

Michael Chekhov

Morning June 7, 1938

FEELING OF THE WHOLE  
CONSTRUCTION OF THE PLAY - RHYTHM  
"GHOSTS" - RHYTHMICAL PATTERNS

King Lear

FEELING OF THE WHOLE:

Spanish Evening:

In approaching the play, we are not required to begin our work at the beginning of the play and go right through it. Our Method allows us to "fly over" the play, but at the same time we must develop the feeling of the whole for the play. Although we are not going from the first to the last page we must have a certain feeling for the whole. The nature of Mr. Shdanoff's play is quite different to this one, therefore, don't be surprised if we approach this play differently. This is right and it is an organic necessity. The method which demands that we always begin the same way each time is wrong because it would be a dead method. It is, however, very necessary to have the feeling of the whole for each play.

We shall touch small moments of the play. Write down what we do and rehearse it at home, at least in your imagination, so that nothing will be dropped or lost after the rehearsal; everything will be quite definitely rehearsed after our work in the studio.

This play is much easier than Mr. Shdanoff's to grasp from the point of view of rhythm in our sense.

It is the nature of the play. We shall start from the

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point of rhythm in this play. In trying to get the feeling of the whole, pay attention to the three different parts: In the first part, the oppression of the old - Old People, old settings, darkness - everything which wants to die and to oppress the new life which wants to come up. The third part is opposite to the first, in a certain way, and in this play very directly opposite because the new life flourishes, and the old life is defeated. The second or middle part is the transition between the two - in this case the fight between the young people and the old people. Take this as the first frame in which you will put the feeling of the whole, because this is one of the foundation-stones on which we must work.

Concentrate and fly over the play in your imagination, having this feeling of the whole. Then try to do it many times, at first in general, and then gradually add more and more details. Now try to experience it with your whole body; in a sense try to find the psychological gesture for the whole play. Then try to find more archetypal gestures occupying your whole body, your whole actor's instrument.

Then try to imagine the atmosphere of the beginning - the dark, angry, oppressive atmosphere of quarreling and inharmony. The atmosphere of the second part is like a thunderstorm and sunshine coming through it. This change of light and darkness, with great strength, is the atmosphere.

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The oppression becomes active fighting. There is a kind of will in this middle part which is right. The third part is the atmosphere of sunshine and growth, and happiness and gaiety.

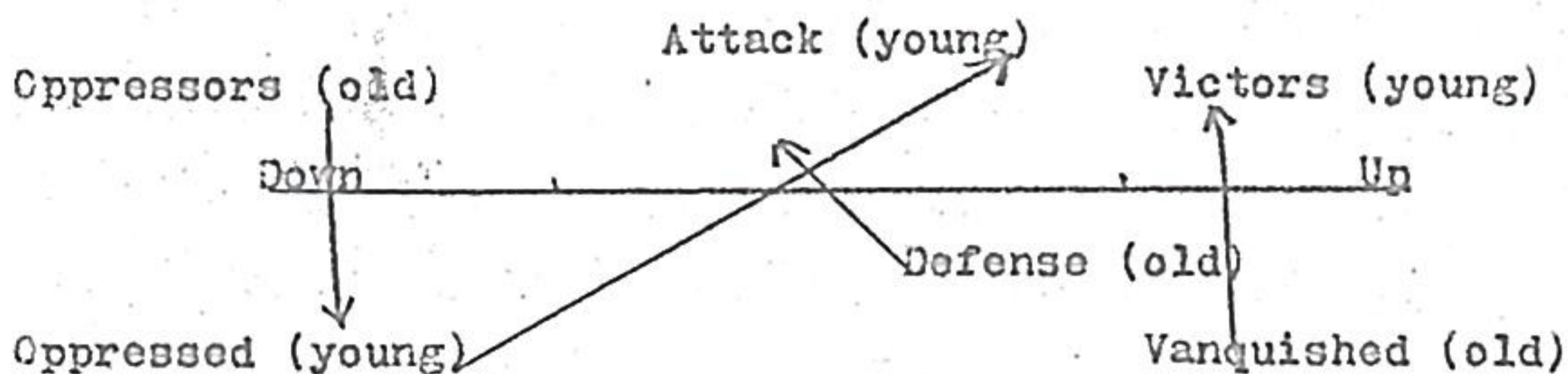
Then go through from the first part to the third in gestures, and by saying "the first part, the middle part, the third part." The qualities of the first part might be described like "↓" and the last part "↑". The middle part is not yet found.

Be aware of the danger of trying to be funny. If you believe in the styles and characters and situations sufficiently, they will be funny - you don't have to try to make them so. Now, do the wrestling exercise in pairs, in different styles, then in the style of comedy near to vaudeville. Do each movement with the feeling of the whole - have a simple pattern which will give you the foundation on which you can stand. Do one wrestling movement in the style of comedy near to vaudeville, and resolve it together. Then do it altogether as a group - first contact - first the feeling of the group - then the feeling of the whole; then the feeling of truth; then the style in the movement and in the voice when saying, "We are wrestling." Do the whole gamut of wrestling exercises. Do this same pattern in the first "oppressed" part, then in the last part which is "victorious", then in the middle part which is "conflict."

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Do each one first as the old people and then as the young people.



#### CONSTRUCTION OF THE PLAY: - RHYTHM:

By this means we approach the play more from the point of view of its construction. We must be able to be quite free in our application of the Method; if we can apply it when and how we like then the Method will serve us.

The idea is that the first and last part are opposite in certain qualities and powers. Certain opposition is always there and this is the main idea of this rhythmical gesture. Without this opposition there is only a straight line which means nothing for our psychological being. But this is not all - where opposition is there is always repetition. Imagine that if it is full opposition, there is nothing of repetition. If you will analyze your psychology during even this full opposition you will feel a certain thing which is like a "ghost" or a "phantom" which follow you, and this is the first part. When the opposition is absolutely incorporated then this breath of the thing which is no longer there will be felt. Without this "ghost" or "phantom" we

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cannot even experience the opposition - I only know what the opposition is when I experience that which is no longer there. That makes the whole composition.

In this play everything is turned opposite, but in the majority of cases part of the "ghost" of the first part is always incorporated, so that the opposition, followed by repetition, is always there - the question is only how much is the repetition a "ghost".

"GHOSTS" - RHYTHMICAL PATTERNS:

In King Lear the repetition is incorporated almost fully. At the beginning of the play Lear is tremendously powerful in the sense of "I am," - when he says, "come not between the lion and his wrath." The play starts with "I am" and it ends with "I am" - it gets other qualities but the thing which always remains is Lear's powerful "I am." He is never actually weak...when he shouts in the storm that he is weak it means he really is stronger. The "ghost" in King Lear is always there in the unbreakable will of Lear and this goes through the play without any change - the qualities of the unbroken will are changed but not the will itself.

Edwin, for instance, changes absolutely in the sense that being powerful he becomes weak - when he sits and speaks his soliloquy alone he is strong but at the end there is nothing of him left, no soul, no spirit, no thoughts. In contrast we see Lear as a person who dies as strong as he lives. This is an example which shows us that the "ghost"

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can remain as full-blooded as it was in the beginning. The will of Lear is the full repetition at the end by the full contrast in other things. The repetition is absolutely clear and not a "ghost",- although it can be either a "ghost" or a full-blooded thing - but it is always there.

In the first part we have anticipation, which is another "ghost". We have said that the experience of rhythm can only be experienced by the quality of being able to anticipate and to remember, or recall. I have read that a prophet looks forward but there is another prophet who can look back historically - this is the ability, but changing the direction. Anticipation and recollection. It is absolutely the same process from the creative point of view, whether I am looking forward or back. These "ghosts" are there by means of the same psychological prophetic ability.

It is more difficult to find this experience of the three parts in Mr. Shdanoff's play [The Possessed] because the line is so complicated, but in this play we can begin. Our approach to this play is to experience the rhythmical pattern and imagine it as well. Then we can fly over the play, being sure that we will always know where we are.