

Michael Chekhov

July 18, 1939

THE ACTOR'S MEANS OF EXPRESSION - HIS CENTRALIZED BEING
 CONCENTRATION - "I AM"
 IMAGINATION
 AWARENESS
 INCORPORATION
 FEELING OF BEAUTY - AESTHETIC CONSCIOUSNESS
 FEELING OF THE WHOLE

Sometimes we are inclined to "fly over the Method," so will you please take all suggestions which I will give, and which you already know, as if they were new things. Try to take them freshly.

THE ACTOR'S MEANS OF EXPRESSION;- HIS CENTRALIZED BEING

As actors, we have to appear before our audience showing our bodies, our voices, and our emotions, so we have to be conscious of all the means of expression we have. It is not enough for the actor simply to have a body, and a voice, and emotions - this feeling of having the body, the voice, and the emotions must be somehow increased. We must be aware of being such kind of beings which have body, and voice, and emotions. We have to be aware in such a way that we feel our body much stronger. We have to feel that we have our voice in a much stronger way - I do not mean to have a strong voice, but that "I have a voice," "I have a body," "I have emotions," and if we are aware of having these means of expression, the means of expression will be stronger than usual.

This is a very important point in our Method: To be aware of ourselves as instruments conveying, through our bodies, all our inner life. If you will sometimes stop your

M. Chekhov

July 18, 1939

"usual life" and say, "Now I concentrate on the ideal, on the feeling that I have my body." Simply try to be aware that you have your body, and it is your instrument with which you have to appear before the audience on the stage.

From inside, accept your own being, your own body, and you will see immediately how it will become stronger and stronger. I do not mean that it will become tense, but psychologically your body will become stronger. That is what we are aiming at. Then when you are aware of your body in general, you can go on by saying to yourself, "My body is a definite form, not only the body in general, but it is a certain form."

Exercise:

Will you please walk with your consciousness inside of your body, and try to realize that you have a head which is a round form, and this head is beautifully situated on the neck; and then your shoulders; and you have your chest and your torso, and your legs and feet, your arms and hands, and each part of our body has its own beauty, its own mission. With your legs and feet you can express on the stage certain things; with your torso you can express another thing, and with your arms and hands you can express still another thing, and with your head - how the head is situated - how you can turn the head and look to the right and left and up and down. All these things are means of expression.

Then will you please realize that in your chest some-

2072
M. Chekhov

8146
July 18, 1939

where there is a center from which you can imagine your arms extending, and even your legs, so that you get the feeling gradually that you have your own body, your own form, centralized in this point in your chest. This feeling of being centralized there will give you certain power over your own body. This one feeling that we are centralized for ourselves in our chest will give us the power to manage the body, to move it as we like, and we will never be "lost." If you have this center in your chest, you will always be able to keep the whole organism together in a harmonious, powerful, psychological conception.

Exercise

Will you please walk quietly trying to be aware of your bodies and being led by your center which you have in your chests. Try during this walking to appreciate this marvelous feeling that you have your own being centralized in your chest, and from this point in your chest you have the power and the ability to move all your limbs and the whole body in a harmonious way.

This feeling of harmony in our bodies will be increased if we do this simple exercise in conjunction with music. Will you please walk or march so that this rhythm will increase the harmony in our own body. Even try to imagine that the music comes from the same center in your chests - it is your

M. Chekhov

July 18, 1939

music - you are producing this rhythmical sound. Always be aware of the harmony of your own body, which you can create by making the simple effort to concentrate on this point in your chest - keep this feeling, and if you feel that your body tries to become stiff, free it immediately.

CONCENTRATION - "I AM":

In just the same way as we try to get the idea of the harmony of our whole being, we can do the same with our psychology by the means of the ability of concentration - to bring our creative mind - all our inner powers to one center which is now not in our chests but is everywhere and nowhere - it is our own "I Am." Our own "I Am" is usually weak, but if we do the exercises of concentration, we will see that this feeling of "I Am" becomes stronger, and we will feel as if we are centralized on our own spirit. The ability of concentration and the exercises, if they are done sufficiently and with the proper activity, will give this marvelous feeling of "I Am." With this "I Am" we will begin to get our own being centralized, so our body will become centralized and our spirit will be centralized. This is the most beautiful thing, and especially for an actor who shows his whole being and nothing else on the stage. Then we will immediately become artists in the highest sense of this word.

IMAGINATION:

M. Chekhov

July 18, 1939

We will now go on to the next point: When we are centralized through the ability of concentration, we get another ability which is the ability of imagination. When we are centralized, we are able to catch with our concentrated and centralized being, everything we wish to catch in the world of imagination. If we wish to imagine a human being, or an animal, or a devil, or an angel, we can catch it with our centralized being, which we cannot if we haven't a strong feeling of "I Am."

Exercise:

Will you please try to imagine a young human being, (and try to hold all the details because the more our ability of concentration is developed, the more we are able to imagine in a very concrete form). Try to imagine this young human being as concretely as possible.

AWARENESS:

Try to ask yourselves whether, during this imagination, you really get to a certain extent the feeling of "I Am." If you find this point during this concentration in the imagination, then it is much better and more productive than to do it without awareness. It is important to be aware and to exercise the result.

Exercise:

Will you imagine just the same human being not young

M. Chekhov

July 18, 1939

but old. Try to compare the moments in your own life when you are distracted or tired or lazy, with the activity you have at the moment, and simply by comparison, you will get again this awareness of "I Am."

Exercise:

Will you please do the following thing: Imagine again the same human being as young, and then try in one minute's time to transform it into an old being, so that you will not have now the fixed idea in your imagination but you will give life to your imagination, you will create it, and you will transform it from the young being to the old being. Try to do it so that your imagination will not break. Try not to allow it.

Now I want you to discover one thing: that to be able to imagine really so that you give your own life to your image, you cannot do it other than to give your own being to it. It cannot be done with your intellect only - you have to imagine it - to see the picture. You have to give your will, that means to give your whole being, to sacrifice your whole being, and that means to work by the means of "I Am." So we come back to the "I Am" which is the beginning and the end of everything. The artist cannot be unless he is a specially awakened being with "I Am."

INCORPORATION:

M. Chekhov

July 18, 1939

If we have developed our concentration and our imagination, the next step will be the ability of incorporation, which is very easy to do if our imagination is strong, and if our body is centralized and harmonious.

Now will you please incorporate the image you have just created, and try in one minute's time to incorporate the following things: Start with this human being, first of all, young, and then old, the whole time incorporating your imagination. Start with the young - while incorporating try to keep somewhere before you the image which you will incorporate - not remembered.

In almost all cases I have seen something which is very good - you have incorporated not only bodies but old psychology, which is so important and about which we speak so often during our rehearsals. Sometimes you are enticed by your body, simply relying on the body and the outer means of expression instead of the psychology. This time I have seen you have imagined it and followed the psychological process of getting older, and I ask you to remember this. As much as you have inner power, never allow yourselves to express by outer means of expression without psychological grounds. It is a very good case to show yourselves how much more interesting it is to follow the psychology of a character. The outer means will come of itself if the psychology is there. Sometimes some of us actors, when we are rehearsing, belie

M. Chokhov

July 18, 1939

ourselves and our directors as if we are ready to move as a character and nothing happens. It is immediately obvious that it is a superficial thing.

FEELING OF BEAUTY - AESTHETIC CONSCIOUSNESS:

We have exercised some days ago two qualities which we think we must develop as actors - the feeling of ease and the feeling of form. Now I want to exercise two other qualities: feeling of beauty and feeling of the whole.

There are two kinds of beauty - the feeling of beauty which we call "showing off," and the real feeling of beauty in our sense - it means that we have to be psychologically beautiful for ourselves. Do not show your beauty even to yourselves but simply have an "aesthetic consciousness." Being "aesthetically conscious," you will never be able to "show off," which is not aesthetic and not conscious - quite the opposite, it is shameless.

Try to move about, awakening this elementary thing which is given to every being - feeling of beauty. All animals have a certain feeling of beauty but the human being, with his ability to commit sins, has the ability to go to this other extreme, this "showing off."

So will you come back to this elementary feeling of beauty. Remember that this feeling is given us by nature, and we simply have to find out where this desire to be beautiful in the highest sense is sitting in us. Actually we have nothing

M. Chokhov

July 18, 1939

to create - it is there but by the means of concentration we must find out where this point lies, and if we have once discovered this thing in us, it will be always at our disposal.

Now, keep the feeling of beauty and take into consideration the following thing: If you will try to entice the thing which we call "charm" on the stage, you will discover that one of the points in this thing is the "aesthetic consciousness" - this feeling of beauty which the actor has developed.

Will you try to realise the following: If, for instance, we are acting on the stage a negative character or a cripple, we can do it in two ways. We can perform this cripple so that the audience will say they do not want to see it, but if we perform the cripple with our aesthetic consciousness, it will become charming because it will become art.

So, will you please imagine a crippled figure and try to move being crippled, preserving this aesthetic consciousness, or feeling of beauty. Try to be as beautiful as you really are, and now dance with the feeling of beauty, and try to overcome this temptation for "showing off."

Exercise:

Please fight or wrestle with each other with the feeling of beauty. When you stop, you must be aware that your bodies and psychology are beautiful because you are concentrating on this feeling of beauty.

M. Chokhov

July 18, 1939

Exercise:

Try to do this more difficult thing - everybody fight with everybody.

FEELING OF THE WHOLE:

Will you please, if you can, keep the feeling of beauty and the feeling of the whole, which means that you have to anticipate the whole story, and you have to be able to remember retrospectively what you have done. So always have the feeling of the whole, with the future and with the past. I will give you the task to build a big group, which you have to create with the theme we will get from music. You have to anticipate the theme when you listen to the music, and try to create this group so that you will feel the whole not only as a theme, but also as a group of figures - it must be a whole thing. You will create here in the middle part of the room. You must be careful in the distribution of your bodies so that it will not become a mass. Do it as quickly as possible.

Each rhythmical pattern, from our point of view, has always three parts. It is a law which you cannot escape, and if you will look at this group, you will see there are definitely three parts, the beginning, and the end, and the space between is the middle part - a harmonious whole.