

4321
Michael Chekhov

January 21, 1938

PSYCHOLOGICAL GESTURE
THEME OF THE POSSESSED
CHARACTERIZATION
TEMPO OF REHEARSALS

PSYCHOLOGICAL GESTURE:

Imagine that each person, every human being, is able to make some gestures. It is quite clear and quite obvious. What does it really mean to make a gesture? It means that in our soul there are awakened certain desires, certain feelings, certain ideas, and so a certain spiritual content which the human being wants to express through the gesture. This certain spiritual content may be expressed by the motions or gestures of the human body.

Point 1. This is one side of the process. The human being expresses certain spiritual experiences through his gestures.

Point 2. Through the impression of this gesture we are able to get the spiritual content, which is the real impulse from which the gesture arises. This spiritual content is incorporated in the gesture. Here is someone standing and observing, and by receiving the impression from the other person's gesture, he is able to penetrate, through this gesture, into the real spiritual content. That means the invisible thing, the spiritual thing, becomes visible in the gesture received; which means that the visible gesture disappears in him who receives the gesture, which is the content of the other person. Here is certain invisible content. Here is

M. Chekhov

January 21, 1938

visible gesture. The invisible content incorporates itself in this visible gesture. Here someone receives this gesture and through receiving it awakens in his soul similar spiritual content.

For instance, I have in my soul a certain doubt. I make a certain gesture. Blair receives my gesture and, through receiving the gesture, he gets the feeling of doubtfulness. What does it really mean to receive the gesture from someone, by observing? It means to repeat it visibly or invisibly, but to repeat. To understand something through the gesture which one is observing, means to consciously or subconsciously, visibly or invisibly repeat and then, through this repetition in the one who observes, arises the same or similar spiritual content.

Therefore, we may say that here is the process of repetition. I can say to Blair "I am doubtful." Blair will say "Yes, I understand you are doubtful." This is the intellectual, not the artistic way. We seek for ways to understand each other through artistic means, such as the psychological gesture. When I make the gesture of doubtfulness, I give this impression in an artistic way, and Blair understands me as an artist and not as an intellectual.

There is also another process going on. When I make the gesture for Blair, something is going on within me which means I am doubtful; this is the spiritual content. I

M. Chekhov

January 21, 1938

incorporate this content in my gesture, but from the moment when I have incorporated my spiritual content in my gesture, then something happens to me from this gesture, a certain echoing. I am doubtful - I make the gesture. The gesture which I make to incorporate the spiritual content works back and changes the content, which was the real reason for the gesture. This is the main structure for the psychological gesture, which has many, many aspects, but this is the beginning which I want to point out to you. The aim for which I do my gesture is one thing, but the process which goes on inside it remains always. We have a certain content in our souls.

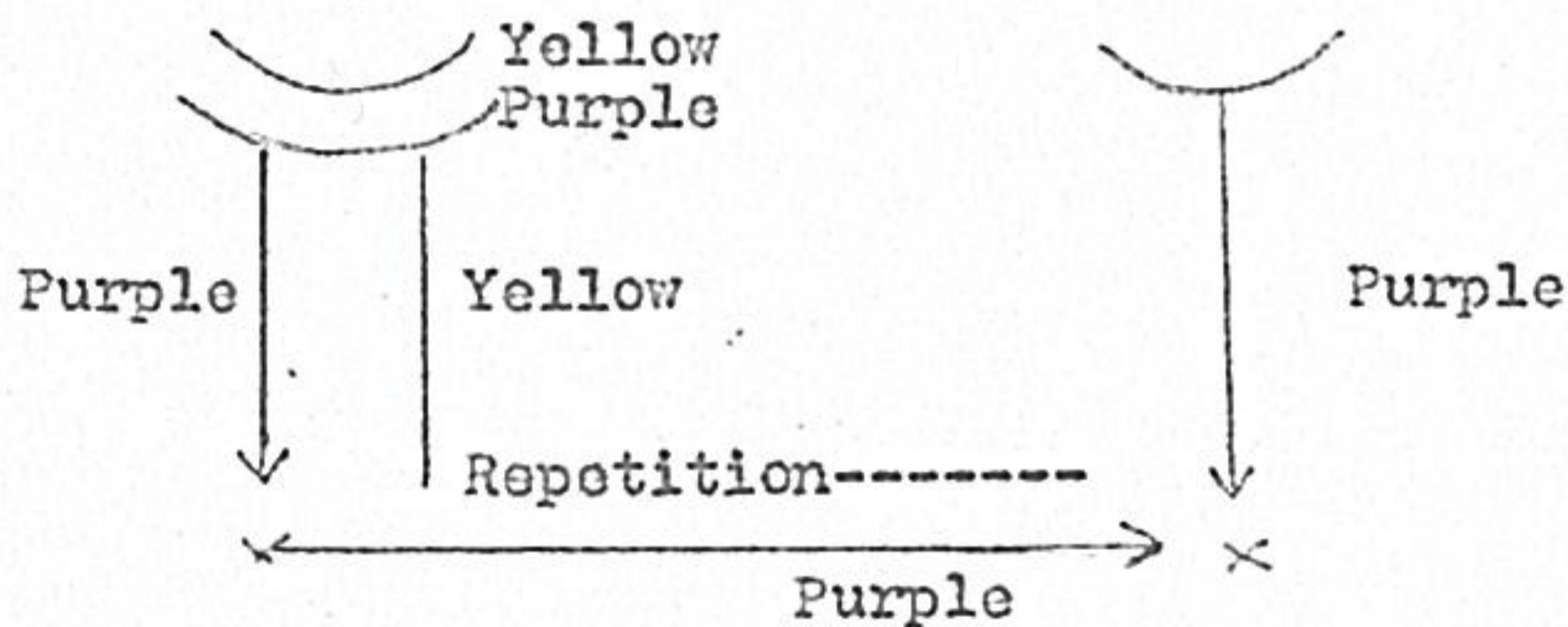
"I want to enjoy the sunshine." - I can incorporate this in a gesture. If we try to do this several times by concentrating, we shall see that our desire to enjoy the sun, which was simply taken as a condition first, will appear in us as a psychological effect. Try to listen to what is going on inside of you through repetition of this gesture, and you will get more and more real desire to enjoy the sun. Note well: You must not act - this is very important. By doing a psychological gesture you may not act. For instance, I want to enjoy the sun. I have chosen for this my psychological gesture, and by doing this gesture I will get a certain content which will grow, but there is one thing we must not do. Instead of inspiring the gesture, perhaps I will try to act.

M. Chekhov

January 21, 1938

Such action is premature and will kill. If I make the gesture I increase my feeling. There is gesture which causes the feeling, and there is action which has nothing to do with gesture - two different things. Pure psychological gesture is not the action.

Why do we call it "psychological gesture"? Because the gesture is meant for the psychology - for getting certain psychology we make certain gestures. Slowly - if you will think about this it will be very helpful to you.



Now we shall try to do certain experiments with our future theatre. We shall not try to rehearse the play; we shall start with improvisation as if we are creators of the play. We shall create the play from the very beginning to the end - the author is helping us but we have to create the whole play from the beginning. We shall start with certain themes from the play of Mr. Shdanoff [Our Phantoms or The Possessed]. When it is translated we shall read it even if it is the first draft.

THEME:

1921
M. Chekhov

January 21, 1938

Scene 1:

Entrance to Church with steps leading down to the street. Imagine everything. Provincial town. Sunday. Most important people of the town, Governor, and ^a lady who is very important and influential. This day being Sunday, the beggars who crowd the steps hope to make more money, and are impatient for the service to be over so that people will come out and distribute money among them. Movement of people coming out of church. One beggar, a very strange young woman who is lame, kneels before the lady who comes out of the door. The beggar girl looks at her in a very strange way and says, "Mother." The lady is astonished and asks what did she say - "Mother - Whose mother?" Beggar girl answers, "You are the mother of John." (John is the son of this lady.) The lady has no idea why this beggar girl speaks such strange words to her. This strange girl had some years ago married the son of this lady, but it was kept secret. The beggar girl loves the young man who married her and who sent her away, and she has not seen him for many years. Her love for her husband has grown, so much that a great satisfaction comes in being able to say "Mother" to this lady.

It is enough for the actor who is able to create something from this bare outline. Next time there will be more explanation, but this is the process of growing up, and is sufficient for today. From these few suggestions which I have

4921
M. Chekhov

January 21, 1938

given you must be able to create a feeling of the whole - the psychological whole of this small sketch. As professional people you must be able to do this.

The son of this lady is a rich and important person, while the girl is a beggar, and this is the whole reason why the marriage was hidden. Another point is that he lives abroad, and she is here in this small provincial town, and therefore she does not see him.

Try to rehearse with each person who is acting - everyone must do this work actively inside. We are not rivals in our theatre, we are helpers. During work with our colleagues we must never be passive - we must be active. If my friend sitting in the rehearsal is bored, my activity falls down, just as when there is a lazy, critical or bad audience. Rehearsals are the moment when everybody shows his shortcomings. At this moment we need support more than during the performance, when we are sure. Never be bored - don't forget to support each other. In the theatre we are going much quicker than the school.

CHARACTERIZATION:

Today I want to see one facet of each character. The Governor is a powerful man and when he goes, he feels all visible and invisible things give way before him. Everything must be done in the style of the play - characters must be authentic or "in character" - clear cut. We are going to

M. Chekhov

January 21, 1938

rehearse some small scenes or "points" until the real picture is attained. The lady must have a warm heart, but be very decided and positive in everything she does. To find the technique you must know the technical way to do this.

Scene 2:

Drawing room of rich lady who has taken the beggar girl to her home to find out what it is that she means. She asks the girl who she is and why she said "Mother", and how she knows that she is John's mother. The beggar girl gives no answer - she only absorbs everything about the mother, and needs nothing more than to get this symbol into her heart. In the mother's heart arises the vague fear that perhaps her son is married to this strange girl. The door opens and servant announces that the son has arrived unexpectedly after many years abroad. This is another blow to the mother - first this strange girl, then the arrival of the son. She is quite dumbfounded. Son appears and mother shouts, "Stop! Who is this girl?"

Rehearse it - one independent small strange scene. You have to find objectives and atmosphere - don't flounder. You have an objective - you have really to look upon everything from this point of view. If it is truthful, the director and actors are free to go on indefinitely, but cannot if it is not true as there is no basis. Please do not be afraid of not yet being able to do it. Do not require more than you

M. Chekhov

January 21, 1938

can. The only thing you have to do is to be truthful to create atmosphere.

Scene 3:

The same room. The son has taken his wife and has led her away. The mother does not know yet what has happened because the son has taken his wife very quickly, after he understands the situation, but nothing is yet clear to the mother. From the church several persons have come home with the mother. There is one young man who appears to be very gloomy and tortured. When the son leaves the room with his wife there is a heavy pause, and everyone seems oppressed with gloom. The son reappears alone and feels the dreadful atmosphere, but is unable to do anything to clear it. They all look to him for an explanation. The guests are very dignified and inwardly strong people. Among them is a young officer and his bride, and as they prepare to leave the room the gloomy young man suddenly strikes the son, and there is a chaotic reaction from the others. The bride faints. The son accepts what he feels the other man has in his mind. They break apart - the mother goes to the son and touches his face and says, "John." The bride recovers, and looking at the son says, "My dear, my dear John." Another scandal.

TEMPO OF REHEARSALS:

During professional rehearsals the tempo of the work

M. Chekhov

January 21, 1938

is quite different. The actors should have everything at their finger tips, so that they will be able to do what the director requires of them. Such experimenting as we have had today is good, so that we may feel how necessary it is to take the method. Otherwise we are not going to be able to rehearse - we will always be studying, and this stage must pass. You are given a definite character, atmosphere, succession of events, etc., and you have no right to forget, even if there are ten or twelve things in succession. In our future theatre we will have the "double cast" - in preparation by two or even three different persons.