

Michael Chekhov

October 5, 1936

OPENING DAY - CHEKHOV THEATRE STUDIO
Dartington Hall, Totnes, Devon, England

First Lesson¹

THE ACTOR-ARTIST
CONCENTRATION
THE ACTOR'S MARCH

THE ACTOR-ARTIST:

It is very important that during the lessons you must be very active at all times. Your figure [body] must be beautiful during the whole lesson. In whatever you are doing, you must feel yourself full of power, full of energy, and never allow yourself to be a bit weaker or use the chairs to help you. These things we must avoid once and forever.

In our school everybody is beautiful, everybody is strong, healthy, and very active. That is our style, and if we try always to be like that, you will see very soon the people who belong to our kind of school and those who do not. You must have pleasure in staying with us. You must feel that you are doing it with great pleasure. That is a very important feeling for an artist; to do everything with great pleasure and joy. You must be gay and serious at the same time; young and clever, powerful and soft. We are going to study this way in our school.

We aim to be actors and more than actors - artists. What does this mean? It means that we are going to study, to learn how we can have our inspiration at our command. That

is our most difficult task, but we shall have a method which will make it possible, and the first condition is that we must be able to concentrate.

CONCENTRATION:

Exercises for developing concentration:

Begin with very simple exercises: 1. Choose a chair and try to find out everything about it - its form, color, weight, and so forth. Now send your feelings to the chair. Now move the chair with your "invisible hands," touching it and lifting it. Send your will, your power, to the chair. Now drop the concentration and be aware of the difference between being concentrated and not being concentrated. Now repeat by sending your power, your will, your feeling to the chair. Increase your power.

2. Concentrate on the chair, and when you feel that you are really one with the chair, close your eyes and see the chair in your imagination only. Now send your will, your power, your feeling to this image.

3. Listen to a sound on the drum. Feel the sound all around you, enveloping you. You will have a feeling of joy from being concentrated on this sound. Now stop the actual sound, but continue to follow it, to listen to it. It should be as clear for you as the real sound.

4. Now, when the sound is being played, become distracted by something else. Then, when the sound is not there,

try to hear it by being concentrated on the imaginary sound. These exercises will help you to realize that when you are concentrated, you can hear an imaginary sound more clearly than you can when listening to an actual sound, while being distracted.

5. Now the musician will play a tune to which you will move quite freely. Then each must choose a tune of his own, and while the musician continues to play his theme, you will listen to your inner tune and move to it.

THE ACTOR'S MARCH:

March around the room following a leader. You are strong, you are healthy, your hands and arms are free and beautiful, your legs are strong. Imagine yourselves in three parts - around your head is the feeling of space and power, the power of thought. Around your chest will be the power of feeling, and around your feet the power of will. These must be in beautiful harmony as you march. Then you will be concentrated people.

Exercise:

Concentrate on a spot somewhere in the room, send yourself to it, become one with it, and when it becomes a living force for you, then begin to move about, to play ball, becoming freer and freer in your body, but all the time increasing your will toward the spot. Drop the concentration. Once

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more, concentrate on the spot, then become distracted. Try to remember how you felt when you were concentrated.

These exercises will be repeated many times, but, as artists, you must learn to listen to them each time as if for the first time.