

Michael Chekhov

(afternoon) January 25, 1938

CHARACTER OF THE PLAY - STYLE
FORM Vakhtangov

CHARACTER OF THE PLAY - STYLE:

Today we will try to touch on both plays for the future theatre. Vakhtangov once said that each play must have its own "studio". This means all the long preparatory work connected with each play - perhaps we could call it the "study" around the play. His idea was that each play must be acted in a different way. Although we have a method which is applicable to everything, still each play must have its own special kind of preparatory work. We must discover what kind of acting belongs to each play because each play has a certain character and this is part of the style of the play. It lies not only in what the author gives but in the acting.

As actors we must elaborate a certain kind of acting for this or that play. Today we will try to find the style for our two plays. Naturally, this style cannot be found at once, or cannot be remembered. It must be found, and this is the work which must be done by the group. Therefore, the attempt to find the style of acting is our work, not the work of the director alone. The director can make some suggestions, but the style must be found by each member of the group, and it will grow gradually.

FORM:

We will start with the Church Scene: With a certain

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feeling of form which belongs to this play. Everything in this play must be acted with an increased feeling of form. Each movement, each glance, each inner state must be far far away from vague flowing things. It must be like a stone or a crystal. Please try the entrance and then we shall see what it really means to find this form. Try to find a form like a diamond. First imagine everything you know about the scene, then take a certain ground from the Method, and then begin.

Criticism:

You must try to find a much clearer form. Try to escape uncertain movements which arise from an inner state. Any kind of uncertainty is wrong for this play, which will require to be acted in a very quick tempo, because the tempo will give the tension of the thoughts and feelings which are in the play. But this will come later.

Try to find a very definite form for the hands. They must express something more definite as if something is going on inside of them. You must find inner forms.

The task for Beggar Girl: Will you please find a simple objective which will lead you to a very quick tempo.

Scene with Convict:

Each scene must be full of inner content. This thing must be felt so much from inside that you will have a

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feeling that it will burst. This is the kind of form we need for this play. The expectation of the audience must be awakened from the very beginning.

Repeat the scene at a slower tempo. Now we see that a slower tempo is wrong for this kind of performance. Try to imagine this to be a small scene, and try to find justification for quick tempo. The form is like crystal which is ready to burst. Repeat scene of the Church steps. Suggestion for the Beggar Girl: In your effort to get a quicker tempo you have lost the softness and warmth of the girl. I want you to find the objective which will allow you to have the quick tempo and still keep the lyrical quality of the character. Try to find and justify and be sure that you know how to do this. In our Method it is possible. We have to know how to do this. Think how many objectives there are in ^{the} entire play, and they must all be found.

Task for Mrs. Elmhirst and Deirdre as the mother: I have the feeling that you came down with the sole intention of giving money to the beggars. This keeps the "bursting" quality back. Take a simple quality for the time being - a simple physical objective: "I am going home and I pass everything by" - nothing more. It is an inner state which must be taken as a crystal and so strong that it can burst. I want you to fulfill the objective in such a way.

Task for Beggar Girl: Imagine that you have to be

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fed not only from the mother and the bride but from everybody. Then you have to be able to be fed here and there. Be very active inside. Do everything we do.

Repeat Convict scene. Because the tempo was too fast it was empty. Quick tempo as tempo is an illusion - it does not exist. The real tempo does not mean necessarily quick tempo. It means to do it fully. Standing still with tenseness could be terrific tempo.

Repeat Convict scene. Suggestions for Convict: You are speaking about the killing of the beggar girl - try to imagine what you would say. It means that you may lose \$1,000 to buy a passport illegally, as you are a convict and want to escape from the country. It is terribly important that you accomplish your objective. All these small things done in these sketches will come into the subconscious and from them the play will grow.

New development in Convict scene. When the convict rushes away and disappears, another man appears. Who is this person? This is one of the most important characters in the play. Follow with your imagination and create something. This man is a revolutionary - a fanatic. It is his idea to destroy the world, and in its place build a new world without any succession. Revolution but not evolution. His brain is burning with this idea. He is no more himself - he is the idea itself. The ideal is burning in his head but

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not in his heart. He does everything logically. This is the whole idea.

The revolutionary who is a spy and knows everything, appears before the son and asks him where he has been. He must know everything - if he is not able to know everything it will kill him. The son has been with another man and has told him that he will be killed by the revolutionary. The revolutionary knows this when he meets the son.

Do not force yourselves because we will have time - we will get many suggestions. Our Method allows us to touch different parts of the play from a different viewpoint. New character, inner characterization, outer characterization, some parts of the text, etc. This is much more pleasant.

The revolutionary has spectacles. You have to combine this inability to see well with the necessity to penetrate into everything. Combine this outer and inner thing. The revolutionary's idea is that the whole world is a big machine - a beautiful machine. This quality of the machine sits in him.