

3218
Michael Chekhov

7445
October 21, 1941

First Lesson to Students in New York Class

GROUP FEELING
PHYSICAL - PSYCHOLOGICAL EXERCISES

GROUP FEELING:

In life today, everyone loses his individual face because of certain clichés which cover the life of humanity. It makes us all uniform and as long as we are uniform, we cannot create anything. Therefore, we should try to awaken a certain first desire to become a group, an individual group with certain qualities, certain positive and perhaps negative sides, but individual. The group which is sitting here today cannot be substituted for any other. The idea that we are the seed of something which will grow and bring special results; individual results, not a uniform result. This desire to become somehow individual as a group, will help us very much in our practical work.

All the exercises we shall give you will be exercised by you not only here, but at home or wherever you are when you are not here. This is essentially important because if you make these exercises only when you are here, it is not enough to re-create our nature, as it were, in the sense that we want to free certain powers which are in us. All the exercises have to be repeated again and again while you are not in class.

There is always one great difficulty which arises. You will say that you get so many exercises that you will not

M. Chekhov

October 21, 1941

have time to do all of them, and gradually your activity may drop because you do not know which exercise to do. Here is the first step towards the individual approach to our Method. You have to choose exercises which you think are given just for you. This problem can be decided only by you. Each of you must ask himself which exercise appeals more to him, and then concentrate on those exercises as much as time allows. But in the future, try to avoid the feeling that there are so many exercises that you do not know how to do them.

PHYSICAL - PSYCHOLOGICAL EXERCISES:

We have a series of exercises which can be regarded as purely physical and bodily ones, and there is another kind which can be regarded as exercises of a more psychological nature. This is true and yet not true because all of our physical, bodily exercises are based absolutely on psychological energy, power, desire, etc., and all our psychological exercises are serving one aim - to develop our psychology and bodily activities so that they will become one.

The soul of the actor wants to express itself, and as long as we have our bodies, voices, etc., we have to have a psychology which permeates absolutely our body, and we have to have a body which is absolutely responsive to our psychological impulses and desires. So they are one thing - our body must become part of our soul, and our soul must

M. Chokhov

October 21, 1941

become part of our body and voice, etc. If we achieve this result, it is one of the main things to be got in our school.

There are so many things in all of us which try to separate our soul and hide it and cover it with so many things which we accumulate through our childhood, through education, school, and the life around us. We hide our soul deeper and deeper inside us, and sometimes it is so deeply hidden that we do not know that we have one. And then we try to act - with what means? With our body and voice? But these are not enough to create anything. Our body is not creative if it is not permeated - our voices are dead if they are not able to convey certain movements and qualities which our soul has. So we have to meet ourselves once in a very strange way - we have to discover that we must be able to overcome certain things which we have not overcome until now - to show to our audience certain emotions which we were ashamed to show even to ourselves. We have to discover these emotions to be brave enough to meet this moment when we must decide that if I am going to be an actor, then I must show things which I have hidden until now. Otherwise, I have only my body and my voice and so many clichés. But that is not art in any sense.

Tomorrow we will start our exercises, and we will try to see, day after day, how our soul and our body and voice can be awakened and merged together. We shall meet

M. Chokhov

October 21, 1941

this not very pleasant moment when we must tell ourselves that we must become more open, otherwise we cannot act and cannot be understood. Then we have to develop this kind of activity and choose certain exercises to concentrate on. We have to want to create an individual face for our group. So, when we start our exercises, let these ideas be remembered by you, as they may help. Our duty will be always to repeat things which have been told you, and to remind you again and again so that you will have pleasure in hearing them.