

Michael Chekhov

(afternoon) March 15, 1938

REHEARSAL TECHNIQUE  
STYLE  
FORM

REHEARSAL TECHNIQUE:

When we try to act at once by having some text, or scene, or character, then it is the most dreadful thing we can do. Never try to act without any basis on which to stand. We must each of us be busy with the idea - What shall I have as ground for my work at the moment? I must remind you to take something quite consciously as a ground for the work. If you take the objective, then it must be taken, not the illusion of having taken it. We do this very often and go on without realizing that there is nothing of the objective, nothing of the psychological gesture, or the atmosphere there. There are so many illusions of this kind.

Point 1: I have told you many times to have certain ground and to have it and not be satisfied with a certain illusion.

Point 2: This term we have started rehearsals for our future rehearsals, and I notice we have lost a very important point. Each professional rehearsal is something which must be continued by the actor at home. It does not concern the director where, it must be brought to the next rehearsal as a concrete fact - as the result of our rehearsal yesterday. Therefore, I asked you to have your notebooks and write everything down that we have found.



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Last time I have noticed that now it becomes more and more like a usual kind of rehearsal. We are more or less happy, we are speaking words, but the work is something that will not be touched until tomorrow because I hate my profession. After the rehearsal the actor goes somewhere and forgets his part. Then he comes back to the rehearsal and continues what he has not really done in between. (You must not think I speak about the real rehearsal). In the modern theatre the actor does not want to be reminded of his profession. It is my duty to remind you that our "rehearsals for rehearsals" are rehearsals for you, and you must continue the work from one rehearsal to another, and bring some result next time. It must be prepared. You must write down what we have done at the rehearsal, then elaborate it and prepare it for the next rehearsal.

STYLE:

Today I want you to start again with the style of Mr. Shdanoff's play so that the style can be incorporated in our speech, and I want exercises for everybody who is in the play. Short sentences. Words. Will you please try to explore the style we have found for this play and how it can be incorporated in our speech (I don't mean Miss Crowther's speech) I mean our actor's speech, how to speak in the style of this play. Do the following: Re-do it inwardly, without movements, then out of inner activity - you must have this



style already there. The style is absolute form in everything, in emotions, in will, in body, in being silent, in being movable, in being immovable: absolute form.

#### FORM:

This form is filled with certain content in accordance with the play and this kind of feeling of form is such that the audience must get continuously the impression that the form will be broken. Such a kind of feeling of form - to threaten the audience.

Because of this tremendous thing inside, experience the style as "storm" inward and outward. Everything is urgent, if we take an objective, it is an objective which is urgent. There are no objectives which are not urgent.

Incorporate this style. The real actor has always something with which he can fill the form and this is his own presence, his own individuality. Therefore, I must find myself, my "I am" sitting in this form, "I am" present on the stage. Now, will you get up and keeping the outer and inner form, break the form, and everything will come into chaos. Sit down with the same threatening effect to the audience. Now, will you please only say one word, "Yes". In this "yes" must be form - "I" must be there in this form and the next second "I" will break the form. Don't break the form. There are some moments in the play when the form is broken. Now, say very softly and tenderly, "No". Try to fill this sound



form with your own presence so that it will threaten - be very tender. This play is a storm.

We will confuse for a certain time this filling the form and slow tempo. We must find this very tense thing. Still more tenderly but three times as quickly. (The quickness in this play has nothing to do with nervousness). In a very quick tempo, threatening, get up and say, "No".

Now, sentences for everybody. Nicholas and the spy. I want really nothing from you only for you to explore how you can fill the words with the style - incorporate in the style.

Spy: I refuse to let you wriggle out - you have promised.

Nicholas: All wrong - I have promised nothing.

It is better to go through this artificial stage. It must be something which has a form. Nicholas with one big movement - form filled with content so that each movement is very sharp, very expressive, very strange. The whole play consists of storm - very sharp, expressive, clear cut forms. Keep this desire to get the form - don't be passive.

Crowd scene in Train Derailment:

"What has happened - why have we all had to get out here?" Speak as the crowd, but each one must be sure that he gets this individually. Now, move by trying to find the person who can explain to you what has happened. Combine these



words and each word must be threatening for the audience. I must feel they are waiting for me - what shall I do next moment. Keep this exploratory activity.

Church scene:

The mother's speech and action must have something of this stormy quality in it, even in this scene.

Mother: Has your little grandson come back from the hospital cured?

Beggar: Yes, kind lady, he has, God bless you kind lady, he has come back cured.

Now, in addition, move in the style. To coax the audience to work with us by threatening them with our presence on the stage.

Mother's action is to keep the money and listen to the old woman's story, then give her the money from the bag, in the style of the play - tension. Try to find in the words how to live in the style.

Scene between Mother and Beggar Girl:

Mother: Now, my dear, tell me all about it. What was it you came to the church to ask me?

Beggar Girl: I only wanted to ask you...No...I only wanted to ask you...No...I only wanted to see you - my mother.

Scene in Mother's sitting room with Governor, Liza, etc.:

Each position, each movement must be absolutely threatening for the audience.



Liza: Auntie, don't be frightened if I break my legs. It might happen to me any day. You yourself say I ride so madly. If I am lamed, will you take me about - I would not let anyone else take me. Now, come on, where are your manners, dear? Say you would think it the greatest happiness.

Officer: I do not see any happiness in a broken leg.

. . .

Officer: Then it is you who will take me, Liza.

Liza: Heavens, he means it as a joke.

We must not confuse the style of this play, the presence must be there without pushing - if you push, the audience will push back.

There is another danger; therefore, I will tell you about it. To be present on the stage leads us sometimes to stiffness. If in the beginning you are a little bit stiff, there is time to take it away. Better to have certain stiffness and full effort to fill the presence of everyone, everything on the stage.

This is the task I give you for next time: We must try to explore this style in our speech, in our movements, in our positions, in everything, and next time it must be there.

Girls: You are standing at the back of the stage. Experience it. It is quite different from the front. Now, by having this experience that you are standing at the back of the stage, will you please say the sentence, "Do you want to see my friend?" in a very gentle and warm way, in the style



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of the play. Recall the style. Presence. Now, come forward and experience the difference. Now, experience this walking toward the audience and saying the sentence in a threatening way. Now, moving backward, experience keeping the same style.

Boys: *Whispering*, in quicker tempo.