

Lessons to Teachers

LESSON XVII

RHYTHM
ATMOSPHERE - HOW TO CREATE IT
"WHAT" AND "HOW"
PERFORMANCE AS A LIVING BEING
THE SPIRIT, SOUL, AND BODY - THE
RHYTHMICAL PERFORMANCE
THE ACTOR'S ARTISTIC EGO

From today on, classify all exercises under the following headings:

Concentration - or attention
Imagination - or fantasy
Body
Speech
Atmosphere
Rhythmical exercises

RHYTHM:

The term "rhythmical" has a special meaning for us. Rhythm will come as the great result of all our work. These rhythmical exercises will lead us to what we really mean by rhythm, form, etc.

All our exercises belong to one organism and are not to be separated one from the other, but until we realize the whole organism, we must divide them.

ATMOSPHERE:

There are many human beings in the world, and every human being can have a mood as his own world. Try to imagine that somebody has such a strong mood and such a strong

radiating ability that the mood of this person permeates the whole place. If we imagine such a picture, we can speak of two things - a mood inside of this person and the objective atmosphere around this person, or building, or street, or city. Something which becomes objective we call "atmosphere." It belongs to all and to nobody special. With the word mood we can describe a very individual state of the soul of a person.

That atmosphere can be very objective - we can convince ourselves with the following example. Imagine a disaster in the street - somebody has been run over by a car. We are coming through the street and at once we come into this atmosphere, and before we understand what has happened, we are already in the atmosphere. Modern psychologists will describe and analyze this effect and ascribe it to the many unconscious or half-conscious impressions which we have received without knowing we have received them. But for us, as artists, this explanation means nothing. We have nothing to do with materialistic analysis and psychologists. They will only spoil things for us because we do not want to analyze in this materialistic way. There are ways of analysis which arise not from the materialistic point of view. We refuse analysis of the materialistic kind.

The example of the street disaster shows us that

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the atmosphere is living as if in the air as an independent power. From whom is this power independent? From anybody. It begins to be a power of its own. And that fact is very important for us as actors, and we can gain much from this knowledge.

When we enter into this atmosphere of disaster, and we will be astonished at what we see. The injured person has a very strong mood, the policeman has another mood, ^{the} and audience has other moods. You will never find the person who exemplifies the whole atmosphere. The atmosphere of the disaster is so individual and not like the mood of any person who is part of the atmosphere. This fact is very little known, and artists don't pay attention to this very important thing.

This very objective thing we call atmosphere, and in a person we call it mood. You are going through the street, and you ask, "What has happened?", because the atmosphere came over you and filled your soul, and what is very astonishing and important for us, you begin to speak, to work, to imagine, under the inspiration of this atmosphere. When you are asking, "What has happened?", that is not you, it is the atmosphere which is speaking with your voice and your body. Your whole being begins to be inspired with this atmosphere.

This is a great power which we can use in our work. If we are able to create atmosphere, the atmosphere will

create our performance, and as with the case of the disaster, it is not possible to see a person going through this atmosphere absolutely cold. You will see how absolutely important it is for every creation to have atmosphere and to hold it, to radiate this atmosphere and to change it. Then you will see that our performances will gain such convincing power as is felt with a disaster, or at a wedding, or a great event. It means that all our performances will be like great events through this atmosphere.

"WHAT" AND "HOW":

"What" and "How" we know of with regard to teaching, and the same things are true in art. "What" we are playing and "how," and "how" is much more important. In science, "what" is more important than "how," but in time that also will be changed. In art, "How" is and always will be much more important. This "how" is now lost in the world of the theatre. Actors are always playing "what" and never "how," therefore, they are all so dry, so clever, so mechanical, so withoutsoul, only cold spirit and mechanical body. That is a picture of the art of the theatre today.

THE PERFORMANCE AS A LIVING BEING:

Every performance must be a living being with an independent life. Actors, producers, musicians, scenic painters, etc., must all be servants of this higher being.

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which they come together to create. This being is very similar to a human being in some directions. We human beings have our spirit - that is our "what" - that part of our being is very bright and very cold. For instance, intellectual people have a little bit of the spirit which is not yet spirit. It is only a little ray of the spirit. A mechanical engine has a very cold, bright, evil spirit, but it is a spirit. When it is working, it has a genii or spirit, which is very cold and very bright and evil. Every engine is necessary in our life, but it is an evil spirit. That is the spirit in our life which we can see very clearly in engines. We can see a good spirit in a tree. The construction of the tree is spirit - but good spirit. That is spirit - that is "what." "What" is spirit."

THE SPIRIT, SOUL, AND BODY - THE RHYTHMICAL PERFORMANCE:

Now we have to come to the soul. The human being has a spirit, and he has a soul. Soul is mood, feeling, warmth. In the theatre the content or the plot of the play is spirit, and the atmosphere is the soul of the performance. This soul of the performance is independent of the artists, just as the atmosphere of the disaster is independent of the disaster. We have the spirit of the performance, which is the plot, the "what," and we have the soul, which is the atmosphere which inspires us, which is the "how," and we have a body.

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All that the audience sees and hears - our background, colors, sounds, and our bodies - these are the body of the performance. The actor is part of this large and rhythmical body. The actor must speak and act not only with his own body, but with the scenery, the lights, the music, with every part of the body of the performance. We are wrong if we think that on the stage we have a body and a costume and that is the only body. When I am standing on the stage, the stage itself, the music, my partner's body, the lights, my partner's speech, my speech - are all parts of the large and very complicated rhythmical body of our theatre. It must be rhythmical. Later, I will explain the rules and laws by which we can have the full harmony of the whole body, soul, and spirit of the performance. The performance must be rhythmical, and this can only be when the whole body and spirit and soul of the performance is working together in full harmony.

Just as the heart is absolutely necessary for the human being, the atmosphere is necessary for the performance because it is the heart of the performance. We, as actors, must learn how to create, to keep, to radiate, to manage this atmosphere and how to get inspiration from it. This is a very interesting point. We must be very powerful, as specialists, in order to create and manage this atmosphere on the one hand, and on the other, we must learn to be so open and so selfless that this atmosphere can inspire us. And both are possible.

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To be very active and at the same time to be very passive.
We can only do this by losing our egotism.

THE ACTOR'S ARTISTIC EGO:

How is it that a very high spiritual person can be very strong and very open at the same time? Why? Because he has overcome egotism. The worst thing is lost - his egotism. The new theatre is not only a theatre, and training in it is not only training to be a good actor. It is necessary to penetrate much deeper into the human being who hopes to serve this theatre. He must discover his own egotism and try to fight it. It is natural to have an increased feeling of egotism when you go on the stage because the first thing you feel is "I." This "I" must be transformed, not lost, but transformed. This can only be done by love - again I must use this great word "love" - love can re-create our artistic ego.

This is a foreword to the exercises in atmosphere, which are very very simple and very, very instructive.

1. The first exercise in atmosphere: You must, from time to time in your life, but always as an exercise, try to imagine, and through this often repeated imagination, get accustomed to feel that for you, as an actress of the future, atmosphere is something which fills the room, or the space, large or small, like air, like light, like odor, like warmth.

That is your first exercise - to get accustomed to

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the feeling that you can go through atmosphere which is like light or like air. Try to imagine that the room is filled with air. Only air. That you can breathe here and there and everywhere. Now try to substitute the air with atmosphere. So that you can feel yourself "happy" there, and there, and there. And you can feel the room "happy" when you leave it because "happy" is there. Or "unhappy" or "Tear" or "humor." These are all atmosphere and there are no limits to it, as there are no limits to feelings.

Every atmosphere can be imagined in the room, in the space. Why must we do this exercise? Because we are accustomed to think of feelings as our own feelings in our own beings, and we are accustomed to hide our feelings - this is particularly true of English people. Throughout our lives we are doing counter-exercises; we are doing everything we can to confine our feelings under our skins so that we show nothing and radiate nothing.

Very seldom do we try to understand another person's mood because our lives are too polite to be artistic. All is masked; all is hidden. We must exercise not only to open ourselves and show to the audience our souls, but we must imagine that the space has a soul. That is the first exercise. To imagine that every space can be filled with atmosphere, which has an objective presence like a human being, but it is atmosphere because it exists independently.

You must get accustomed to feel that a certain space can be filled with atmosphere. It is not important at first what kind of atmosphere. You must do gymnastics with your mind to feel that the space can be filled with atmosphere. With these simple exercises you will reach a new understanding of the room about you. In our usual everyday life, we only use the room for practical purposes and do not feel that the room is a reservoir for atmosphere.

We must get accustomed to think of space in a new way and not only think, but feel. Therefore, these simple gymnastics. If you train yourself sufficiently, you will feel many atmospheres around you. We must not analyze this, but we must feel it and master it.

The atmosphere must be created every night that we play. That is our invisible technique. This atmosphere cannot be false. If there is untruth on the stage, atmosphere cannot exist. The stage cannot lie, and if it is lying, then you cannot have atmosphere. The truth on the stage, which will be out atmosphere, will be a magic power. Many things can be mistaken for atmosphere, but real atmosphere cannot be imitated.

2. We must suppose that every event, every thing, every composition of things, every room, every city, every street, etc., has atmosphere. Our second exercise is to understand the atmosphere of everything. This is done by very simple

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things. For example, take the fireplace and concentrate yourself on it. Now try to realize what the fireplace is saying. What is its atmosphere? It is not so important at first whether the feeling is right or wrong, but it is important to feel what the atmosphere is saying. You have lived with the object for a short while, and you must know what you feel about it. In this exercise we can be free and have our individual reactions.

When we are doing a play together, the atmosphere will be found and set, and everyone playing in the play will know what the atmosphere is and will help to create it. If you give yourself a task to find the atmosphere of a certain object, right or wrong, you must solve it for yourself. You must begin to feel the atmosphere in music, and the atmosphere in colors. You can help yourself from this point of view by seeing again in your mind's eye, or your imagination, as many pieces of art as possible and penetrating into them. For example, very consciously and concentratedly get the atmosphere of a picture, or of some music. By looking at objects through various colored sheets [gelatines], get the atmosphere of the colors.