

Michael Chekhov

November 17, 1939

Meeting with members of the group

FUTURE OF THE STUDIO:

Beatrice: We have all been feeling certain things on our own, and we have tried to analyze our feelings. Even before we went to New York, we felt that we were frightfully isolated here - much more so than at Dartington. We have no outside life at all, and it is much harder to find the stimulus to work. Gradually one loses the desire to act. At Dartington we had activity around us which led us and gave us the desire to work and fight. When we came here, it became a little more abstract to know what we are going against. It is difficult to have any personal life here - we all had the desire to get in to New York. The feeling is that there would be great difficulty in getting an audience around here - from the community - and the expense would be great for so little.

Michael Chekhov: I can only speak frankly to you. I think that your desire to live in the city and to get inspiration from it is the way I had hoped you would leave behind you. Being inspired by the city life means to be against everything I wanted from you. I wanted to find something other than the banal life of the city - that will never lead you to the ideal which I thought of. I will not go with you - I cannot do this business. If I cannot, in two or three years, awaken in you fully this pioneer desire which does not know this city life, I am mistaken, and you must find someone else to lead you who

M. Chekhov

November 17, 1939

will accept your aspirations and will use this nervous illness which leads to the war. I cannot lead you in this modern disease.

I believe that we have come to the moment when you have to decide whether you are going this way or that way. To work in these circumstances gives us the opportunity and ability to concentrate - this is a kind of creation. If you will go to subways and elevators, etc., you will not become pioneers in the sense I mean. I cannot shut my eyes to it. If you cannot concentrate fully here, you will not be able to concentrate there - you will have a feeling of being drunk. But this is not what I have been looking for my whole life. I cannot give in so easily immediately to this. My whole ideas and ideals and experience and hopes are in this, and I would be a liar if I say something else. I must say that that is no, and if you accept it, well and good; if not, I will find my destiny elsewhere.

If you think by leaving our life here you will get any more than the usual kind of results in the theatre, you are very much mistaken. One of our friends who had left the Studio asked me why didn't I choose experienced people, why did I work with young students who didn't understand me, why not take experienced people and make productions with them? But I believe only in young people - only young people can understand what I mean - never experienced, old actors. Therefore,

M. Chokhov

November 17, 1939

I believe in modern youth - only they can once understand what I mean and go with me together to certain things which will be entirely new in every way - the vision of the life of the theatre of the future, the rejection of the past.

Therefore, I do not mean to say that you do not have the right to go to the city - it is right and natural, but on the other hand I am also right. If you take the scissors and cut down the plant which we have tried to grow for three years - that is a big question which must be solved. But I know one thing and that is that I cannot give up my belief in modern youth, my belief and vision of the future, my point of view of the present life.

Please forget that we belong to different nationalities - we must speak humanly. If you could see in what danger America is now, what powers are arising everywhere, how soon they will overwhelm you without asking where you want to live, or what you want to do - they will crush you. Two tremendous powers and two terrible figures are standing over America - I speak as a human being to human being - you know the names of these powers. If you young people who are much finer than others, don't see this danger, if you take your life just to become a little busy and happy instead of creating something which will fight these two figures which are hovering over the only free country - then you are yourselves in great danger and you do not see where you are driving. It is too important

M. Chekhov

November 17, 1939

and I cannot stop from saying this.

The question which you put before me is not just that of changing the place but changing everything. What I always meant was that we could become pioneers, not only in the theatre but that this group could create something which is important for America - something much more significant - a group of people who want the inner life with eyes which see these two figures which are looming over us all. This can be done only through such effort where you have sacrificed something, where you have opened your eyes to see the life as it is - which is like a nightmare. We can use our life here simply to dream about the city, or we can use our life here to see what is going on around us everywhere. If you do, you will see the real tremendous danger.

Mary Lou:           What I found in New York was not excitement, but the fact that one saw people that you are working for. - it is for these people that you are working.

Lonnie:               You must know that we want to follow you, or we would not be here. But our life depends upon the people who come to see the play.

Mary La:             New York is as abnormal in its excitement as this place is without any life.

Erika:                I feel I don't need stimulation, and I work a hundred times better in the country, but I feel I must act for people, and if it is impossible to get an audience out here, then I think it would be better to go to another place.

M. Chekhov

November 17, 1939

Michael Chekhov: Have you no concrete suggestions?

Hurd: We felt very unified and strong during our work in New York.

Michael Chekhov: What you say and what Beatrice says are two entirely different things.

Beatrice: Many of us do not love the city, but here we are so isolated. Even if the Studio were in Ridgefield itself it would be better.

G. Shdanoff: That is one of the sacrifices which our profession when taken deeply really demands. In the city we are distracted by many other personal problems so that our performances may not be ready.

Alice Crowther: I think the problem is not one of the stimulation of the city, but rather the stimulation of encountering opposition to our life.

Michael Chekhov: You are fighting in a different field of life. In my youth I had no direction - I was just thrown into the life - I was not led, and I was unhappy. In modern times there are two ways, either to be absolutely aware of the way, or to flounder as I did. It is a question of knowing which state we are in as a group. Have we aims and means to our aims, or are we aimless and without means?

Lonnie: I think we feel we could bring more to the group if we had our own individual life.

Louise: I think you must appreciate everything you

M. Chekhov

November 17, 1939

have accumulated in the world. But I feel that I am terribly young and know nothing about the world and have nothing to give.

Tom: Out here in the country, just among ourselves, we become stagnant. If we had been able to go right back with a production of Pickwick, it would have solved our problems because we would have had our audience, and we would have had our personal lives at the same time. I want to act for people. From my point of view, I think we would lose money by trying to build up a theatre out here.

Beatrice: I think things have been clarified in many ways. We have heard Mr. Chekhov's opinion about the country, and we know that we don't want to live with subways, etc. Now that we know Mr. Chekhov's point of view, it seems to boil down to the question of our own personal lives, and a lot of questions have been clarified.

John: Perhaps our personal life should not be suspended to such an extent that we lose touch with human beings outside our scope of activity.

Woodie: If there is no other way, it is a difficulty we must face.

Blair: I think that now that Mr. Chekhov has given us his opinion and we know definitely what he feels about it, and we are here to be led by him in the way he sees for the group, we must make the decision. These things sap so much the energies of the individual - make your decision and either

M. Chekhov

November 17, 1939

go ahead or not. Make the sacrifice, take the long view, make the decision yourself for one way or the other.

Lonnie: If this feeling is so universal in the group, it might mean either going back three years or going on. Some consideration must be given to those who want certain things, otherwise they may be made to feel forced to leave when they don't really want to. Something very important to their being and their welfare may be lacking so they will go, but they need not. If people keep leaving the Studio, we will be going back three years and even more, and it need not be. I feel it can be solved somehow.

Sam: I don't believe that if you don't wholly agree with Mr. Chekhov, you should get out or hold your tongue and sit. This is essentially a democratic group - if we are strong enough, we can influence Mr. Chekhov, and if he is strong enough, he will influence us. It can be merged and reconciled.

Michael Chekhov: I would feel extremely unhappy if you were to shut your mouths just as I know I will not shut my mouth, and I will not make compromises. My suggestion would be that you have to live with this problem and take practical steps. If you find a wonderful plan, then I will reserve the right to say "yes" or "no" to it. Having respect for each other's freedom, we must try to find a practical plan, and I will tell you whether I will follow it or not.

M. Chekhov

November 17, 1939

Lonnie: The only practical suggestion so far is that we should move the group. I think it would be best to move to a larger community, but it need not be New York.

Tanny: I don't think it is the ideal of this group that we should have just this one little spontaneous meeting which arises from this smoldering feeling. Let's go about working out our problem.

Michael Chekhov: If you disagree with everything, how can I work it out with you? If your search for happiness leads you somewhere else, you must find it.

E. Somoff: It is a question of trying to find the solution for everyone. The compromise need not be vital. Besides purely ideological obstacles, there are financial obstacles, which are probably stronger than you think. I will promise to try to do whatever I can to give practical suggestions, and if you will do the same, I am sure we will consider every possibility to make our common life happier. The fact that you are not entirely happy here is disturbing for Mr. Chekhov and for yourselves. We must find a solution.