

Michael Chekhov

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PSYCHOLOGICAL GESTURE  
DIRECTING THROUGH THE IMAGINATION  
GRAPHS AND CHARTS OR SCHEMES  
JUSTIFICATION  
ENSEMBLE ACTING  
TIME, SPACE, ACTIVITY, QUALITY

PSYCHOLOGICAL GESTURE: Balladina; Criticism:

As a director you gave your cast some psychological gestures, but the cast has never fulfilled them - the gestures remained as an illusion. There was only fifteen percent of fulfillment, and they were done very superficially. In the case where actors are doing the gesture without any exploration, or doing it less than a hundred percent, it is of less value than the intellectual approach, and we lose the whole idea of the gesture. The psychological gesture must be taken so profoundly, so seriously, because without this exploration of the approach through the gesture, the gesture is nothing but an illusion, and this kind of illusion kills the whole Method. The whole point of the Method is the gesture and the imagination, as a result of which the feelings will grow and the poison of the intellect will be avoided.

Your actors were empty before you, and they were living in an illusion that they were doing something. When the director does this he is blind. He is looking at his actors but he does not see them. You have given the words too soon on the grounds of the psychological gesture, but the gesture had not been properly explored and the result was that the actors lied in their voices. All directors must be aware



of the illusion in making the gestures. The director must require that the whole being of the actor does the gesture. The aura must be there so that the actor will get something new from the gesture.

DIRECTING THROUGH THE IMAGINATION:

Sometimes the mistake on the part of the director is that he adds something of himself when he is looking at his cast. The director believes more in his actors because he wants them to do the task, and so he adds something of himself and then he feels it is right. But it is a mirage. The director is only injecting his own consciousness. It is a very dangerous thing to think that you are going the right way and to believe in such an illusion. When your actors accept your suggestions with their intellects it is nothing. When they are silent and quiet, then you know that they are really following you with their imaginations. It is so easy to be intellectual and to accept things in that way.

The gesture must be the ground for the speech. The actor must love the gesture and work with it very much, then he can speak from it. Sometimes you feel that the actor does the gesture fully quite soon, and in that case you, the director, can give the words. There is no rule. The gesture and speech must be together. Let your actors imagine and try to turn the words into pictures, and not into intellectual conceptions.

The directors must know that the psychological gesture expresses nothing - it prepares. It is the preparation for future expression. If it expresses, then it is not the



psychological gesture. It may sometimes turn out to be an action, but this is a coincidence. The preparation by means of the psychological gesture must be done so widely as to shatter the being of the actor.

Each psychological gesture can be done with full outer energy and be right, because of the time, space, activity, quality factor. Or it can be the same movement but absolutely empty - only movement without any streams, without any idea about where it leads, without any idea of the clear form. In one case it progresses and in the other it does not. In any case, the psychological gesture can be very small, and very quiet, and very short, and yet be right if it is for a certain aim - quality, activity, time, space. This quiet gesture can be done one hundred percent with subtle movements of the body. It depends on how the psychological gesture is being done, and not whether it is done physically or not.

You will remember that after we have done some psychological gestures for the play, for the part, for the scene, even when we are no longer doing the gesture it continues to be there, without any visible sign. Therefore, the actor speaks on the stage after he has done the gesture, and the gesture is transformed into his speech and into his feelings. This means that the psychological gesture, which we have done with one hundred percent visible or invisible power, is something which must remain there forever. By making all the muscles



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free, something will be done like it inside and be transformed into the speech, the images, etc. Therefore the question is not whether the gesture is being done visibly or invisibly, the question is whether it is being done one hundred percent by giving your whole activity to it. The psychological gesture includes everything!

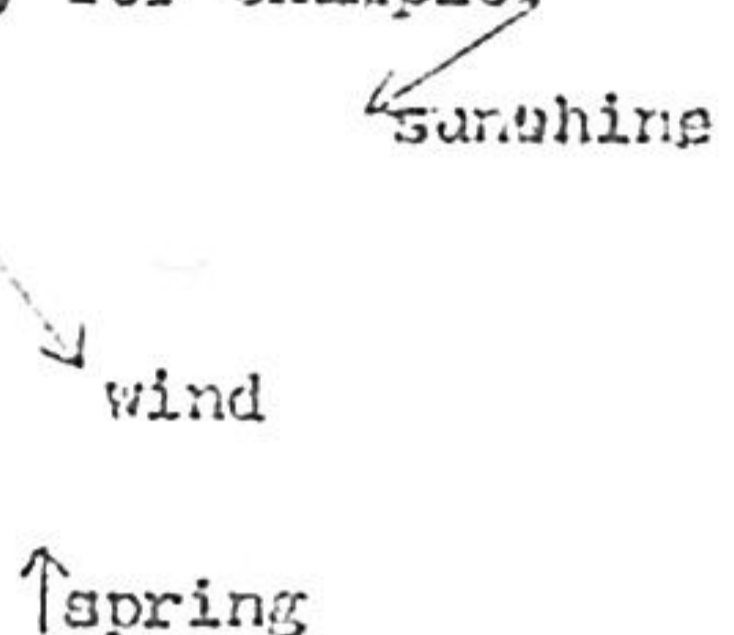
When the director requires the atmosphere, and then asks his cast to speak or move out of atmosphere it is an illusion, because the atmosphere is not yet there and the actors speak or move without it. In creating the atmosphere, the director must spend more time on it and must help his cast because the actor's psychology is bewildered unless he does. It is something in the actor's nature. The moment an actor gets a part he becomes more stupid than he is as an ordinary person. Therefore, the director must help his cast - they cannot produce the atmosphere in five minutes, and they do not know the simplest things. Therefore, the director must repeat for them the quality of the atmosphere which he wants for them.

#### GRAPHS AND CHARTS OR SCHEMES:

These are very good and they help the actor to discover many things, provided they are not done with the intellect. It is very interesting work. You must imagine over and over again until you get the feeling of the powers in the play, and then you must try to fix these powers. Then your head can



help you, but the question is whether you start with your head or your imagination. If you start with your imagination you will get a feeling of the powers. The actor sees the wind and the movement, and he will react to this feeling. This feeling of the dynamic of the event will gradually give you sunshine, wind, and spring, for example;



or the realistic approach:



It was how these examples were done, not the examples themselves which were wrong.

Let us take an example from one of our plays - The Golden Steed. Why is Antin thrown back and down to his brothers? How can you answer this? Intellectually, dynamically, or with the emotions, or the feelings, or the idea of the play, or with the atmosphere of the play? The real answer must be given by you from the composition of all these things which are indescribable. If I told you that Antin was drawn to his brothers because they are of the same blood, that would be an intellectual answer and not an artistic one. If you will remember - without any reason - which is the most beautiful thing on the stage -



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that as Antin you are climbing up, you will feel that as an artist you must have something pulling you down. For this aim the two images are given - the two brothers.

This is absolutely enough for the artist. If I ask you to run down the staircase with the feeling that you are running down into the depths, you as an artist will not ask why, you will do it and will convince us that this was a small piece of art. The most beautiful artist is the one who starts his creation without any reason, and later on he finds some reasons. Whereas the most dreadful artists begin with reasons, such as propaganda, and give the most inartistic productions.

#### JUSTIFICATION:

Then what is justification? Justification will prevent you from lying. It lives in the artist's soul. Children begin to lie after they are three years old. It is something like a sin that we are born with - something innate in our nature. The most beautiful justification is the aesthetic one.

Criticism of the "Madonna and Holy Ghost" theme:  
I am not against using the highest things in connection with our profession, because we want to lift our profession up. But I was a little shocked by the wrong use of certain words. When you speak about the Madonna, perhaps you could point out that each woman was the Madonna. But the reference to the



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Holy Spirit was not right, because the use of such words as Jesus, Christ, etc., are so vague in our minds. It might be right if we wish to work with the archetype - something which is greater than our individual lives, but if we use these divine words we must wait until we are able to use them in the right sense. Let us take another example: if you call a child "angel," there is something right about it but when a lover refers to his love as "angel," there is something wrong. Our first approach to everything is by means of the archetype, and we must not approach such profound things until we are able to understand them.

Criticism: The Golden Steed rehearsal:

I was very touched by the performance, in spite of all the wrong things which were done from different points of view. The acting was very touching at times. I was touched by Jocelyn's work - by her unfolding. The long walk in the Silver Steed moment was very good. Not every actor is able to hold the attention of the audience in such a long slow walk. This had quality.

ENSEMBLE ACTING:

The whole of the cast was really an ensemble. There is nothing more touching in the world than ensemble playing. It is something which nobody can kill, because it is such a great power. All the illusions that I am alone as an actor are gone. Today there was a real ensemble, and for this



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ensemble we can give our lives because it is worthwhile living for. The ensemble in this sense is a germ from which we can dare in time to say that we are servants of the social life. From this germ we will give our love to the society in which we live. At such moments this love is almost tangible. This germ will heal the audience. Each of us as individuals needs healing - all our ills are the result of disharmony inside. When we are able to send out not only the performance, but also our human belief in something, it is very healing.

The time will soon come when humanity will be divided into two parts - one will be more materialistic while the other will be more spiritual - these two parts of humanity. All the spiritual knowledge and facts which are now ignored will be as obvious as materialistic science. There is already a spiritual science in the world, but the time has not yet come when people will hunger for spiritual knowledge. We must find our own way.

Such performances as the one you have given today, with real human qualities, is a germ. It is capital which we have brought to the account of the future life, and if we will work along like this then in the future we will be really something which it will be worthwhile to be.



SPEECH GESTURE - PSYCHOLOGICAL GESTURE

The Golden Steed:

Between the main climaxes we can find auxiliary climaxes. For instance, the moment when Antin falls to the ground, and the brothers are standing above. This is the auxiliary climax between the Copper Steed and the Silver Steed. It is the lowest point.

Clowns:

You must take into consideration your audience. There must be at least two levels. It is a good approach to start with the feeling of truth, but you must understand the two levels - one the guise and the other what is going on under the guise. Take the problem as though you were preparing this sketch for a real audience, then you will get a better inspiration.

Directors must correct psychological gestures by means of time, space, activity, and quality.

Balladina:

The exercise is to speak the text by doing the psychological gesture at the same time. The rhythm of speech and the rhythm of the psychological gesture.

The director gives the psychological gestures not only for the sentence and the words, but for the character. The rhythm of the sentence will give the right accentuation for the rhythmical gesture. This now becomes the rhythmical



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speech gesture as well. The gesture and word will fuse if  
the accent is found.