

Michael Chekhov

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THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE PLAY  
CHARACTERIZATION

## PHILOSOPHY OF THE PLAY:

Criticism of Rehearsal of The Possessed:

Many things were much better, but some gaps will be clarified within the next few days. We are going to talk to you about the philosophy of the play because sometimes you speak sentences without knowing actually what thoughts are behind these things. The sentences may sound logical and right from the point of view of emphasis, but still I hear behind these sentences that the actor is not acquainted with the philosophy.

In our talk we will clarify certain lines in the play, what is implied by this and that sentence. Then the human nature and intelligent actor's soul will respond, and then we will get these nuances - as in music - a major or a minor key. It cannot be squeezed out of the piano, it must be the key in which the thing is written. So it must be in the key in which we are acting this play. This key is a certain definite world, a world of certain ideas which we have to understand, to think about and to awaken certain knowledge about. This will be the key to this play.

The second thing we are going to do. After this work about the ideas in the play, I will ask you about any sentences which are not clear to you. After we speak about

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the philosophy, go over the whole text and try to find the important words which must be emphasized. We have done this but before we explored this world of important ideas, but now we must do it after we have explored these ideas.

The third thing is that we will go on with rehearsals just as we have in details: 1. Philosophy. 2. Emphasis on the grounds of the philosophy. 3. Usual rehearsals. 4. Speech.

The rehearsal in general was actually well done. Take this as encouragement. There is much to do. On the basis of what you have done, will you please go on.

#### CHARACTERIZATION:

Woodie: How your own good-heartedness is too great, and Verkovensky has become sympathetic and kind of charming. This is wrong. All the elements are there, but your own heart becomes too big now.

John: As an actor, you must know that you must pay more attention to the super objective, "Always looking for, always seeking for, always trying to solve the problem." This is such an important part of the human being which makes a human being a human being. The person without problems is not yet born as a human being - the human being is one who is looking around and seeing everywhere problems. In our play, Stavrogin is the human being, that means he is the person surrounded by problems, who is trying to solve them. This is

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the super objective for you.

For Woodie, the super objective is "To grasp and to crush." For Beatrice, your super objective is "To burn, to set fire to everything." Today she had the fire instead of passion. Dorothy [Mrs. Elmhurst], if you get in the sitting room scene the same human tragic qualities you have in the last scene, it will be right. Less commanding and more tragic. Take the quality of the last scene, and transform it into the second scene.

Criticism of the Meeting scene:

It is already there, but there are some things which can be improved. It is no longer chaotic, but we must shape it more by the following things. The whole meeting, especially the second part, seems to consist of separate pieces which are not connected with each other. The reason for this is that everyone who gives a cue to the speaker, in giving their cue they break the connection. It is not the speakers themselves, but those who give the cues who break the line for them, and the whole scene breaks. From this point of view all the cues which we hear are either not in the right tone, or they are in different rhythms or tempo so that they do not help the speakers to go on because of this cue. They must pretend either that they have not heard it, or they must come down and start from the point which the cue starts from. If we can go over the whole scene and find the cues, we can preserve the unity.

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Although Sam as the Theorist is very good in figure, it is very difficult for him not to recite as though it were written in verse. You must be absolutely as concrete as Verkovensky with all your mechanical ideas. The same standing on the earth as Shatov. We get the impression that he is flying because of this verse quality. The more his ideas become concrete, the better. Sam's character is in the speech and everything, but it may be too low and too slow from the point of view of the whole. But do not change the character. The monotonous quality belongs to the character, but it must be performed in a way more colorful.

Woodie: Very often you yourself have been much slower with the cues, and you start from the beginning. You must get the feeling that the whole thing goes up and up and never down throughout the whole scene. The climax comes at the very end. The direction of the play is such that this scene is the climax of the whole play because it is the defeat of Verkovendky, after which he is going down. This is one of the most essential things.

The crowd: When you have cues one after another, you have such long pauses between that you drop the scene. It takes scenic time, which is really a different kind of time. No one who has a cue must waste one single moment, and must merge his cues so that we have not time to take a breath.

Sam's cues are so important that he should make a

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trick not to be the character he is, but to become full of temperament, because to give the cues as the character you are in the beginning would only lower the scene. Imagine your character in great agitation. The whole scene is in the wrong tempo for everyone. You will get the tempo easier if you will avoid these gaps, which make you start from the beginning again and again.