

Michael Chekhov

October 4, 1938

FIRE
 FEAR - COWARDICE - TENSION
 THE ACTOR'S HEART - HIS FEELINGS
 THE ACTOR'S SACRIFICE

FIRE:

Criticism: Today the most important thing which was wrong was the speech. The speech is never full of fire - fire taken from the imagination, not tension. You must criticize yourselves from the point of view of fire. What was the real fire, and what was substituted for fire. I must warn you as far as it concerns the fire, which is one of the most important things in our art and in our work, that you confuse two things - hysterical tension and fire. These two things are absolutely different. Instead of giving fire you sometimes give hysterical tension. Your nature prefers hysterical tension because it is easier, because it is always there, and because you can become blind at the moment. You are not able to face your own soul, burning to wait for the fire and obey it.

FEAR - COWARDICE - TENSION:

This is a certain cowardice in you not to be able to try for the real quality, and to be satisfied at the moment with something which is superficial and which is only a substitution for the real thing. We have spoken about this cowardice in respect to the objective and everything else. Instead of allowing your body to follow the objective, you substitute it by thinking of what you are going to do, and then the body gives you hysterical gestures and things.

Think of this cowardice and try to overcome it.

M. Chekhov

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It is only a question of your own talk with yourself, each of you, no one else can help you. Only if you, in the most profound point of your own soul, will speak to yourself and ask if you are a coward on the stage. After you have seen that you are afraid of the objective, of the fire, etc., then you will see that all these things can be exercised. Until you will see that you are cowards, you will not get the real understanding as to what it means to be glad, to be happy to fulfill the objective, to live in fire, to speak with fire, to be extremely happy to be on the stage and not to be afraid to be on the stage.

THE ACTOR'S HEART - HIS FEELINGS:

Now we come to another point. We have spoken several times about why we as artists are trying to find a certain new approach to life. Whether it is pleasant to hear such things or not, it is a fact. What in us is killing our talent, our fire, our desire to be an artist? What is it? It is that we understand the life, but we do not live it. This is the disease of modern times, and especially of young people today. If we take all the events which are going on today, and ask ourselves if we really live with the people around us - we understand perfectly and can criticize the present situation and each speech in Parliament, but we do not live at all. We are in a big piece of ice, and it doesn't concern us at all.

M. Chekhov

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Perhaps it is good as a kind of self-protection against things which would really make us mad, if we truly understood what is going on around us. It is good to a certain extent and our nature helps us by trying to kill this part, and allows us to understand but not to be concerned with it. But for artists it is impossible; otherwise we have nothing to say or to perform on the stage, because the understanding which we must always show on the stage, which actually we are showing, it is only understanding, it is not yet the life.

For instance: each person in our audience can tell you, "I understand what you mean, but I understand Shakespeare better than you act it." You are defeated. You have nothing more to show your audience. But if you show how you live with these twinges of conscience, then no one has the right to say that he lives more profoundly than you. No, this is a unique thing; here is a unique thing and the other is nonsense, a flat, dull, stupid thing. If you speak from the heart, you will speak in quite a different manner. Each instant becomes a world, but we take this as insignificant compared to our own problems. This is not yet to be an artist.

THE ACTOR'S SACRIFICE:

The artist must be able to feel with his heart about everything, and perhaps last of all about himself.

M. Chekhov

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It is impossible to be an artist without sacrificing one's own heart - this is the problem. He who wants to sacrifice his heart will always be able to do this. It is not a question of being a cold person, but rather that we don't want to sacrifice our hearts, and to a certain extent we are right but we must do it because we have chosen the way of an artist. What have you to sacrifice? Your own heart. Everyone needs it and no one gives it - only the artist has the right to give other people his heart, and this is the most important part of the whole problem.