

Michael Chekhov

(Afternoon) June 24, 1938

STYLE
FEELING OF FORM
CHARACTERIZATION

STYLE:

It is necessary at times to go through exercises for style, as a kind of "sanitorium" of the two plays which are working on. Today, we will try to get this understanding, this ability to do everything in the style. We will try to go through different complicated things, trying to keep the style through them all. Until today, we have taken the style very pedantically - now we will be quite free. This will make us more free in our understanding of the style. We will start by creating the style, and then we will apply it to different things.

First - The style of Mr. Shdanoff's play [The Possessed]:

1. Your presence - your "I am" must be present in every part of your body. Your head alone is free. Ask your body whether your presence is there.
2. The feeling of form - form in your speech and movements and in everything you do.
3. Avoid stiffness.
4. The form filled to the bursting point.
5. Ability to do everything in the tempo. - Urgency.
6. Radiation - although the style is heavy, the actor himself must not be heavy.
7. Break the form.

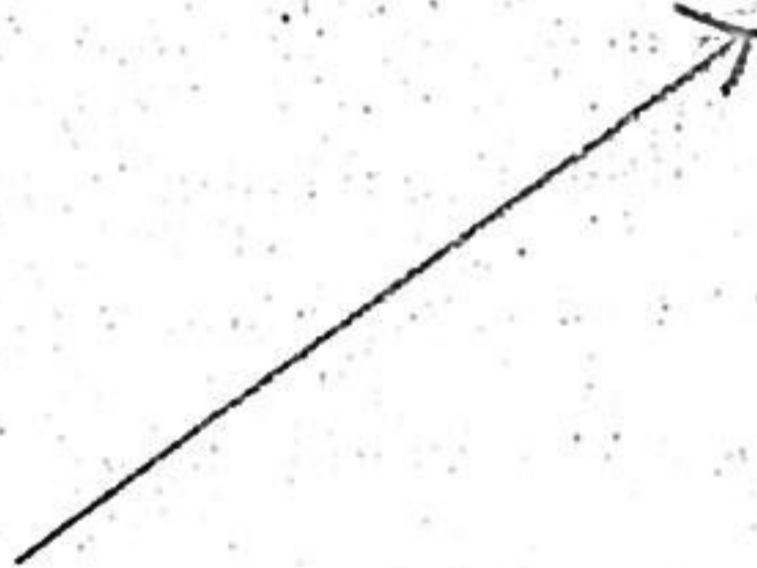
Exercise:

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Create the above style and remind yourselves consciously of each point. Now create a crescendo which must be broken at its highest point. Then do the same thing, this time breaking the form by means of a pause.

Now create a crescendo, breaking it first with noise and then with slight sounds and means of expression.



Breaking the form in two pauses by starting crescendo with no outward sign. A pause breaks the form for a moment.

Exercise: Theme of the Hero in the style of Tragedy:

The hero is approaching from a great distance - great expectation and joy on the part of everyone - in the style of tragedy. When he approaches the crowd, he falls dead. The form is broken by the pause which follows his fall. Build a set which will express this style - your movements, your speech, everything must express it - all points of the style must be there consciously. Add contact - you must be aware of the space and the human bodies in this space, therefore, contact or group feeling has been added.

Avoid the stiffness. We must exercise this continuous fight with our enemies such as stiffness because when

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stiffness is present in you, you are compelled to push. To perform tragedy on the stage the actor must never be bound - the more free you are, the more tragic it will be. If you will overcome this idea of stiffness, you will get a special kind of freedom which we need.

In this form that is near to bursting, our spirits must be strong enough to promise, by means of radiation, that at any moment something will happen. This is a kind of tension which is not physical tension.

FEELING OF FORM:

Now the feeling of form - moving through space - a feeling that something is left in the space when you move so that you can follow this form. It is a psychological trick which gives much to the audience and to the actor. Move so that you leave many many forms in the space - free bodies - free heads - do not be in a hurry - the tempo is there because "I am present" - because "I am here" - not because I am in a hurry.

Crescendo. If you start too high, you will have no space in which to rise. You must give yourselves many tasks during your work. In this exercise it is better not to be able to fulfill the whole task and to struggle with all the points than to be able to fulfill only one point fully.

Now, the same story in the style of comedy - Shdanoff style, plus comedy style. Form - comedy - radiation - comedy.

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The same ability to leave the form in space. Mold the space. Fill the form to the point where it will break. Heads quite free. You must accept the good things in you - you must know when it is right. Comedy, not in the head but in the whole body - leave your faces free - it is the bodies you are concerned with and the face will follow.

Exercise: Style of Circus:

Presence - the whole body - form. Be sure you are molding the space - the form must remain in the space. Radiation - if it is right, accept it inwardly. Try to get the tempo out of your presence. Each small movement, each big movement must mold the space. Out of presence you will get tempo. With free bodies, build a circus set.

Criticisms:

Never use animal sounds or noises - sometimes you are in danger of falling into subhuman means of expression. These are never funny and don't belong to the actor's means of expression.

Shdanoff style in drama:

Presence - free bodies - try to fill the presence - be sure you are molding the air with your speech as well as your movements. Now fill your forms until the point where it can break, in your forms, movements, everything. Radiation.

Now apply this to the situation I will give you.

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Theme: A political trial - the condemned and their relatives are waiting for the verdict which is the worst possible one. By means of crescendo, create the scene to the point where the judges give the verdict, then break the form.

Spanish Evening:

Style: Feeling of ease - free bodies - free hands - butterfly - psychologically uplifted from the earth - rabbit psychology, which means you are concentrated on something outside of yourselves. Keep it, and during the exercise be conscious of what you are doing - why you are moving - feeling of ease. You must instigate yourselves by knowing all these things.

Now take the sentence, "May I show you all my muscles?"

1. In the first part - the Young People are oppressed.
2. Then you are the victors.
3. Then the struggling Young People.

Now the sentence, "I love the moon - I shed a tear," in the same way.

The process of speaking is the process of opening - I open myself. Now with the movement it will also be the opening - don't forget to leave your bodies.

Now the sentence, "Sh-- my daughters might hear," in the same way.

Now add to these qualities the "juggler" quality. We now have (1) Feeling of ease, (2) Rabbit, (3) Butterfly, (4) Juggler.

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Now imagine the baby laughing - the smile - I will tell you when to incorporate your imagination. Suddenly, from inside comes this smile which has nothing to do with our smile - it is absolutely different. Watch this smile and watch its psychology. Now get up as though you see something from far away.

CHARACTERIZATION:

Try to adjust your real body to this imaginary body.

1. Old People walking with your imaginary body being smaller than your real body. Don't add anything artificial.

Now this center which is low is very heavy - your imaginary hands are longer than your real hands.

Now say "Hello" in accordance with this imaginary body. Be brave enough to create out of this imaginary body and don't pretend.

Now, normal center - Young People. Now add to this a "shining" center which vibrates. The center has the quality of warmth. Now, add to this an imaginary body which is very slim and beautiful and just a little taller than you really are.

Characterization for Old People: Imagine your body as it is, but the center is very small - small and sharp like a little diamond, a little bit in front of the nose. Your imaginary legs are very thin and spindly, and you have wide shoulders. Addition: The small center before the nose is ice cold.

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By this means of getting characterization it is very important not to add anything, otherwise it is absolutely wrong. If we are trying to add and force, we only mold our physical body, which is not the right way. If you will believe in this invisible body, you will get the real ability to live in accordance with this imaginary body, and you will be able to act. If you are doing something artificial, it will disturb you. It is important to overcome this temptation to add something.

Old People in the middle part where the Bridegroom is to be married and all the people are dressed for the wedding.

Woody's characterization: The center is a spiral coil. Now add to this the spiral going in. Now add to this the center taking everything in like a whirlpool.

Beatrice's characterization: The center is in the right place - A sun which explodes and at the next moment becomes a little hot star.

The work today has shown us that we are still a school although we are rehearsing two plays - we are not yet able to manage the Method. There are so many things which we only half know. We must go on with a strong desire to get this artistic freedom and a strong will to overcome these things which are our enemies and which hold us back. We must never think that we know everything. The old and new students must practice and rehearse the Method with great will and a great desire to get it.

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We must get the desire to be the new kind of actor and to digest our exercises so that we will become this new type of actor. Any actor can speak on the stage - any actor can move on the stage - but any actor cannot radiate on the stage. We must be able to do all these things as a result of digesting the Method. Get this desire to re-create your natures, to make a new nature and a new kind of actor.