

Michael Chekhov

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HISTORY  
FEELING OF TRUTH AND JUSTIFICATION  
THE ACTOR'S BODY

Goethe .

## HISTORY:

Many of our guests will ask why we left England and came here. The reason was that when the Crisis came, the government of England informed Dartington Hall that in the case of an emergency, all our school buildings, the theatre and workshops would be immediately taken from us and used for their purposes. Therefore, we would have had no place in which to live and work. Secondly, when we got this message from the government, we realized that the majority of our students were Americans, and from this we got the idea of coming to America, to go on with our work. We could not find any reason why we should stop, but wanted to go on.

## FEELING OF TRUTH AND JUSTIFICATION:

Concentrate again on these two things. In each of us is burning two flames, justification and feeling and desire for truth. Not naturalistic truth, but truth in every fantasy. When you create a prodigious dragon, it is not naturalistic, but it can be truthful. The feeling of truth is not a feeling of stiff, natural things. Reality and naturalism are two different things. For me, an angel is absolutely real, but it is not natural because an angel is a supernatural being. My creative world has reality. Everything can be truthful, whether

M. Chekhov

February 18, 1939

It is natural or fantasy. Goethe, in speaking of the exact imagination, says that the imagination is just as exact as a scientific statement. The imagination and fantasy can and must be exact.

The other flame which is burning in us, is the ability to justify everything. The chair or the table don't need to be justified because they are there, but creative things, such as dragons, have to be justified because the snake of lies can live there in this world of fantasy and imagination very easily. The snake of this lying business can come into our imagination, and produce things which are wrong because they are not justified.

To justify everything which is above and beyond tables and chairs, is one ability - a flame, as it were, burning in our creative soul - and the second thing is to develop the feeling of truth. The feeling of truth will urge you to justify things. Things which are justified will always awaken your feeling of truth. They are wonderfully connected - if one flame burns, the other does too. An unjustified thing cannot be truthful, and a thing which is full of lies is not justifiable. We can speak philosophically about what it means to have a feeling of truth, and how we can justify from this or that point of view, but this would be a wrong approach.

We are appealing to our creative instinct to give us this feeling of truth and the ability to justify. If you will

M. Chokhov

February 18, 1939

knock at the door of your creative spirit, and persistently ask it to give you this feeling of truth and ability to justify, then you will get these two answers - these two flames will begin to burn. You will ignite these two flames, without this intellectual thing which can only analyse all your creative efforts.

It must be a deed, and act of will - justification - not just a concept. The feeling of truth must be a fact, not a concept. The same with group feelings a fact

We will approach the same problem of feeling of truth and justification from another angle. We want our authors to develop this flexibility. After the author has seen the sketch performed, he must be able to re-write because he has got new ideas, and the actors will re-act the new text. We will get better and better scenes, if the writer tries to grope in the still dark world of the sketch. Where is the climax, for instance? It is right for this scene to climb up to this high point taking so long to do it, or should it be shorter, etc., etc. Or the anti-climax should be reached in another way perhaps. The author must get the gesture of the whole picture - this is an invisible gesture - this gesture must be true and justified.

#### THE ACTOR'S BODY:

We have a great enemy for these two marvelous flames in our physical body. The body can be beautiful when it is

M. Chekhov

February 18, 1939

developed, but when it is not, it can show lies and dreadful things. So we have to fight all these bodily difficulties. You can see actors in Russia whose feelings are vivid and alive, but when they begin to act sometimes the audience is cold and untouched by this volcano of feelings. There seems to be a contradiction. Sometimes the bodies are so full of lies and different difficulties and unsound things, that the audience will not get the actor's feelings because the body is between his feelings and the audience, like a stone wall.

The actor cannot be on the stage without having a well-developed body which will convey - not stop - his feelings to the audience. So, to develop our feelings, will, and imagination is one thing, and to develop our body so that it will not preclude the actor's spiritual action to the audience, is another.

Sometimes the actor can have such a trained and developed body that, although he may be dead inside, his body is persuasive. Both extremes are wrong, and we are aiming to get the inner life as strongly developed and the body as well cultivated as possible. One of the things which disturbs the actor is the unnecessary tension of the muscles. Our muscles are always playing certain things inside us, and there is such a chaos which we cannot actually grasp with our conscious mind. This thing is stronger than it should be if the artist uses his body as his instrument. For the ordinary person it may not matter, but for the actor it is another thing. We must

M. Chokhov

February 18, 1939 .

get control of our bodies in as subtle a way as possible. Not only the primitive thing of relaxing our muscles, but by changing the inner chaos and rhythm - this must be done subconsciously in a more subtle way, for example, wrestling without muscles, but add to it and understand it now not only as freeing our muscles, but the educating of all our muscles and body.

The body must help the audience to get all the actor's ideas. It must be able to convey the actor's feelings to the audience.