

Michael Chekhov

March 12, 1937

THE THRESHOLD
FEELING OF THE WHOLE
ENSEMBLE
QUALITIES

As a result of our experience during the performance of March 8th, we must do our exercises with much more energy. We must also start some new exercises which will be a mixture of some exercises which I have done before, and some new exercises. We must remember that without technique there is no art.

THE THRESHOLD:

Before you enter the stage you must do something in your consciousness - you must enter the stage with the gesture of opening your heart, your soul, your mind, and taking into yourself not only the whole stage - which is the world in which you will live and work - but all your partners as well. Without this open heart we will never be able to create the troupe, the group, which we are aiming at.

This is the first thing you must assume as part of technique. If you are a religious person and you are entering a church, you will never do so without some inner gesture for the threshold. We must have such a gesture for the theatre, and we must have this gesture absolutely instinctively, as if entering the room of a sleeping child.

FEELING OF THE WHOLE - ENSEMBLE:

Make a small stage, be absolutely free, and then

M. Chekhov

March 12, 1937

consciously prepare yourself for entering the world of the theatre, without any sentiment, but in a businesslike, professional way. To love your profession, and to love your partners does not mean to be sentimental- you must do something for your profession, some business, it is as simple as that.

In a businesslike way try to approach the stage and open your heart - try to be free - do not be contracted. By your heart we mean the whole being. The more you are open, the more you are free. Take your partner's hand - to take is part of your business. Be absolutely free in your body, your mind and your heart, and open more and more. The beauty of this opening of the soul is that we are not frozen by this. It is usual to contract when one is trying to be open, but this is not right - we must be open and free at the same time. By being open to your partner, you must respond to each visible and invisible movement. You must really vibrate in accordance with your partner - like a membrane.

Give your partner a handkerchief and your partner must take it with great sensitivity. Your partner is more important than you are yourself. Fight with any contraction in yourself - open yourself wider and wider, without any limit. The action must be a whole one. Now say the word, "Handkerchief." In this room, which is the whole world, two beings who are the whole group, and the action which is the whole one. Then you will find the beauty of being absolutely and completely in everything.

If you are giving your partner a word, it is only the half of the word - your partner must complete it. Never think that on the stage you have to speak, but rather we have to speak. By this feeling that we have to speak, you will get such effects that it will be like a symphony, because we are speaking. If you have to speak a soliloquy on the stage, everyone must be with you wherever they are in the theatre. How shall the group speak the soliloquy through one person? Because we are with him, and he will know and feel it. We are one whole group, one family. When the whole is really there, there is nothing more beautiful in the world - the whole performance, the whole scene, the whole dialogue, the whole mood, etc.

Now someone else comes into the world of the two, and you must open your heart and include him in the work. The rest of the group must be with the performance - from the beginning to the end we are responsible for each thing. Like music, like harmony, you must take this third person into your world. Then a fourth person will come on the stage suddenly. Prepare for his coming and take him in with the same skillfulness that you have taken the third person's entrance. Then widen the space and fill it. Then ask a question and get an answer - the answer must grow out of the question, not independently. The dialogue must be one whole, one flower.

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Then take other objects and give them to each other, being aware of the quality of the object. Speak the word in the quality of the object, for instance, heavy, light, cold,

Take the quality and transform it into the movement, the word - you must do this by the feeling of the whole space, the whole group, the whole action.

When you are tired from this work you must make an effort and you will reach another level, and on this other level are beautiful things.

Now let everyone join the group on the stage and pass various objects from one to the other, increasing the tempo with a feeling of ensemble, reaching a climax and then slowing down through the feeling of ensemble. Then for one moment realize the whole - one stage, one family, one group, one dialogue - the whole. The space on the stage is our real world - it is invisible, but it is here. Now do the actor's march with this feeling of the ensemble, the whole.