

Michael Chekhov

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PSYCHOLOGICAL GESTURE
TIME AND SPACE
QUALITIES
ACTIVITY - INTENSITY AND DIRECTION

PSYCHOLOGICAL GESTURE:

We are going to explore quite a new thing. No one in our profession knows about psychological gesture - we are pioneers in this work.¹ When we make mistakes during the rehearsal, it gives us an opportunity to experiment and explore further the possibilities of psychological gesture. Therefore, you must feel free to explore and experiment, to make mistakes and to ask questions. We must explore the realm of the psychological gesture together.

In recent lessons we have established first, that the gesture arises in one person, is received by another, influences him, and also influences the one in whom the gesture arose. Secondly, we have established that the gesture must occupy the whole body (better to say the whole being), because the whole being includes the psychological and physical whole. (Thinking - that is "imagining" in our profession.) The psychological gesture, if it is made by the whole body, is like a form into which, and through which we must pour out different qualities we need for this or that aim. Under qualities we are free to understand everything.

I must warn you that we must take all conditions and analysis, such as quality, activity, time, space, etc., conditionally, because it is the requirement of our human intel-

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lect to get it in clear, sharp form. But, when we have digested all these things, they become one organism in us. Therefore, take all these points and divisions conditionally, for they are only given to you to help you to digest. Therefore it is quality - therefore it is activity.

Now, we have other things to say about the psychological gesture and then we will get the full idea of it. We have qualities - the gesture may be warm, sharp, hot, cold, contracted, etc. The activity of the gesture is very important. Each gesture, of course, must be done with activity - that is acting. Every psychological gesture which serves certain artistic purposes, and which is itself an artistic thing or piece of art, means the activity in the gesture must be defined by the artist. If I make a gesture as Michael Chekhov, without paying attention to what I am doing, I am not artistic. I must find out what I want to do. Very strong and intense activity - this is something that I want to have. Activity must be defined by our intuition, that is "Imaginary" activity. There are two aspects of activity: (a) Intensity. For instance you may want very subdued activity, or again you may want very strong activity, depending on the aim of the gesture. (b) Direction. For instance, the activity may be from below to above, or from above to below. Certain direction must be defined by your artistic intuition. Through these two points, intensity and direction, you have certain activity on which

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you build everything.

TIME AND SPACE:

What does time mean in the gesture? Again, it is imaginary time and imaginary space. This has nothing to do with time in the naturalistic sense. Our imaginary time can be instantaneous, or it can be an eternity, depending on the imagination. Space. The world in which I do the gesture may be a very small one. I can do it in a very small space, but it is the whole universe, because my imagination is the whole universe. Real time - imaginary time; real space - imaginary space.

Catherine has asked the following question: When we are doing our gestures are we not hoping to accumulate certain feelings and powers to use later on in the theatre? In her case, quite the opposite occurs. She becomes more free by making the gesture. Human nature and nature in general, is always giving and taking. It is absolutely true that by doing this gesture two or three times we will accumulate, and it is also true that by doing the gesture two or three times we will be absolutely free. It depends on the human will - whether you are inhaling or exhaling. We must take in and give out. We must accumulate impressions, and the moment comes when we must give them back in our human life. Nature requires it - the taking in and giving out - the give and take.

QUALITIES:

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Now, will you please take first this outer and inner form. From the point of view of qualities, we are quite free to take any qualities that we need. For example, we will take the quality of anger or wrath, then transform those qualities into quite the opposite. (1) Wrath. (2) Release.

Before we go on I want to call your attention to the fact that if you really do these gestures with your whole body, your whole being, it is not important what you are using (legs, arms, shoulders), it will be right. Again, do the gesture of wrath, then release. These definitions are, of course, only symbols because if you will really do it properly, you will feel that the whole world of feelings and qualities want to express themselves through this gesture. This is the real beauty and real purpose of the gesture - to awaken not only tones, but overtones. This point, which is very important, will later merge with the work on the stage.

For instance, if I am going to prepare a sentence, and I get the psychology, and I get the pleasure, then I will love the gesture. It is not only for a sentence, but for the whole play. At the moment you pay attention to this pleasure you will get many things from it. The psychological gesture is inexhaustible when properly done. If you are able to exhaust it, then you are not fully experiencing it.

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ACTIVITY - INTENSITY AND DIRECTION:

Let us repeat the psychological gesture. The quality is that of wrath. The intensity of the activity is neither too strong, nor too weak, but medium. In this way the gesture becomes more difficult but richer. You possess it more. Of course, you need more time to get the point when the gesture is quite free, but when the pleasure arrives it is worthwhile to do this for as long as you need. It is under "activity" we have (a) intensity (b) direction. The gesture for this particular psychological gesture is to the center - concentration - so that we have activity which is the middle degree and which is concentrated. The time is short, even shorter than the actual gesture. It is like a spark. Please try to imagine that the time changes itself. The beginning is very short and later on becomes years and years. Will you try to combine these things. You will find it worthwhile.

Incorporate the gesture with the words "What are you doing here?" Now, the gesture is much clearer to you. This is the important thing to combine as they help each other.

Now, on the basis of these gestures, will you please imagine certain action. You are taking down your hat which is hanging here, on the basis of the gesture. The action becomes powerful, expressive, and it speaks to

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the audience about things you want to convey to the audience, through the gesture. The wonder of the gesture is that it is absolutely concrete and absolutely free.

There are two approaches: One way is to have a certain intuition which tells you something and you begin to explore, and then find a gesture. Another way is to know what you want and to take the gesture for this quite clearly. Therefore you must not think we have to start with gesture, or that we have to have intuition. Everything is possible. It depends on the things which are "undefined". It must be the ground for these different things. It depends on the movement, on the mood, and everything.

Therefore, we must be able to approach this psychological gesture from a different point of view. The whole idea is, through the psychological gesture, not only to accumulate things but through the psychological gesture to hear them, to coax them from the different parts of the inner world. By doing my psychological gesture I am coaxing, but it will not come to me unless I make this appeal.

I want to come back again to Terry's case this morning. Terry has given a certain gesture and has asked Mr. Harvey to play. Is it style, form, atmosphere? It is everything. If you want to call it quality of style, then it is. If you have the gesture and the real meaning of the gesture it is like a game of chess. You have many possibilities. The

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more exact you have it in your mind, the more free and flexible it becomes. Therefore, do not be afraid to start with these exact things. There is time and space, activity (a) intensity (b) direction and quality.

The whole psychological gesture is imaginary not concrete.