

Michael Chekhov

September 26, 1939

COMPRESSING THE FORM  
ACTING FREELYThe Possessed:

After we have got all the meaning and the objectives and the content clearly, we have to compress it; then we will have a fine performance and a fine, cleverpsychological approach. You must go on alone in this work, as we won't have time to go over each sentence. When you find the objectives, they must be urgent.

Vorkhovenski's task is to inflame Stavrogin, to calm him, to make him think, to do everything with him - to possess him. His aim is to mold him. The whole scene must be a devilish trick. For Stavrogin: there is a state in the human life very often when the person definitely feels that there is one word which, if he hears it from somewhere, will enable him to understand everything which tortures him unconsciously, subconsciously, and consciously. Sometimes the person cannot find this word for years, and then comes the moment when he hears this word and his problems disappear. This is the state of Stavrogin now. He is looking for this word, he will pronounce it, he will speak it, and it will help him. When he sees Kirilov, he thinks perhaps he may have the word in his crazy spirit. Perhaps Lisa, but no not at all. She gives him a counter word. It is a very urgent business for him, and he is continually asking, "Have you this magic word for me?", from Martha, from everyone.

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Everything becomes more and more sensible in every way when the actor puts the question before himself, "What am I doing at each moment?" When the actor really feels one point of the Method, all the other points occur of themselves. For instance, if you take the real atmosphere, the objectives will come of themselves, and vice versa.

#### COMPRESSING THE FORM:

The next step. When we have more or less understood the scene as actors, I would suggest to compress it, but so that all the objectives, gestures, characteristics, meanings, etc., will remain. Compress it by avoiding all unnecessary pauses, by having "I Am" on the stage, and fulfilling all the objectives, etc.

This small piece which we have tried to elaborate can be elaborated still more by finding gestures and objectives and everything, and this should be done through the whole play. Will you do it alone? Try to compress it with this sense of urgency, in the style of the play. Find all your objectives in a state of great urgency.

Try, during the run-through, not to flounder but to explore what you are doing - what are the objectives. Awaken in yourselves the desire to be more aware of what is going on. If you will feel how shapeless and senseless you are on the stage, it is already a step forward, and you will try to get the shape and the form. Secondly, try at the same time to

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compress everything so that it will not become more and more vague, but will become more and more precise because of this compression. It must become so clear - like a snow crystal. Be more and more aware of what we are doing and get the crystal form compressed.

**ACTING FREELY:**

To act freely means that there are no special tasks given, and your actor's soul can be free to follow itself. But this is the opportunity to remind you that to act freely does not mean to enter the stage without any responsibility to your audience, yourself and your director. You must remember that when you act freely, it means you have to make a real effort, an honest effort, to act being concentrated on all the things the director requires. That means don't enter the stage without atmosphere, don't try to speak your words without understanding what they mean, don't drag the performance for lack of inner tempo, presence, and radiation. Without these things, it means to act freely and wildly. This is the great difference. We will ask you to act with everything, otherwise there is no profession - only certain vague things. I require you to act freely, taking all the grounds, and to show that you are able to do it.

Verkhovenski (Woodie) must imagine himself acting without gestures. At present, there are too many gestures which weaken your figure. Try to find a certain series of

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gestures which will be absolutely expressive. If you repeat the same inexpressive gestures, it will be bad. If you will imagine yourself acting without gestures, you will then drop some of them by yourself. This will develop your taste.

We must rehearse what to do if the audience laughs, or protests against certain ideas or applauds them. Experienced actors know how to watch for these things, but we have no such experience so we must learn how to react to these things, we must acquire the means.

Before we meet the new students, it is essentially important that they will understand that we have a certain atmosphere in our school - a certain group feeling - a certain admiration for our profession. We are not youngsters from the street who will whistle on the stage. Our style must somehow be shown to our new students - this will help very much in leading them forward. Please receive them in a friendly way. Discard every kind of criticism so that they will not feel that you are superior, but they will find in you helpers and friends and not critics.