

Michael Chekhov

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LIFE AND DEATH IN OUR PROFESSION  
PSYCHOLOGICAL GESTURE  
HARMONY OF BODY AND VOICE

LIFE AND DEATH:

The more often you remember the question of life and death in our profession, the better it will be for you. Life on the stage is everything; without it not all the beautiful technique in the world will avail you anything. You must have this life and you must be able to create it and have it in your hands by means of your own power.

PSYCHOLOGICAL GESTURE:

There are many things bound together in our profession. For example, this is true of the psychological gesture. By finding the psychological gesture and elaborating it, we are at the same time elaborating our speech, our actions, our style - everything. By observing our work, I have found that there are some mistakes which are very often done in using and applying the psychological gesture. Therefore, I think it would be very desirable to do one exercise which would be preparatory for each time the psychological gesture is used.

This is the special exercise; to be able to produce and create and use the psychological gesture, whichever one it may be, we have to develop the ability to make each gesture, knowing absolutely what we are producing by doing this gesture, and by using the whole body and permeating the whole body with this special kind of activity, which we have chosen for this

M. Chekhov

June 28, 1937

special kind of gesture. Second, we have to use this psychological gesture, and its preparatory exercise, for finding another bridge which will lead us to the moment when we will start to speak our words on the stage.

We have some bridges, and one of them is the psychological gesture. After doing the psychological gesture we can begin to speak, but it has never been done every satisfactorily as yet. We are using the whole body, and we are finding the transition to the future word. Let us do some exercises:

#### HARMONY BETWEEN BODY AND VOICE:

We will repeat the psychological gesture exercise we did this morning. Try to beat something in the following way:

1. Know that you are beating.
2. Beat with your whole being.
3. Find some sound.

It is easier to move on the stage and do some business, or mise en scène, than it is to speak the words. It is always like that. The words which the author gives us are much more clever than our bodies, and therefore it is much more difficult to speak because the actor feels that it will be very stupid and wrong. If we establish the harmony between our bodies and our voices, we will acquire the ability to move so that we will prepare ourselves for the words. And the opposite will also be true. In our ability to speak freely, we will correct our movements in the finest way.

M. Chekhov

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If you will remember some of the performances you have seen on the modern stage, you will see how the actors suffer from this contradiction between body and voice. They are two persons: one is speaking very wrong and false from the head up, and the rest of the body is another person. That is why actors are so happy when they find some absolutely insignificant things which help them when it comes to speaking. But there are very few such helpful things, and we must find something stronger. Therefore, we must develop our bodies and our voices in harmony,

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