

REHEARSALS OF SKETCHES
 PSYCHOLOGICAL GESTURE
 ATMOSPHERE
 SPEECH

The Golden Steed: Atmosphere - Psychological Gesture - Speech:

Without the power of the atmosphere, we will not be able to radiate when we get into the theatre. If our psychological gestures are weak, our action will be weak. Imagine you are looking at an actor who is acting very well. What makes him act well? He is producing a gesture in his speech. We begin with this most important point in our work. We are in a better position than actors who are compelled to grope in the darkness. Therefore, we must keep our psychological gesture with both hands. Today it was very weak, and it was not clear what the psychological gestures were. As a result the speech was only moving the mouth, and nothing more.

To make the atmosphere and radiate it, to produce a psychological gesture inwardly, to speak and fill the space - if you will try to do all of this, you will increase your power. This activity must have direction. The second rehearsal was much better, which shows that we can do better. If you cannot, then the mistake would be with the director, but you can do better, therefore it is your responsibility.

PSYCHOLOGICAL GESTURE:

Abyss exercise: The world of the real life and the world of imagination are two entirely different worlds.

Balladina. (Director's exercise.)

The scene in the chapel with Balladina when she faces the Saint. The exercise was for Balladina to be drawn to the Saint - to face him. He turns his head and she retreats, still being drawn to him, and he extends his hand to hold her back. Kostrin stands watching - his gesture is to take in. The Saint's gesture is to be passive, to be transparent. Balladina is pulled towards the Saint until she comes face to face with him. He turns his head away and shows his hands in front of his face, as if they were a mirror of

Balladina's soul.

Criticism:

The kind of psychological gesture was good, the moving forward was good, but the mistake was that you did not make it clear why you were doing this. Therefore, half the result of the work was lost because the actors did not know what their aim was. If the director tells his actors what he is aiming at it will help the actors very much, and this will give quicker results. But if the director does not know himself and wishes to continue to explore, then he must try to explore together with the actors. Why should you hide your aim from your actors? The action of being pulled by the heart was good when it was given as action. You can elaborate on this as much as you like when the actor has his action. Instead of this the director gave the action of moving with the left side without explaining the aim of the action.

On the other hand the mistake of the actors was

M. Chekhov

January 23, 1937

that they did not explore their gestures with a hundred percent power. You will get nothing from half-way movements. You must do the gesture with all your power, then your body will give you the answer. You are not yet able to act, but you are able to exercise the gesture with your full power. Gradually this gesture will be transformed into feeling, but you will never reach this transformation of the simple gesture if you are doing the gesture half-way. The director's mistake was that she did not point out this weakness on the part of her cast. The gesture to take in is not enough. The director must tell the actor clearly what he must take in. The actor would then do it inside, and in this way really take it in.

To be one hundred percent active in doing gestures means to know exactly what you are doing. Therefore, even a slight vagueness on the part of the director will force his cast to work only with half power. The idea of a passive or transparent gesture was good. When this was accomplished then the director could have let the actor lessen the transparency and begin to radiate. The director did not give the actor any progression, and it was not clear why he should be transparent. Where was the bridge? And the idea of the mirror was only a symbol, rather than a psychological gesture. We must have sound and good pictures or images in our imagination, but not symbols. The idea of dragging the feet was not good - it would have been better if the whole leg had been dragged, because there would have been something to explore.

You must remind your cast that they must not act the psychological gesture, but must only explore it. The director must never ask the actors whether they wish to repeat the exercises or not. It is bad because actors are very lazy, and the director will weaken his cast in this way. The idea of the mask was all right, but you did not give the reason for it. Mask as mask as illustration is nothing.

It is so important to explore our whole nature with these psychological gestures. For instance, the gesture from the heart. Perhaps the director will go further and explore the left side as feeling, and the right side as will. These simple exercises for the psychological gesture will grow with experience. If you will build the whole scene by means of your psychological gesture, you will at the same time rehearse the play, but on a level which is much richer. The richness of the performance in the real world depends upon how high you can reach the "platonian world", or the world of our psychological gestures.

Peer Gynt:

You can take the whole first part of the play and bring it into one gesture. The psychological gesture is like bread and wine for the actor. Peer Gynt must push his obstacles away, not as heavy material things, but as a poet with a feeling of beauty. Let him do it as if it were a soliloquy. The actor must really experience what he is doing.

M. Chekhov

January 23, 1937

The less free the actor will be in doing his psychological gesture, the more free he will be later on. It depends upon the director what form of the gesture he gives. We are now working with the psychological gesture because we want to understand it. Later we will perhaps pay less attention to it, and will pay more attention to imagination and other things. The director can find the whole play in the platonic world. The more harmonious your composition of psychological gestures is, the nearer you are to the platonic world. When the director has found a gesture with his actors he can change it and explore further.

Don Quixote:

Always think of the spiral. It is good to do psychological gestures and then imagine and always go back to each thing, and do other things in between. As a director you must vary your approach. The purpose of giving imagination as a ground is to awaken the imagination of your cast. The director must show his cast some forms hidden in the play in order to awaken their imaginations. He must also show his cast the connection between various moments in the play. The director must not lead his cast through the play each time - the actors must do this alone - but concerning various points the director will speak to the cast at every rehearsal. Looking at the play again and again is work which the cast must do always. Only the significant points, their

M. Chekhov

January 23, 1937

connection, and the construction must be shown by the director.

The Golden Steed:

We will speak our lines on the wings of our psychological gesture. The small circle around the structure is the space you must fill with the fullness of your speech. Pure psychological gesture - in the platonic world where things are in their purest form. At first these psychological gestures with speech may seem artificial, but this may be only until the gesture becomes easy and like second nature to you. When the director has given you a gesture, after you have mastered it the director can tell you everything around the play at this moment and it will be the aura around the gesture you are able to do. Now imagine that you have not been given a gesture, and the director has only spoken to you - it can be a very empty thing.

Peer Gynt:

It is not right to give a passive gesture such as "waiting". You must tell your actor what he must do. For instance the mother must grope for thousands and thousands of miles. Then it becomes an active thing. By "gesture" we mean being active. To "recall" is also wrong - instead of recalling you should repeat very clearly what you want done. To recall gives you nothing - to repeat would be active. If you will recall your own action or your own rehearsal, you will take from the remembrance the worst things, and you

will not be able to recall the good things which always come from your inspiration. You must each time act new things. What you can recall is your aura. If you try to recall the rehearsal you will only give dry, shallow things. You must act each time as if for the first time. If you recall you will only take part of what you have done, and your whole power will go in trying to recall it. Instead of this you must throw it away and get new things. The text you will remember as sounds and melody - that is another thing. It will become, as it were, second nature and will re-create many things for you. If an actor really remembers his words when learning them, this is more than meaning, it is the re-creation of his own being.

The gesture to die contracted, or the gesture to die giving up, these are beautiful compositions. The director must underline these two things. In order to reach the composition of the two, you must explore each moment spiritually, and the actor must regard them as jewels. Don't let it be vague.

* * * * *

ATMOSPHERE:

The Fishing Scene:

Exercise for imagination and for creating atmosphere. Imagine the moment when your fear begins to stir - that fear which is never far from your hearts. It grows and grows with each gathering cloud, with each gust of wind. At last borne

in on you is the full knowledge that the storm is a terrible one. Imagine how every part of your being gradually becomes riveted on the storm - nothing but the thought of the storm exists for the whole village. Finally comes the moment when this conquers everything, and sends you out from the safety of your homes into the night, down the rocky path, battling for your lives at each step, until you reach the beach.

* * * * *

Sometimes the directors are working too slowly. There is not so much time in our life, and we must work much ~~more intensively. You need much time for imagination, but~~ when giving definite actions they should be given quickly and actively, because the actor's nature is to be lazy.

It is better to do an exercise in sections, and then bring them all together, rather than to give your actors too much to do at first.

By doing a gesture, the actors will discover some psychological subtleties, and by understanding them the actors will change the gesture. When the actor can add nuances, it means that he has discovered something, and then he will be able to add and add new qualities and discoveries to his gesture. Then the ball will jump from psychology to gesture and from gesture to psychology. The actor will understand you in this new language, and will be able to follow your direction without the need of speaking intellectually. The gesture will

M. Chekhov

January 23, 1937

become a language between the director and the actor.

You do not clarify the idea of how you are using music in Peer Gynt. Everything must be given in much clearer form. Must the mother always be lying down? Perhaps you will reach more results by having her standing or sitting - this leads to acting.

The director must give simpler gestures so that they can be explored more deeply. In order to explore all you have given today, you would need weeks and weeks. For instance, Peter has done today but he has not explored. If you had given him this in a simpler form it would have been better. The danger is that the actor does the movements in an empty, mechanical way.

St. Joan:

Exercise with the group. To recall the result of your creative process is wrong - you must create it each time, but in the case of the mise en scene or the text these you must recall. You can tell your actors to stop and be conscious, and in that sense recall what they have just done. The actor must be conscious of what he has done, but he must not use it as a substitute for creating freshly each time.

Exercise:

The group rotates from left to right, exploring being lost - a small circle of them. They become aware of Joan and are led to her. She leads them on. She takes them

M. Chekhov

January 23, 1937

in and they are led by some quality of her gesture.

Sometimes we have the illusion that we are doing psychological gestures, but we are not. Today this turning gesture was only an illusion. This is the director's mistake. You must have an eye for reality - you must not be drugged by the illusion that your cast is working. You must know when they are going wrong, or when they are doing nothing. This is a most important point. The director must be much stronger with his cast.

Joan's gesture was really done, and the result will come. Beatrice's feelings are so flexible - she begins to feel very easily. This is an actor. Beatrice has this ability. Having done a gesture, at once something comes from her. The director must find why this does not happen when it does not. How to overcome this? If the director sees that the gesture was not understood, he must stop and give very clearly an explanation of what is meant by this gesture. For instance, is the shoulder falling down or is it pulled down - they are entirely different things. What is with the center or the legs or the hand? If the director sees that the gesture is not realized, then he must give each part separately. The director does not need to analyze the gesture if it is not understood, or to change the gesture. But do not leave your cast in the state of half-understanding of what they are doing. This must be absolutely clear for everybody who directs.

M. Chekhov

January 23, 1937

Sometimes, for various reasons, you lost your energy. Try not to stop your work even for seven seconds. This stopping will never give you rest. It is very tempting to rest for a few seconds, but if you overcome this temptation your power will grow during the rehearsal. If you make some efforts in the beginning you will lose this desire to rest, and the rehearsal will be an entirely different one. Later you will get much pleasure from this.