have lost so many of them because of your lack of contact. To have contact means to be able to give and take suggestions - it does not depend on the theme but on the inner construction of the actor's soul.

OBJECTIVE:

Continue the exercise but add an objective - to enlarge your own being, and to attract the attention of everybody. If you could have two things intuitively, it would be a great benefit for you: 1. The feeling of ease. 2. Aesthetic conscience. This would add very much to your work. All our things are flexible and applicable to every style. Not only tragedy and comedy, but everything in our Method appeals to the actor's nature, not to this or that play. We must adjust the Method so completely that it will change our natures, then everything we do will be easy, concentrated, significant, etc.

AESTHETIC CONSCIENCE:

Begin the scene again with the feeling of ease and aesthetic conscience. If you do not have these two things you

M. Chekhov

November 1, 1937

will always make the mistake of exaggeration, because you feel you have to do something. Never allow chaos - check suggestions and develop them and then drop them. The feeling of form will help you here. If you have an objective, it saves you from this dreadful thing which is to show "as if" you have certain feelings. That is why we have our own technique to get the feelings, and let them pass through us. It does not mean that you must laugh or smile or pretend. No, the objective is given to expand your being, to do everything so that it will give pleasure to others.

It is wrong to do things in the hope that others will laugh - that is death for the audience, for you and for your partners. It is better for it not to succeed. Give your actor's nature the possibility to get the result, not to assume that it is already there. For instance, you may do some stupid thing and nobody laughs. Why? Because sometimes one's partners feel that they must express this thing to be gay? Not at all. You must only be attentive and patient enough because your objective is to get the pleasure. If you will really concentrate on getting the pleasure, then you will get it but you must have time - don't hurry with this. If we have an objective we must rely on it entirely, in tragedy, comedy and every kind of performance. Let it be dull, but don't try to exaggerate.