

Michael Chekhov

January 27, 1939

THE PAUSE  
READING THE SCRIPT

The Possessed:

SLIM MIKE:

Change the direction of your character. In accordance with the character I have in mind, I will lead you in a different way. This is very good exercise for the imagination, to discard one thing and to start another.

By means of the imagination I will tell you the following: On your present image, put a mask. Let your present character be hidden and covered with a fine suit, hat, scarf, knife - but the knife is for him like a toy. Inwardly he is a coward, but he is like a gangster. Take the character you have shown, and in your imagination cover it with all the things which have been suggested, and it will be one thing.

The first part - until the word comes "clear off" - imagine from which side he can catch Stavrogin. He explores, he touches the ground - a careful work of exploration. How can he tell Stavrogin that he is ready to kill his wife? He is beating around the bush.

The second part is the killing part. Imagine it in the form where the will, the decision, the desire to kill is one hundred percent. He is burning with the desire to kill this person who tortures him. Such gangsters know their timetables - it is a revenge - vengeance. This part is

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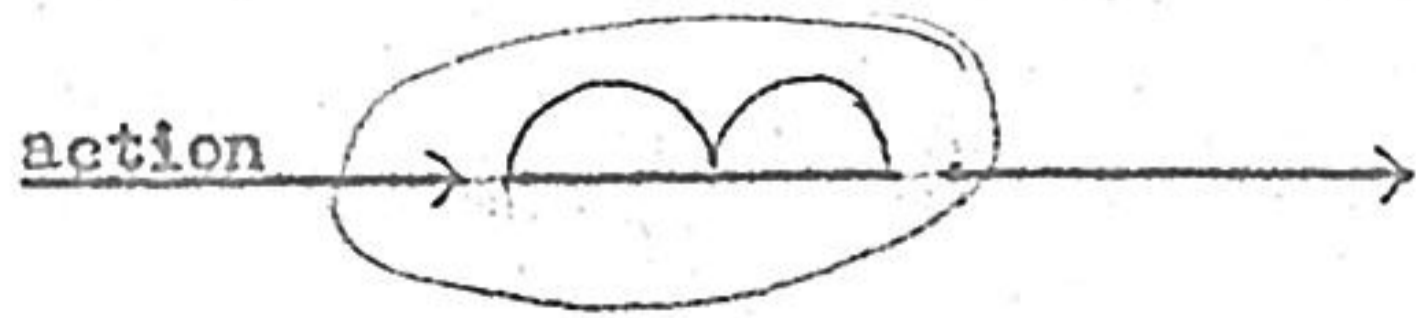
absolutely emotional, but under the guise of these fine things. Just like a psychological explosion, nothing can stop him... nonchalant, suave, slick, smooth.

In the third part he is himself in danger. How can he get away from this person who can destroy him; to tell him, "To hell with you," but at the same time to escape from the danger?

In the second part the cue will be the pause. When Stavrogin feels Slim Mike is about to stop him and turns and says, "Drop that knife," Slim Mike is caught, and this is the beginning of the third part. He is as if photographed just at the moment he produces the knife. He loses his courage and when Stavrogin says, "Drop that knife," then comes the pause in which he feels that he is naked, and exposed before him, and through this pause he starts to escape. (1) Bravado, timidity, surreptitious, diverse. (2) Rage. (3) Exposed.

THE PAUSE:

The pause is divided into two parts - that which is the result of the previous action, and that which is the preparation for the coming action. One is because of the action before, and what shall happen is prepared in the pause.



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Read the script yourself - not by reading it line by line. You must get it by means of your imagination. This means to act inwardly everything you are reading. If you are an actor, it is enough for you to act - don't wait until you understand because by then a certain thing will be dead in your actor's nature. We have to imagine everything.

After reading the whole play, you will not only know the content, you will have already some joy, some pleasure, some actor's emotions warm in you, because you have a special kind of reading. If your intellect observes everything in a moment, the feelings will not be active. If you read with your emotions, with your imagination, you will be motivated to at once incorporate it in your body and your words. You will be filled with the desire to act.

This psychological difference means everything to us as actors. If we read with our imagination, we will save very much time. It will be the first step to acting and not to the dry speaking of words. If we read plays with our intellects, we are preparing a wooden part which will torture us in our rehearsals later on.

Try never to learn your lines by heart mechanically, but by imagining them - by acting them. It may be quicker to learn the lines mechanically, but it will kill the actor in you. When you have to deal with the text, try to make it alive by your imagination. The print is mechanical enough,

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but we must put the imaginative life between us and the text, otherwise it will kill us. It is something like a ghost which haunts the actor if he has in his mind's eye only the written words, but if he is freed by the imagination he has a direct approach to the life of the word. If you have only the written word, it is like a screen between you and your art. Always put your imagination before this dead text, and it will do its creative work.

If you will imagine in this way, it will prevent you from being poisoned by the letters. The same is true with children who have read without getting any pictures, it kills their imagination. We, as actors, must overcome this thing consciously - children cannot because they are forced to do their work. But if we know that this is invisible poison which we swallow, it will make us ill later on.