

CONCENTRATION
MOVEMENT
THE CREATIVE IMAGINATION
MUSIC AND RHYTHM
OUR FUTURE THEATRE - OUR AIM
FOUR STAGES OF THE CREATIVE
PROCESS

Goethe

CONCENTRATION:

Concentration is a willed directing of the forces within us. We must gather all our forces and send them toward the object, the idea, or the image. Each one of you must be able to say something about concentration. What you have to say may be very short, and then give an exercise as an example.

It is very important for us to try to understand the whole of our training. Let us imagine a circle on which there are a number of points. One of these points is concentration, which is the door to our creative imagination.

MOVEMENT:

Another point on the circle is movement. We cannot convey our creative ideas without movement. We must develop the possibilities of our bodies as our artistic instrument. In developing all our movements we must go through three stages. The first stage is our acrobatic work because we must find the possibility to move ourselves freely and widely and to loosen our bodies. The second step is to try to fill our bodies with feelings. We have started this in class with the

staccato and legato exercises. This is the first step toward speaking through our bodies. These two things go parallel, but the order is first acrobatics and then the exercises. The third step will come next term when you will study a very perfect kind of movement, and you will be instructed in very fine feelings and ideas in connection with the body.

THE CREATIVE IMAGINATION:

Imagination is another point on the circle. We must develop our imagination. Concentration and imagination are very close to each other. To have a good artistic imagination means to have a good power of concentration, just as to have a good power of concentration means to have an active imagination. We must start with this third point today. There are many other points on the circle which we will deal with later on.

MUSIC AND RHYTHM:

Imagine that some lines are pointing inwards from this circle. They are pointing to another circle which is smaller and much more complicated. This circle contains everything which is in connection with music and rhythm, both in the sense which Mr. Harvey [Patrick Harvey, composer-pianist] will teach you, and in our actor's special sense.

OUR FUTURE THEATRE - OUR AIM:

From this second circle are lines pointing to the

M. Chekhov

October 8, 1936

center. This center, or point, is our future theatre, our future beautiful performances, our touring group, our art, which we have to represent after we have found our way to this inner point. Now it is a little clearer why we are working on this circle, on the inner circle, and finally to the real point.

It is not good for students to walk in the dark. If a teacher has to give something, it must never be a secret. The pupil must always know what he is doing, in order that he can decide whether he wishes that method or not. In this first trial year, you must be very clear about everything. We must decide about you, and you must decide about us. Everything must be open and clear. That is why I want you to know what we are doing and for which aim.

About the imagination. Everybody has imagination because without it we would not be able to go through this door. It is necessary to imagine that if I try to go through this wall, I will be hurt very badly. This is the imagination which everyone has instinctively, but this is not the creative imagination and has nothing to do with it. We must develop our creative imagination if we want to be creative artists.

FOUR STAGES OF THE CREATIVE PROCESS:

What must we do to develop this imagination? The first step: We must understand and concentrate on the simple idea that imagination is the ability to see something invisible.

M. Chekhov

October 8, 1936

If I see this piece of paper, it isn't imagination because I really see it, but at the moment when I close my eyes and continue to see this paper, which is no longer visible to me, that is imagination.

It is very important to be a little bit astonished about this simple thing. If you can find in your soul a little bit of astonishment, you have already taken a step forward. To be a little astonished about imaginary things. Everything about which we are astonished, about which we are filled with wonder, gives us always something new. The artist has always to feel everything as new - as if for the first time. That is the power of the artist. That is the real impulsive power of the artist, to be astonished every time about everything. He must be astonished at the knowledge that the imagination is the ability to see unseen things. Please try to realize this real wonder that you can see unseen things.

Now comes the second step: Not only can I see unseen things, but I am able to create in my imagination things which are not existing in reality. For instance, I can create a flower which I have never seen. My own creation. This must be very astonishing for those who want to develop their imaginations, but I do not think you can persuade someone who is not an artist in his nature about this wonder. Such a person will answer you, "And what about it?". He will

M. Chekhov

October 8, 1936

never understand, while the person who is gifted will realize that it is a wonder that I am able to create this flower and see it before me.

Therefore, we have to increase this power which we have as artists, which is given to us by our nature. As artists, we are able to be astonished by the creation of things which do not exist. It is astonishing for us as artists, but we must pay attention to the fact that it is astonishing, to the fact that it fills us with wonder.

We are working in the world of ideas, and these we will make our exercises for the development of the imagination. First, we can see unseen things; and, second, we can create unreal things. The third step: If you will create something and then live with this creation. For instance, if you create a strange and interesting landscape, and if you concentrate on this beautiful and strange landscape, you will notice that this landscape changes you. This is again a great wonder. Your creation influences you, its creator, and the soul of the creator changes under the influence of his own creation. This is really the ability of an artist - to be changed because of his own creation.

What does it mean when an artist, or an actor, or a writer is, for instance, crying about the picture he has created himself? It means that his own creation influences him so strongly that it changes his mind. He begins to live with this creation and to change his own being, his moods. Goethe

M. Chekhov

October 8, 1936

worked on Faust for forty years. Now we can imagine what happened to Goethe under forty years of the influence of the characters which he had created. For instance, if an actor is acting Mephistopheles, in one month he is another man because he feels the character. Now imagine what must have happened to Goethe himself, who was so fine in his feelings and so receptive. This third stage is when our own creation is able to change us, its creator.

The fourth and last step. We have to influence this image. We have to change it. For instance, I have to create a character which I am going to act. I see my image in my imagination and then, if I have a well-developed imagination, I am able to do with this image all that I want. Now it is standing before me, and through my imagination I let my character grow older and older, then younger and younger. Or he is first full of radiating power, and then he becomes an egotistical person. I can change not only his outward appearance, but I can change his soul. I can create the whole human being if I want to, and I can give him this kind of soul, and that kind of being, and this kind of will, etc. I can create a human soul, and spirit, and body in my imagination.

These abilities are really astonishing, and we must never forget that one of our most important technical abilities is to be astonished and to be active in the world of our imagination.

Exercises:

1. The first exercise is simple. Look upon some object and then close your eyes and try to keep this object before your mind's eye very very clearly. Try to re-create the whole object as clearly as you can. The energy you will spend on this work will develop your imagination. In concentration exercises the process is important. In imagination exercises the object is important. Having something to concentrate on, we must have the power of concentration. The two things are so close to each other that we have to consider them as one thing. In order to train these abilities we have different exercises, but to use them we have one. You must do these exercises until you are a little bit tired. That is the test to prove that you are really doing the exercises. You must also try the exercises at home and in your free time.

Question: Should one see the object always as a whole?

Answer: The under-developed imagination tries always to show only one part, because it is easier. You must try to see the whole thing. The whole for an artist is what I want to see. It can be only a spot or the whole picture.

Exercise:

2. Try to imagine something which is not here, but which exists elsewhere. Try to remember, and on the ground of your memory, try to see the whole picture as clearly as possible until you are tired.

Exercise:

3. Try to create something which does not exist. An animal, a flower, a landscape, a figure. Something of your own creation which you have never seen. Something simple for the beginning because the more simple the subject, the more benefit you will have from these exercises.

4. Listen to some music and at once create an image. This image can be a remembered thing, or not; as you want. Keep the image immovable. If no image comes, then invent one.

5. You have to create an image after you have thought of an abstract idea. The abstract idea is something opposite to the real. There are two worlds - abstract ideas and living images. Abstract ideas have nothing to do with art. The living images are our art. We must be able to re-create each abstract idea into a living image. In this way we can use high ideas for our art, and re-create them into living images. Choose a word which expresses an abstract idea, and then you must find the living image. For example, truth.

So we have exercised our imaginations in the following way: 1. Close your eyes and see something which you have observed. 2. Imagine something which you have seen somewhere but which is not there, something from your memory. 3. Create something which you have not seen before. 4. Create an image suggested by music. 5. Create something from an abstract idea.¹