

Michael Chekhov

October 5, 1938

TRANSFORM DIRECTOR'S
SUGGESTION INTO ACTOR'S DESIRE

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In the first lesson I gave you a new approach to our work, and I wish to go on with this. I will give you a theme, but this time I will give you the ground with the condition that you will try to find this new psychology that you want to find the ground, and that you will ask the ground what it can give you. Try to fight the feeling that you must get the ground and that the director will require results from you. The theme and the scheme of the scene will be a meeting scene - the Meeting Scene in Mr. Shdanoff's play, and the ground will be atmosphere.

Now take another ground; take it as if you want it; take it at once so that it becomes yours at once. We want to follow all the suggestions which will arise in our souls while we are doing this scene. What is true for this moment? What suggestions can we get out of these surroundings? If someone speaks, try to follow emotionally as it were. If you feel that you must move or speak this is acting, but do not follow the impulse from your brain. Follow the events as they are. Don't think we are repeating the scene; we are never repeating if we are following the sounds and the atmosphere; we are always doing something new, and this you must take as your ground. Follow truthfully your inner desire to react to everything, and act. This is the ground you have

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because you want it; you have taken the suggestion as though it were your own. If you can realize that the soul and the spirit - these two un-modern things - are the whole secret of our art. Sometimes when you try to hear nothing happens, but it really is simple.

Let us take a scene from Don Quixote. First of all we are following the suggestions of the director so strongly, so openly that they become our desire. Transform my words into your desire. The basis is the psychological gesture; the gesture is one of heaviness, slowness, down into stupidity and dullness. Then at the opposite point, the gesture at the end when they are mocking Don Quixote, the gesture ends in a sort of stiff stupidity, with the arms raised wide above the head.

This ability to transform the director's suggestions into your own desire is the only way for an actor to approach the reading of the play for the first time, or the listening to a new play. The actor must listen so that he becomes the play, the part, the audience, everything. The play really becomes him.