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Norris Houghton

LIFE AND DEATH IN OUR ART:

Sometimes in our art we are nearer to the death and then we are less artists, whereas the nearer we are to the life the greater artists we become. Naturalistic art is in the middle between death and life, and this kind of death and life which we see in the naturalistic theatre is not art because there is too much copying, too much use of dead means of expression. Art is something which is much more full of life than life itself, therefore it is art and we need some special means of expression to be artists, because the quality and quantity of its life is different from life itself.

CLICHES:

The nearer to death the more we are in the hands of clichés. It is very important to understand that a cliché is, of course, death. But if we fight with the cliché, trying to escape it, we will make another mistake and will, perhaps, create another cliché or something of the kind. However, we

must not be afraid of clichés - this was a big mistake in the Moscow Art Theatre. When Stanislavsky explained that we were using many clichés we became very afraid of them, and we suffered very much over these clichés for many years. (Mr. Morris Broughton, who wrote a book called Moscow Rehearsals, could tell us whether they are still suffering in Moscow under the fear of the cliché.)

But in our school we must escape this fear, just as we are trying to escape the fear of the feeling of truth. When we were rehearsing in Moscow, Stanislavsky, his teachers, and we actors ourselves were like inquisitors. It was like a disease for many years, and we were never free of this fear of the cliché. The idea about the cliché is right - that each actor is always in danger of creating many clichés instead of life. But we must escape this kind of punishing ourselves.

What must we do? First of all we must develop the following thing - a real and concrete feeling for what is life and what is death. I have mentioned some exercises. These can be increased and perhaps we must do this, but without having developed these two parts of our soul - one part which is speaking about death and the other about life - we will not be able to transform clichés into something which is living. We will be compelled to suffer under clichés and will make the same mistake as we have done in Moscow.

FORM AND CONTENT:

It is absolutely necessary to develop these two reservoirs - one of life and the other of death. We must not be afraid of the cliché because the cliché has form, and without form we cannot express ourselves and there will only be chaos. Therefore, we must make some clichés, but they must be filled with life. If it were not so the question would arise as to whether we should have the form or the content. The answer is we must have both. We can never have only form, because it is cliché and death, neither can we have only content and life, because life without form is chaos. Therefore, there is no question of choosing either form or content - we must have both form and content.

#### GIVING LIFE TO THE FORM:

Another question arises which is also wrong. For instance, the actor may say that if the director is giving me so many forms he kills my activity and creation, because the shape or form he has set must be given. But the shape, the form must keep the life which the actor himself must give to it. The director is giving the form and the actor is filling the form with life. Of course it must be a collaboration between the director and the actor. The director has the right to give a form and must do so, while the actor must give the life to the form. The moment that the actor refuses to give life to the form then clichés are there at once.

As an example, the whole of Meyerhold's life suffer-

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ing was because he gave beautiful forms, but none of his actors filled them with life, because the actors around him were so small and his imagination was so big.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, all the demands to fill his strange and beautiful forms and shapes were hopeless, and now they say his imagination is nothing but shape. He was not guilty, but the actors were not able to fill his strange forms and shapes. This is the tragedy of his life. If he were able to play all the roles himself, then we would see what a genius he is.

We must experience the same thing, the same danger every day. We are students and actors, but we must experience now the same struggle between shape [form] and life. We must make an effort to pour the life into the shape [form] and we have to do this every moment during any rehearsal which is not a technical one. Before the actor goes on the stage and tries to speak - before he opens his mouth - he must already have strengthened his will to give as much life as he possibly can, and if he really wishes to do so he can give very much life. Before the actor begins to move on the stage he must fill his body with life. This is the question of being honest with our art.

#### LIFE DURING REHEARSALS:

If we take our profession seriously and are honest towards it, we must make an effort each day, each moment when we are rehearsing. We must question ourselves truthfully,

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and we will find that during so many rehearsals we have made no effort to give life because it is tiring. Everybody wants to be very comfortable and they protest against moving too much. The more life is in me, the more dead my body becomes because this means we become tired.

Therefore, the more alive I am the more my body asks me to diminish the life, and it makes sly and cunning efforts to find positions which require less energy from it. This is the language of our body, but we must say that the body exists because it will die. If the body lives comfortably, then we are not artists - this is our conflict. As an artist it is not possible for me to live in my body and in my spirit, otherwise I would be half and half and that is the most dreadful thing.

#### THINKING - FEELING - WILLING:

Why have we spoken so much about activity? We must understand by this that we are appealing to our life, to our fire. Why must we be active? Because of the need to fill each thing we are doing with life, with atmosphere, radiation, etc. Activity in this sense is the life. We have spoken of the human being as consisting of three parts - thinking, feeling and willing. Thinking can be dead and inartistic - that is what we call the intellectual approach to everything. It means that my brain and my body are absolutely lifeless and lazy, and some vague shadows are shooting through my brain. This is dead

activity. Death is active in our brain at such times. We have a means to overcome this, and that is the imagination.

#### IMAGINATION:

To have an image means to awaken life. Without life we are not able to have an image.. The real imagination awakens the life, and the life awakens the imagination. Do not confuse it with cool intellectual thinking of the image. It will give you nothing. I can think about a yellow dragon but it will give me nothing. The image is always full of life, of my life if I have exercised it enough. Then the yellow dragon will be something which will not let me be still. The imagination is the creation of life, and life is created out of the imagination - it is one thing. Therefore, the imagination is one of the means to push this death as far away as it is necessary in order to be an artist.

#### ATMOSPHERE:

The second means we have is atmosphere which is appealing to our feelings. It is only possible to create the atmosphere when we are sufficiently full of life to radiate it out. Feelings and atmosphere which we try to radiate out of ourselves is life. If we collect feelings and keep them to ourselves, then as actors we are dead. Or if I love someone and never let them know, I am dead. If we are collecting things in ourselves then we are killing our feelings, but if we are opening our hearts we are discovering and awakening our

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life in the region of our feelings.

#### RADIATION:

When we are trying to radiate, we are doing something which is much more important for our profession than if we are acting a big part. Actors think they must have practice with parts such as Hamlet. This is the wrong idea of development - the exercise of radiation gives the actor more than the whole part of Hamlet, if you act it only with your intellect and a certain amount of habits. Everything which concerns our feelings - which we call radiation, atmosphere, and opening our hearts - is the way to develop our life. Everything which we are collecting, and hiding, and holding inside ourselves is killing our life. The same feeling, for example, can be killing or reviving - it is joy or it is suffering. This is Dr. Steiner's idea. If we are suffering and closing ourselves we are dying, but if we are suffering and opening ourselves inside and suffering before the whole world, then we are getting life, and experience, and wisdom through this kind of suffering. If we are happy and collecting our happiness inside ourselves, or if we are opening ourselves with our happiness, this is a great difference. This is necessary for our profession - the region of our feelings must have open doors.

#### THE WILL - THE OBJECTIVE:

The third region is the will, and it is the same story again. I speak of the human being as an artist. If our

will is awakened by some impulses coming to us from the outside, that means that our will is not awakened at all. For example, if you sit on a tack you will jump up, but this is only a reflex and nothing more. But if you have an objective to get up slowly this involves your will, because you want from inside and you are acting. Here again we have the beautiful means given us by Stanislavsky - the objective. The objective awakens the life in our will.

#### THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE METHOD:

Now you can see the beautiful construction of our Method - atmosphere, imagination, radiation, opening our hearts, and the objective. We have ourselves in our own hands and the means to fight with all kinds of clichés, by filling the cliché with imagination, with radiation, with the objective, and in this way we will always have the most beautiful thing. Therefore, we must not be afraid of clichés, because with our method they need not be clichés.

Perhaps the actor may think he is full of life, but he may only have clichés. That is something else. If an actor has a cliché, and the audience is waiting to see it, if we study this kind of cliché we will see that it is never the same thing twice. Superficially, it might seem that the actor is always doing the same thing, and it is influencing the audience and himself, but if it is alive it will be something else, even if only in the smallest degree.



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When we have metre, for example, it is dead. Life never intends to repeat itself - it is the tendency of death to repeat itself. The shape, the form of the cliché is almost the same as the thing which is full of life. We use the example of metre only because we must use it sometimes. All that we have spoken about relating to life and death in our art will help you to know why you are doing certain things. This knowledge will be helpful to you in answering many questions.

Stanislavsky once said that if you are acting a good person you must find first where he is evil.