

Michael Chekhov

July 10, 1940

LESSONS FOR BEGINNERS

CONCENTRATION
THE OBJECTIVE
CONTACT - GROUP FEELING
INCORPORATION
THE ACTOR'S TASK
ENSEMBLE FEELING

The Method will help you to cherish your talent and to keep it young. The imagination helps you to this youth - the intellect leads you away from it.

The body is the instrument for conveying the inner life of the actor. 1. Exercise by approaching one another with outstretched hands, with the quality of sympathy. Do this many times realizing that you are using your body as a means of conveying your feelings. 2. Point to some object and say, "There," realizing that you are using your body to convey something, some feeling.

CONCENTRATION:

This is really the process of collecting all our powers and directing them towards one given thing - it is the ability of grasping and holding the given thing. It gives these abilities: 1. It collects and directs one to a given object. 2. It gives real depth of understanding of the object, more than the intellect can give - it will discover things for you. 3. It gives new life constantly and prevents clichés.

M. Chekhov

July 10, 1940

THE OBJECTIVE:

A certain creative power must be in your whole being while you are on the stage. You must be alive in all parts of your being. By exercising the objective you will get this in a very special way. In taking the objective you must experience the sense that the whole being wants to fulfill the objective. Don't be satisfied by understanding the objective - the whole being must become a different one because of the objective which fills the whole body.

Exercise:

Take the simple objective to cross the room and open the door.

CONTACT - GROUP FEELING:

It is essential on the stage to be open to your partner - not egotistical. This is a power which must be developed, this ability to include others in our being. Just as you can open your physical arms to each other, so you can open your psychological arms. This exercise must not be done "in general" - it must be directed to some individual being or beings but must not be done in general. It is tempting to do so, but it is an illusion. Also, you must be aware not to do it sentimentally - it must be very concrete. Even a group must consist of individuals for you. This will develop a sensitiveness for each other.

M. Chekhov

July 10, 1940

Exercise:

1. One person will ask another person what time it is. The other person must listen to the way in which the question is asked and must reply in harmony with the question. It must not be indifferently answered. You must catch this fine music.

2. One person enters the room and says, "Hello" in a certain way to another person sitting in the room, who must react to the suggestion of your partner.

3. Now a musical phrase - you must listen to it and try to form a group which will be most expressive of the music. Listen to the music with your whole being until you feel that your body is doing what the music suggests. We must acquire the ability to move absolutely fully with as wide movements as we are capable of - broad, wide movements.

INCORPORATION:

We create our characters in our imagination. In our psychology. Then we use our bodies and voices to serve this psychological creation. This is the basic idea of our studio. It must be understood and meditated upon, then it will bring results. This is our understanding of the actor's profession. We shall try first to imagine and then to incorporate.

Exercise:

Imagine a Greek woman who looks into the distance

M. Chekhov

July 10, 1940

and sees something which frightens her. She utters a cry and falls to the ground. First look at your image in your imagination. Create it. Elaborate it. Take account of what you have done and try to discover how close you have come to your imagination or how far you were from it. How far can your body and voice fulfill your creative spirit?

Now repeat the exercise, imagining it again, but this time in a much quicker tempo and incorporate it almost immediately. Try to discover what the difficulties are in doing it in a quicker tempo. Now add to this incorporation the feeling of ease so that your voice and body will not be tense, but will be light and easy. Spiritual activity and bodily abilities and feeling of ease - all these must be very clear in your incorporation - then we will become artists.

Let us imagine a scene in a generally stately atmosphere but one in which depression occurs and at the end there is a very tense moment just before a catastrophe. It is the moment when Lear speaks to Cordelia, and she replies, "Nothing, my lord."

1. Generally stately atmosphere
2. Depression grows
3. Catastrophe

There are three steps in such an exercise: 1. To imagine freely, 2. To begin to incorporate. From the first

218
M. Chekhov

July 10, 1940

attempt to adjust what is seen in the various individual's imagination - accept them as additions and on the basis of these additions, imagine again; 3. One of the participants can direct the scene as he sees it in his imagination.

THE ACTOR'S TASK;

You must be able to merge two worlds - the visible and outer world of our bodies, and the invisible world of creative, imaginative fantasy. These two worlds must be merged, therefore, there must be something there to merge. Our task as artists is to revive things which can accept and receive the life. The present culture in the theatre is so dead - it is at the lowest point of degeneration of all that has been in the past in the theatre. Things which are leading to new, increased fiery life will shock the audience and the critics. But we must go through this if we are brave enough.

Modern actors, directors, audiences, and critics will judge us not from the point of view of our ideals, for which they will have no interest, but they will judge us on the present state of the theatre - through death. It is not the theatre they will see. We are not the theatre from their point of view, but in time we shall show them what we mean by our theatre. Give us time and be patient; let us develop and be born. Like a birth which is so terrible and unaesthetic and shocking - this process of bearing the child - but when we have the child, it is something which gives sense to it all.

M. Chokhov

July 10, 1940

So we are coming - we are approaching - it is the mother's first cry. The audience and the spectators have grown accustomed to corpses, nice corpses. Today is the beginning of something very great, if not, it will die out because of its difficulties.

ENSEMBLE FEELING:

Exercise:

Try to find one another - without sentimentality. Be open to each other. Be sensitive to each other. Try to guess what is going on in each other's souls. This openness leads us to the greatest sensitiveness. Try to guess the inner and outer life. If someone moves, take it into your consideration. On the basis of this increased sensitiveness we will be able to create together...not stars and serfs and slaves. There is only one star - the performance itself.

To get to this standard we must be sensitive to each other and create together. This is the seed for a democratic theatre - sensitiveness to each other. Very strong individuals - very strong "I Am" personalities, but each so strong that they do not need to hurt each other. If I am weak, I hurt everyone to defend my weakness. This is true of the theatre.

If you have developed yourself strongly as an individual, you will never hurt your partners. You will be able to

M. Chokhov

July 10, 1940

collaborate with your partners, and you will never feel that your partner does not give you the opportunity to speak your words. If we are democratic in our theatre, we will see that it is through collaboration. We are consciously pedantic in our work. Exercises must be considered as something which must be elaborated very carefully. This slow business is necessary and inevitable during the exercises.