

4

Meditation and imagination

The contribution of anthroposophy to Michael Chekhov's acting technique

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In the literature about Michael Chekhov and his technique, certain key words recur as milestones, sometimes retaining their original meaning and sometimes evolving as he adopted new terms during the various phases of his research. Here I would like to focus on some of them in particular: image/archetype; imagination; fantasy; concentration/meditation; subconscious; objectivity. At the beginning of Chekhov's research the terms denoting his real principles occurred sporadically, but as his technique developed they began to interact, overlap, and intertwine in the definition of the actor's work on the character.

When I first became acquainted with the publications by and on Michael Chekhov, what caught my attention, as a scholar of both the theatre and Rudolf Steiner, was how these key terms correspond to those in Steiner's teachings (Cristini 2008). Thanks to this coincidence, my interest in the Russian actor has gradually turned into a line of research, which, although still in its initial phase, increasingly reveals new affinities of thought between the two teachers. It has also led me to adopt anthroposophical practices in my theatre research. What is even more interesting is something that seems to emerge from the latest studies (Autant-Mathieu 2009¹): not only did Chekhov endorse anthroposophy and consequently adopt some anthroposophical principles, but the Russian pedagogue began to deal with issues of imagination and concentration even before his encounter with Steiner's thought. Moreover, while the bases of these principles can be attributed to both his first master Konstantin Stanislavsky and to Yevgeny Vakhtangov, it should be noted that Chekhov talked about the importance of these elements in the work of the actor, in a way influenced probably by Eastern philosophies, from the very beginning of his research. For this reason we may safely suggest that the two masters worked individually on their respective (albeit quite similar) formulations and that only at a later time did Chekhov adopt Steiner's theatre teachings.

Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925), the Austrian philosopher and founder of anthroposophy, dedicated himself to theatre from his period in the Weimar Goethe Archive (1890–97), through his life in Berlin where he founded (together with the

German playwright Frank Wedekind) a sort of theatrical company (the Berliner Dramatische Gesellschaft, 1897–1900), to the collaboration between the theosophical and anthroposophical societies. Since the early twentieth century he had been working with actors in Monaco, developing a personal pedagogy— a sort of method with a specific training and an approach to the creative process on character — matching his deep knowledge of theatrical art with his anthroposophical thought. Steiner was not only a philosopher, but also a playwright, director, teacher of actors, and, last but not least, founder of eurythmy, a new and original kind of spiritual dance (Cristini 2008: 147–88). Thus we may consider Steiner a true man of the theatre, which is one of the reasons why it is important to understand the link between him and Chekhov, who was interested not only in his philosophy, but also in his theatrical thought and practice. In *The Path of the Actor* (2005) Chekhov states that he first read about Steiner's philosophy in 1918, but it seems he became acquainted with his teaching for the actor only later, under the influence of Andrey Bely and his partner, Assia Turgenieff, one of the first collaborators at the Goetheanum, the home of the anthroposophical society in Switzerland. As Christine Hamon-Siréjols has shown, Chekhov, who was fascinated by the occult and mysticism, was seduced by Steiner's idea of the "three dimensions" of the human being (2009).

Steiner's anthroposophical and theatrical thought is based on the principle of the tripartite nature of the human being: the division into a physical body, an etheric body (made up of energy and vital force), and an astral body (made up of sensations and feelings)— all of them guided by the ego. One of his most important principles is related to the word, considered by him as a spiritual dimension of the human being, the expression of his spirituality. This concept served as the basis for Steiner's work with actors and his formulation of both eurythmy and *Sprachgestaltung*, or spiritual speech (1926). Underlying Chekhov's technique are some complex principles that have to be explained in order to better understand his teaching. Chekhov's work on concentration, dream, and fantasy grew out of the main anthroposophical concept of the existence of a (hidden) spiritual dimension in man. It is not a coincidence that many teachers of the technique also know anthroposophy.

The creative work on the character: developing the imagination starting from the actor's subconscious

Beginning with his very first experience of teaching in his studio (1918–21), Michael Chekhov spoke about concentration as a means to reach a higher level of attention through conscious observation (Bergamo 2008). However, his writings do not always clearly explain the mechanism underlying the efficacy of such exercises, nor does Chekhov indicate the source of inspiration for this kind of training except in his later writings (White 2009).² We must look instead to Steiner for a detailed explanation of these principles. These are to be found both in his courses of *Sprachgestaltung* and eurythmy and also in his last course dedicated to the actor, which were held in Dornach in 1924. In the last lessons of that course — which Steiner describes as the most esoteric — he explains how, through meditation with specific mantras indicated by him and through the exercise of active observation, the actor may capture images

useful in the composition of the drama and the atmosphere that characterizes it. The figures to which he refers are nothing more than archetypes residing in the spirituality of the actor, in his subconscious, at a very deep level, which, once brought to light, remain alive in the consciousness of the artist.

From the very first chapter of *To the Actor*, Chekhov, like Steiner, speaks about the creative imagination, explaining how a world of images populates our unconscious memory and how these images can be useful to the actor in the process of creating the character. These are images that develop independently of the control of the will – and are therefore objective – but which can, however, be recalled from the subconscious through the exercise of concentration or meditation. Chekhov believes in an objective world where images have their own life beyond the control of the actor, a dimension that Rudolf Steiner considers part of the spirituality of the actor himself. According to Chekhov, through concentration the actor can enter this world, strengthening his creative will and achieving independence from the ego, which we can see from his 1923 response to the Academy of Arts Questionnaire (1983a: 23).

Chekhov also emphasizes how important it is for the artist to acknowledge the objectivity of the world of imagination, which enables him or her to break free from the influence of an overly intellectual approach that might impinge negatively on the creative process. In order to work on the images, the Russian pedagogue leads the actor to free his imagination and creativity from the intellect and reasoning. For this purpose he conceives some concentration exercises so that the actor can work consciously on himself, perceiving his character in a more objective way. Steiner defines this approach as being outside of the character, looking at it objectively as a sculptor would do with the work he is creating. He sees this task as presenting the greatest difficulty for the actor, who is at once artist, creator, and incarnation of his own work. Margarita Woloschin, one of Steiner's first pupils and later a friend of the Russian actor, writes the following about Chekhov's poetics:

Once he told me that on the stage he experienced himself as a duality. An invisible actor played for the public and the visible actor merely followed him, trying to imitate him, but without ever reaching his perfection. Chekhov did this quite consciously and wide awake, as a result of hard work, not as a medium, but as a conscious instrument of something higher within him. He made a distinction between his ordinary ego and the artistic creative one. "The latter," he said, "is connected with the body according to laws differing from the way in which the former is connected with it. Inasmuch as the actor himself is creator and material in one, his artistic ego must face his ordinary one from outside. An actor should never set forth his own feelings on the stage, but always have the feelings of the character he is impersonating."
(1978: 41)

First steps towards creation through concentration and meditation

Concentration is thus a necessary condition for creative work. Chekhov explains why: a human being, in every moment of his or her life, receives an infinite number of different impressions from the outside world; the consciousness retains what has

been perceived and registered through all the senses. By concentrating it is possible to extrapolate some of these impressions and make the images concrete. The development of the powers of concentration and the imagination therefore go hand in hand. In fact Chekhov describes the imagination as a free combination of different elements in a world that does not correspond to reality but whose materials are often drawn from life and made out of those same impressions that are captured more or less consciously. The artist's task is then to enrich the quality of his own imagination in order to enhance his creative approach to the stage. The actor will seek to overcome the cultural inhibitions that limit the imaginative freedom and tend to turn into clichés on stage, through exercises aimed at stimulating the free association of images, as Chekhov recalls, quoting the teachings of his master Stanislavsky:

Exercise for the imagination

To look for resemblances between objects and certain persons; between people and animals;

To concretize musical works in fantastic images;

a) Someone says a word or two, the others extemporize. b) The same, but done differently. It is agreed beforehand that the imaginative extemporizing must be done in a definite key: sad, joyful, lofty, sorrowful, mysterious.

[...]

A group is seated at a table. Someone utters a word. His neighbors try to fixate the first impression produced by the word, the first image suggested by it, and then in turn convey it to his neighbor. The images arising in this manner are often so subtle and fleeting that it is impossible to convey them in words, and that is why one should not bother about searching out the adequate methods of expression. Let it be a gesture, a facial expression, an inarticulate sound, but let it express to someone else this fleeting expression.

(1983b: 55–56)

Chekhov also explains how important it is for the actor to develop a sort of instinct that will tell him or her when to shift from reflection and reasoning to the images in order to reach what he calls a “sense of truth,” a sense that people have lost in our times but which can be recalled. To this end the Russian pedagogue prescribes several exercises aimed at the development of fantasy and imagination. For instance, the actor is instructed to examine architectural structures in different styles, tracing the lines, shapes, and colors, then try to perceive the weight and forces that support them until he can feel the architectural structure and appreciate its beauty, and finally to imagine them in different shapes, sizes, and colors. Another exercise suggested by Chekhov is to read or recreate a story unquestioningly, allowing one's creative subconscious to work freely with the images, associating stories and objects with each other (1953).³

In addition to the images that can be created or derived from exercises, Chekhov singles out the possibility of recalling others that have imprinted themselves in the unconscious memory over a lifetime. By concentrating one can actually evoke these images and use them to create a character. He then defines two types of

concentration: “the unwitting, indirect, unconscious concentration, and the conscious, directed, or willed concentration” (2000: 18), and on several occasions sketches some simple exercises to develop the conscious concentration essential for the actor:

Choose an object in the room, observe its qualities.
Do the same thing and then close the eyes and try to see it clearly.
Observe the whole room and then choose a section of it, observe it, then close the eyes and try to see it all clearly. Then describe what you see.
Choose a sound and hear it only.
The same but in spite of another very definite sound going on.
[...]
Imagine the growth of a plant.
Imagine an action and then the reverse of it.

(18–19)

Interestingly, with the passing years, Chekhov adopted anthroposophical poetics more and more explicitly, the only difference being that Steiner speaks of meditation rather than concentration. In fact, the more Chekhov devoted himself to anthroposophy and learned about Steiner’s teachings, the more his statements reflected those made by the latter in his lectures. For example, in a 1936 lesson⁴ Chekhov confirmed the meaning of concentration as “being with,” explaining how true concentration needs the use of all five senses: for him to be completely turned towards the object is to feel the whole of it. If the object on which the actor is concentrating is an image, then Chekhov spoke of perceiving (or feeling) the soul of the person or the thing on which one is focusing. Later on he would express this concept with the term “spirituality”:

Concentration for us is a special thing. It is a special term for us and has a special meaning. It is not only the ability to concentrate in the usual sense, but the ability to concentrate on the spiritual objects. [...] It is our method of contacting and merging with the creative spiritual forces, which is the door by which we can enter into the creative spiritual world.

(42)

And also,

We must train ourselves in order to develop our powers of conscious concentration. This is done in three steps: first, by exercises which help us to contact and communicate with physical things and to feel their “spirit.” These exercises commence with seeing and hearing. In the second step, we begin to be able to imagine the objects of the physical world. In this stage we are beginning to be able to do without the help of actually seeing and hearing the object. In the third step, we pass into the vast world of creative imagination where we can enter at will.

(47)

As illustrated in *To the Actor*, Chekhov believed that the more we are able to maintain a deep concentration on the visible and invisible objects to which we direct our attention, the more we will understand the true nature of the spiritual imagination.

Creative imagination and archetypes: attaining the supersensible world through eurythmy

About this spiritual dimension of both art and the human being, Steiner spoke at a conference dedicated to eurythmy held in 1923:

It is therefore clear that a work of art can originate from the supersensible world. In the present era a great deal is said about how the subconscious and unconscious are interwoven and floating about in the human being according to animic-spiritual laws. But most of our contemporaries let the unconscious remain unconscious. Anthroposophical spiritual knowledge proposes instead to cast light into the sphere of the unconscious, comparing it with the sphere of the supraconscious, and to comprehend the relationship between the animic-spiritual elements active in the human being and the higher spiritual sphere.

(1947: 217)

Regarding eurythmy, Steiner explains how the sound of words or music – if created by a true artist – can create an image that rises above the thought. Indeed, if the latter reproduces that which is sensible, then the evoked image elevates man to the sphere of the supersensible. For this reason also, it is important for Steiner that the actor trains in order to develop his creative imagination, and to make images emerge from the unconscious memory, archetypes equally perceptible by the spectator (Cristini: 2012).⁵ Steiner sees the theatre and art in general as a possible means of spiritual elevation for man: being born in the supersensible sphere, these instruments are able to lead us to new spiritual heights. For him, theatre is a sort of path of initiation undertaken by both the artist and the spectator, who are guided by the sound of the word, together with its translation into movement on stage, as in the case of eurythmy.

Chekhov also speaks about the spirituality of the human being and how valuable theatre is for its recovery: “I believe in the spiritual theatre, in the sense of concrete investigation of the spirit of the human being, but the investigation must be done by artists and actors, but not by scientists” (1985: 141). In many documents now available (Chekhov 1995), we can read about the evidence of his devotion to the teachings of Steiner and his use of eurythmy in the actor’s training and staging. As Yana Meerzon explains, in *Hamlet* he acted a “pantomime-ballet” inspired by Steiner’s notion of word as gesture, a dance that was probably close to a eurythmic form (2005: 191–226). Moreover, Michael Chekhov recommends that actors create real characters, as close as possible to the ideal or archetype, which they must seek in their imagination. In this domain the character is actually free from the limitations imposed by reality and the actor preserves its independence, because it emerges

from the ideal world of spirituality (Kirillov 2006). In some lessons given in November 1941, Michael Chekhov describes the archetype as an “idea of” and explains:

[...] the archetype does not take part visibly in my action – it is my own secret. It is the source from which I get confirmation for acting the father in the play – for enriching the role of the father in the play.

(1985: 113)

The connection to anthroposophy is quite evident here. As I have already mentioned, in Steiner’s fundamental works – but also in the conferences dedicated to theatre and art – he speaks about the creative imagination. He uses this term to indicate the need for an artistic attitude that he defines as “mobile thought”: an attitude of continuous research, remote from pure intellectual reasoning. Steiner’s interest is focused on everything in nature that can reignite the fantasy through the recollection of universal images, or archetypes, that he considers common within the same culture or to humanity. These are images that populate the artist’s unconscious and which, once recalled, stimulate his creativity to work in a way that is no longer a subjective expression of the ego, but is totally objective and therefore ready to be shared with the public. Thus the power of creation will emerge from the spirituality of the artist, from his ability to relate to the world, understood as the macrocosm to which he belongs, and that is why Steiner saw in the theatre a vehicle and a means by which man can restore his spirituality. Chekhov adopts this concept of spiritual art, referring to his statements on meditation as an initiatory practice for the actor to acquire knowledge of human spirituality as well as of supersensible reality, and uses Steiner’s concept of a connection between nature and rhythm in the approach to acting, in order to reveal the inner forces and invisible movements hidden in the gesture (Padegimas 2009: 199).

Psychological Gesture (PG) or Soul Gesture?

In addition to suggestions on how to work with fantasy and imagination, Steiner offered actors a series of positions and attitudes derived from active observation of human beings: not only their outward appearances but also their spirituality. He initially intended these gestures for eurythmists, but later recommended them for actors also. He called them Soul Gestures. They comprise six attitudes that can help the actor to find the right atmosphere to express certain feelings or sensations through the movement of the whole body. Steiner lists them and describes their many nuances, illustrating the movements and the corresponding expressions: insatiability, intimacy, kindness, communication, sadness, and hopelessness – seen as manifestations of man’s spirituality (Steiner 1995). As we have seen, Chekhov also makes use of something similar: he calls them Psychological Gestures, and, although he is referring to Stanislavsky, in some cases there is an obvious link with the Soul Gestures Steiner had previously described in teaching eurythmy. Deirdre Hurst Du Prey points out the link between the two notions and notes that although Chekhov

drew his ideas from both Meyerhold and Vakhtangov, he was probably also referring to the gestures described by Steiner (1983: 85).⁶

Chekhov uses the term Psychological Gesture (PG) – referring to gestures both visible and invisible, real and potential – to indicate the whole of a gesture together with the feelings connected to it. The actor who understands the atmosphere and the psychological state in which his character is living may draw from them his actions and gestures, hence defining the image. He will not necessarily have to imitate these gestures on stage, but he can use them as a source of inspiration: we may consider them a kind of “guiding images.” Chekhov himself gives instructions for identifying the main PG of a character in relation to the state of mind and atmosphere in which it exists: by repeating this gesture physically and then in his own mind, the actor can grasp the essence of the character. Thus, the PG influences the actor’s creative imagination in order to discover new subtleties. For Chekhov it is the means that lead the actor along the path that proceeds from the dramatic text (from which he draws hints regarding the gestures) to the subconscious (which is the source of his interpretation) and finally to acting (1953). The PG is archetypal, Chekhov explains: “the gesture and the archetype are one thing – the gesture gives you the image, and the image gives the gesture” (1985: 116). In 1920 the Russian actor had already talked about it as an expression of the attitude of the character and as the archetype of the character itself. In time he refined this concept by working with eurythmy: from his meetings in the early 1920s with Assia Turgenieff and Andrey Bely, to the lessons at Dartington Hall.

Chekhov’s PG and Steiner’s Soul Gesture are fundamental elements in the work on the character. For Steiner, who described these gestures in 1913 on the occasion of his first lessons in eurythmy, it is a crucial subtext for the actor. In eurythmy the Soul Gesture serves to translate some inner moods of the human being and the atmospheres of the poem or drama onto the stage; for the actor Soul Gestures assume the function of a subtext that leads to the definition and embodiment of the atmosphere experienced by the character, and then to the expression of the corresponding attitude. These archetypal gestures are added to the repertoire of images that the actor will draw from his own subconscious through meditation. For Steiner, Soul Gestures are therefore images that awaken the actor’s fantasy and consequently the creative imagination. By recalling them the actor can not only represent archetypal gestures and movements but at the same time he can also evoke specific moods and feelings as a character, without relying on memories of his personal life to express sensations and feelings. Because they are determined through the observation of humanity and its spirituality, these gestures are an objective tool for the actor and a safe one because there is no emotional involvement. It is in fact a fundamental assumption for Steiner that the life of the actor should remain separated from the life of the character, because the latter lives in a world that does not belong to real life but to the artistic reality on stage. Regarding characterization, Chekhov himself illustrates how to observe people meticulously and the way they move in relation to feelings, emotions, and moods. These are attitudes that the actor has to practice imitating by incorporating traits revealed by observation: it is precious material that is stored in the unconscious and which will resurface when necessary. Chekhov explains how this type of exercise will lead the actor to see things that others do not see (1953).

Working on character: Steiner's influence on Chekhov's method

Other material left by Chekhov relates to dreams and contains strong references to Steiner's teachings. By recalling his dreams and by trying to live them again as clearly as possible with his awakened conscience, the actor, he argues, will find a sense of style and will train his imagination, because despite their often chaotic appearance, dreams are the products of our unconscious creativity and are therefore rich in style. Chekhov refers to Steiner's Drama Course (Dornach 1924), the last one he taught before his death in 1925, which deals with the actor. Although it lasted only a month, this course is a compendium of anthroposophical knowledge applied to theatre and to the art of acting. It contains references to Sprachgestaltung and eurhythmy, but above all descriptions of physical exercises related to the sound of the word and exercises devoted to the development of fantasy and imagination. As I have already mentioned (Cristini 2012), this course can be considered the ultimate expression of Steiner's theatrical research (Steiner 1926).

In the course, Steiner led the actor to a kind of observation that is not a mere knowledge of the exteriority of things but is also a perception of the forces and principles that lie beyond tangible reality and which are almost never taken into account: the esoteric and the intangible that constitute the supersensible and spiritual world of which humanity is also an image. Steiner's term "spirit" refers to the entirety of perceptive and cognitive abilities that form part of human beings. The other dimensions are given by their physical and etheric appearance, which consists of all the energies that rule them. All Steiner's teachings are based on a tripartite conception of the human being, a vision that Chekhov also appreciated. According to this idea, the human being is organized into a system of nerves and senses, the means of the world of sensible representations and thought; a rhythmic system, the means of development of the world of feeling and sensation and of everything that in mental representations is a reflection of the world of the senses; and finally a metabolic system through which the will pulses and in which the will finds its physical instrument.

Steiner firmly believed that observation of human beings, of their movements and expressions, and above all where they derive from – the spiritual life that animates gesture, voice, and movement – can provide actors with an archive of images on which to base their own artistic creation. In this sense he speaks of facing the object in a contemplative way (conscious and objective, comparable to meditation) in order to exclude any emotional and intellectual involvement. It is this profound observation that leads to the formation of a real image in the memory of the actor, an image that can be recalled and elaborated through fantasy while working on the character. Steiner divides this work into several stages. The actor gives an initial shape to the character through study of the language that the author has given him: he therefore starts from the text, not for its semantic value, but for the sound and rhythmic qualities of the speech. A better definition is then achieved through observation and meditation: the actor makes the character concrete by identifying its way of moving, walking, and talking, and finally he detaches himself from it through a process of objectification. To this end Steiner conceives a series of exercises based on the repetition of words composed of particular sounds and evocative of the sense of

tragic or comic, similar to a sort of mantra. The phrases are often meaningless but their repetition leads to a perception of the atmosphere in which the character is living without involving the actor emotionally. It is the sound itself that evokes in the actor the feelings and the emotions of the character, so that he does not risk identification or emotional involvement. According to Steiner, the actor has to be able to grasp the spiritual dimension of both reality and the play.

Steiner articulates the training of actors as being like a game of correspondences with the purpose of developing their creative imagination. Among the analogies he mentions are the relation of the sounds of vowels and consonants with the physical sensations and emotions. Another example is the link between the practice of the ancient Greek gymnastics⁷ and the exercise of the right tone in playing the drama. Steiner explains how to work on the association of the sense of taste to physical and emotional feelings, and the correspondence between colors and moods. If the memory of taste can lead to certain feelings and consequently can facilitate their expression, then each color (Steiner has in mind especially those that form the rainbow) provokes a particular state of mind. Thus, by meditating on colors (observing them in nature), the actor can immerse himself in what Steiner calls the "animic experience of colors," in order to interiorize that experience and then recall it on stage. While useful in the creation of the character, these exercises will not be explicitly evoked during the performance, but they will be like a sort of subtext that will guide the actor's work on stage.

To avoid the risk of identification with the character, or the opposite one of falling into cliché, Steiner states that the actor must maintain a boundary between the actor-self and the character-self, and avoid sharing the latter's emotions, feelings, and thoughts. For this reason he recommends a kind of work that is not based on the remembrance of the actor's personal life, but on the development of creative fantasy that will lead to the formation of the image on which the actor will build the character. By thus working not specifically on his personal interiority but with his fantasy and imagination, the actor, having provided the character with its own life and temperament, may then stay outside, in real life. Steiner writes:

What is presented on the stage is effective, not through its reality, but through what derives from the "fair seeming": it is imaginative despite its reality. And when the dramatic forms come before our souls as images—that too is imaginative, albeit in a special sense. Imagination is not experienced in its true being, but as a projection into our souls in image-form. In the same way a shadow thrown onto the wall by a three-dimensional object is related to the object itself, though in no way containing what lives in the object; as a good two-dimensional portrayal contains everything its three-dimensional subject has: so what is represented in our imaginings contains the shadow thrown there by imagination. The stage presentation is fundamentally nothing but an external, corporeal representation of what lives in these images and for this reason we feel an aversion (if we have healthy feeling for such things) whenever in the drama external reality is merely imitated naturalistically.

(Steiner and Steiner von Sivers 1981: 119)

As I have mentioned, Steiner also refers to dreams, using them to make a comparison between the fantasy image (the character) and the dream image, and to explain the level of insight needed to create a role. The exercise of meditation and concentration needed to remember a dream that will allow the actor to reach his deepest intimacy, his subconscious: the world of images locked in the unconscious memory and then recalled will constitute an objective repertoire of materials from which the actor can draw, being free of emotional memories or feelings. Steiner defines them as universal and archetypal images that, once embodied in the character/actor, will be recognizable by the audience due to their nature: the actor will make the character more tangible in the perception of the spectator, who will therefore experience the image as one shaped in his own fantasy. The character thus created will recall a partly unconscious set of images common both to the actor and the spectator; through the practice of *Sprachgestaltung* and work on the dramatic text, the actor will then define the contours of the character, whose figure would otherwise remain a blurred idea.

Here is the first step of the exercise: through meditation the actor remembers his dreams or the images registered unconsciously during the day and tries to reassemble the shapes emerging from his own subconscious. In the second step he must reach an even deeper level of introspection and relive all the events of the dream, striving to remember every little detail. Steiner explains that what is garnered by the unconscious during the day (and to which we do not usually pay much conscious attention), or what happens in the dream, will resurface in the quiet of meditation in a well-defined way: as memories that will replenish the archive of images on which the actor can draw. With this exercise he will refine his sensibility more and more and thus endow his store of images with new subtleties. For Steiner the key of the actor's creative work lies in his inner life, in his esotericism: the more the actor works on his unconscious memory, the more he will experience the character spiritually, while remaining emotionally detached. In this esoteric dimension, the lived experience of the subconscious takes the place of reality and enriches the imagination.

Steiner developed his theatrical pedagogy in opposition to the ideas of naturalism and realism in the theatre, and in order to reveal the artistic dimension of the work on stage. Moreover, he focused on the subconscious in order to develop the actor's imagination, protect his mental health, and avoid involving him or her personally and psychologically during his work on the character. Chekhov likewise did not agree with the total psychological involvement of the actor and sought to develop a new creative process regarding the character: Steiner's method and thought offered a way to train fantasy and imagination by working on the spiritual dimension. Concentration, meditation, remembering dreams, and recalling images from unconscious memory are all practices that give actors concrete images and archetypes to which they can refer both in the creation of character and on stage during the performance. In these universal images— together with the PG and Soul Gesture, with the atmosphere and the spirituality of language (which for Steiner gives the atmosphere to the performance)— Chekhov saw an alternative way of working on character, a sort of subtext on which to build its life and temperament. With this approach, the actor works on his own spirituality. In Chekhov's and Steiner's methods, meditation and focusing on the subconscious is essential in order to develop fantasy and the imagination: by

meditating, the actor can collect the images in his unconscious memory which will form the basis of his creation of the character. These images are precious because of their objective nature and also because they are archetypal.

Both teachers take the same path towards objective creation, which leads to artistic creation on stage, visualizing an ideal spiritual theatre as a means to reach the spiritual dimension of both humanity and the world. Steiner's practical examples of meditation, comparing the oneiric dimension to the spiritual one and explaining how to reach them, offered Chekhov tangible instruments with which to work on elements that otherwise would have remained abstract concepts and on which he could base a technique for the actor.

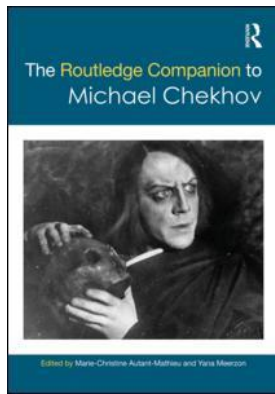
Notes

- 1 For a further investigation see M.-C. Autant-Mathieu (ed.) (2009), *Mikhaïl Tchekhov/ Michael Chekhov. De Moscou à Hollywood. Du théâtre au cinéma*, Montpellier: L'Entretemps.
- 2 We know from direct sources that in the First Studio of Stanislavsky the actors already practiced yoga and other exercises drawn from Eastern philosophies. See White (2009).
- 3 For several examples of exercises devoted to the imagination see Chekhov (1953).
- 4 15 April 1936. See Chekhov (2000).
- 5 For a further understanding see the fundamental works of Rudolf Steiner edited by the Rudolf Steiner Verlag (Dornach).
- 6 In the course of my research, I have additionally found parallels between these ideas and the instruction given by François Delsarte in his course of applied aesthetics (Cristini 2011).
- 7 Running, jumping, throwing the javelin, weight lifting, wrestling.

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