

Michael Chekhov

August 26, 1940

USING THE METHOD
 TEMPO
 RHYTHM AND LAWS OF COMPOSITION
 THE GROUP AND THE INDIVIDUAL
 NEW PLAYS
 THE ARTIST'S INNER ACTIVITY
 THE DIRECTOR'S ROLE
 METHOD OF REHEARSING
 THRESHOLD BETWEEN THE ACTOR'S PRIVATE
 AND CREATIVE LIFE
 A "STAR" GROUP

Twelfth Night

Max Reinhardt

Dr. Rudolf Steiner

We have entered into a new stage in our work in the studio and in the theatre. The first half of the work is my long speech, but the second half is the work you must do in applying my suggestions, each one to himself. Do not take it "in general." I shall speak about certain points as though I am criticizing you, but don't think of it as criticism but rather as a statement of fact. That will create the right atmosphere during our talk.

USING THE METHOD:

We have somehow entered deeply only into the first stage of our work, which we may call the understanding of the Method. But that is not enough. To understand the Method does not mean that we are able to use it. Of course, the longer we work together, the more we shall learn to use the Method.

TEMPO:

So the first stage is to understand the Method, and

M. Chekhov

August 26, 1940

the second stage - which we have to enter now - is how to work with it, how to apply it, and in which sense. For instance, I mean today in the sense of tempo in our work. We must use our Method, or whatever kind of work you apply so that the tempo of our work will change from now on. We are absolutely wrong in our tempo.

RHYTHM AND LAWS OF COMPOSITION:

The third stage, which we will enter later, will be when we try to find that which is the finest part of all art, and our art especially - I call it rhythm or the laws of composition. But for this stage of our work, we must be more ready inwardly. What interests us now is the tempo.

THE GROUP AND THE INDIVIDUAL:

It would be good for us today to understand that there are two things in our theatrical life - one is the group, and the group has its own requirements, its own means of life. There are certain things without which the group cannot live and develop. There are individuals in the group, and the individuals have a quite separate life and this is right. Individual life and group life must be understood very clearly, once and for all. If, in our minds, there is a confusion between these two different things - a member of the group and the group itself - then both suffer. The individual feels that there is something wrong with him or the group, and the group

M. Chekhov

August 26, 1940

suffers because it does not get what it needs for its life. The individual must know what the life of the group is, and then, remaining individual, adjust his own life to the life of the group.

Let us see what the group needs. It needs, first of all, to earn money. A very materialistic point of view but very essential. If, for instance, this individual has more money and this one less, the individuals will always adjust themselves to life, but the group needs a certain amount of money or it cannot exist. That means that the group must be able to produce the goods which it can sell first quicker, and second, better. About the better part of it, we try to raise the standard of our productions and will continue to try, but about the quicker part we are very weak.

What does it mean to be quicker? It means that we can count on selling our goods more quickly. What does that mean for us? The quicker we can prepare our plays, the more opportunity each of you will have to develop yourselves as actors. You will not need to sit so many months and prepare only one small part. You must be able to work so quickly that we can produce one play after another.

Now you may think that it is I who am slow. I will disillusion you. I work very quickly, and I give you so many suggestions, but I never get them back quickly. To give a suggestion quickly is one thing, but your mistake is that you

M. Chekhov

August 26, 1940

either forget it immediately after it is given, or you lose it after the rehearsal, dropping it at the door of the theatre. You don't pay attention to it, or you don't elaborate it.

My tragedy and yours is that after giving you certain suggestions, the next rehearsal comes and I do not see anything from the suggestions of the last rehearsal. Please apply this individually, but in general the group drags the whole work down. And what actually am I doing which seems that I am slow and deliberate? I am repeating at each rehearsal the same thing. We got it, to a certain extent, but tomorrow, instead of going on, I am compelled to repeat again the same suggestions. So the tempo of the work is entirely with you.

I have noticed another thing which is also a sign that we do not understand what it means to work quickly. Let us take an example from Twelfth Night. When we chose the play, the group was excited, and the work went so quickly because you were somehow satisfied with the play. Then came a long period when you could not move forward. I knew that it was because you lost the accidental joy and when the period came when you had to work in tempo, then it was slow because there was no tempo and no ability to work with the Method. Then came the third period when you knew that the performance was very near. Again everyone was active, and we were more or less ready.

M. Chekhov

August 26, 1940

This is, of course, wrong in all three parts. To work quickly because of the accidental excitement, not to be able to work because there is no excitement, then to work because the finish is near - it is all wrong. This is the most dangerous kind of floundering. It is not work, it is not knowledge of our profession - it is pure accident.

Here we must ask ourselves whether the Method helps or not. If the Method is not taken in, it does not help. The Method is like a box - if you do not open it, it cannot help. But tempe you must be able to understand even if you are not using the Method, if you are preparing your parts somehow, even then you can apply tempe - and that is what I call the life of the group.

The life of the group requires certain things which are independent of the individual. Whether this or that individual has acquired the Method or not, the group requires tempe. One may prepare his part by simply repeating the words - it is wrong, but still it can be done. Another may imagine the audience, and he becomes inflamed and works for five minutes and then it is gone from his imagination. It is wrong, but it may work. Another has his own personal method. But even in such kind of floundering, tempe must be applied. When we get our kind of tempe, we will get more and more parts.

NEW PLAYS:

M. Chekhov

August 26, 1940

We are always in great danger - as is every theatre - and we especially because we are not backed by somebody with modern, sensational plays - we have to persuade the audience that we are good only by acting. If we hope to rely on good plays, we must know that they are now so infrequent and that eighty-five percent of them are failures. We can always have a failure if we count on the play itself. We cannot count on good plays - famous authors will give their plays, first of all, to certain stars and not to us now. It is quite natural, quite obvious. We must not close our eyes to it, but it does not mean that we cannot go on developing our group so that one day good playwrights will come to us first.

How can we do this? By raising the standard of our acting. We cannot rely on our efforts but only on our acting, and again we come to the third point to remember. If we go slowly, we will develop slowly - this is again the question of raising the standard of our acting so that we will get more and more different parts.

From the point of view of our own dignity as actors, what is actually the difference between a free artist and a slavish one? Slaves always need a certain whip - a slave is not able to do anything before he is ordered and whipped. And what is it, other than a whip, when we like the play and are even intoxicated by it - we work and then the intoxication is gone, and we are like slaves again. Another whip of the

M. Chekhov

August 26, 1940

coming performance and we work again. It is a slavish psychology.

What would be the free approach to our work? Of course the opposite one - constant activity in the sense of terrible inner and outer tempo in the work, whether I like the play or not, whether I like the performance or not, if I am an artist, I am an active one, an artist who lives and works in tempo, in extreme tempo. It is not just quicker, it must be extreme tempo. Then we can hope to really bring such an amount of life to our group, that the group will develop quicker in every sense.

Now you will tell me that one may be tired or that something may stop the tempo or diminish it, or one can say that by nature one is not quick. In each of us, but in an artist especially, there is such an amount of hidden activity that it is only the question of discovering it once - really discovering it. If you do discover the real amount of activity in you, then you will say to yourself, "Now I am awakened, and I will never desire to fall into the deep sleep which I, as an artist, was in before."

THE ARTIST'S INNER ACTIVITY:

You cannot imagine what a great happiness it is to find one's own activity - as an artist, it is the greatest happiness you can imagine. It is something which cannot be substituted from outside. Let me give you a little example.

M. Chekhov

August 26, 1940

I was always more or less active in my theatre work, but once I came into a terribly difficult situation. It was in Germany when I met Reinhardt for the first time, and he gave me the leading part in his play. He wanted to perform the play in Vienna, and he gave me this part.¹

Now if you know German actors, you will realize that after they have acted the play a hundred times, they get a strange ability - they speak so quickly that they don't understand each other - the audience does not understand them well either, but the actors cannot stop this quick speech. I was familiar with the German language, but it was not my mother tongue. But Reinhardt told me to be ready in eight days - my first German part! I had to learn acrobatic action; I had to learn the text and to understand my partners. The members of the group thought that if I entered Reinhardt's group, I must be able to understand the language. Either I had to say no, or I had to do it. I decided to do it, and that was the moment when I discovered that all the activity I had possessed in my life before was simply nothing and that was the birthday of my tempo.

I prepared the part, the tricks, and was able to understand my partners, and in eight days I was ready. Then I have understood that if it is necessary, or better still, if it is understood that it is necessary to have this kind of activity, it is there. So it is never lack of activity.

M. Chekhov

August 26, 1940

it is lack of understanding that the activity is necessary, and that is the point.

It is like the first birth throes. There are some mothers who cannot make the necessary physical effort, and the child is born in quite a different way. Up until now, in my work with you it is through I am always making a caesarean operation! That is why I have been so unhappy, because the mother - after such an operation - cannot have children in the future, and this is again very similar to our situation. If you prepare your part so that it requires a caesarean operation, then you will become weaker because you will feel that somehow the curtain will be raised, but that after this operation you will become more and more passive. After another part you will be still weaker, and the surgeon will be absolutely exhausted.

THE DIRECTOR'S ROLE:

We, the directors, must also have our joy, and that lies in seeing how the child grows after it is born - we must see and enjoy the new life. When you always repeat the same thing, we lose interest; that means that we, the director, lose our inspiration which we need too. If we come to you and give you certain suggestions, and if you answer us by preparing the part, elaborating it, then we get new ideas and are inspired by your work. But if you do not do it, we become so depressed

M. Chokhov

August 26, 1940

and exhausted that we start the rehearsal with the feeling that we are afraid to begin. It becomes painful and senseless.

Instead of that, we could develop the play and elaborate it to such an extent that not only will the audience be astonished at how you can act, but you yourselves will be astonished. In our Twelfth Night performance, there are so many things which can be done, so many humorous and romantic things. If I could show you the store in my mind where all these unborn things are lying, you would see the pity of it. Why? Because you do not give me the full opportunity to do all the things which can be done.

About this inner activity from another point of view. My destiny gave me the opportunity with Reinhardt when I discovered more activity than I had ever experienced before. But it is not necessary for everyone to encounter such a difficult task. It can be discovered by us, but in the psychological approach to the work. It can be a similar case. You can discover it with great pain and a feeling of catastrophe, or you can discover it easily by simply discovering your own activity.

Now the secret. If you will once discover the source of real human activity and artistic activity, you will get a very strange thing. You will discover that you are not getting as tired as you were before. Half-work makes one more tired than full-work. The more creative you are, the less tired you

M. Chokhov

August 26, 1940

are. In our organism there is one organ through which all our activity goes and that is our physical heart. If one tries to awaken the activity without appealing to his heart, such activity will never be the right one; it will be tension or something different again.

The heart is the organ for two things - physical and psychological. Psychological for the circulation of the will and for efforts of thinking. You cannot think properly if you don't make the effort, ~~not in your head but in your~~ heart. You must think of making such an effort in your heart, and then you will understand what real thinking is. All of you know this to a certain extent.

Here the whole mystery lies. If you make a half-effort, your heart gets tired. If you make a full effort, your heart becomes awakened instead of being tired. The heart, like a plant, needs to be fed. Imagine you are a plant and that you say to the earth, "Not so much sap." The plant might have the illusion that it is growing, but it will be fading, while if the plant will ask for more sap, it will become stronger. The same is true of the heart in the spiritual sense. If we don't fill it with activity, it gets tired, but if we fill it with activity, it gets life and strength. Our ability to be active without being tired increases.

It is one of the illusions that we all have, that the less work we do the more power we accumulate. Quite the

M. Chekhov

August 26, 1940

opposite is true. If one sleeps more than is necessary, one wants to sleep more and more, whereas if one sleeps less than is quite necessary, he is more and more awakened. Half-activity makes one tired, while full activity makes one strong. From the point of view of Dr. Steiner's teaching I can tell you what he says from the spiritual standpoint. He says that everyone has two hearts - one physical and the other etheric. The etheric heart is actually the one which should work, and he who develops this heart with pure human activity develops the etheric heart, and it sometimes becomes a very big one. The physical heart is always about the size of a fist, but the etheric heart can be huge and never gets tired. When the person gets the real activity, the whole effort is transposed to the etheric heart, and the question of being tired is no longer there. The etheric heart does the work, and it is always sound and even a person with a bad physical heart can work for hours without trouble, because the etheric heart is there. But in order to get this, one must develop the real activity, and then it will grow. So from this point of view, it is the same thing.

METHOD OF REHEARSING:

Now one practical suggestion. As we enter this new stage in our work, which is the stage in which we must find the tempo for the sake of the group and for personal development, I will give you some suggestions. First of all, try to

M. Chekhov

August 26, 1940

got the habit of coming to rehearsals with paper and pencil, or better, still, with a notebook. After each rehearsal I will give you time to sit down quietly and write down the main points which you must remember, elaborate, and prepare for the next rehearsal. You will write them down, and while you are doing this you will already somehow summarize the rehearsal. You will not drop it after the rehearsal stops. You will concentrate and accumulate and write it down so that you may prepare it for the next rehearsal.

The second suggestion - between rehearsals you have really to prepare what you have written down. It would be better at the next rehearsal for you to say that you have not been able to get all the suggestions, but only this and this. Then we would at least know where we were. Be sure that you do not repeat what you did the last time, but you will be doing something new which you have prepared - so many atmospheres, or objectives, or whatever they are - you will enter the stage with a certain definite thing which has been prepared.

What will the rehearsal be as a result? It will be a real rehearsal, during which you will try out how much you are able to master what you have prepared. If you enter the stage and start the rehearsal with a feeling of the play in general, of the scene in general, and of yourself in general, it is nothing. But if you always have something which you

M. Chekhov

August 26, 1940

know - even if at the beginning it will be only three of four things - it will be a consciously taken step forward.

When your activity is more and more awakened, you will see that you can do much more than you can even guess. It will develop, but certain things must be there already. By doing so we will develop another thing. We will grasp things, our artistic souls will grasp things quicker than we do now. It is also an organic development of our effort to awaken activity and to work consciously. This ability to grasp things becomes organic with this awakened tempo and activity. This is gained through tempo.

On entering the stage you must say to yourself that you can do this or that thing because it is prepared, and then you will get another thing. You will be able to distinguish between your own floundering - it will be as clear as being ill or being well. If you are floundering on the stage without an artistic actor's aim, you will feel ill and that is right. You must be tortured by this invisible floundering, you must be unhappy or even ill because of it. If you can bear this floundering, then it is a sign that something is wrong with you. When we sleep, we sleep; but when we are awakened, we must be fully awakened. Our etheric heart must become a worker for us. When you look at your friends on the stage while they are working, you will become ill when they are floundering, but if you see them working consciously,

M. Chekhov

August 26, 1940

you will become inspired. It will come, and there are many signs by which you can judge. But if you are indifferent to your own state on the stage and to your partners', then you are asleep.

As artists of our kind, you must forget absolutely that there is a state of indifference. It must be discarded. You must be either happy or unhappy - there are no other states for us. When indifference comes, then you are wrong and nothing is accomplished by the individual or the group because the group has its own requirements, and one of them is that each individual must have his own conception of art and work, but for the group the activity must be there. Either happy or unhappy but never indifferent.

THRESHOLD BETWEEN THE ACTOR'S PRIVATE AND CREATIVE LIFE:

Then a practical suggestion: after you have written down your ideas, work upon them during rehearsals, together or individually, and then come to the next rehearsal and consciously do something. When we started our school in Dartington, I mentioned from the beginning the so-called inner threshold between inner work and private life, and this is the time to remind you of it. You may get the desire to follow my suggestions and make an effort, but if you forget about the threshold between your private life and your creative one, you will not be able to do anything.

You must make a certain inner division once and

M. Chekhov

August 26, 1940

forever between the private life and the stage, whether it is rehearsal of performance. Then you will see how much more you will get from such a rehearsal, which is, as it were, a performance - how much more you will be able to perform and how much richer it will be. You must change your inner psychology and step over the threshold, then you will get richer and richer and will be more and more sure of yourself.

It is so important to believe in oneself as an actor, to know that you are doing good work. But you will never get this positive feeling, this assurance, if you enter each rehearsal just as you were before - then it merges like a mass of porridge or something which is without form. Inwardly there should be no time or space for anything but the rehearsal. I get angry because I feel I cannot more the play forward - this is also wrong. But on the manner of your approaching the rehearsals in the future everything will depend. It is not something which can simply be given to you as a suggestion. You must understand how essential and important it is to get the tempo. Let us understand this necessity because there is no lack of activity - only lack of understanding.

Please think of what I have told you - my whole appeal to you is to try to get the idea of why it is important to work in this way. If you understand this, you will find the approach to your own tremendous activity. Without this activity you cannot live. We can take part of our activity

M. Chekhov

August 26, 1940

for living and make it a conscious activity and use it in our artistic work.

Why do people who do nothing become fat and dull? Because this activity is not used. It all belongs to us, and we can take it and transform it into spiritual activity. Why does a person who works very much spiritually tend to become thinner and taller? Because part of the activity which serves the body is taken by the spiritual activity, and this is right. We must not give too much of our human activity to our bodily activity and let it become fat - whether visible or not. Our body will become finer and stronger.

We cannot say that we are not active by nature. We are all absolutely active, so active that if we once find it out, we will become heroes and pioneers in our group. And it requires only one thing: to discover this unlimited activity in us, and to apply it to the tempo of our work. To get this ability one must understand why it is necessary for our group.

A "STAR" GROUP:

On another point: I have told you many times that we are not hoping to have stars in our group. We want everyone to be a star, and first of all, the group itself must be a star. A group can arise which can be considered as a star - a group which acts so well that it becomes equal to a star - that is our aim. Everyone in such a group must be a star, and

M. Chekhov

August 26, 1940

the group itself is such a star. If we consider our group as a growing star, then we will understand that there is no other way to create this group, or "star group," than to sacrifice individual things to the group.

What is this sacrifice? Activity and tempo. If the group consists of individuals who are all awakened in the sense of activity and are all able to work in tempo, then the group cannot help but be a star. What will the group be like if we are awakened and working in terrific tempo - a star? That is our destiny. What happens to groups when they have individual stars and all the other actors are lower? The stars are sucking the lifeblood from the group - the stars become more and more shining, while the group is dying.

I once saw a performance in which the star was acting not very well, while another actor was doing beautiful work, but no one paid attention to him. The star had a big series of clichés, but no one noticed the acting of the good artist - that is the star system. It is terrible and tragic.

What are we aiming at. Whether it is the part of a servant in the play, whether it has one word or no word at all, it must be just as well regarded by the audience. But it can be done only if we understand that the individual must sacrifice something to the group and that is this new-found tempo.

Perhaps one feels that I don't want to sacrifice

M. Chekhov

August 26, 1940

certain personal things for the sake of the group - the group disturbs certain personal things which I preserve for myself. But it must be understood that the group has its own life. The group cannot live without having its own life, which is something quite separate from each of us. If we understand this profoundly, we will always face the question - "Do I really give to this being all that I can?" Then you will not be able to belie yourself by saying "I did what I had to do and then lived my own life." If you really look at this, you may see that you do not give the group what it needs, but what you don't need.

When we understand that the group has a separate independent being, you will see what it needs. It is a very fine thing for each one of us, and we must decide this question individually. And what will be the result? We will find that we can give to the group much more than we give now, simply because we are clear about the question of what is the group's needs. It is again the same question - if we understand the problem, we can always find the power and the right means to solve it. If we half-understand or are half-aware of what is going on, we may be inspired by things in our private lives, but the group may not need this.

Perhaps the group does not need our accidental fire - the group may need quiet attention at rehearsals, or constant fire instead of an explosion, or perhaps it needs

M. Chekhov

August 26, 1940

only a little effort from each of us to cross the threshold. When you understand what the group is and what our aim is in creating a star group, then you will realize more and more what it means. You will cross the threshold, you will stop unnecessary talk behind the stage, and so on. It will become quite different to us if we are concerned with what the group needs, rather than what we are willing to give at the moment.

So let us think of what I have spoken about as being in three parts: 1. The Method, 2. The manner of using the Method, which is active tempo. 3. Then the third stage will come, which is the composition or the rhythm and that is the very heart of our art. It will come in time.

If the Method is understood from the point of view of the group and tempo, then you will see what can happen. Imagine the ideal actor who can use the Method perfectly and instantly. What will you see? Terrific tempo. Sometimes we strive one rehearsal after another for an objective, we will be able to take any objective instantly, and then you will find the economy of time. If each member of the group is able to do this, we will find ourselves ready even before the settings are.

When we rehearse Cricket today, let us begin this new stage in our work. Try to find out what Cricket really is, what your part in it is, what you have done before, what has been required of you. Try to find this activity and come

M. Chekhov

August 26, 1940

prepared and conscious of all this. That is your first task.