

Michael Chekhov

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CRITICISM OF OPEN CLASS
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS
FIRST APPROACH TO THE PLAY

CRITICISM OF OPEN CLASS:

The weak point was Lower Depths. In general what was wrong? Sam was a very characteristic case - he knew absolutely everything he was doing, but he was entirely empty. He went along the way he has elaborated and studied - he relied upon all the means of expression which are superficial. He strengthened the voice instead of strengthening the soul. Instead of strengthening the psychological gesture, he did it with his voice. That was his half-conscious trick.

Instead of going deeper into ourselves, instead of making a real effort, we sometimes take our voice, our eyes, our shoulders, or hands and think we can produce just the same effect. Sam has tried to belie himself and the audience. Never. Perhaps you will belie part of the audience which are not specialists. Better to make the effort to take your own soul in your hands. This was Sam's mistake, and the result was that in the first part you could go on, but when you came to the second part, "I feel kindly," you usually get quite a distinct tempo because you touch your soul, but yesterday it was just like a mechanism. Tempo does not lie in your body, or your voice; it lies in your soul. But as you were not awakened you have missed this moment. You will see how important it is to act with the psychology of the soul.

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Blair's mistake in the second scene was with his temperament. You have qualities and ability and temperament, but you obey them instead of governing them. You like a certain feeling, and you follow it and fall into a pitfall. You felt you wanted to increase something, but instead of following the lines you fell into hysterical things. If you want to increase something on the stage, you must do it with the means which you have got for it. You can increase it by the means which you were given, and then you will not slip into pitfalls. You must know that if the form is there, keep it, and work within it.

All the forms we are given in the Method are flexible, not binding. It is the way to freedom. Don't confuse the real freedom within the form given, with the false freedom of doing something different. Instead of following the lines you have changed the way, and have fallen into a pitfall. This is a psychological thing, but with you it was hysterical and this was wrong. When you are acting hysterics, you will never be hysterical. Blair showed his own personal hysterics.

Erika - it was very bad. Bad because you have lost a little bit from everything. You have had imagination, and you lost a bit of it - you had form and you have lost a bit of it - your pounds became shillings. You lost a bit from everything. You must not allow this thing - you must train yourself to be as much aware as possible. Don't allow yourself

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to drop one shilling out of the pound. Always one hundred percent. This, of course, is for everyone, and for the group as a whole. When you cannot produce atmosphere, you are giving me shillings instead of pounds. You must not allow yourselves to do this thing. Everything was right, everything was there, but not enough. Erika, as an experienced actress, you must know how much you lose when you do not greet your audience with a full heart. You will lose everything. Each moment that you do not include your audience you lose as an actress. This is the criticism in general. The school work does not allow us to drop it without correction.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

Sam: We are not always conscious of these things, and we are satisfied. It was not good, but we felt more satisfied than last time. What is it that fails us?

Answer: It is always like that - all actors suffer under this thing. When we are doing nothing, then we feel marvelous. We are simply there and "at home," and we show this homeliness to the audience without artistic fire. We are satisfied because we are sitting "at home," as it were.

Alan: When I really try, and I feel it has fire and everything, it is sometimes empty.

Answer: There are four points. It is one thing to be on the stage as if "at home" by doing nothing, and another to be on the

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stage and to be with this fire and not to work before the audience, this is good. To work before the audience without fire, this is bad, but to work before the audience with fire, this is good. One thing we must be conscious of, and that is how to help ourselves when we feel we are wrong. Only experience will do this for us. Of course, we will always make mistakes.

When I started acting on the stage, I was making these same mistakes, but when I got an interest for certain questions in the theatre, I understood that these mistakes could be understood if the actor somehow has a real interest in his profession. These certain things will come to you, and you will know why you like your performance or you don't. Experience with certain conscious attention. We must be conscious only of the Method. After a certain experience, when we know we are wrong then take something like the objective, or radiation, or contact - whatever will help - everything will help. But to leave oneself without help, feeling that something is going wrong, or to surmise that something is wrong, to leave yourself without the help of the Method, this is wrong. It could even be temperament instead of fire - the juggler's psychology.

Blair: I felt outside myself and quite free. It was something I have been trying to get.

Answer: It is very possible that it is right because some

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moments were very good. So you may be right by following this outside thing. All your remarks make me very happy because it is the beginning of conscious work. Sam was very clever yesterday and very stupid, and Blair was stupid in a good sense.

Jeanne: When you tell us to take the atmosphere, and we try to imagine the air filled with the atmosphere, sometimes there is none.

Answer: Thinking and imagining are different things. If you will practice and really do this work, then you will not be troubled by questions.

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FIRST APPROACH TO THE PLAY:

Catherine, as a beginner, try to use the Method as much as you can. Try to find the need, the necessity for the Method in your work. Don't just wait for the teacher to give you help and assistance, but try to find the urge in yourself. When working on a scene for the first time in our method, try to find the psychological spine of the ideas - not through your brain, that is easy - but through your whole being, and by means of your imagination.

Try to see the character, the situation, the other characters, the whole scene, and see yourself acting it. Find the main nerve, or will, or line that leads your character.

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creates in it the desire to speak such words in such a way. Try to find this main thing which you will find intuitively and through your imagination - never through your brain.

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Psychological Gesture:

Take different positions and "listen" to the experience you have in these different positions. Don't decide to express anything but take a position and try to live into it. Certain feelings are awakened because of these positions if you will "listen" to them.

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Criticism of Rehearsal of The Possessed:

We must learn how to combine things, otherwise we will always stand on the same spot. If you are given the rhythmical gesture, for instance, it does not mean that it annihilates what has been given before. You must take a new suggestion and combine it with the old.