

Philophonetica: Love of sounds

Discovering the connection between the sounds of language and the human soul

Yehuda Tagar

Tagar, Y. (1986). *Philophonetica: Love of Sounds. Discovering the connection between the sounds of language and the human soul - An Anthroposophical method of preparation for the arts of Drama, Psychosophy and Adult Education*. Paper presented at the biennial conference of the Anthroposophical Society in Australia, Warrah Village, Sydney, Australia.

This was the first circulation of written material using the term Philophonetics (Philophonetica as it was called at the time) for the first public workshop of this modality at the Biennial Conference of the Anthroposophical Society in Australia in Warrah Village, Sydney.

An Anthroposophic method of preparation for Drama, Psychosophy & Adult Education

Introduction to Philophonetica

And it is demanded of us that we understand the Micrologos in the Microcosmos, so that man may gain understanding for that from which his own being proceeds, for the Macrocosmos through the Macrologos. (Rudolf Steiner, "The Ephesian Mysteries of Artemis", 2nd December, 1923)

So here we have a definite suggestion for training. The student has but to practice himself in sensitivity for all the several sounds- there are no more than thirty -two or thirty-three altogether- and the corresponding feelings will come, if he will only make up his mind to become conscious of them. (Rudolf Steiner, Speech and Drama Course, 10th September, 1924)

Philophonetica means love of sounds, or in other words, a soul relationship to the sounds of language, consonants and vowels. It is a path of discovering the inherent and fundamental connection between the Human Soul and the sounds of language, as the ground-work for a new approach to Drama, to Psychology, and to Adult Self-Education. Working with the sounds in this way leads one to a self-knowledge of the soul; to knowledge of the Human Soul revealed through the activity of the sounds; to knowledge of the Soul of the sounds revealed through the activity of the Human Soul.

A fundamental underlying connection exists between the sounds of language and the forces at work within the Human Soul. Those underlying connections were well known in ancient times, when the spiritual and artistic origin of language was still instinctively felt by

people and consciously cultivated in the great mystery centres, such as Delphi, Eleusis, Ephesos, and Olympia in Ancient Helas (Greece). There in those powerful sources of Human culture, cosmic and human secrets were revealed to the seers through the power of the word. These connections were gradually forgotten by Humanity through its process of descent into a more and more materialistic and intellectual perception of reality. The result of this process is reflected in the way Human beings relate to their language.

In our century many new scientific and artistic streams are attempting to broaden man's conception of reality beyond the mere materialistic and intellectual understanding of it. No wonder then that in their attempt to do so these new streams take a deep interest in re-awakening to the soul and spiritual profundity of language.

Such is the case with the scientific and artistic stream: Anthroposophy (The Wisdom Of Man), founded by Dr. Rudolf Steiner (1861- 1925) in the beginning of the century. In this stream of a broadened conception of the natural and human sciences gave rise to a new approach to agriculture and medicine, as well as to an impulse of renewal to the plastic, musical and language arts. The meeting between the artistic and the scientific work in this stream gave rise to one of the most creative alternative approaches to education in this century, called the Waldorf, or the Steiner Schools. This stream also gave rise to a new art of Creative Speech, as well as a new art of movement (capable of making both speech and music visible) called Eurythmy. Through these new arts a beginning was made for such a re-awakening to the essence of language, as was described before. But before this reawakening to the essence of language could bear fruit also in fields like Drama and Psychology, which are directly concerned with the Human soul, a particular development needed to take place in the understanding of the relationship between the sounds of language and that soul. That development, however, can only take place through a direct and a conscious experience of the soul's response to the effect of sounds.

Indications for a development in this direction were given by Rudolf Steiner both in the context of an alternative approach to Psychology, called *Psychosophy* which he proposed in 1910, and in the context of an alternative approach to Drama, which he proposed in 1924. The meeting between these two has, in my view, the potential of giving rise to a new skill of Adult Education, based on the self knowledge of the student.

Starting from these insights *Philophonetica* is the practice of the discovering and the cultivation of the above soul connection to the sounds of language actively, consciously and

directly. The awakening to these connections may result in a growing awareness to the following:

- The nature of the sounds and the forces at work in them.
- The various soul forces and contents discovered and named through working with the sounds.
- The fertile relationship between the objective and the subjective poles of our perception, as they meet in language.
- The universal nature of all languages, as it reveals itself when language is being experienced as a direct expression of the soul life.

Through *Philophonetica* the above awareness becomes personal language whose only source is a firsthand experience and discovery. Processes are being suggested in this work, which were found to be fruitful, but the results and contents of which are left to be completely self discovered. The role of the guide in this method is therefore not that of an instructor but rather that of a facilitator for the emergence of self-knowledge. Through the exercises of *Philophonetica*, carefully constructed and experimented with, a conscious activation of different soul forces is taking place, in relation to the phenomenon of the sounds. Particular soul forces are becoming conscious through activities such as:

- sensing the sound
- recalling the sensation
- allowing the sensation to resound in one's feeling
- "becoming" the activity of the sound in space
- speaking the sound
- preparing for the speaking

Each of the experiences arrived at through the above activities and through others is being in its turn transformed and expressed through a bodily gesture, and thus enlarge the vocabulary of a new sort of body-language. Considering the fact that in each of these activities the whole range of consonants and vowels can be experienced- the whole range of the soul experiences can become correctly and specifically named by the sounds of language. The sounds of language thus become a language for life of the soul. The enlivening and healing effect the sounds have in this way upon the soul may be described as *a soul-message*.

This way of working with the sounds may result, to start with, in the creation of new skills in three fields: Drama, Psychology and Adult Education. Within the contribution Philophonetica can make to each of these fields- the artistic, therapeutic, and educational aspects are of equal importance. The following is a short description of the particular implication Philophonetica may have when applied in each of the above fields.

1) Philophonetica: in the service of Drama

Such things were well known to the men of earlier times , just as they knew too that the art of music takes us back to the Gods of the past, the plastic and pictorial arts lead us on to the Gods of the future, while the art of drama, standing between the two, conjures up Spirits of the time which we live. (Rudolf Steiner, Speech and Drama, 21st September, 1924)

But now, as evolution proceeded further, the perception began to dawn upon man that when the Human Being presents his own innermost soul, then too he is presenting something Divine; if he can present on the stage the Divine that is in the external world, he can also present the Divine that is in himself. And so, from being a manifestation of the Gods, Dramatic Art became a manifestation of the inner being of man; it presented of the stage the HUMAN SOUL. And this inevitably led to the need to bring innermost Human Experience into the forming of the speech, to bring this same intimate Human Experience into the gesturing also that was done on the stage. (Rudolf Steiner, Speech and Drama, Lecture 10, 14th September 1924)

What can be imagined as a direction for the renewal of Drama today? In order to relate to such a question, a purpose for Dramatic activity had to be conceived. After all, what do we need Drama for? Is it a form of entertainment, on a deeper or a shallower level, something to pay for and to be paid for? Is it a form of a naturalistic expression of Human beings, expression as release and as awakening? Is it a form of criticism and of protest against the ills of society? Is it a form of educating the public in one desired direction or another?

All these concepts concerning the purpose of Drama are simultaneously at work in the field now and in the past. I do not wish to argue with any of them. I wish to point very briefly to a particular line of thought about Drama which existed before and alongside the others, since Drama is a part of Human culture. I start where Drama starts, in the Mystery centre of Eleusis, west of Athens, where for a thousand years of the emergence and the decline of the ancient Greek civilization, the purpose of Drama was well defined. It formed the core element of the Eleusinian process of initiation. That core element was made of a

performance of a tragedy. The first tragedy in the history of the Occident, called by later generations the Mystery Drama of Eleusis. I say by “later generations” because as long as the mystery centre of Eleusis was still functioning, its secret content concealed from public knowledge by a vow of the initiate and the penalty for the breaking this was officially and practically, death.

It was not until the time of Aeschyllos and after the Persian wars that Drama became a form of art for the public. From the depth of the underground catacombs in which the process of Eleusinian initiation took place was Aeschyllos called, before completing the process and before taking the vow of secrecy, to be a soldier in the Persian wars which broke at that time. He never returned to complete his process of initiation, but he had beheld the moment when Persephone from the abyss uttered the cry of anguish which resounded in the heights of Olympus and brought forth the youngest Dionysis called Lachos, to write with her, and restore her to light. This traumatic picture, which haunted Aeschyllos throughout the rest of his life, became the sign under which his Dramatic work and the Dramatic art of the Occident in general was born. Aeschyllos was made the first play-write, tragic actor, director, designer and producer of Drama, of the West. He was also the architect of the first theatre to be built for Drama, the theatre of Bacchus, in the downs of the Acropolis.

Aeschyllos did not leave us with any theory of Drama; only with seven plays, out of the seventy he wrote and performed in his theatre. He was the doer of theatre, it's founder and father. The purpose and meaning of Drama as a form of art was defined by Aristotle more than one hundred years after the death of Aeschyllos, when the civilisation of Ancient Greece was already in decline. According to his well-known definition of the art of tragedy in his book “*Poetica*”, it's purpose is the purification of the soul forces of the spectator through the way in which they are being activated in the process of the performance. That desired end of the Dramatic process he called: *Catharsis*.

Aristotle's definition of the art of tragedy thus marked the end of an era in which, chiefly through the work of Aeschyllos and Sophocles, sacred processes of initiation had been transformed into a form of art for the public. These sacred processes of initiation have disappeared together with the mystery centres of old, which housed them. Their transformation into Drama as a form of art remained.

It may be helpful in this context to mention that Sophocles, too, was an initiate of Eleusis, and so was Plato, the teacher of Aristotle. From these facts alone, it seems to be self-evident that Drama, both as an Esoteric process and as a public form of art, is originally and

fundamentally identified with soul processes, whose purpose was the soul health and the spiritual development of the individual.

More than two thousand years later, a further step in this line of thought seems to have been taken by another philosopher and scientist, Rudolf Steiner. Towards the end of his life he formed a vision of a renewal of Drama which would reconnect the present stage of this art with the inspiration of its origin, in a new form suitable for the present stage of Human consciousness and one which will be able to serve Humanity's future development.

The purpose of such a renewed Drama, according to Rudolf Steiner, is to be a forerunner in the creation of a new level of Human consciousness. The new faculties of body, soul and spirit through this renewed Drama will render the Human Being a more mature inhabitant of earth and the universe, and his ability to experience and recognise the world of phenomena will grow from being one of an external relationship to it, into being one of an internal relationship with it. In this huge task of creating the next step of Human development, Drama will have a major role, alongside many other streams of artistic, scientific and spiritual development. These new Human faculties, in their emergence will give rise to a new cultural era. Such respect for Dramatic Art and faith in its potential importance for Human culture, is expressed in the vision of this man.

Towards such a lofty ideal of Drama, only very humble first steps, at best, can be hoped for today. But even for such first steps, the clarity and the direction of that vision are as essential as the star is for one who navigates at night time, in the wilderness. Rudolf Steiner did not leave this vision only as a shining ideal, above the heads of his listeners. He also gave a comprehensive method for its fulfilment.

The last course of lectures he gave in his life, was the course in Speech & Drama in September 1924 in which he conveyed the basic structure of the method which, when understood, may lead artists to take the first steps towards the fulfilment of that renewal of Drama. It is a comprehensive approach to Dramatic Art, covering all the aspects of that art and all the skills associated with it, which he intended to become a practical technique of training and production.

But in the middle of that course of lectures, he openly acknowledged that, conditions being as they were, it would only be in the distant future that students of Dramatic Art would be able to be trained in the method he proposed. Whether or not we are already on the threshold of that future time, is an open question, to be practically answered through the work of those who shoulder responsibility in such an attempt. The attempt to realise the first steps

of the above mentioned techniques is what I mean by the term the *Anthroposophical approach to drama*.

The insight that gave rise to the development of Philophonetica was given by Rudolf Steiner - mainly in the above-mentioned course of Speech & Drama, though its background lies in many other expressions of the Anthroposophical image of man. Among the multitude of new techniques suggested for all the aspects of Dramatic work given in that course, he gave the seeds for a new method of developing Dramatic Gesturing, building a character, directing, set designing, costume designing, lighting and cultivation of the feeling experience of the sounds of language. He gave these seeds as nuts, but he did not crack them for us. He gave them as ideas - not yet as a technique.

The development of Philophonetica is a result of my ongoing attempt to make this handful of promising seeds into an applicable technique, into a method in which people can be trained. After five years of living with these insights and researching them, my understanding of the basic structure of this new Dramatic method became clear enough for a practical experimentation with it. After one more year of such experimentation some essential techniques are ready now to be offered as the beginning of a training course in this direction.

Philophonetica forms only one essential component of that method. Its share in the above-mentioned Dramatic method can in this context only be described very shortly. It exists on three consecutive levels. Two of these are levels of training of the actor (and in some variation also of the training of the other stage related professions). The third level is the process of producing a play.

On the first level - of the training of the actor, supported by the practice of Greek Gymnastics as its bodily basis, Philophonetica provides the source of the substance and of the formative activity which are to become the skill of Dramatic gesturing, (In the case of the other professions of the stage it will provide the source for the preliminaries for their crafts). Through the exercises of Philophonetica each sound creates in the soul a whole range of subtle impressions, echoes and responses which are being transformed directly into bodily gestures.

In this process the sounds become a precise, and at the same time a personal language for the elements of the soul life. Some twelve different ways have been developed for the experience of each sound. Each of these ways activated a particular element of the soul life in a way suitable to it, in relation to a particular sound. Considering the number of consonants and vowels that can be experienced in these ways, the whole range of the soul

life, conscious and unconscious, can be contacted, experienced, named and expressed. In acquiring the conscious access to these soul elements and the flexibility of expressing them through bodily gestures - the preliminaries of the skill of acting are being laid, with an inherent connection to the element of speech from the very beginning.

At the same time, this familiarity with the soul - sound element can be expressed through other mediums too, preparing each stage worker to his task: Through colour and forms to the set designer and painter; through colour and fabric to the costume designer; through colour in light to the lighting designer through Dramatic timing to the lighting operator; through music to the composer; through movement to the choreographer; through the formation of soul contents in time and space to the director.

On the second level- the soul and sound substance is taken a step further into the formation of gestures as the expression of basic Dramatic situations. A particular way of making use of chosen Dramatic texts forms an important element of this process. The previously acquired experience of the single sounds in relation to the soul forces is being used here in combination with bodily and mental activities, in entering a particular Dramatic situation. This process can result in the building up of an inner experience of such a situation which, whenever called to mind, can readily flow into a bodily gesture or into an intonation of speech. These basic modes of gesturing become a basic equipment for the actor and as in the previous stage can be transformed by the other stage professionals into their mediums.

On the third level- *Philophonetica* becomes the language, in common with the whole company for the process of producing a play. The soul and sound vocabulary which has been developed individually by the participants can come now to its fruition as a tool for the understanding, naming and cultivating the dramatic text, for all its stages, through all its aspects. The sounds become a new language for the identification of the characters, with its implications on character building and on costume; of the basic moods of a scene, with its implication of stage design and lighting; of the moods of particular moments in scenes and therefore changes to lights; of the psychological process of the whole play, with its implications on rhythm and the use of space.

All these implications can grow organically out of the development of the feelings for sounds, namely *Philophonetica*, when taken seriously. For the reality of the Word, when rightly understood, is the growing point of each of the Arts and Drama is the space where all the arts combine in a joint act of creation. It is therefore only natural that the basic elements of the Word, namely the single sounds, can become a fruitful common language for all the arts in the Dramatic work.

I must reiterate that the process of production itself according to the Anthroposophical approach to Drama, of which Philophonetica is but one element, is not described here. That process is based on the understanding of the organic connections between the soul, the speech, and the gesture elements, and on a rhythmical activation of these subtle connections in the Dramatic process. In this context I have only made the attempt to show those aspects of the Dramatic Process to which Philophonetica is essential.

2) Philophonetica: in the service of Psychosophy

My dear friends, you have identified yourselves with a movement in which your store of knowledge can increase if you think of your present knowledge as a karmic fact. In that way, you will have arrived at a cross-roads, a vantage point from which vigorous co-operation in this work is clearly discernible as a task enabling you, now, or in a future incarnation to serve humanity. Do not think of that as an abstract ideal, but keep constantly returning to it in a practical way. This work must be made to bear fruit. (Rudolf Steiner, Psychosophy, November 1st-4th, 1910)

Psychosophy was intended by its founder - Rudolf Steiner as the study of the human soul in its position between body and spirit. This threefold image of man is a fundamental element of Anthroposophy, the philosophy, science and path of spiritual development, of which Psychosophy is one aspect. Starting from this conception of the soul, Psychosophy strives to make conscious the experiences the soul undergoes in relation to: the physical world (appearing through the senses); the spiritual world (appearing through the core of one's being); the soul world (experienced through the soul's own inner life). Becoming conscious of the inter relationship between these three levels of soul experience, one can experience how each illuminates and gives reality and meaning to the other.

Now a method of psychological and therapeutic research and work which starts from seeing the soul in its position between body and spirit must reflect that position in each of its steps, to be true to itself. Practically speaking, a method that is to answer to such a demand had to be able to address the soul substance and activity in that whole range of its manifestation. If such an understanding of the human soul is to become a practical method of research and work, then methods have to be found which are able to address this range of the soul life, directly and in the soul's own language. I believe that there are many methods to do this. I propose here a method of psychological research and work based on the sounds of language. In this method of sounds serve as an object of perception, as a tool for the

discernment of soul forces and contents, as the bearer of meaning and as a means for the soul's direct expression. For such is the phenomenon of the sounds of language that they can address directly each of these soul faculties in the soul's own terms. This method is termed *Philophonetica*.

What becomes evident through working with *Philophonetica* is that working with the sounds one is actually working directly with soul forces and contents. The naming of these forces through the sound becomes deeper and more and more precise. This naming and the bringing into consciousness of the soul life through the sounds is but the beginning of *Philophonetica* work in its psychological application. Having made the connection between the soul life and the sounds the second stage may be called "a soul massage". The sounds reveal, at this stage, an ever surprising "healing capacity", which is due to their simultaneous existence within the depths of the often very painful soul experiences, and in the heights of their free formative activity which is approaching the soul life from the light. Any vowel or consonant can become an experience on all these levels, a sort of "ladder of Jacob", on a smaller or larger scale. And when, through combinations of sound experiences, emotional configurations of the soul can be made conscious and worked with, a therapeutic way of working with one's biography and present disposition can be found.

3) *Philophonetica*: in the service of Adult Education

Thus we see that a conflict exists between the arising of freedom of thought and the kind of authority that works over from the past into the present. And there is a desire not to see clearly the intensity of this faith in authority, to have illusions about it. For in our time, faith in authority has grown tremendously and under its influence men have become helpless in forming judgements. In the fourth post - Atlantean period man was given a healthy understanding as a natural gift; now he must achieve it by his own development. In this he is held back by faith in authority. We become entirely tied up through our faith in authority. (Rudolf Steiner, "How can the soul needs of the time be met", 10th October 1916)

What is adult education, as a profession, or even as an issue? It seems to be, in most cases, an invisible one. Education, as an issue and profession, as a well recognised and formed one, in connection with children and adolescents. But when it comes to adults - the subject matter or skill, the "content" of the educational process takes most of the attention. The educational process as such, in the case of adults, tends to escape the attention. As a result it is hardly a recognised skill or profession, from that point of view. Now, no-one with full consciousness would assume that the same methods and processes, suitable for children,

or those suitable for adolescents -with all the differences of opinion concerning them- are suitable for adults as well, and that they should therefore be copied, in Adult Education. However, because of the lack of consciousness mentioned above, that is exactly what seems to be taking place in so many institutes of Adult Education. What is then the purpose of Adult Education as a process?

I suggest that the real issue of Adult Education is how to create the conditions for a process in which an individual can develop his inherent interest in the world and himself, in freedom. From this point of view, three issues spring first to my mind as key issues for the forming of Adult Education as a future skill: The question of authority in the educational process; the question of the relationship between the student and the knowledge he seeks; the question of how to enable Self-Knowledge to develop alongside and through the particular training in question.

The first two questions are relevant for child education as well, only the answers should be different. For the starting point, I think that the right source of the authority for the student lies in himself, a point which even the common law realises. Following from that, the ideal relationship between student and the knowledge or skill he wishes to acquire, is one which arises from his own interest. The third question is unique to Adult Education, and an Adult Education process that cannot address it, is one that is asleep to its own uniqueness. Every branch of knowledge, art and skill, in its attempt to renew its ability to be relevant to the soul-needs of the time, through an Adult Education process will have to find its own answers to these questions.

I will try now to give a brief outline of the way in which *Philophonetica* may contribute to this challenge. The brevity in which I will describe it here may make a demand upon one's imagination. Its ability to contribute to this challenge lies in the nature of the two components of the *Philophonetica* work, and of the process through which they meet each other. One component is the sounds of language. Their very nature is to coexist in both the objective and subjective realms of human life. For through them works the genius of language itself, speaking to the individual from within, pointing to a new source of authority - an authority which does not appear through a leader any more, but one which appears through the space *between* people.

The other component of the *Philophonetica* work is the soul-experience in response to the sounds: feelings, imagination and impulses of will become new sources of the knowledge of the sounds of language. The awakening to these activities of the soul, enkindled by the activities of the sounds of language may contribute to the creation of that space between

people. It is the process of the meeting or “conversation” between these two components, forming the actual Philophonetica work, which can allow self-knowledge to grow alongside the acquisition of a skill.

That process consists of a sequence of workshops, each of which activates a particular soul force in relation to the sounds; starting from the sense impressions of the sounds, through the resounding of that impression in one’s feeling-life; the act of *becoming* the activity of the sound in space; the inner preparation for such a becoming; then, the speaking of a sound, and the various preparations on the way to speaking it - these are but a few examples of the ways in which the two above components meet each other through the Philophonetica work. Each of the experiences is taken by the participants into its expression, in gesture, and thus becomes conscious to the doer as well as to the beholder.

Since each of these activities is the expression of a particular soul force, a whole range of soul forces can thus become conscious and named. A new vocabulary for the soul-life can thus grow from one’s own experience. That vocabulary can become a link between the un-named reality of the soul on the one hand, and a theoretical description of that reality, taught from esoteric and scientific sources, on the other hand. The Apollonian and Dionisian streams of knowledge of the world and of oneself can thus have fruitful meeting in this way of working with language.

Besides its result in the growth of consciousness this way of working with the sounds also results in a healing effect coming from the direct activation of the sense of speech, (which is connected to the fluid system in the body) by the beneficial forces of the sounds.

With all that, Philophonetica is but one of many ways in which a modern art of adult education can evolve. It seems to point, though, to a particular direction of working with the challenge of that field. Because of the universal nature of its two elements, namely language and the human soul, it can become, in my view, a beneficial component in training Adult Educators in general. It seems to have the capacity to enkindle, and give strength to a sensitivity through which the essence of another being can be perceived. With that, I wish to conclude this short description of the implication Philophonetica can have in the field of Adult Education.