

Michael Chekhov

February 5, 1940

IMAGINATION  
 THE INNER LIFE OF THE CHARACTER  
 BECOMING THE CHARACTER  
 BECOMING AN ACTOR  
 CONCENTRATION  
 TWO STATES OF CONSCIOUSNESS  
 INSPIRATION  
 INCORPORATION  
 EURHYTHMY  
 FIRE  
 IMPROVISATION

King Lear  
Dr. Steiner  
Hamlet

#### IMAGINATION:

We have spoken about concentration, and now I want to speak about imagination. There is a very first stage in imagination - to have an image which we can describe and can see with our eyes closed, as it were. That is the very first stage which is very close to simple memory, but that is not what we want to develop in our school.

#### THE INNER LIFE OF THE CHARACTER:

In our sense, imagination is something which is much more profound - something as if clairvoyant. This special kind of "seeing" the image - through the outer image which you have before your closed eyes, as it were, you have to see the inner life of the image. You have to see the psychology of the image. You have to see its feelings, to see its emotions, its will impulses, and even its thoughts.

In our profession all the thoughts must be turned into action and feelings, but the thoughts of the image must

M. Chekhov

February 5, 1940

be somehow "seen." If you will understand this, you will see why this process of "seeing" the inner life of the character is really a kind of sight. It is not guessing, it is seeing - with what? Not with your eyes, but with something which is the combination of your own will and heart.

We can see with our whole being and that is right. With our whole being we must see the whole being of the character which arises before us, or sits in us. You will see that writers and playwrights cannot write plays without having this second sight, as it were. This ability to see the inner life of the character requires very intensive exercises. We cannot be satisfied with what we have because we all have this ability - it is only in exceptional cases where a person cannot see the image - but for our profession we have to be specialists in seeing the inner life of the character.

#### BECOMING THE CHARACTER:

Don't be satisfied with showing only the outer image. Make the effort to see the inner life, but this does not mean that you have to discard the outer parts - the outer parts and the inner life are one. When we get this ability to see with our whole inner life and activity and will, the will and the heart of the other being, then we will become influenced by it. When we see this inner life so obviously and get it in our own inner will and feelings, then we become the character. Inwardly - that means that we get the desire to do the same

M. Chekhov

February 5, 1940

as the image does, to speak the same words, to feel the same feelings, and we become in a certain sense the character.

#### BECOMING AN ACTOR:

This very happy moment may come only after we have really developed this ability to see the inner life of the character so strongly that we become it. To half see it is not enough. So you must develop this ability until you will get this special thing, which you will recognize immediately. You will not be able to confuse the imaginary thing and the real one. The moment will come when you will know what it means to imagine the inner life of the character. When you get this, then you will become an actor at this moment. That is the way to that inner point where we are actors. Then we are born as actors. Then we will get immediately the desire and the ability to act the character, and we will never rely upon our voice or body only - substitutions for the inner life - all these pretences will be gone, and we will feel offended if we try to act with outer means, after this experience. You will feel how cheap it is.

#### CONCENTRATION:

To get this ability to penetrate into the inner life of the character, we have to develop the ability to concentrate our attention in the way we have spoken about in the last lecture. To find this special contact we have to

M. Chokhov

February 5, 1940

be concentrated - we touch these inner things with our whole being and that means to be concentrated. Combine the lesson on concentration with this one and you will see that they are so very close together that they cannot be separated. It is one act, one event, and only for the sake of exercise do we separate them. When we go on to incorporation, you will see that it is the same thing - part of the one big event in the actor's being which is one thing, and only for the sake of exercise do we divide it.

There are two possibilities for becoming the character. One way, which we deny, is that of really becoming, as it were, mad, and losing oneself and becoming possessed by the character. This leads only to hysterics and psychological illness, although it is possible to become the character in this sense. Very often actors who try to get more and more from the character go this wrong way, and become really ill. Our approach is a different one, and the whole group of exercises in our school is actually the guarantee that we will not go in this wrong way, because in imagining we are always objective. To imagine and create in our sense means to be always a little above our own being.

#### TWO STATES OF CONSCIOUSNESS:

If you will imagine yourself as an actor trying to squeeze out of himself the passage from King Lear, "Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! rage! blow!" you will see that

M. Chekhov

February 5, 1940

it cannot be done. But in our way, we look at Lear in our spirit and we are waiting for these suggestions and inspirations as artists - that means people with two consciousnesses. The artist cannot be with one consciousness - there are two: one is creative, objective, and inspiring; and the other is moving, and speaking at the same time. At the moment when the artist merges together with the other but recites or acts or dances, then the hysterics are there.

Try to imagine the lines, "Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks!" Being concentrated on the image of Lear and his surroundings. Try to imagine him in a concentrated way and try to do it. First concentrate and then try, through this concentration, to act with your whole being, observing Lear's inner life at this moment. Then I will ask you to incorporate it as much as possible. Or take the moment when Hamlet is on the castle tower and sees for the first time the ghost of his father and says, "Father!".

In this process of imagining you will see that there is a desire to imagine the inner life with our whole being, and at this moment you will see that you need somehow to move - to begin, as it were, to act. Don't stop this, but allow yourself to move. The more you will imagine, and by imagining become somehow free and allow yourself to move, the better it is because we are actors; and our profession is to convey everything we have to our audience by means of our

2208  
M. Chekhov

February 5, 1940

bodies, and voices, etc. So it is right when imagining to have our bodies so free and at our disposal that they will allow these movements. Of course, if you will try to move before you have imagined, it will be rough; but you will find to what extent you can do this by means of exercising.

In our age, as you know, almost all our inner powers have degenerated and that means that our head or brain has usurped all other powers, and we find ourselves existing - being [doing] only what we make of the efforts with our brain like a psychological cripple - that is what we are. This powerful thing has a little appendix which is our whole being - therefore, it looks like a cripple. But actors have no right to be powerful in the brain and weak everywhere else. We cannot act with our head at all - only with our being, and the head must be the appendix of our whole being and only the face, which is very subtle - not anatomical and psychological - will reflect our life and inner activity which comes from the whole being first and then is mirrored. Therefore, it is so ugly when the actor begins to make faces instead of using his own body. Only when the actor is able to pour [everything] into his whole being, then the face becomes beautiful of itself. So, if we will try to imagine with our whole being, and if we will allow our heads to imagine with us, then the thief which sitting in the brain will become weaker and weaker. So be aware when the brain tries to usurp and concentrate everything in the head.

M. Chekhov

February 5, 1940

There are marvelous expressions in Dr. Steiner's books when he speaks about the kinds of concentration. He suggests that at certain moments the whole being becomes an ear, or the whole being becomes an organ for touching. Our whole being must become like big spectacles to catch the life which the image before us produces and radiates. There is the whole being, the image which we are looking at, and we are the whole being - there is no brain, no ears or eyes - two whole beings meeting each other, and when they merge, inspiration comes and we can act.

#### INSPIRATION:

All other attempts to act will be either making faces or trying to justify oneself to the audience, and one will always look like a puppet on the stage. Just as a naturalistic performance on the stage looks like a puppet. The more natural the actor is, the more like a puppet he looks because there is no inspiration. But if the same natural thing - for example, drinking on the stage - comes through inspiration, then the drinking will be drinking, plus art. The whole secret lies in where we get our inspiration - from the world of the imagination or from our cleverness which sits sometimes in the head, sometimes in the legs and hands, and so on. It is cleverness which can't be used on the stage. It is not very useful to us because it is taking the nature as it is and not slipping over it. We must get it

M. Chekhov

February 5, 1940

from the other side, and that is by developing our concentration which will give us the ability to receive impressions from outside.

**INCORPORATION:**

You have made an effort to create the inner life of Lear - whether you have succeeded fully or not is not important. The important thing is that you have made the attempt to do it. You can develop it, and you must by means of exercises. You must make your body such a flexible instrument that it will catch suggestions immediately from your imagination. When you try to incorporate, you will find it is not quite what you have imagined. That is always the way, but the more we develop our ability to imagine and make the effort to get the whole being of the other, the more our artistic taste will be developed.

**EURHYTHMY:**

Your instrument is a little behind what you see in your imagination. First of all, this shows us the necessity to develop our bodies and voices and especially through Eurhythm because Eurhythm catches the most creative impulses of your spirit. Then you will see that all the gymnastics which we do are but a little child because Eurhythm exercises are spirit, and our body and our voice becomes more and more permeated with the spiritual impulses. That is what we



M. Chokhov

February 5, 1940

need for other things which are intangible and cannot be grasped by rude means. They are things which are everywhere and nowhere, which have shape and which have not. It is a spiritual thing which permeates our bodies through Eurhythmy and the method of Dr. Steiner.

Artists are specialists in the spiritual sense, otherwise they are puppets and nothing else. Therefore, try to realize what we have Eurhythmy for and the speech method also. It may take longer, but it leads us to the aim which we visualize. Of course, we must not become professional Eurhythmists because it is an art which is different, but it enables us to permeate each means of expression by this spiritual impulse. The more you will develop your ability to see the images in their inner life, the more you will come to the idea that Eurhythmy is as necessary for you as water or air. Then you will take more and more from Eurhythmy and the speech method.

**FIRE:**

The other thing we have in our imagination, something which inspires us, makes us happy and creatively burning so that we feel we cannot even stand it physically, is this fire which comes. We have to let this fire go through us, otherwise we will be consumed by it. We could explode and die from this accumulation of fire, if we didn't let it out. When we try to convey it and let it out, we feel it does not satisfy us

M. Chekhov

February 5, 1940

because everything is so rude and primitive. Now here comes another point - the necessity and possibility to improvise.

#### IMPROVISATION:

The real source and impulse for improvisation is the necessity to somehow let this fire out. When it is so, then the improvisation is really the improvisation - otherwise it is a very torturing exercise which we see in many schools. The improvisation makes its start again from the same point - first to have the image, and then to try to incorporate it as exactly as possible. From the first moment you will see that you cannot incorporate it as you see it, and so you have to open all the doors and send it out.

All the activity we have in our profession is actually one big thing - you can start from the imagination and you will finish with something else. Actually the whole method is one big thing, and when your soul will get the feeling that the method is one whole thing, then you will be an actor and a happy one. But to get this marvelous feeling of one thing, we have to exercise each point separately.

Concentrate on your image with tremendous inner activity - keep it as long as you want and be ready at any moment to get up and improvise. Of course, we have a certain hesitation about showing things which are not ready - the

M. Chekhov

February 5, 1940

artistic conscience must be there, and it is one of the most experienced teachers but still try not to contract this conscience, but help it - allow yourself to make mistakes - if the conscience becomes not an adversary but an inquisitor, it can become a bad thing. Listen to it always, but consider it as a friend which will tell you when you are wrong but in a different way.

When we are afraid of making mistakes, we hear from our conscience only one thing, "Wrong, wrong, wrong," but if we are friends with our conscience, we may hear, "Lying, but that is all right." When we get this ability to hear two things from our conscience, we have become friends with it and that means to be free with it. Let the conscience give us suggestions and not punish us because if we are afraid of our conscience, we can become contracted.

Try to improvise the following thing: take the theme into your imagination and lay the stress not so much on incorporation, but try to let your fire out. Try to get the first understanding of what it means to have only a general idea, perhaps without details, and then plunge into this well and do things right or wrong.

Exercise:

It is a very small village or town in which the life is somehow dull and especially for the young people. Each Saturday when they finish their work, they come to the dance.

M. Chekhov

February 5, 1940

There are three or four families in the town who are very snobbish - they never come to the dance. The others are so-called low class and, therefore, very free and happy. It is dawn - everyone so gay and so happy - now comes the moment when everything becomes unbridled - a second life which begins early in the morning. It is a very high pitch - everything has been said before - there is a certain exhilaration - a beautiful chaos. Workers, farmers, servants, etc.

Remember the purpose of the exercise - first have the image and then let it go through you.