

Michael Chekhov

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CHARACTERIZATION  
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 GROUNDS FOR DIFFERENCE IN METHODS OF  
 STANISLAVSKY & MICHAEL CHEKHOV

Stanislavsky  
 Don Quixote

## CHARACTERIZATION:

From today on I want to give you a task about our play, Spanish Evening. As you know, in comedy the most important thing is the characters and the events. We will discuss why it is so important later on, but at the moment the most important part of the comedy, the characters, must be elaborated. The task is to work upon the characters. We can change the actors at any time but it does not matter, because the time and work is not lost; the exercise is always very precious.

## IMAGINATION:

Work on the characters from the following points:  
 1. Approach the character from the imagination. That means that you must take a certain time, not accidentally but regularly every day, quite definitely. Find out the distribution of your time which will allow this regular work. The time must be definitely chosen; the time for imagining your character.

## INCORPORATION:

2. Then the incorporation of the character which

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you have imagined. By this we mean you must also imagine the voice and try to incorporate it too.

**INVISIBLE BODY - CENTER:**

3. Choose another time during the day and try to get it from another point - by exercising your body. First try to find your invisible body, which one is the best one. Then try to find the center and try to adjust your physical body to this invisible body and its movements and whatever else you find. Every day exercise the adjusting of your physical body to your invisible body and its center. It must be done absolutely every day, otherwise you will have it only theoretically, and it will not give you any practical results.

This is the task: to approach the character from two sides - from the world of the imagination and incorporation, and from the world of the body by imagining an invisible body and by adjusting your physical body to it. Unless you work upon this very much it will be amateurish and theoretical, and will have nothing to do with our Method. We will elaborate the crowd from this point of view of characters; different faces of the crowd. This will be elaborated with the whole group, then you will add it to your character work. Imaginary justification and feeling of imaginary truth. If I do it otherwise I become less and less an artist and more and more a person.

**PSYCHOLOGICAL GESTURE:**

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Try to realize that we have our bodies and that, by the means of this body, we are able to express certain psychological content or experience. Try to experience the psychology of <sup>imagining</sup> opening your heart, your soul to someone. Just imagine this psychological event of opening your heart towards someone, or to the whole world. Keep it, and then be aware again that you have your body - keeping the other experience at the same time.

Now try to find the simplest expression of this; then try very consciously to find the simplest bodily expression for this simple psychological event which we call "to open our hearts". Now we shall turn the whole process; we have got a certain psychological experience and we have expressed it through a movement.

Imagine that the psychological experience was strong enough and the bodily expression was strong enough. This is a quite natural way which everyone knows in everyday life and on the stage, and on this basis was built the whole Method of Stanislavsky and his Moscow Art Theatre. He started with the psychology and then he found the best expression for the body; this was his process.

Now, if we will turn the whole process we will get what we call the psychological gesture. This is the simplest explanation I can give you. We shall start with a certain means of expression - for instance, we want to open our whole being and it will call up a certain psychological experience

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inside us. This is the whole story. Now try to make the most complicated gesture of opening your whole being, and try to be aware of the psychological experience which must come from it, if you are free enough. Try to accumulate this psychological effect which will come if you have done the gesture fully, if we are artists - which we must take for granted.

Now appraise quite intimately whether you have accumulated certain feelings, and will, and images by doing this simple gesture several times; whether you have really accumulated something there. If not it means that your gesture was not complicated enough, or not elaborated enough, so that in a certain way it has occupied only half of your body and being. By lifting your hands and arms you should feel that streams are going through them, are coming from them. Concentrate on it consciously; although we may know very well that to do the psychological gesture we must use the whole body, we forget it. This is never allowed; if it is the psychological gesture then it must be done with the whole body, the whole being.

Listen and hear and feel and be aware of the psychological results, because it makes the whole difference. If we are doing the gesture fully, but without paying attention to what is going on inwardly, it will only be a mechanical thing; it will not give me anything because I am not paying attention to my psychology. It is the most important thing to have the eyes turned in when doing the psychological

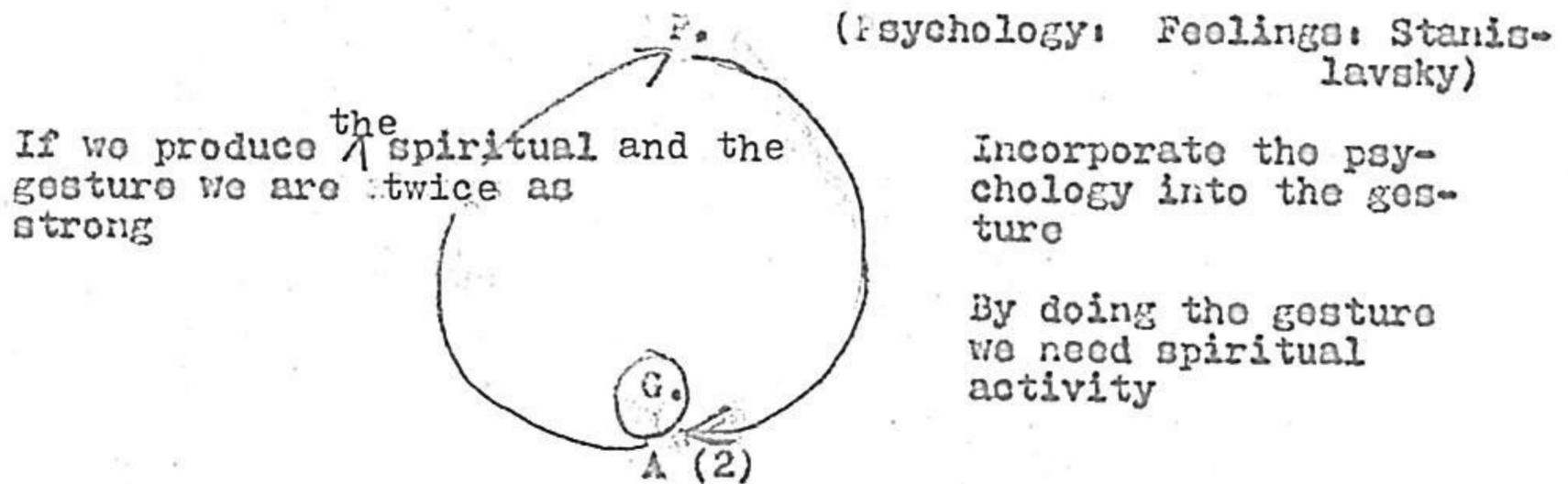
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gesture.

There are many points which are connected with the psychological gesture, and we will consider some of them now. One of the most important is to do the gesture with the whole body, and the second is to do it aiming at the psychological effect, and the third is to do the gesture with one hundred percent activity. The gesture may be a very soft one, but you must be active when doing it; do not confuse the physical power and the dimension.

Now, to do it only in the imagination; if you will ask what this means you will come to a very interesting conclusion, which is that you have come to the first point from which we started - that it is actually a psychological effect from which we have found our gesture.



From each point you start you will find the same thing - it is a whole which always goes on in our creative souls. Then we might ask, why don't we continue the Method of Stanislavsky? Here is the main point - it is difficult

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this way  
to awaken because it is a feeling. This activity [of the psychological gesture] is spiritual as well as bodily, and they multiply each other. This is the point why I have taken this way from Stanislavsky; this is the moment, because this is the point where we have our whole nature absolutely full. There is no other place where we can catch our nature. Stanislavsky only uses the imagination and the first part. You can be active by doing it in your imagination, and now you multiply this by doing it in the imagination and at the same time [doing the gesture]. Therefore I have chosen this way as the simplest one. It always leads to the highest spiritual results, and at the same time it is not something which makes our work mechanical. We are still always in connection with the circle (as shown on the diagram) and with the psychology.

Do the gesture in the imagination, and then don't do the gesture but keep the result. If it is a psychological gesture it means that on the basis of this psychological gesture you can use any means of expression which you choose - it is not important which one. If I have the psychology of the gesture, and I speak on the basis of it I can radiate atmosphere, I can fulfill the objective, I can do anything. Use the words as a means of expression: "Oh, yes, yes, of course." It is allowed to use the psychological gesture as a ground, but it is not allowed to use the intellect instead of this living means of expression of the gesture or the

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imagination.

Then simply have the psychological gesture in you, without doing it in your imagination or actually. Now act the scene of going to the balcony, and come to the open air and walk there for a moment, and try to speak to each other. This whole scene must be the development of the same gesture. Now use the same gesture for the aim of radiating the atmosphere. The gesture is full enough to expand with the kind of atmosphere, and by means of the actual gesture and the content of it find the atmosphere and fill the room with it.

The gesture can be applied to everything in our art; to one word - to the word "why?" for instance, or to the sentence, "Blow, winds and crack your cheeks..." - on the same gesture. Then to one small thing like picking up something from the floor. Now take the chairs and put them in a row, and take your places as if waiting for a lecturer to arrive - on the basis of the same gesture.

#### THE ARCHETYPE:

Each gesture can be applied to a series of scenes or even to the whole play if necessary. The psychological gesture, if it is big enough and wide enough, and embraces many things which you as artists are gaining, it becomes more and more archetypal, so that the nature of the gesture is archetypal.

Another point: do the gesture again fully. We

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have done this gesture and our intellect is inclined to think that this is a gesture which we have done. Of course, there are others which we have not yet done - everywhere in the whole world exist gestures which we have not done, but this one we have done - intellectually it is right but artistically it is not right, because we have not done a gesture, we have done each time a different gesture - why? - because it was not always the same gesture which our intellect is inclined to tell us. We cannot repeat the same gesture. If I have done it once, and I try to repeat it again it is a completely different thing - it depends only on my ability to listen to the difference of the gesture.

#### THE NUANCE:

That means that we touch the problem of the nuance. It is one of the most important things in art in general, and in our art especially. If I have done the gesture once, and then I try to do it again I will feel that I cannot repeat it exactly because the nuances make it quite different, even though the nuances come accidentally. Now I want you to master and manage nuances consciously, and wittingly, and at your will. If you have done the gesture once, you can do it another time with a certain nuance which you want to give to it. The world of nuances rubs away with intellectual boundaries. With nuances the intellect is no longer able to juggle. The nuances standing before the intellect, it does not know

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what to do. This is the way we can always go and escape the intellect. Bridges and transitions are very much the way of the nuances - when we do this we are most artistic at this moment, because the intellect cannot go with us - the nuances are too fine for it.

Now do the gesture with certain nuances which you will choose for yourself. I have done this with nuances, let us say, but in these nuances I am inclined to think again that I know them, and I can repeat them. Again the same story unto eternity - nothing can be repeated and when you are choosing nuances you must always feel that this is the realm of full freedom, and if you have done something like that today you have the right to do tomorrow another nuance.

That means that the psychological gesture, rightly understood, is the way to awaken the love for freedom, for artistic freedom. It is a very important point, to take the gesture as the way to freedom with all possible means. For instance, take the same gesture of lifting your hands quite simultaneously - parallel. Now, after we have mentioned the nuance, if we will consciously change just a little bit in our movement, and if we are able to hear this difference with our soul, it will already be a new stage in our creative part, whether it is in the sentence or some other part. You must feel this psychological difference which is the nuance.

Now, lift your hands as before, but this time with the right hand leading - try to find the tremendous psycho-

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logical difference. Now with the fingers apart. Now lift your hands but have the wrists absolutely weak. Now clench your fists and do the same thing. Now add another nuance - in closing <sup>your</sup> fists try to bow your head at the same time - you will get quite a new part, quite a new psychology. Now clench your fists and lift your head - quite a different thing.

A new, strange and original psychology begins to be born from these things. It is quite a different world - it is the poetry of our art. I am sure that when the poet writes his verses he does inwardly a lot of these gestures, but in words and images. By having a difference in tempo you will get different things also. The gesture is the bank in which the capital is, and it depends upon the part how much you will take. The gesture will accumulate so many abilities and qualities and then the character will take it gradually.

In Stanislavsky's Method he understands imagination in the following way: if I am going to prepare the part of Don Quixote I must imagine his surroundings and he himself, but not myself. I must consider myself as Don Quixote. But my Method is that I have to imagine him - I have nothing to do at first except enjoy him in my imagination, and gradually I get inspired by him. Stanislavsky and I have discussed this point but have never agreed on it. Stanislavsky thinks that almost everyone can act anything, but to get this ability

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I must consider myself from the very beginning as Don Quixote. Whereas my idea is that I have to see him <sup>[Don Quixote]</sup> fighting, as long as I need to, until I get the feeling that I want to fight.

You can find the gesture sometimes from the characteristics of the character. To find the archetype from one characteristic thing is also possible. I have made a little mistake in the very beginning, by making descriptive gestures at first. It was of course the nature of the gestures, but they were too descriptive and we must take them more archetypally. I feel it is better to take the archetype because it is wider and richer.

Question: What do you do with a character which has two gestures? How do you combine them?

Answer: They will find the combination inside of you. It is not necessary to combine them outwardly. Each character has one gesture, but you may not find it at once. It will come after they merge together in your psychology. This is the same as the imagination. You may have two images which are attractive, and you don't know which to choose, but they will eventually merge themselves.

Question: How did you come upon this idea of gesture?

Answer: Partially from Eurhythmy and partially from Dr. Steiner's training in general, and partially from my personal experience on the stage. It goes back very far, but the clear understanding of the gesture is not that far away.