

Michael Chekhov

June 8, 1940

MEETING WITH ALL STUDENTS

THE LIFE OF THE STUDIO
 ARTISTIC IDEALS - COMMUNITY LIFE - MORAL LIFE
 VISION OF THE FUTURE THEATRE
 PROFOUND APPROACH TO ARTISTIC LIFE

THE LIFE OF THE STUDIO:

This time I will remind you, and myself, that this is a question of destiny. Each of us should speak as I do now - I speak to you and to myself as well. I don't think there is anyone among us who does not desire to preserve our organization - not only to preserve it but to develop it, to improve it, and to make its life and its tone always higher and higher. Therefore, we must simply remember why we are here and under what conditions, and this is actually the theme. We must always distinguish between the organization and the people who pass through it. Today we pass, tomorrow someone else perhaps. So the organization must stand unshakable, and this is what we have to preserve.

If this is point one, and every one of us must come and go, there is a very important principle involved, whether everyone who enters wishes to conform to the rules, the ideas, and methods, the kind of life which this place has. The principle is that everyone who enters this characteristic place must not have in mind to change these rules and regulations, but to have another idea and that is to preserve them.

There are two kinds of organization - one in which people have come together to try to build an organization.

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They try to experiment and make anything they want from it. This is quite a different thing. Our organization was thought out, and the details were there before the very first student was accepted four years ago. So there is nothing to change in the organization - there is only one thing to do and that is to maintain and increase it.

There is a long way ahead before we reach our artistic ideals. From every point there are lots of things to do to fulfill what is here as a task, with no desire or possibility to change something according to certain needs or desires. That is point one. Here is an organization with its rules and ideas, and there are people passing through it, and these people must put before themselves the question, "I enter the organization, but am I able to conform to the ideals and ideas? If not, then of course I will not be able to change the organization at all and so must go through and disappear." This is the main point.

ARTISTIC IDEALS - COMMUNITY LIFE - MORAL LIFE:

It is a very clear picture - either we must pass through or stay to enrich and improve the ideals and the kind of life. If there are people here who wish to elaborate and make the life in our organization more firm and sound, then I can say there are three ways, or lines, along which everyone of us can develop the life and increase the standards, or three ways through which someone can spoil this organization.

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These three ways are: 1. Artistic ideals - a very big field. 2. Community life. Rules and regulations - another field. These two things which seem to be so far apart from each other, but the community life is as important as to be on the stage.

I have heard of some incorrect behaviour of students in this community part of our life. It means that if a student does not wish to submit to the regulations of the house-keeper, then he must pass through and go away. Or suppose that someone does not like one of the directors. The director will remain because he is a member of the organization, but the student must go. It is the only way to preserve our ideals and ideas, which were established before the students ever came.

Beatrice Straight has given me the right to lead the studio artistically and that means that we have thought of certain things before we opened the school. So, as students, you must find a way to collaborate - or go away.

MORAL LIFE:

Between these two extreme poles - the artistic life and the community life - there is something which we must call the third way. This is the most subtle and fine thing in which everyone can be of great help, or can spoil it with one glance. It is, as it were, the Moral life among us. I

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am embarrassed to use this word because I do not mean moral in the usual sense. For instance, if I am not present at the rehearsal, that is a moral point relating to our art life, while if I am not making my bed at the right time, it is also a moral point, but one connected with our community life. If I have to be told something twice, and will only do it when I hear it for the third time, that is also moral.

Of course, it should not be the case. For instance, the behaviour during rehearsals. It is very important how much of you is present during the rehearsal - if you are absent in your attention or if the director feels someone passive in the group, it is like a drop of poison because it disturbs the rehearsal, and this again is a moral point for us. On the other hand, if someone is sitting actively, it helps the rehearsal - the kind of presence is either breaking this artistic work or increasing and helping it. Often such a silent presence means everything, but often on the stage there can be talking and inattention, and this, of course, is not right morally.

So there are three lines - three ways: Our art and our ideals, the community life, and something intangible which unites both poles and makes them living and full of meaning, [the moral life.]

I speak to you now about another aspect. Of course, in an organization such as ours in which we are creating things,

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there always will be individuals of different values. For instance, today or tomorrow or next month for some particular thing, someone will be of particular value. We must not say that we are all equal. A certain play will require particular gifts - that cannot be denied. Let us say the "A" has the main part. He is the hero, and he acts it well. That is important, but on the other hand "A" must not allow himself, being "A," to neglect certain things. He must not overestimate himself - he must be content to be "A." If he begins to admire himself, then others will not do it for him! It is always better to let others admire.

This little confusion must be clarified because it is again an important moral point of view in our school. Let us create the "A's" so that our organization will grow in every sense. But I beg everyone who is an "A," or will become an "A," to be especially strong and fine and sensitive to all the artistic and community moral things. If "A" is correct, then everyone around will be correct. I address this to myself because I have been placed in this special position by Beatrice. I know my mistakes, and I will try always to improve them, but let me ask you to do the same. Then we can not only maintain our organization but will make it better for the whole world around us.

VISION OF THE FUTURE THEATRE:

What are our ideals actually, and why are we here?

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First, we have a vision about the future theatre. It is a very high standard, this vision. It is something which must be created anew. It is a new approach to the theatre, to the interpretation of plays, to the actor's nature - a new approach to everything. It must become clearer and clearer to everyone. It is very clear to me, therefore, I know it is something which leads us forward.

We have to respond to the social life of Europe, of the whole world. We cannot avoid this question - we cannot say that it does not concern us what is going on in the world. If we do not allow ourselves to at least think about such things, we are lost because we will become dead in everything. We can do very little - actually nothing - but this something must always be there, as a certain justification for our existence in such times.

We must look ahead a bit. Whether we go to war or not we do not know, but we can see that the culture of the near future will not be what it is now. People are suffering so much today that the future will not resemble our present time. We must find a new approach to the future. One thing is obvious - everyone is suffering. We are not travelling a rosy path. It seems that human beings become more and more profound and look with different eyes and hearts. Everything becomes more and more profound.

PROFOUND APPROACH TO ARTISTIC LIFE:

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That means that we must become more profound in our artistic life. We cannot confine ourselves to the idea that we will create a nice theatre. That is not enough. It must be a theatre which will be able to look into the eyes and heart of the future people. As an artist, I must be able to go on performing, whether it is comedy or tragedy, knowing that there is a mother in the audience who has lost her child. Do I know in my artistic consciousness, as I put on my make-up, that the mother is there, and am I enough of a knight on the stage to appear before this mother? If I have such a consciousness, then everything will be right, if not I can speak Shakespeare's words or the words from the bible, but they will stop in my throat because of the lack of inner approach. So our ideal must be to make our profession more and more profound, to meet the future.

I will conclude my speech with the following: I have spoken in general and have reminded you of our artistic and community life and the moral life - in our special sense - between them. All of us are passing through, and all of us must concentrate on the answer to the question, "Can I serve this organization from inside, following all the ideals and rules and regulations? If not, whether I am "A" or "Z," it is better that I leave the school or the theatre, because I cannot be a member of this organization. If I can, then I am welcome, and I will help to increase it."

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And so I call upon you to create the life, but first to think whether you are able to do it or not, and if you are able, then let us do it because it is worthwhile to go on. Sometimes I have heard that we have the best possible group, and sometimes I have heard a certain reproach. My answer is that if we are the best group, then everyone must be grateful and satisfied that he is in the group. There is no other point of view than the group. As members of the group, we are either creative or destructive, and that is the theme of today.

There are just two things to be added: If someone is in difficulty in the work - psychological or otherwise - please do not hesitate to come to me, and if I am able to give an explanation, I will always do it. Don't keep such things too long inside you because maybe they can be solved. Secondly, the new plan is to show Twelfth Night sooner. Please try to help me to create it as quickly as possible - make it quick inwardly.

Start by imagining, but try now to combine three things: First imagine the sketch I am going to describe to you; second, walk around so that it will not disturb your imagination; and third, try to incorporate what I shall suggest to you so that your body and imagination and my suggestions will become one thing. First, a short description of the sketch which you must imagine, then try to incorporate it, and repeat it on different grounds.