

Michael Chekhov

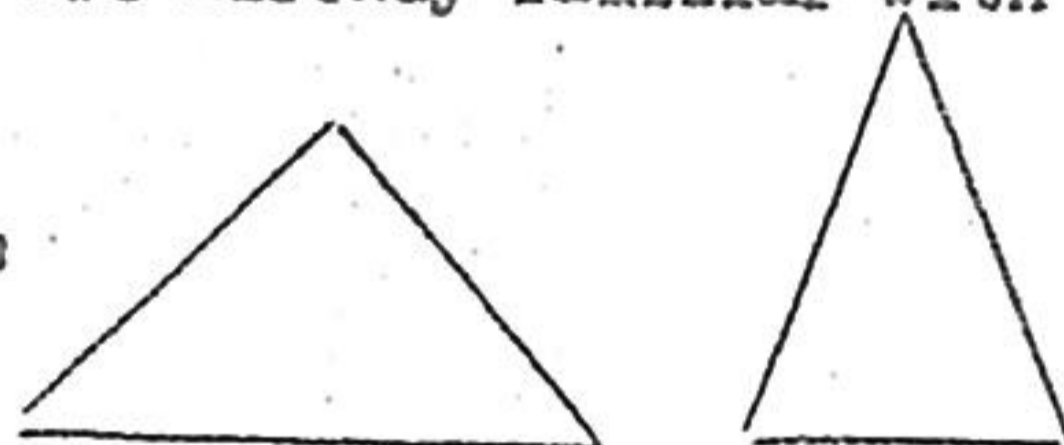
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PSYCHOLOGICAL GESTURE
 IMAGINATIVE TIME AND SPACE
 IMPROVIGATION
 THE PSYCHOLOGY OF COLORS
 Stanislavsky
 Dr. Rudolf Steiner
 Vakhtangov
Eric XIV
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The Deluge

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL GESTURE:

If the psychological gesture is taken as a technical means for developing our inner life, then it is something of great value. If, on the other hand, it is taken only theoretically, it will not be of any use. Try to take it practically from the very beginning, always asking yourself how you can apply it to your art. Students who are already familiar with it must try to take it afresh.

Let us draw two triangles:



If we look at them, we will experience the feeling that both of them are acting, as it were, different parts, different characters. One has one will, the other another. One triangle has one feeling, the other another. They have different feelings and wills. If we take these two beings and try to penetrate into their inner life - even two geometrical figures can have an inner life if we approach them as artists - if we experience their inner life, we will see that we have to produce a different psychology in ourselves - different will and

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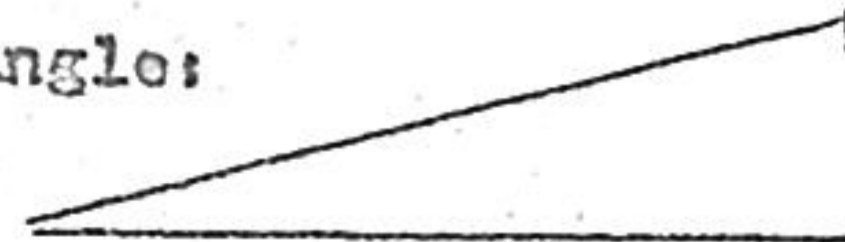
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different feelings. We can describe these feelings and will impulses. For instance, we can say that the will of one triangle is tending towards the earth, while the other streams upwards. But we can do another thing: we can describe them with our gestures.

How can we describe or incorporate the will of one triangle with a gesture? If you do this gesture trying to express the will of the triangle, you will see that it is possible. There are things which lie in this triangle which we cannot confuse with the other. The will of this one cannot be confused with the will of another. Even if we have only a very primitive artistic feeling, we cannot confuse the will of these two triangles. There are objective things which inspire us. This primitive example gives us the opportunity to study the nucleus of the whole idea of the psychological gesture.

Try again to express the psychological gesture of this part. Feel that this characterizes a certain kind of will which we can express. Express it with a gesture which is the psychology. Therefore, we call it a Psychological Gesture.

Take the example of another triangle:



Find the difference and try to express the kind of will. You will see that it alters our psychological approach to the object.

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There is one mistake which is easily made and that is when one makes a descriptive gesture - something which imitates the outer form. This we must always try to avoid. The point is that the psychological gesture is the archetype of the thing. The more descriptive you make it, the less it will become a psychological gesture - it will only become the imitation of the outer form. Try to avoid this and take instead the soul of the triangle. Use your own human form, your own body to express the will which needs to go this way or that way. Try to fight the descriptive and tend more to the idea of it or the archetype of the will. Find the psychological difference.

Try to experience this simple gesture as though you were trying to develop a part. If we approach it as a psychological gesture, then everything becomes just like the actor's part. It touches immediately our psychology and makes out of us actors. If we approach everything in the world by means of the psychological gesture, then everything becomes "actable." Whether it is the setting, the costume, the color - everything becomesactable, and if we take and digest this idea of the psychological gesture, we shall see that although parts and plays are written, they are only one part of what can be acted. The triangle can be acted, the tree can be acted, the color can be acted, and the play can be acted.

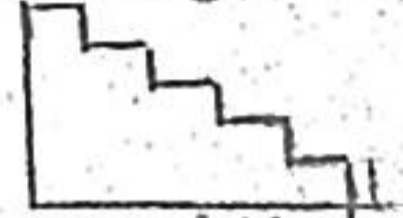
If we really understand the psychological gesture,

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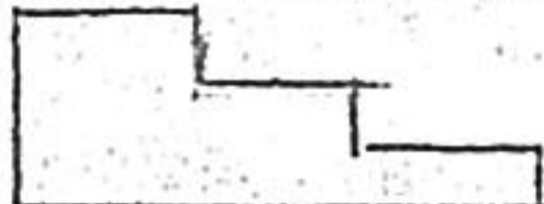

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we will see that there are no limits for us as actors because everything can be turned into the psychological gesture, and in this we can be masters. We can act anything. Here is the point which must be understood, then you will understand the idea of the psychological gesture. It is a big big door through which we can enter and take everything, and turn them into things which we can act. It is not a small door - it is a big door which will make us kings in our profession.

Another example:



We have the gesture

and qualities of this staircase without comparing it to other staircases. There are unlimited numbers of qualities - everything that can be expressed can be put in these qualities - feeling of ease, imagination, form, objective, etc. For instance, there is a certain effort or will up or down this staircase. You can feel this rhythmical effort "up" and you can express it in a gesture. It will become still clearer if you will take the following thing -  quite a different quality - turn it into the psychological gesture and find the degree of activity. Now another example:  we will see what an effort is there!

All the examples we could take would be of the same nature. The psychological gesture may seem a difficult psychological madness, but if you will really take it psychologically, you will see that it is just as simple as anything. It is much more simple than to take the part without first

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into it by means of the psychological gesture.

Exercise:

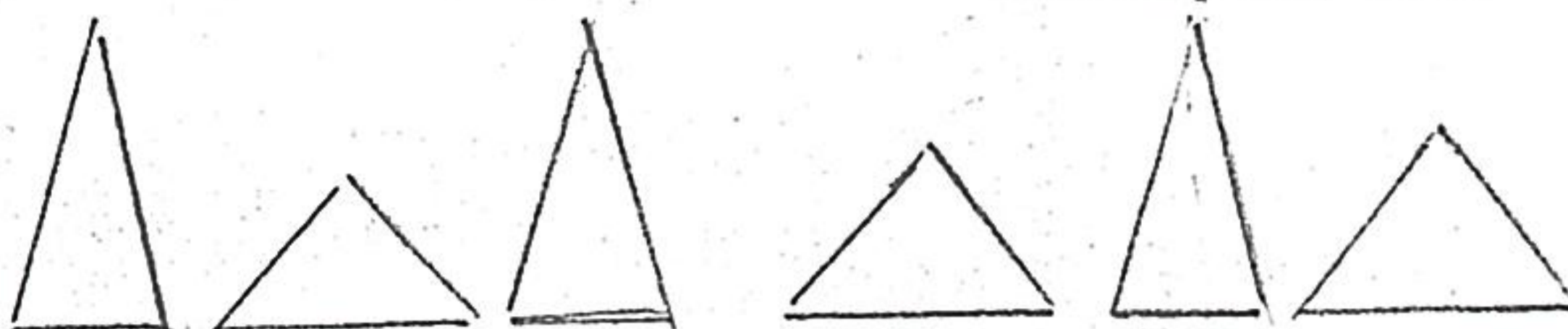
Choose two different things and try to turn them into psychological gestures for yourself. You will see that such things which are not so obviously diametrical as staircases and triangles will have a gesture and can be turned into a psychological gesture.

We cannot fight the interference of our intellect in all this, but we have to keep the intellect controlled or subordinated. To allow the intellect to serve us only when it is necessary and to the degree which is necessary. The psychological gesture appeals exclusively to all the capacities of the human soul, except the intellect. Anyone can understand the psychological gesture by means of the intellect but then the psychological gesture is dead, and it becomes a funny theory and nothing more. But if it is understood by all the varied capacities of our soul, then it becomes alive and this life can be increased.

For instance, take a triangle and then take a different one. It is quite obvious that in one triangle there is more restlessness than in the other. Now we invite our intellect to show us how we can get a composition of triangles in which this activity and restlessness will become greater. Our intellect will say immediately, two of one kind and one of another, but it is quite the opposite:

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This shows how stupid our intellect actually is.

It shows us that when our intellect tries to interfere with our psychological investigations, we must suppress it. To understand the psychological gesture, we must appeal to the intellect but consider it as a servant and not the master and must appeal to all the other capacities we have to understand, to practice, and then to experience the psychological gesture more and more.

When we produce the psychological gesture, what do we actually express and experience? As human beings, we express by the means of the psychological gesture nothing specially, but everything. In the real psychological gesture there is nothing left out. The human being has so many senses - more than five - according to Dr. Steiner's investigations there are twelve senses. We have three main faculties - thinking, feeling, and willing. They are all included, and nothing is left which is not used and absorbed by the psychological gesture. By thinking, we mean imagination, thinking in images, and not intellectually. Grasping the image. Investigate and penetrate into making this gesture so that all your faculties are entering into this gesture. The gesture must be filled with your feelings, with your will, and with your thinking abilities - that means you know what you are aiming at.

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The whole human being, psychologically speaking, is concerned fully with the psychological gesture if it is properly done. It uses all our capacities if it is really done.

Imagine the following - very interesting for the artistic soul. We produce our psychological gestures with our bodies. We know that all the psychological capacities are taking our bodies and moving them - our soul and our bodies, two friends in this case, are both producing the psychological gesture. What is the difference between our psychology and our body? Our body is limited in space - our psychology is not limited. We can love someone who is two miles away, but we cannot touch him. We can extend our soul over unlimited space. This is a very important point in our psychological gesture.

IMAGINATIVE TIME AND SPACE:

We must have a practical approach to the thing which we call imaginative time and space. For instance, the psychological gesture is one thing. Physically we are limited, but psychologically we can produce this gesture for an indefinite length of time in space in time. Not the physical laws of space and time - it is imaginary time and space. For instance, a gesture can be made and imaginatively I can feel that I have gone down through the earth. Eurhythmy is the classical archetype of these things. The time is the same - we make such a gesture, in actual time, we are limited, but in

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imaginary time it can be a century. Imaginatively I can make a gesture through the whole universe through millions of years, and it will be really my experience of millions of years.

When scientists say that the earth is so many millions of years old, we take it with our intellect, and it gives us a certain idea; but this can be turned into a psychological gesture and we can imagine the earth in accordance with the scientific finding. We can do it with a psychological gesture - we can imagine all the billions of years with one gesture.

Make the gesture with imaginative time and space. Our physical body will become only a little spring in this tremendous psychological machine, which we can move timelessly and spacelessly. Only by using and exercising the psychological gesture until it becomes a necessity for us, as actors, to use this means which opens all the keys and doors.

Now we can ask why do we need the psychological gesture. If we want to become more and more awakened, more and more psychologically fine, more and more majestic as actors. Always to move on the stage being somehow limited, subconsciously being limited by one's skin and body and by time and space, leads to a certain kind of naturalism, like a stale piece of bread which you cannot eat. The present theatre, with very few exceptions of real individuals, has come to such a moment when everything is bad, bad in heart and soul. But

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we must fight with it. We must discover again that our profession is something which frees us, which must free not only us but the audience and the authors - free the actor which is coming, which must come, otherwise one can suffocate for a long time. Eventually the time will come when the glass must be broken and the freer air will come in.

The psychological gesture gives us the fresh air - the author who is around the air is fed by it. The author must be around, and the actor in the center, but we can do it only if we re-create our actor's profession. One of the strongest means to re-create our actor's profession is the psychological gesture, which breaks all barriers. It gives us more psychology, more profound, more free understanding of all the parts and plays which we are going to perform. That is point one.

It will become more and more clear as you use the psychological gesture - a new organ will be born in us. It will become an organ of thinking, willing, feeling. We will be given an organ which penetrates into the play or the part - an organ which is much more profound and much more clever. First it frees us, and second it gives us the play or the part in a more profound way, and third, it makes us in time more and more expressive. If our hands and bodies are permeated with the psychological gesture, we will feel our limbs in quite a different way. We will really get different hands

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and arms, and eyes and bodies, and legs and feet. Like the old Atlanteans who were able to extend their arms in accordance with their desire. Psychologically we can still do this, and we will get this ability constantly if we exercise the psychological gesture, and we will not desire any other means.

When we walk on the stage, after digesting this psychological gesture, we will not walk simply as our body walks, but we will walk psychologically different. Like the Atlanteans, we will stretch our being before us and then it will become expressive. If we do it purely naturalistically - simply a body moving across the stage - it will do nothing. Our timeless, spaceless gesture will become a concrete thing in our acting on the stage, for ourselves and for the audience because we have got this ability to produce psychological gestures by penetrating into the play and by rehearsing.

Another point - the fourth - is for ourselves, as actors, who are going to prepare the play or the part. There is a well-known psychological law that if we move our body then after the physical movement certain psychology appears. To a certain extent this is true, but in our sense we will not take it so materialistically. We will take it from the point of view of the psychological gesture.

If we exercise a certain psychological gesture by means of our soul and body, then we discover in ourselves all our abilities - psychological and physical - which will be

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drawn like magnets to the point which our psychological gesture is trying to investigate. Many things will be called up which I, as an actor, do not even know are in my subconscious, and the moment will come when I am ready to act a certain moment, or part, or character.

That is another very important point. It is the most artistic way to rehearse our parts, our scenes, our characters, etc. If I do a certain psychological gesture a number of times, I will find in me a certain psychological something, to move in accordance with this gesture, to speak, to receive influences from my partner, to influence my partner in preparing a scene. The psychological gesture will make such economy in our inner efforts to prepare our part and will kill many unpleasant, small devils and witches which are always there trying to find the way, as if to help us to prepare. They are afraid of this psychological gesture because it is too clean, too fine, too simple.

For instance, there are no rules telling us how to discover the psychological gesture - it must be discovered intuitively. The actor must find it intuitively. There are no rules - if you have found a psychological gesture, and you are sure it is the right gesture, then you can rehearse everything on the basis of this gesture. For instance, one single word or one sentence - let us say you have to speak, "I think I love you." For this one sentence you can find different

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psychological gestures, which are so much better than discussion or analysis. By means of the simple psychological gesture, everything can be experienced immediately.

For example, we can take the whole scene, including the characters, and it can be performed with one big gesture. Everything is led and inspired by this gesture. There are no points to which the psychological gesture cannot be applied. The whole play may be considered as a gesture, and whatever may be the part you are acting in the play, you will know what you are doing through the whole evening.

Before I knew about the psychological gesture, I worked with Vakhtangov - a very gifted director. We worked together on different parts. We did not know about the psychological gesture, but for Eric XIV¹ we tried to find how to act this part as if in one grip. Now I would say that through the psychological gesture we found the following trick. Vakhtangov said, try to imagine that there is a circle around you on the floor which you are trying to get out of, but you cannot. It was more or less groping and trying, but he found something which I later understood as the psychological gesture. Everything I did in "Eric" was based on this almost psychological gesture.

Also, when I was working on The Inspector General² - Stanislavsky was directing and I was acting - he didn't know about the psychological gesture either, but instinctively he

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he felt it must be there, and he called it a technical way of acting the whole part.² He suggested that I should do the following thing: it is not archetypal enough for a psychological gesture, but it is on the way. It was the gesture of starting a breaking of things. Then the whole character came to me. The whole part lay in this thing, and it was absolutely the same what I did.

In another part which I played in The Deluge - the part of a poor businessman which I was acting as a Jew - again with Vakhtangov as director - we tried once more to find this thing.³ The technical trick we used was that I was always trying to find something on me. Through this means I found the whole part - all the necessary psychological things were drawn to this point, and they were at my disposal, and it was absolutely the same which words and situations - freedom comes.

IMPROVISATION:

We have spoken about improvisation. Here is another point of view on improvisation. If you have the psychological gesture for the scene or the character or the play, then you are free to improvise. If it is not Shakespeare, then we can improvise even the words. If the psychological gesture is there, the words will come of themselves. Making improvisations in the school where I was a student was always a terrible thing for me - I could not find the words - but at the same time I

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felt, when I was on the stage, that I could improvise not only different psychological movements but mise en scene and even words. Now I know that it is simply the psychological gesture which comes. If it comes and is there, then all the faculties and abilities of each creative spirit are taken in one grip including our ability to create words.

So it means we cannot improvise our words until we have got the psychological gesture on the basis of which the whole power and ability for improvisation is there and cannot be otherwise. We have in our inner life such dead points which cannot be awakened. It seems the life is still there and can be awakened, but how? By means of the psychological gesture - then our inability to create words will become an ability. It is a great stimulus for awakening the life in ourselves. Everything can be turned into the psychological gesture.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF COLORS:

Let us consider color. We have three colors in front of us - green, red, and blue. We can turn them into the psychological gesture. We know of two great men who have spent a great deal of time and energy penetrating into the life of the color, from the point of view of what is, for us, the psychological gesture. They have discovered things about the psychology of color which is the psychological gesture of

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the color. Goethe and Rudolf Steiner have both worked upon this color idea.⁴

Red is something which is aggressive, which attacks us and, in accordance with other things which can be added, either frightens us or makes us gay, happy, and excited. So this color is already a gesture from our point of view. We can have the psychological gesture of the color.

Blue makes quite a different gesture, according to Goethe and Rudolf Steiner. It goes away from us, drags us, calls us. It makes us more thoughtful, more devotional - quite the opposite to red, which pushes us away and laughs, and shouts at us. Blue says "come," and recedes from us. If we will develop this ability to live with colors, we will notice very interesting things. If we take this artistic approach, we will see that red and blue cannot be put on the same level. Psychologically the red will always turn to the blue and push it forward, while the blue will always retreat. Green blue is neither aggressive nor retiring. It gives a certain balance between everything, and especially between blue and red. It calms us. Yellow streams, radiate, disappears, and dissolve, making us happy because it invites us. Yellow does not want to be limited or framed - it suffers when confined, while green desires to be confined. When we frame or shape green, we feel satisfied. Flesh color, like yellow, makes the gesture of diffusing, but in a different way from yellow, which is

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radiating and shining. Flesh color disappears. If we try to keep it and hold it and compress it, we always get an ugly feeling. For instance, a swelling is not only ugly because of the disease which causes it, but because it is kept together like a knot. This color does not permit being kept or held.

For instance, if we take blue - it loves to make the border very intense and deep and the center paler. It makes the gesture of surrounding itself with its own strength. Quite opposite to yellow which likes to be very strong in the middle part and very pale at the edge. We are very often struck by the pictures of the modernists and futurists because they give quite opposite things - they want to kill naturalism but they give only the revolutionary feeling. It is historically very important they they should throw away all the naturalistic things, but they do not show the way to the new language of the colors of tomorrow.

I have seen some paintings which students of Dr. Steiner have done in color. Some take it very intellectually and follow these laws in a dead way, and the picture becomes a certain scheme - more or less pleasant - but I have also seen marvelous things which have been painted on the basis of Dr. Steiner's suggestions of color. They got such effects where everything is painted not only for the content and the likeness to the natural, but the colors themselves speak because they are put there in the right way and in accordance with their character.

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We cannot do everything with yellow or blue because the character of the color does not allow it. When one lives with the colors according to these suggestions of Goethe and Dr. Steiner, and the combination of colors - when one really gets it and does it profoundly and the whole soul accepts it - then the colors begin to speak and the picture is painted out of colors - out of the character of the colors. The few good pictures which I have seen are really something new and expressive and strong. The whole picture speaks with a new language and with the psychological gesture of the colors. It is a real poem consisting of colors. It is not our profession, and we will not develop it, but it shows how everything - even colors - can be turned into the psychological gesture. Figures, parts, lines, the whole play, colors, form, costumes, everything can be included in the psychological gesture.⁵

If we will turn this into practical things, it will make our profession something worth working for and living for.