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MICHAEL CHEKHOV'S SEVENTH CLASS FOR PROFESSIONAL ACTORS

"FEELING OF THE WHOLE"

SETTINGS - MISE EN SCÈNE
FEELING OF THE WHOLE
PREPARATION AND SUSTAINING
ENSEMBLE OR CONTACT
OUTER AND INNER LEVELS OF ACTING

If the actor will read the script in his imagination often enough, he will come to the rehearsal with many new things. Now let us read the text of our scene out loud. While reading the text, rely upon the atmosphere, and imagine how you would act, but don't actually do it. The first atmosphere is chaotic and wild without any reason.

SETTINGS - MISE EN SCÈNE:

The setting for the play very often remains absolutely abstract to the actors, because of the mistaken idea that our profession is somehow one of floundering. It is a very pleasant thing to know the setting as well as one knows one's own room. Therefore, we have to become familiar with the setting by, first of all, putting some questions to ourselves. Where are the lights, for instance? You must have in mind the atmosphere when you decide such things. We must develop a sense for these things. It is not just the same thing wherever the lights are. Again, when the director fixes the mise en scène, it is only good when the actors are free to improvise while the director is giving certain mise en scène.

M. Chekhov

November 28, 1941

Try to understand how our scene can look: 1. Chaotic. 2. Unified by the song. 3. Intimate.

Now take the first cues. Those who speak the lines are already on stage and the others are coming on. Those on stage must speak so that everyone will hear, and the task of the others is to speak as if in chaos, but so as not to distract from the others. All the characters who are not speaking are moving around in a restless way.

To recapitulate the first steps toward producing the play: 1. The setting must be well-known to the actor in every way. 2. Find first the main atmospheres - in the imagination, and then by concrete improvising under the suggestions of the director. When the first atmospheres are there, with the special *mise en scène*, then it is the basis on which the director can direct, and the actors can act with mutual understanding. Then the director will not be a despot, and the actors his slaves. The actors will understand the director's slightest suggestion, because it will come out of this understanding.

FEELING OF THE WHOLE:

I have said that there are four qualities which the actor must have as continuous abilities. One is the feeling of ease, another the feeling of form, and the third one we may call the feeling of the whole. The actor must have this ability to grasp the play as a whole, and inside are little

M. Chekhov

November 28, 1941

"wholes". If there is a word which is of special significance, the actor has to have the ability to grasp this word as one whole thing.

This special ability to grasp things in time and space as one whole thing, is important from many points of view. First, if this ability is developed, the actor will not be lost among the many details, but they will become organic parts of the whole. We often see actors who are able to act so that there is a marvelous series of details, but it is still not pleasant to look at because the actor has not the ability to grasp the whole thing, inside of which will be elaborated the "embroidery".

This feeling of the whole, which is a very pleasant one, can be developed slowly by very simple means. Let us do again the movement of lifting your arms and hands up and down, with the aim of experiencing this simple thing as one whole complete thing. It is a purely psychological thing. A psychological thing with which you can grasp everything. This beautiful feeling of "one" thing must be awakened. If you will awaken this feeling, you will even dream about "one" - it is so complete and beautiful!

Now do the exercise twice with your arms, then next to it once and then pause, and then bring the arms down and make it one whole thing. Whatever may be the complicated tasks or business between partners, if you have this feeling

M. Chekhov

November 28, 1941

of the whole it will suggest the most correct timing. It is the best inspiration for many things - rhythm, timing, meaning - all will become clear.

PREPARATION AND SUSTAINING:

Exercise:

Sit down, get up, change your place and then sit down again, and experience it as a whole. You will meet many disturbing things, but try to overcome them with this feeling of the "one" thing.

Exercise:

Ask your partner what time it is; the partner gives the answer, but both must have the feeling of the whole.

Now you will see that this feeling of the whole is impossible without preparation and sustaining, and it becomes so pleasant for us and for the audience. These inner things which we cannot show but can experience, that is what the audience wants and needs.

Now repeat the exercise of asking someone for the time, but both must experience the preparation and sustaining together. This is a fine mutual business. Now experience two different things as two waves, but still one thing. First the preparation, then ask the question, "What time is it?", then sustain. Then begin another wave by saying, "Let's go,", then go and sustain. All one thing.

M. Chekhov

November 28, 1941

ENSEMBLE OR CONTACT:

We use the feeling of the whole mostly with our partners on the stage, so it requires a very fine mutual understanding and sensitiveness to our partners. There are other exercises which prepare us for this fine ensemble feeling, or contact.

Exercise:

Sit in a circle so that you can see each other. In order to be sensitive to one another, it is not enough just to see or hear the other person. We must have another imaginary organ, and we must awaken it in ourselves. In this exercise we must all get up at the same time, without any agreement having been made among us.

OUTER AND INNER LEVELS OF ACTING:

Listen and look at each other, and rely upon this third thing which is this highly developed sensitiveness. This is the thing which we are actually acting with, not only with our hands and voices, but with something more. This is one of the things which we have to develop. The world becomes bigger for us, and there are many new levels of acting, and the audience will be spellbound if there are at least two levels - one physical and outer and this other inner thing which we have just experienced.