

Michael Chekhov

February 6, 1939

ATMOSPHERE
"WHAT" AND "HOW"

ATMOSPHERE:

We try to understand certain principles of our art by separating them. For instance, we are exercising the imagination this time - next time it will be the atmosphere or the objective and so on. But this is only in order to teach you, to initiate you. These principles must not be separated. Sometimes when you concentrate on the atmosphere, you eliminate the objective and the gesture. This is wrong. You must make the effort to keep all these things together. If, for instance, you have got a gesture, keep it forever. Whatever the director will suggest to you, it does not mean that you must throw away other things. You have to accumulate all these things; that is part of our profession. Only the director can tell you when to discard things. The psychology of the spectator is that of a conductor.

Looking at the performance means acting at the same time. If the actor is a real one, he will never be bored because he has always to do something; he is always acting. When we are looking at the performance we are actually acting. When you realize this, you will find beauty in every rehearsal, every performance.

"WHAT" AND "HOW":

The Fishing Scene:

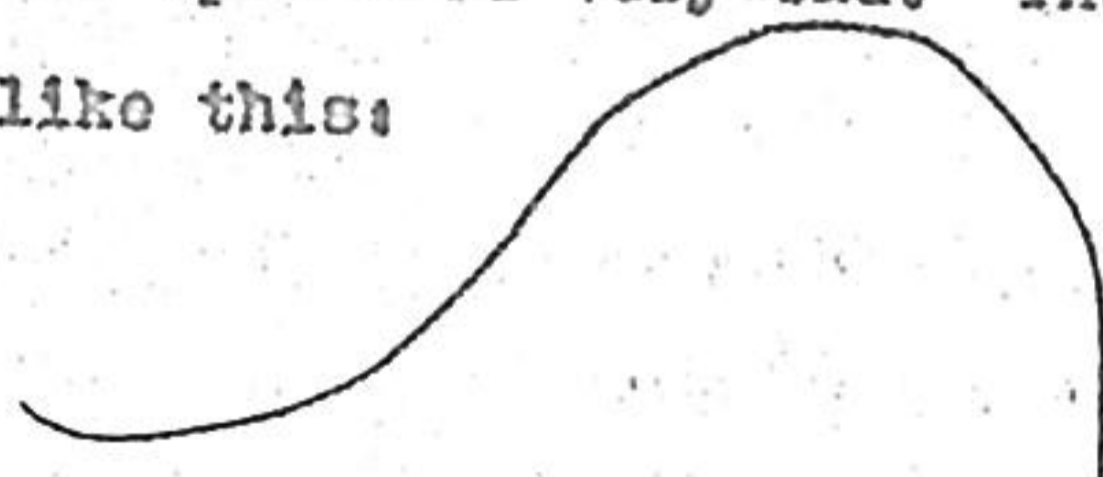
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Some of the things you have done today were too obvious. Instead of showing the real psychology, you were content with the scheme, the dead scheme. The "what" is not art...the "how" is. Suppose you are climbing up the rock. Ask yourself "how," and your psychology will respond to the question. Then you will see that it is much more complicated than what you have shown today, because you have only done "what." Immediately the question of "how" is put before the imagination, the whole story begins to live. "How" are you waiting - "how" are you striving, "how" are you crying. Everything can be asked "how," from the make-up and the costumes to the deepest depth of our psychology. The danger is that everything must be regarded from two points of view - "what" and "how."

Lower Depths: Criticism of scenes:

The speech is very bad. The pattern of the scene should go like this:



In free acting, try to keep everything you have done, and then be led by your creative instinct. Everyone must listen with his musical ear. This cannot be written, it must be felt by the actors, and we are the only ones who can do it. Our art lies in the ability to create these intangible and tangible things. Otherwise we are only speakers of lines.

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Noon - Summer

Dawn - Spring

Twilight - Fall

The second part is romantic - noon. The hot poetry of summer. Everything is hot and like the grass in summer. The first part is cold, gray, death, the second warmth of human soul, and the last is the glimpse of sardonic humor - playing the fool.