

Michael Chekhov

February 25, 1938

RHYTHM
RHYTHMICAL EVENTS
BEGINNING AND END - FEELING OF THE WHOLE
BRIDGES AND TRANSITIONS
RHYTHMICAL COMPOSITION
PERFORMANCE AFTER CURTAIN IS DOWN

King Lear
Leo Tolstoy

RHYTHM: RHYTHMICAL EVENTS:

I have noticed with some of our students that the feeling of the beginning and the end, which is at the same time the feeling of the whole, was done sometimes intellectually. The illusion of the whole is there but the real experience of the whole - the beginning and the end - is not. We must know that there are two feelings of the whole - one is the intellectual which we cannot apply to our art at all, and the other is that which feeds and leads our whole nature. It is the whole nature which participates in this rhythmical thing. The beginning must be connected with the end. When you begin the rhythmical event, you must anticipate the end. It is really the whole nature with all its functions.

BEGINNING AND THE END - FEELING OF THE WHOLE:

The beginning and the end, the feeling of the whole, must be experienced by our whole being in the same way as the objective, psychological gesture, etc. Between the beginning and the end, the life flows. We must feel everything that is going on between the beginning and the

M. Chekhov

February 25, 1938

end as a transition - a psychological, physical, or emotional bridge. It is quite natural if we have a feeling of the whole, we experience this middle part, but by studying these things we have to pay attention especially to this transitional part. This is nothing new but we must be able to concentrate on this part.

BRIDGES AND TRANSITIONS:

Now, a movement starting with the right hand. Experience this transition. Now do it altogether - the beginning - the transition - the end. Follow consciously the middle part - it can be very long (throughout the whole play). We must be able to have these special psychological masses that keep the middle part in our will. If we are able to follow this transitional part, really to follow with our whole being, we will kill our intellectual disturbance, which I have noticed you sometimes present - we must do away with it.

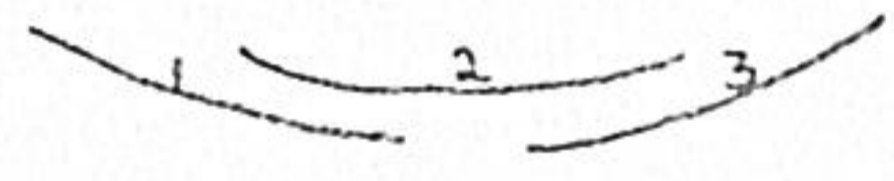
If it does not give you pleasure, something is wrong. The rhythm always gives pleasure to such a high extent that it is like an ecstasy (an artistic ecstasy) if it is experienced to the fullest extent, and this must not only show us that the thing is right - the pleasure of the whole being - but this pleasure could be and must be our guide in seeking the real rhythmical life in us. By doing this small simple exercise, we will cure our big mistakes.

M. Chekhov

February 25, 1938

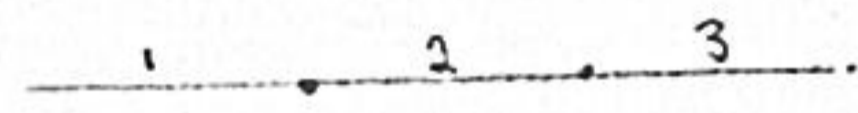
During this transitional part, please walk slowly forward and then stop. At the moment when we confuse the starting point and the transitional part, we are not free. The transitional part has certain divisions, as well as the beginning. We must get accustomed to distinguishing the three parts - the beginning - the transition - the end, as if it is one family in three parts.

What we call the beginning we must call the first part of the rhythmical whole, because the beginning in the sense of starting point, is something different. It is more in the nature of a meter. The beginning, in the sense that it is the first period of the whole process; the middle part, the middle period of the process; and the end, the last period of the process. Imagine it is like this:



Still there are three parts.

or



They are one - the same thing.

To be able to experience things which are without boundaries, and to experience things which have boundaries as if they have no boundaries. This is one of the necessary abilities for experiencing rhythm.

Please again do the same gesture and experience the one which is three, and the three which are one, without boundaries.

Question: What do we do if we are preparing to take several

is will power, stately, majestic, earthy existence, and from this earthy, egocentric existence the tragedy begins to move. Follow in your imagination through the series of scenes, and we will see how the first part begins to be thinner and thinner, and King Lear speaking first with the steward, then with the fool, then with the daughter, begins to be less egotistical, earthy, firm, stately and majestic.

The first part makes gradually a gesture of the disappearance of the earthy, stately, heavy. The moment where all these beautiful illusions of the first part stop. It is not possible to define the beginning and where the end of the beginning is. There is no end but there is a beginning, without boundaries. The gesture in King Lear as the first part, is without boundaries, therefore, we have to experience it as if there are boundaries somewhere in the rhythmical world. In this feeling of the boundary which is not incorporated, but exists in the world of rhythm as an idea, because the first part disappears to somewhere in the ideal world, there is a finish. It is like a prayer to an unknown god we have not seen. He exists although we do not know. I am praying, I am believing.

The second part begins somewhere simultaneously with the expiration of the earthy power, and gradually we come through the storm, and through the torturing of King Lear to the real madness of King Lear, and the pretended

madness of Poor Tom. We come to the middle part which is emptiness - everybody has lost his former pattern and existence, and everybody to a certain extent has died. The world becomes empty and dead, and the storm has ceased, and the cleverness and life and majesty has expired.

Now, will you please follow the imaginary form which is a little bit difficult - the earthy life of King Lear expires. As the result of this expiration comes the second part which is death and emptiness, and when he and blind Gloucester meet each other on the heath and empty spaces, they are actually the reversal of the beginning, in which was the mighty king and his servant Gloucester.

Now, let us ask the questions as though we are intellectual people. What is this emptiness, this death expressed in madness, blindness? Is it the result of the disappearance of certain qualities which were in the beginning, in the sound, majestic world of King Lear? In the kingdom divided in three parts which still remained so majestic that the beautiful King of France seems to live somewhere so far away? Then King Lear has nothing. Is this disappearance of King Lear's life the result of the disappearance of that, or is the second part madness, blindness, death, something not defined from the first one? This is put very intellectually. But if we try to speak rhythmically then, first of all, the question could not be put. Everything in the rhythmical world is at the same time the result of previous things, the result of future things which have not yet appeared. They are absolutely in-

M. Chekhov

February 25, 1938

dependent at the same time. \ I am very sorry to speak theoretically, but it is necessary to speak about this, otherwise you will not be able to experience it.

RHYTHMICAL COMPOSITION:

Imagine the following thing, that, as the result of King Lear's mightiness, we may understand the emptiness, because he was so mighty, the only person in the whole world who is able to become nothing. It is very easy to imagine this composition. If he had not been so mighty in the beginning, he could not be poor and nothing in the middle part. But from the rhythmical point of view it is right because he will become poor, and he is mighty. This is absolutely necessary to have the ability to feel backwards, as Eleanor suggested. If, for instance, an actor is gifted by nature, he will have this feeling for rhythm, but it must be developed if he is going to act King Lear. He has beautiful moments. First picture: King Lear sitting on the throne - the scene in which he curses Cordelia, and throws her from her tremendous world.

Second picture: King Lear awakens in the tent of Cordelia and tells her that he is a poor old man, please do not harm him. He kneels before her. Now, keep these two scenes in mind.

Third picture: He has his ideal (Cordelia) like death in his arms, and he dies.

M. Chekhov

February 25, 1938

The gesture through three pictures. If an actor has a feeling of rhythm, these three pictures may make for him the whole world - not only from the beginning to the end, but from the end to the beginning.

As an actor I know how I have to sit on Lear's throne in the beginning, because I anticipate the end. This is the rhythmical secret of the theatre - I have to act from the end to the beginning. This can be awakened only by a feeling of rhythm, when the future is the past, and the present time is everywhere. It is absolutely concrete and nothing to do with the intellect.

For example: Tolstoy died while leaving his house. God had created the whole destiny for this strange man, has decided that his death will be when he leaves the house and goes for a walk. Because his death was predestined, his whole life was as it was. Because his death has thrown the shadow from the future back to the present. Therefore, he was such a strange man because his death was always coming from the future in the present, the same way it can for us, if we are familiar with rhythm.

PERFORMANCE AFTER CURTAIN IS DOWN:

We will use the same method of creation as gods. When we are, as Lear, carrying Cordelia, we are acting the person who sat on the throne. If I, as an actor, had not sat there I could not appreciate this moment of this old, old man.

1021
M. Chekhov

February 25, 1938

It has a certain strong connection - now the past becomes present, just as when I was sitting on the throne, the future became the present. Therefore, we have said that we have to find the idea of the play when we have seen in our imagination the whole performance - when the performance is finished, the idea of the play arises. Therefore, our exercise of imagining the whole play when the curtain is down.