

Michael Chekhov

March 16, 1937

INGENUITY AND ORIGINALITY  
FREEDOM OR LICENSE

INGENUITY AND ORIGINALITY:

After our performance of March 8th it is necessary to begin these new exercises. The actor's nature is a very strange one - there are such contrasting and contradicting things in it. For instance, actors are able to be as active as a thirty horsepower car, and yet they can be so lazy that they are almost dead. This is a good thing and a bad thing at the same time, because to have a big diapason is a very good thing, but sometimes the person remains at the dead end, therefore it is necessary to develop both sides of the actor's soul abilities.

ORIGINALITY:

One of these two parts we must develop - in the actor's soul lives the desire and the love for creating new, ever new things, but also in the actor's soul lives another thing - the love to repeat old, dreadful things with the full feeling that he is creating and doing something beautiful. These two parts - to find new things and to cling to the old things - these are some of the contrasts in the actor's soul. From our performance on the 8th it can be seen that we still cling to some small things which we have found, and which we are not able to overcome. We are drawn to them, and we are getting more and more sleepy through them. We must awaken the other thing, which we will call the ability for ingenuity.

## INGENUITY:

This ingenuity is in every actor's nature, but very often it is there in a state of deep, deep sleep. We must awaken this ability to be ingenious. We have to add to this ability so much conscious activity and life that it will not only be awakened but it will become active, so that a real actor of our school will not be able to be on the stage without this continuous desire and ability to find new means of expression. This is possible, because I know from my own experience that this ability can be developed, and when it is awakened and developed, the actor changes his quality and standard so that the same audience discovers at once that this actor is another person - he has awakened his source of ingenuity.<sup>1</sup>

This makes such a great difference for the actor, because everything becomes possible, everything is interesting for him, everything is flying over the footlights. Then he begins to hate the thing of repetition and dated forms. However, in developing this new thing we must not forget the other thing, because repetition on the stage is as necessary as ingenuity, but the balance must be found. For the present time we must not forget but only overlook the repetitious side of our work. The harmony between the two - ingenuity and repetition - is the feeling of form and freedom.

## FREEDOM OR LICENSE:

There are two things in life and on the stage which are very important - one is freedom and the other is license. What is the simplest definition of this problem which is so important for us? The free actor or the free person walks only in "legal" <sup>[legitimate]</sup> ways - by legal I don't mean traditional, I mean following certain laws. How he walks, and the way he chooses, this is the question of freedom. License, on the other hand, means to walk without any legal direction - trying to go through the wall or trying not to go when it is necessary to go - this is something which the person wants to do which is opposite to all rules and ways and impulses. This is chaos and license, while freedom is acknowledging the legal ways.

Ingenuity is the way to freedom on the stage. Because the stage, and especially our future theatre, will give us many rules and many ways and many things which we will not be able to overcome with license. But the ingenuity which we will awaken in our souls will give us the freedom to follow all these legal ways. Therefore, in our theatre the actor who is not able to be ingenious is a person who has no idea of freedom on the stage.

This is a long series of exercises which are very simple and very instructive, but we must do them. We will not be able to repeat them in class, so you must be very determined and by doing these exercises for five minutes every day, you will really reach the place where you will awaken the source of ingenuity in you, and then you will really

enter paradise as an actor. How much richer your actor's life will be, because you will really be creating on the stage. Actors who only repeat become tired, unhappy persons, because in two performances they are exhausted and must repeat the same thing again and again. This does not lie in the profession, but in the actor's nature. Each performance can be a new thing, as interesting and even more so than yesterday, and each rehearsal a feast and a joy.

Exercises for Ingenuity:

1. Have the feeling that you are repeating the exercises - this is a very important point.
2. Another point you must be aware of is that you are finding another means of expression - everything must be done in another way - don't repeat anything. By doing this you will be knocking at the door of your creative imagination. We have developed the imagination in other ways, but we have never before asked it to be ingenious, and this exercise is a very special one for knocking at the door of the ingenious imagination. The ideal is to awaken this ingenuity so that the actor will not be able to act without ingenuity. The audience must appreciate that it is being done in another way.
3. The exercise must be done according to certain legal rules and yet it must be free. Try to analyze and know what you are doing. Talent is talent, and the gift is the

gift, but understanding must be emphasized. With us understanding is not an intellectual thing - it is a real gesture of grasping inside.

4. Be aware when an exercise is being repeated. You must develop the understanding as to what has to be repeated and what has to be invented. Keep the two things quite separate to begin with, and be aware when you are doing one or the other.

5. Realize that by repetition you have repeated only the main line - the small things you have invented each time. This shows that the question of repetition and invention is a matter of tact, and by keeping them separate in your mind you only exercise one or the other, but in reality in your creative life the two lines will merge and fuse. During the exercise, however, you must keep them separate as much as possible. You must exercise these invisible muscles - this is part of our technique.

#### INGENUITY AND ORIGINALITY:

There are two definite things which are very closely connected in these exercises - they are like twin brothers - ingenuity and originality. To develop ingenuity is not enough because to be ingenious might perhaps be a danger. To pick up something with one hand and the next time with the other - this means nothing. It must be original, otherwise it will be flat and common. The same exercise must be done again and again from two points of view - is it original and is it

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ingenious, and our efforts must be directed towards these two aims.

In order to awaken this feeling for ingenuity, try to recall all of John's work and try to choose what was more original in it and what was less so. We must try from the beginning to judge each other when we are doing the exercise from the point of view of originality, and with time the standard will grow of itself.