

Michael Chokhov

March 22, 1939

STYLE
ATMOSPHERE

STYLE:

The style of The Possessed is shown in the dimension of the gesture - large gestures. The play is in the style of drama near to tragedy - not in the style of Ibsen or Chekhov - the difference is in the dimension of the gesture.

Develop the style psychologically. It is not enough to appear on the stage and move about - the stage today demands something more than that - it demands our psychology, our inner life. That is interesting to the audience. If we give the audience just an exhibition of plain facts, they will understand us, but they will not follow us, they will not be interested in us - we must make them follow us by our bridges and transitions, by our psychological inner life.

We have no right to do things less well than we can, this is an offence to the director and is forbidden. We must believe in our psychology and understand that it is as real and as tangible as the furniture on the stage, or the make-up and costumes. If we believe in our psychology, it will speak to our audience, but if we do not believe in it, then we are nothing as actors - only people walking about the stage. That is why we have all our exercises - for the purpose of developing the psychology. The power of the psychology is real and visible.

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ATMOSPHERE:

Rehearsal of the Meeting scene - The Possessed:

After this scene, and the big speech of Shatov, there is the beginning of the fall of Verkovensky. The whole second act is the fall of this lying Verkovensky. The tempo of the second act will be quite a different one. It will be a little quicker, and with a slight hurry - something is impending. In this picture there is already something which is not quite quiet - certain impending danger is there.

Another point - this meeting is a conspiracy, and this is another very important note in the atmosphere. It is evening, and the room is lit by small lamps or candles. The room is small, everyone smokes - dark and smoke are there. It is a dirty atmosphere - even physically dirty. There is a table on which there are glasses with tea, which every member of the meeting will take, in case the police come. Certain tension and caution in the air.

At this Meeting scene the play changes. Many lines which have been leading up to it now change in their direction. This group of revolutionaries is gathered together to see their leader, for whom they have been waiting for so long. They know that abroad there is a center from which this leader comes to their country and will travel around to all the groups which are spread over the whole country. This is the first group to which he comes, so they are especially happy and excited. But there is one point which they cannot hear and that is that the

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members have always been kept in the dark. It is Verkovensky who does not allow the members even to speak or ask questions - this is his policy. The leader is Stavrogin, and all the hearts are open to this leader, and finally they understand something as members of this big revolutionary organisation which governs the whole earth, or at least Europe.

Atmosphere of Expectation:

A small dark dirty room - lit by candles - conspiracy - people moving nervously, smoking - each speaking but not audibly. High tension, expectation and frequent looking at the door. Entrance of Kirilov quietens them for a moment. Voices heard outside. Chairman quietens the crowd, announces leader. Leader's entrance, crowd begins giving room - pause - growing admiration for the leader out of which comes applause, which is interrupted by the chairman who presents the leader, more applause which Stavrogin and Verkovensky stop.

The chairman presents Verkovensky with the objective of trying to understand him. Throughout there is constant attention on Stavrogin. The theoretician adds confusion, but all are aware of Verkovensky's movements and Stavrogin's growing irony. Voices of the crowd. Chairman interrupts and gives support to the theoretician who goes on with his theories while the crowd becomes more and more uncomfortable. Verkovensky's "Rot" - staccato reaction. Voices. Lame teacher speaks, crowd begins to listen and to understand for the first time.

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On Verkovensky's "Go," the crowd protests, voices still a little independent, then becoming depressed, and then, like sheep, agreeing and applauding Verkovensky. Then there is a sharp reaction to Shatov. Back and forth between Shatov and Verkovensky - some follow Shatov, some go to Verkovensky - confusion.

Suggestion for the whole group who take part in the "voices." Try to get the habit not to speak "in general" - making noise "in general" gives the wrong impression. If you speak a sentence, it must be a sentence to someone, with a definite content and meaning. Each person must convey the meaning of each sentence to someone, then we will get the impression that the crowd is agitated, but if we try to act an agitated group, it will be quite wrong.

At the beginning everyone in the crowd speaks a little louder - this arises because everyone must speak continuously, no one is silent - like a beehive. Everyone hears the voices and the chairman comes back and announces "Gentlemen." Then Verkovensky enters, followed by Stavrogin.