

Michael Chekhov

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CHARACTERIZATION  
IMPROVISATION  
THE INSPIRER - TWO STATES OF CONSCIOUSNESS

CHARACTERIZATION: Old Students:

I want to remind you about the work we have done in connection with characterization. Characterization lies between two dangerous poles. Sometimes the actor creates a character psychologically, but keeps it inside. I knew an actor who created characters so deep and so fine inside him, but they could not be seen. This is one danger. Another kind of characterization which is just the opposite is to perform everything with the body. In this case the psychology either dies or does not exist at all - only outer words and expressions - and this is the kind we see on the present stage.

The real characterization lies between these two poles. It must be as much psychological as it is physical. It must be a combination of the two, then it is a real character. It must be one thing. How to get this? We must imagine another body, and then try to jump into it and move in it. We must have time to get accustomed to it. The secret, of course, is that this imaginary body is already psychological, but it is still a body. Therefore it is so important to approach the problem of characterization by creating an imaginary body, which is the link between the physical and the psychological.

IMPROVISATION: On the basis of characters:

The scene is a group of people who believe themselves

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to be a society for the encouragement of the cultural and artistic life in the country. They are not truly appreciative, but are only snobs and are constantly inviting new artists in order that they may be ecstatic about them. They find in everything the most fine things, germs for the future culture, for the future cultural life. They have a musician as a guest. He plays dreadfully, but he has only ears for praise.

The center of one character is in front of his mouth, and the face recedes from it. Another character has a center which pulls everything down, until it is in his seat. Another has a center which is floating above his head, and palpitating all the time. Another has a center in front of the stomach, another a center which is leaning diagonally away from him. The style of the scene is comedy, close to vaudeville, but with the full feeling of truth.

Criticism:

Sometimes the characters were too involved in the psychology, and sometimes they were too busy doing inward things. ~~You must find the happy medium. It is a question of tact, and~~ you must learn to listen to these fine things. Try to incorporate a character whose center tends to get smaller and smaller, and a little bit down. The arms become shorter and shorter, because they want to contract, too. You must be able to appreciate the most complicated characters, and must find and create them by your intuition. Then you must be able to incorporate these invisible or imaginary bodies, and get accustomed to them.

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Then you will be quite free, and will be in the character at all times.

As an exercise this is slightly different to the incorporation of the character which we have done before. Because then you really see the body of the character with its outward characteristics, with its makeup, etc.; while this way you see it from the inside. But when the creative spark is there, these two will be combined. Everything is one when the creative process is there - when the fire comes.

Balladina I:

Very consciously take some ground on which you will ask your inspirer to give you these feelings. When you lose the ground, take it again very consciously. Use any other means which will serve you, one after another if you need to.

Peer Gynt:

Today we have made a big step forward. There is much less tension in everyone. Mrs. Elmhirst, you are too modest as a personality. You have been compelled to hide so many things in your life, and to show only pleasant things, that it has become something which disturbs you. For instance, you hide your eyes on the stage very often, instead of showing them; and this is bad because your eyes are able to speak so much. The same is true of your speech. You must break this habit of keeping back. For instance, you stand behind the class during the

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exercises sometimes. You have a strong radiation, but a weak action.

Peter, you must try to open the door to your inspirer. You have given good hints, but they are only hints. You guess what your inspirer is going to give you, and you try to show it. With your charm, your humor, you are able to give it out. You allow yourself to show everything through the front door, but nothing from the door behind, through the inspirer.

We must work to establish contact with each other. Through certain efforts you will find each other even if you are in other rooms or other countries. The same is true if you wish to establish contact with your inspirer. For me, my inspirer is an angel, but for somebody else it can be something or somebody, or even your own higher self which you are able to establish contact with.

#### TWO STATES OF CONSCIOUSNESS:

You must work to get this contact as simply as the contact with human beings. At the moment you establish this contact, you will have two consciousnesses.<sup>1</sup> One is with your inspirer and is the inspirer itself, and another is here. From there you will look on yourself and see yourself acting, not only from the outside, but you will see your own soul as clear as paper; and this is the moment when the talent is open, free, born. Because when we are contracted in any way, we are not able to see ourselves. If we are psychologically or phys-

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ically contracted, we lose the vision of ourselves.

Especially as actors we must see ourselves as in a mirror, but from the place of our inspirer. We must say to ourselves, "I see myself from above when I am acting. I am not contracted. I know everything that is going on in me. I not only act my inspiration, but I am divided into two parts and I know what the audience experiences. Not only the audience in general, but different persons in the audience whom I don't know; but I am aware that there is someone sitting in the audience who loves my acting and someone who does not. I feel the people sitting in various places have various impressions."

This is quite a concrete thing. It not only helps the actor, but the audience gives inspiration as well. In Moscow I tried experiments in analyzing this.<sup>2</sup> I acted before teachers, before soldiers, before workers, before ordinary audiences and before audiences of actors. They were quite different audiences and they required that I act quite differently, not because I knew how to act, but because I was in contact with my inspirer; and then I knew these things and looked upon the soul of my audience.

This division in two parts is only possible if we find the contact with our inspirer; then at once you will get much stronger feelings. You will be astonished by the nuances, the power, and the variety. Because it is no longer you - you have become the spectator. It is a very strange state, but it

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is a fact: to be on the stage, and to be in the audience at the same time, and to be there with your inspirer.

But it is not a mystery at all. It is as simple as a,b,c. The things around you on the stage will act with you. It happens very seldom, but sometimes it happens that the whole stage and the audience and your inspirer are in the right place, and you are able to see everything, and everything will play with you and will never disturb you. The chairs will jump into your hands if necessary. I once saw an actor act this way for four minutes. I watched his pince-nez, which acted his part for him. The pince-nez was no longer something hanging on him, but did such strange things. Then he lost this accidental contact, and again the pince-nez was like a dead thing on his costume. It is a very strange and powerful thing, and this is our art. When this happens, you will feel that a human being and an artist are one thing.