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MICHAEL CHEKHOV'S ELEVENTH CLASS FOR PROFESSIONAL ACTORS

"PSYCHOLOGICAL GESTURE"

PSYCHOLOGICAL GESTURE  
TWO LEVELS OF ACTING  
TEMPO  
STACCATO AND LEGATO MOVEMENTS  
"TRICKS"

Hamlet

PSYCHOLOGICAL GESTURE:

Take a certain gesture, such as "to grasp." Do it physically. Now do it only inwardly, remaining physically unmoved. As soon as we have developed this gesture, it becomes a certain "psychology," and that is what we want. Now on the basis of this gesture, which you will do inwardly, say the sentence, "Please, darling, tell me the truth." While speaking, produce the gesture inwardly. The more you will do these gestures, the more you will see what they suggest a certain kind of acting. They call up feelings, and emotions and will impulses. Now do them both together - the gesture and the sentence. Then drop the physical gesture and speak, having the gesture inside only.

Now imagine that your director has suggested a certain acting gesture, which has nothing to do with the psychological gesture. You can do the director's gesture and still have in it this psychological spine. The acting gesture and the psychological gesture do not contradict each other, and must not be the same.

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Take another psychological gesture and listen to what goes on in your soul. Always exercise the gesture enough to be sure that it is there. In each actor's soul, it will be different, even if you are all doing the same gesture. Here we are really free if we start with the psychological gesture, because no one can know what is going on in your soul when you are doing the gesture. The audience will see you, which is the most precious thing on the stage. If you let your psychology be free, many nuances will come.

Use the psychological gesture as a springboard, and you will see that you are much richer than you imagine the gesture to be. The gesture must be exercised long enough to become a pleasant part of your psychology. It is always good to remember that although our physical body cannot go down into the earth or up to the sky, we can do so in our imaginary body. So the psychological gesture changes everything in space and time, because it is psychological.

Now, on the basis of the gesture, which has been rehearsed, let us take the actual business. You enter the room with your hands in your pockets, but in spite of this outwardly lazy, nonchalant manner, you have inwardly this same powerful gesture. This combination will make a very interesting psychology.

Let us imagine that we are playing Hamlet - we are all playing the part of King Claudius when he speaks the line,

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"How fares our Cousin Hamlet?" The director suggests that outwardly you have an absolutely free attitude, but inwardly you must produce the gesture of an outstretched hand with clenched fist, and eyes straight forward.

TWO LEVELS OF ACTING:

Now let us imagine that Hamlet has another gesture - the gesture of drawing everything into himself continuously. Hamlet's psychological gesture is also to take only the things which are before him, but he tries to reach out as far as possible. It is a small, narrow section, but one which stretches over a long distance. Don't forget the legs and feet which do not have to move, but certain streams are warming them. Hamlet's head is down, and his eyes are looking forward. He says, "Excellent, i'faith." He stands quite calmly, but the whole inner activity is that of the gesture. Try to produce the inner gesture continuously, and then you can play with your outer gesture as you like. If there is the spine, the audience will get this second level which is always more interesting than the first level. The second level is always the psychological gesture.

TEMPO:

The Queen's gesture will be one of closed eyes, the neck stretched, and as if parting a curtain with her hands. Here, let me make another point. If two persons are speaking

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together, one may be speaking in a very quick tempo while the other listens. The listener can listen in the same tempo or in a contradictory tempo, which will be much more interesting. There is always the possibility of at least two tempos. When we come to the work on rhythm, you will see what an enormous field there is for these things. They can be in two levels or in many levels.

Let us continue the exercise on the "Hamlet" scene. This time, let all the movements be quick, and the speeches slow. In this small scene many variations can be made. It can be quick speech and slow movements, etc. In order to be able to manage movements in different tempos than the speech, it is very good to do the following exercises.

#### STACCATO AND LEGATO MOVEMENTS:

In staccato all the movements are sure and fixed. Our bodies actually do not obey us. We do things we are accustomed to do and usually don't notice them, but on the stage we find that our bodies do not obey us. We must be able to fix our bodies like stones, and if this ability is developed, it will give the actor's soul so many opportunities and possibilities to express things which we can only dream of now. The director will be able to ask more and more expressive things from his actors. Now let us consider the opposite pole! in legato all the movements are slow and flowing, nothing stops in our bodies, everything is like water, nothing

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is sharp. In this exercise we have to imagine that our movement goes on and streams and radiates out of our whole body. Not only is the physical body important in this exercise, but the imaginary things around and out of us are even more important.

It is important to be able to change immediately from one kind of existence to another on the stage, both in movements and in speech. Our speech depends very much on our ability to move. If we are awkward in our movements, we cannot speak well. So that in doing these movement exercises we are developing our speech as well. It is important in this exercise to develop the ability to express everything that is needed, without any preparation. Exercise by walking in legato movements to the chair, and imagine that when you touch it, the chair is white hot, and express it with sharp, staccato movements. This will awaken in you the ability to live in every kind of experience. It is like experiencing the life of two planets - Mars and Jupiter.

#### "TRICKS":

These things are not like absolute laws, nor are they clichés of any kind. They are things which are absolutely connected to human nature, but the more of such "tricks" we know, the more they can serve us, even if we don't apply them on the stage as such. If we know some "tricks," some day they will inspire us. For instance, let us suppose I want to persuade

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another or tell another something, if we act in the same tempo, it gives the impression that the understanding is not quite complete, but if the rhythms are different, the understanding seems to be there. Or if you have a moment on the stage when you wish to show the more emotional, moral side of the character, it is always good to face the audience. Whereas if you wish to show that you are thinking clever or sly things, or things to do with the intellect, it is better to show the profile.