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Hamlet

Lesson for Beginners:

ATMOSPHERE - THE FEELINGS OF THE PERFORMANCE:

Our business as teachers is to know the various means of our Method, and your business as students is to gradually find out that it is one organic whole. The whole Method has one aim only - to help us to get what we call inspiration. We cannot create talent - we can only create the best possible inner life which will be the door to the inspiration. All the points of the Method are actually parts of the one big door which leads to the inspiration. Today I will talk about atmosphere.

The atmosphere is the realm of feelings in the performance. Each actor who takes part in the performance is a living being with his own feelings and emotions. But there is another being on the stage and that is the performance itself. The performance is an independent being. All the actors, settings, costumes, words, everything are parts of this one independent being which we call the performance. Why do I

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call it an independent being? Because the performance itself has feelings - its own feelings - and the feelings of the performance - not of the actor - we call atmosphere. The atmosphere of the whole play, of certain definite scenes, of moments, of acts, etc.

You can easily imagine that there can be an atmosphere on the stage, or in our everyday life - a very definite atmosphere such as a catastrophe on the street. In this catastrophe you can feel one definite general atmosphere, belonging to whom? To the catastrophe as a whole. This atmosphere of catastrophe embraces everything and everybody who is in this atmosphere. During this catastrophe we can see that one person is afraid, another is indifferent, a third is very active, the fourth is very happy and relieved that the catastrophe has not happened to him, and so on. Many personal moods can be included in this one big atmosphere of catastrophe.

That means that the general atmosphere is something different from the personal mood. If I am afraid and another person is glad that he has escaped, we are in such different moods but in spite of this we are covered, as it were, with one atmosphere which embraces us all.

To understand the atmosphere and to be able to create it on the stage, the actor of our school has to understand and experience absolutely clearly that there is a difference between his personal feelings and the feelings of the other being, which

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is the performance itself. The performance has its own feelings, and this we call the atmosphere.

Each time you hear the same thing repeated in our school - if you hear it with a desire to get something out of it - you will hear something new, you will get another facet of the thing. It is necessary for us to repeat and for you to hear it anew.

THE ACTOR'S PSYCHOLOGICAL BEING - THOUGHTS, EMOTIONS, WILL:

As in the human being, we distinguish three main psychological functions for the actor which are: 1. Our ability to think - thoughts. 2. Our ability to develop our feelings, emotions, passions - emotions. 3. The realm of the will impulses - will. If we distinguish these three parts of our psychological being, then we shall understand that all of them are somehow more or less in our power - it depends on the degree of development of the artist - all three of them are actually in our power. We can regulate them, control them, manage them.

THE BEING OF THE PERFORMANCE - IDEAS, ATMOSPHERES, WILL:

It is the same with the performance as an independent being, as a great individual which embraces and includes all the other individuals in it. This big performance has also three main functions: 1. The performance must have an idea - that is what is going to be performed, the idea of the director

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and the actors...that is what. 2. In the performance there must be feelings - this is the atmosphere about which we have spoken. 3. There must be the will, and in this realm we count many things. It is important for us to distinguish between the three functions in our individual life - thoughts, feelings, and will - and in the ideal performance - ideas, atmospheres, and the will of the performance.

The atmosphere of the performance arises from so many things going on on the stage - the settings, the shapes and forms which create a certain atmosphere. Colors create atmosphere - costumes, make-up, lighting, everything; and, of course, the actor himself. If the actor is able to create the atmosphere of the performance then he gives to the performance its feelings, its heart, and its soul. We can speak of the human being in the performance in the following way: Let us call the realm of thoughts in the human being, the human spirit, and let us call the idea of the performance the spirit. The realm of the feelings in the individual life, and the realm of the atmosphere in the performance we can call the soul. The spirit - the realm of the idea - can be very cold, like a machine.

RUSSIA - CONFLICT BETWEEN FEELINGS AND IDEAS:

In Russia today they are full of ideas, and very clear ones too, but they are deprived of the soul. They are soulless beings, therefore, their ideas fall down into their will, and

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they begin to act. They have ideas and will impulses, but they are crippled because they have no feelings. Therefore, if they have the idea that something must be done, whether they have to kill so many thousands of people, it does not matter to them because they have no heart. They are dead as souls. Therefore, if they decide that someone disturbs them, as they have no feelings and have only the idea that they wish to reach, and in addition they have their will, then they will kill the obstacle. Therefore, the spirit, combined with the will, can give only a more or less finely elaborated machine. The whole of Russia is now a big, terrible machine.

THE WORLD OF ART - THE WORLD OF THE MACHINE:

If someone invents a machine, for instance, he gets his ideas, puts them into the mechanical will and energy which can be found, and we have a machine. The scheme of the machine is the thought combined with the energy. There are two polar things - the world of art, and the world of the machine. Everyone knows this comparison because art is really quite opposite to the machine. Art lies in the feelings - without feelings there is no art. The whole question of art, the whole basis on which art stands or falls is the realm of the feelings - in the individual as well as in the whole big performance, if we speak about the theatre.

Therefore, it is so important to be absolutely

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master of one's feelings - one has to learn to master one's feelings. On the other hand, feelings are so intangible, and so difficult to catch and grasp that there is a real and true necessity to find a certain methodical way, a certain technique, with which to be able to catch and grasp and hold one's feelings.

How to get the feelings inside of one - our individual feelings - is a different thing which we will not speak about today, but we will speak of the realm of the feelings which is the soul of the performance.

Atmosphere: The technique for creating the atmosphere is the following one: Every one of us can imagine very easily that we are surrounded by air at all times. We can also imagine that we are surrounded by air in a defined area - that is quite obvious. But we can do another thing - we can imagine, for instance, the air - and to imagine means to make a creative effort - and the air is filled and to imagine means to make a creative effort - and the air is filled with dust - as artists, we can imagine such a thing. Now imagine the air filled with smoke. Now imagine the air filled with fragrance. Actually, you can imagine the air filled with anything you like - with light, and color, and everything.

Although it is a simple and natural thing to do and seems to be so easy that it does not need to be exercised, still, if we go on exercising the air filled with light, smoke,

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fragrance, colors, etc., we will acquire a certain skilfulness in changing our invisible surroundings, and this is a very important point in creating the atmosphere. If we are able to imagine the space around us filled with certain definite things which we can choose, it is already the first step to creating the atmosphere. Just as we are able to imagine the air filled with blue light, we can imagine the air filled with sorrow, joy, anger, laziness, energy, etc. - we can imagine the air filled with smoke.

Now for the next step: Imagine the anger spreading everywhere in the air, and now you take it into you. This is just the opposite to the technique for the individual feelings which we must always send out. The opposite is true with the atmosphere - you imagine the air filled with anger, and you take it into yourself. Now imagine that we have taken into ourselves this anger which is in the air - what happens to us as human beings? In our Method nothing is artificial - all is natural, but it becomes a technique for reaching the creative state. If we really imagine this anger, and if we are not critical of ourselves during this problem, if we approach the problem freely and are relaxed, then it follows that having gotten this anger from the air, we immediately feel that we are full of anger.

Instead of trying to squeeze out of ourselves feelings, we can find the means to get them if we fill the air

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with imaginary anger, for instance, or love, and open ourselves to it, immediately the anger or love comes. If we are normal beings with souls - not only with spirit and will - then our soul will react because that is its function. Just the same we, as artists, react to imaginary things in the air.

In art we must not choke anything, we must let it be, let it come out. That is the difference between well-educated, intellectual persons who must choke their feelings, and artists. Often the better educated the person is, the more hampered he is on the stage. We, as artists, must re-educate ourselves and become badly educated - that means to show our feelings on the stage. We have to absorb the atmosphere which we ourselves have imagined, then react immediately to this imaginary air, and then our feelings begin to radiate on the stage. When our feelings begin to radiate, when the settings create a certain atmosphere, colors, light, make-up, all together they create a certain atmosphere on the stage which belongs to no one but to the performance as the realm of its feelings.

PERSONAL FEELINGS AND ATMOSPHERE:

So we have to distinguish between personal feelings and the atmosphere. Let us imagine Hamlet - the scene in which they are awaiting the appearance of the ghost.¹ We cannot imagine that they are all in the same personal mood - that would be wrong from the actor's and the director's point of

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view, but it is quite obvious that the general atmosphere is one which embraces them all.

What does it mean for the actors who are going to perform this scene? Hamlet has to act his own personal attitude and feelings at this moment - all the ideas and will impulses that he needs to meet his father coming from the other world. Horatio is in quite a different mood, but still one big atmosphere embraces them all.

What must the actors do? They must develop two things at the same time - they must have their own personal feelings which are suitable for the moment, and at the same time they must exist in the air, which is filled with this atmosphere. They must develop their own personal feelings, not in an empty space but in a certain definite air. For instance, the atmosphere is one of mystery, and Hamlet is in a very concentrated, reserved mood, inwardly strong like an arrow. He can do it individually, or he can develop this personal attitude in the general atmosphere. There is no contradiction because if I am in such a concentrated state, I can live at the same time in this general atmosphere. Then let us consider the soldier who has nothing to do with the ghost - he is in quite a different mood, but he can also be in the same mysterious atmosphere.

THE SOUL OF THE ACTOR AND THE SOUL OF THE PERFORMANCE:

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So there are always two things on the stage - the soul of the actor and the big soul of the performance as a whole. They are not contradictory, but are in fact supporting each other. We are so full of materialistic feelings for things which cannot be pushed one into the other. We are filled with this psychology of the hard, material things around us in our lives, and, therefore, we forget very often that in the realm of psychology, and especially in art, there are miraculous happenings every moment. Theoretically it may seem strange that a mysterious atmosphere can surround everyone and yet each one can be individual. It may seem contradictory, but in art everything is possible, and when we understand this, we will appreciate the whole beauty of the fact that the general atmosphere and the personal mood, however, contradictory they may seem to be, can be merged together and can become one thing.

Now we know that the way to get the atmosphere is to imagine the feeling of the performance or of the scene, spread in the air, then open ourselves to absorb it, and this will awaken our personal response, and we will radiate it back and increase it more and more because we have it. So psychologically we can absorb and radiate at the same time. Physically we cannot do it, of course, but psychologically we can. Imagine we love someone, we are absorbing the person and at the same time we are radiating the same feeling of love. Just

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the same is true with the atmosphere - we absorb it and radiate it back at the same time. It is absolutely personal and yet objective. The mystery of our art is when subjective things are objective and objective things are subjective at the same time.

THE BODY OF THE PERFORMANCE - THE WILL:

The third part of the whole performance is the body of the performance - what we see and hear - the visible and invisible things - the will of the performance of which the individual actor is part, together with the settings, the costumes, the lights, etc., and in the final analysis the rhythm of the composition of the play.