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RUN-THROUGH REHEARSAL TECHNIQUE
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Dostoyevsky- The Possessed
 Bernard Shaw
 Vakhtangov
 Grock, the Clown

RUN-THROUGH REHEARSAL TECHNIQUE: The Possessed

This run-through is for the purpose of giving you a feeling of the whole. Everything must be done consciously, as workers and warriors and not as dreamers or cowards who are running from something of which they are afraid. Take the tasks consciously, one by one, before you begin.

FEELING OF THE WHOLE:

It is essentially important to rehearse the whole play as many times as possible. Thus, the feeling of the whole will grow for the play and for each part. You must know what you are doing on the stage. At present, you know many details and how to put them together, but you cannot embrace the whole play, its whole meaning, its style, its philosophy. To get this we require the experience of running through the whole play. Then you will understand what you are actually going to act.

But to act the whole play without any new aims would be senseless. The director has many suggestions how to lead

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you, but he will not give them all at once. My first suggestion after seeing the rehearsal of The Possessed today is that you must have more feeling for the style, and another is the understanding of the words you are speaking. This was a weak point today. You stressed things which are simply unimportant, and you slipped over things which are essentially important. This means that you do not see the scaffolding of the play, and we got the impression that the building has no firm basis for the ideas. Therefore, the first task is for you to speak the lines, and we will tell you what is important and what is not important, and in this way you will get an opportunity to meditate upon the idea of the play, which is not there at the moment.

You must understand that this work of understanding the ideas of the play does not belong to our art from the ideal point of view - it must be taken for granted that the actors understand the ideas and the director has not to think of it. It is something which must start somehow before our work - the actor gets his part, which he reads, and immediately understands what is important and what is unimportant. We must spend a certain time on this preliminary pre-acting part of our work. The next time you get your parts, please do this work before you come to the rehearsal. This must not disturb the director who is concerned with the art and not with the simple meaning. So now we will plunge into the world of the ideas

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of the play. The whole idea of the play is that "The Idol" has promised to be an idol - this is very important for the whole play.

PRESENTING THE DYNAMICS OF THE IDEAS OF THE PLAY:

You must find the dynamics of the ideas so that you will present to the audience something which will be much more expressive than the lines. When you meditate on this, you will see that you have not the right to speak some words with the same expressiveness as other words. All the words must be combined with the imagination of the whole play, then they will make real sense - not as separate words.

We must know why the word is important in relation to the play's ideas. In this way, you will find the gesture of the whole part, and you will find that it is something very precious. Everyone must get accustomed to this, especially in our theatre in which we are trying to act the depths. Today each word was hanging in the air because we did not know why, or what for, or from which source the word came. We must concentrate on this method of understanding the words, not as separate things, but as little windows to the depths - each important word is like a little window. You must find the organism of the sentence. This may come to you instinctively, but, if not, you are liable to give it undue significance.

What is more important, and what is less so, must be left to your instinct. As an artist, you feel that which is

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more important in connection with the ideas. It cannot be calculated - we never insist on the mechanical stressing of words, but only require you to give the shape to the sentences, which are somehow wrong at the present time. Each sentence in itself has the right construction, which must be found by you. Do not make another mistake, by trying to underline each important word with the same stress or power - it depends upon the mood, on the quality, on the atmosphere, on the ideas. We will need this technique for each part, and soon you will be able to do it instinctively.

The audience must be able to follow the ideas and, therefore, the actor must try to feel the words which are important for the audience to follow. If you don't find this form, the words will overpower us, and we will be the victims of our words. The character can have its own particular words which express its character, but that must not spoil the meaning of the sentence, or the progression of the idea. These two things - the one coming from the needs of the character, and the other coming from the needs of the audience - will merge eventually.

In this work we are looking for the "whats" - the "hows" are always up to the actor. They have nothing to do with the logical speaking of the lines - they are the colors. We must rehearse all the places where you were shouting today, because the performance must be done without shouting. The

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strong voice without quality is a blank voice, the voice without color which makes the audience ill and tired. When you remember these qualities, you may speak as loudly as you wish. Shouting is only when there is voice without any quality behind it.

The rehearsal is the opportunity for you to exercise the possibility of grasping with your invisible hands the feeling of the whole play. Don't for one moment let yourself fall away from this, even if you are only in one small scene, while you are listening and looking you are doing the whole play. This gives the artistic feeling of the whole.

PSYCHOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE:

Imagine your characters and rehearse them from the point of view of significance. I see that you are trying to press and push and squeeze things out of you instead of giving significance, which is a purely psychological thing. When you try to push or shout things out, it means that you lack the understanding of significance as a psychological thing.

This play is an attempt made by our theatre to put before the audience certain human problems, which no one has actually solved. No one has solved the problem of the Christian life today "anything goes." You will see that the play is full of problems which nobody has solved, and, therefore, everyone pretends that there are no problems. This is the tragedy of our age - we pretend to be free from any problems

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and live until we die - which goes on until death comes unexpectedly - everything is like a ball which is thrown and which goes on until it meets a wall...not an interesting life.

Our theatre will make an attempt to put before the audience certain problems - this is the only justification for our play, but the actors must first taken in themselves an awareness of certain problems, otherwise the audience will not believe us. It will be simply chattering from the stage, and this can be found in any play.

The play has many dangerous sides - first of all, it is more serious than the majority of the audience will want, and there are only a few humorous moments. Therefore, I want to call your attention to the fact that, if you do not find significance in your words and movements, you will not be able to justify this play. As yet, you have not even understood the problems which are expounded. The play is a series of psychological pictures, a series of psychological human events, and all these events are problems. Significant human psychology.

If you will imagine the real ideal type of actor who is interested in speaking these words, and in coming into such conflicts, you will see that the play could become almost a revolution for modern audiences who have forgotten these problems, who are afraid of these problems, and who don't want to solve them, because they are too dangerous to solve.

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If you try to find the answer to these social problems in your own human depth, you will find that you are being crushed because they are overpowering. That is why we are simply reading the newspapers and asking whether the war is going on or not.

Such a play as ours which tries to awaken certain problems must be acted by the means of significant human psychology. If you will imagine yourself acting this play with psychological significance, perhaps it will help us to make the play more sensible. Dostoyevsky was not a fool, and after him no one has solved these problems. The play is all right, but the performance must be sensible. I want to have actors on the stage who have problems, or at least are able to pretend that they are solving problems. I don't speak about the play, I speak about the performance. Whether the audience will see a group of actors who are presenting psychologically significant problems, or a group of actors who have not dug any deeper than usual.

THEATRE CRITICS:

Keep before you all the time the presentation on Broadway in October - that will decide our destiny. They will not be kind to us - they will annihilate us in one instant if we show ourselves weak, without technique, without form. But if we show them ourselves as young, struggling idealists and workers, they will accept from us many things which we will

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not even expect. To do this we must be sure, we must be strong, we must have standards. They will not laugh at you, they will not be kind, they will come full of antagonism asking, "Who are these young students? Who are these upstarts?" We must be able to show ourselves to them strong and sure in our technique. Keep this picture before you all the time. There is so little time left for us. Be critical of yourselves, and demand that we will get this thing - we will get it.

Dostoyevsky's style is one of Russian problems - solving problems - restless atmosphere - running after ideas - catching them - concentrating on each problem - indescribable things - flying over the whole world and cosmos trying to solve the problems - everything, anything is a problem - you don't need to know what problem - it is a philosophy - seeking - solving. Dostoyevsky was a restless spirit - he was always trying to solve the problem of the Christ being. The intention of Chekhov and Ibsen was to show dull reality, while Dostoyevsky shows conflicts, disasters, strivings, etc.

SPEECH FOR THE STAGE:

We have no right to speak casually on the stage. Your speech is inartistic - it is so dull, so ordinary, so uninteresting. I don't speak about the technique of your speech, but you must learn to love more, to enjoy more the way of speaking. And especially in this play. The play on the

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stage depends on the actors, and never on the author. If you speak the lines as though you are reading the book and not acting the play, you will kill it, whether it is the wit of Shaw, or the beauty of Shakespeare. I had the honor to speak with Shaw in England, and he told me that when he produced his plays himself, the first thing he asked the actors was to learn the lines by heart, and in two weeks he was ready. But he was only interested in his own text, and that is wrong.¹

You must awaken this instinctive desire, which is in every artist, to have a high standard for his technique. Our standard of speech is low, and you must understand this while you are still in the school, when you still have time to exercise. If you will listen attentively, you will see that when the actor speaks his sentences clearly, they immediately become interesting. The clown speaks stupid things, but if he speaks them well, we laugh. The words may mean nothing, but if they are spoken as Groucho speaks, then they become world famous because it is how he speaks.²

In our play we have lost of Dostoyevsky's philosophy and the ideas are good, but why are they not interesting? Because we cannot pronounce them properly. By listening to one another you will learn that is what we are in the school for. In everyday life people speak dreadfully, but as actors, you cannot go very far if you cannot overcome this difficulty. The task for everyone is to listen and learn what it means to

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... speak on the stage - learn what it means to be heard in the audience. You must awaken this kind of responsibility so that every word is heard. You must speak well and at the same time you have to learn and rehearse all the emphasis so that we can really hear what words you have chosen to emphasize.

... In Philadelphia some years ago, some newspapermen came to me for an interview. I did not speak any English at all, and I heard for the first time how some human beings can speak. It was an extreme example of this inability to speak human words.³

... When we are speaking and trying to express something, we must do it fully. Unless you have this living speech as an actor, you are dead. Learn to listen for artistic speech - you have the means by which you can acquire this artistic speech. ^{If} ^ It does not penetrate into the audience's heart, that means that the speech is not for the theatre. If you have their hearts, you have them, but if it penetrates only into their brains, then they have you.

... Vakhtangov had this ability to a tremendous extent. He was always anticipating the future audience, and, therefore, he was a first-class director, because he always knew what the audience would feel, hear, and see. We must develop in ourselves this psychology to anticipate the future audience - then we will grow immediately because we will know what requirements

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will be put to us. Vakhtangov had this as a gift, but we must develop it.

CHARACTERIZATION:

Suggestions for Main Characters:

Stavrogin must develop the following ability - to speak all his words very lightly and easily. He must not give out his will power, because then he becomes weak. We must always feel that he has much more than he gives - he must never show his lowest depth. He is an incorporated idea, a phantom, not yet an idea. Therefore, this lightness will give you this thing we have spoken of. Your whole will and temperament must sit inside, and you only show it in the Kirilov scene, and the Meeting scene. At all other times you are light. Shatov must give everything out, but Stavrogin's manner is to do everything lightly and easily. He never shows his whole being.

For Verkovensky, the feeling of ease. Stavrogin is easy because he is in connection with the world of ideas, and Verkovensky is easy because he is very earthy - he is a specialist on the earth. He is a juggler. Stavrogin is not on the earth, but Verkovensky is. Verkovensky is something of a dancer. He dances in his speech and body. When he is heavy, he is weaker. He is a specialist in light things - earthy lightness, a dancer on the earth. He is so much on the

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earth that he is able to dance and juggle with everything. As few gestures as possible. To be a juggler means to be able to move only that which is necessary - especially arms and hands.

Martha, take again the task of the feeling of truth for everything, every moment, every glance - everything with the feeling of truth.

The Governor must try to elaborate the quality of an aristocrat. All his shouting and his movements must be found in a fine way - although dead - like an engraving in an old book. This will lead you to acting with movements which will help the idea of a corpse. Aristocratic speech - more gentle. Something keeps you in a certain dead form.

Lisa, today the depth and seriousness of the character were lost. When she is serious and deep, it is marvelous, but when she loses it as today, it becomes the usual kind of acting.

Shatov has made great progress in the Meeting scene, but this kind of speaking you must spread over the whole part. Forget my suggestions about the Russian bear and the shyness. Go on as you are in the Meeting scene - you are charming, and we believe you and want to follow you. Take your own way and discard my suggestions, and try to bring in all your work the quality you have in the Meeting scene. It is very closely tied up with the speaking of the content. We must understand

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your ideas. The main thing in your part is you "prefer to stay with Christ" - this is one of the leading ideas as is, "God and man." These were lost, and they became insignificant and the whole scene lost its meaning.

Kirilov is a very charming character, and the three stages of his development are very good - first, chasing the idea - second, getting it - and third, meeting it in reality. For you, the task is very near to Shatov's. Sometimes we don't understand the ideas. You are the caricature of Verkovensky and Stavrogin, in different ways. In the philosophy of the play, you are put there as a caricature of those two characters. Try to get this feeling, and you will be absolutely obliged to speak out all the ideas. Your gesture of chasing the idea is there, but the idea is too vague for us. You must imagine the idea more - the crazy philosophy itself is not clear enough to you and, therefore, not clear to us.

Dronov, your task is to have the form filled to such a degree that it can break - we must always be frightened of this. We are still too calm because you are too certain that you will not do anything. Inside of this correct officer are lions and tigers and the whole zoo.

Fedka (Slim Mike), try to following qualities. I led you astray by showing you a murderer - you must perform quite an opposite thing. He is not a murderer at all - try to perform the surgeon, psychiatrist, physician. Try to get

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a person who penetrates into the mind of everyone. He is a hypnotist who tries to make everyone go to sleep. You want to create around you a world in which everyone sleeps so that you can take everything.

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We will try to improve certain moments in the play: Scene II - the new beginning. Begin in the atmosphere of great expectation and tension. Start with the rhythmical point into which, and out of which, you speak. Being in this atmosphere of tension, you speak out of this rhythmical point. Then we will get the impression that you are going on - not starting. Everyone must be making this rhythmical gesture of contraction. A real spiritual contraction. Atmosphere, style, gesture - everything must be fully there. Impending disaster - significant.

This is very important because up to this moment we have not seen these people - so we have to have a moment of introduction. Everyone is static, so you must find the best position you can to express your character, and to express this feeling of tension in being drawn to this point. Don't be indifferent with your bodies. When Martha speaks, emphasize her first words with increased attention to her - an accent towards her. Start with these impending things. Significance must be there in the bodies and in the voices and speech. Bridges and transitions must be developed in each character throughout the play - now it is too patchy; too bitty.