

Michael Chekhov

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IMAGINATION - THE WILL
INCORPORATION
RADIATION

Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme
Pestalozzi

I would like to mention one thing. After the first improvisation of "Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme," I said that it was good and that it was good from the point of view of the school, but I did not mention that from the point of view of the imaginary audience it was dull. It was not yet a performance. You must never confuse these two things: from the point of view of the school does not mean from the point of view of the audience. The point of view of the audience is not at all connected with the Method, with technique, and such things. Therefore I repeat that the improvisation was good from the point of view of the school, but not from the point of view of the audience. On this last day of the term I should like to review a series of exercises to remember each idea.

IMAGINATION - THE WILL:

The actor's being is like a room with many doors leading into it and out of it. The actor's nature has many locks and keys which don't allow even the air to come through. We must open these doors. We must throw away the locks and keys. The doors must be open forever, and fresh air must blow through the room. You must be able to enter the room at any time you like. You must do this to develop your talent - there is nothing to develop, of course, because the talent is there in each human being. Each human being is a genius, but we must open the doors which stop all the genius ability which lives in

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everybody. For this purpose we have our school and our training.

One of the doors which is locked and rusty is the imagination. We must open this door. That means we must awaken our activity by creating living pictures. By creating these living pictures we will be able to penetrate into their inner life. This can be done only by the strengthening of our own will. Our creative imagination must be the result of the strengthening of our will. You must make this effort to see, to be able to imagine, in order to open this rusty door.

Imagine that you are drinking tea. With your right hand you pick up the cup, drink from it, and then replace the cup on the saucer. Try to repeat this several times. It may be uninteresting, but exercises for the imagination must be uninteresting - then you will awaken your will. If the exercise is attractive and takes you by its interest, then you are taken and nothing more. Penetrate into the psychology of this exercise, into the inner life, and don't think that there is no inner life even in such a simple exercise. Penetrate and you will find it. When you are doing the exercise in the right way, you will find that it will result in your being interested in the image you are creating. This interest in the exercise is a sign that you are doing it in the right way.

Question: Is it wrong to let your imagination carry you on to the point where you explore the texture of the object, its weight,

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its being, etc.

Answer: No, this is part of the exercise - elaboration.

Question: Is it wrong for me to feel sick at the thought of drinking the tea because I have just finished actually drinking tea?

Answer: There are two sources of creative imagination. One source is really creative, and the other is suggested by our physical process. We must stop the one and appeal to the other.

Question: Is it better to see yourself in your imagination as you actually are, or to see your image of yourself in front of you?

Answer: Both are right, because you are not really drinking tea - you are imagining that you are. In your imagination you must lift your hand, but you don't actually do this. In your imagination you can be everywhere at the same time. Therefore, if you imagine yourself sitting here - if you imagine, not if you are really sitting here - then you will see yourself from here, from there, from everywhere at the same time. But at the moment you realize that you are not imagining, but only sitting here, then it is a different thing.

If you are going to prepare a part, you will experience many things which will answer this question. For example, let us say that you are imagining your character, and you see it from the last row of the theatre. The next moment you see it on the stage. The next moment you are sitting in your wardrobe

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imagining it from there. The next moment you are sitting as your old aunt in the audience and seeing it with her eyes. All this is right. It is only wrong at the moment when you feel some influence reacting on your own physical body. When the imagination influences the nerves and body this way, it is hysteria. During our exercises and efforts you will be able to see that many things are allowed, but you must discover those which are wrong.

Repeat the tea drinking exercise with the following condition: you must increase your will by imagining the whole process of taking the cup, sipping the tea, and putting it down. Now see the whole process backwards, as in a film, but with all details without any jumps. This must be a creative activity. Don't do it physically. Now imagine a more difficult thing: a horse going backwards. You will discover that you have never noticed how things go normally, let alone how they are when they are reversed.

In doing this second exercise you will see how important it is, when working with the real imagination, to awaken the real will power. We will never develop our imaginations by doing these exercises easily. We will only develop our imaginations by each day making a greater effort and never becoming satisfied with what we have reached. In making such efforts we will develop our imaginations. The third exercise will show you how difficult this is.

Imagine two different things: a tree and a cat. Take the image of the tree and without breaking it or jumping from one point to another, rebuild it so that gradually the tree becomes the cat. In order to do such exercises, we need a developed concentration, and, on the other hand, in these exercises we develop our concentration. Therefore, we may consider concentration and imagination as one thing.

INCORPORATION:

The next step is incorporation. This is again one of the doors which must be opened to lead to the freedom of our creative activity, because the actor's nature is such that it requires that he make all of his work external. Therefore, exercises in incorporation are so necessary. We must see and imagine the inner life and the outer appearance of the character, but first the inner life. Incorporation goes along the line of our actor's nature.

Imagine yourself sitting as you are, and then imagine yourself getting up. Do it in your imagination, and then incorporate it with the condition that during the incorporation you must be very aware of what you are doing. You must be aware that you are incorporating what you have seen. Unless you are aware of this, the exercise is without value. Of course, we incorporate things in our ordinary life all day long, but this does not develop our ability to incorporate. We must be absolutely aware of what we are doing, and then the rusty door will

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open. Imagine yourselves getting up with the feeling it is beautiful to get up and stretch your limbs. This feeling of pleasure is the inner life which I want you to see and then incorporate.

You must understand the following thing: everything in our profession and in our theatre life depends upon from which point of view we look at it or do it. Why is one gardener good and the other bad? The powers of the earth and air are the same - it depends upon the point of view the gardener has. The same is true of our profession. If we think that to act on the stage is nothing more than to act, we are bad gardeners and will create only weak plants. But if we take the problem more professionally, the same thing will not only occur to us as different things, but it will be the same for our audience, and they will be quite astonished. The same part will become quite different.

If we will grow accustomed to considering our simple exercises as wonders, we will get from them much more than if we consider them something dull and ordinary. We rob ourselves of a certain power. We reject something which is very necessary for our creative work. We must do our simplest exercises with love and with care. I am going to exercise with love and with care. For instance, I can imagine a little grey stone. It can become very necessary, very precious to me if I concentrate on it with appreciation for this little, dull thing.

You may ask why must we do such uninteresting, dull

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things? Because only in this way are we [as gardeners] able to create our exhibition plants. This approach to our exercises makes in time the master or the craftsman. The master is able to see and create things which become unusual and astonishing because the master hand has touched them - while beautiful things in the hands of a craftsman may become dull. For instance, in schools where Shakespeare is fed in the wrong way, children lose the beauty of Shakespeare, perhaps for their whole lives.

I remember a famous teacher, Pestalozzi, in Switzerland. He was a genius as a teacher. But what has he done with his boys and girls? Every stupid thing in the world was beautiful for these children. He was only a genius. He had no method, but he was full of temperament. It was something which came from heaven to him without method, only instinct and love for the children. And he has done the right things in the wrong way. For instance, he would sit in the class and shout, "Children, the flies, the air, the sky, the flowers!!" With the result that the children loved all these things with a great love. This example illustrates that everything can be taken as precious, and then it will remain always at the disposal of our creative spirit. Therefore, forget that our exercises are dull, and do them with this feeling of "flies and skies." If we are able to shout "flies and skies" in our profession, this is our creative spirit.

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RADIATION:

Consider from this point of view the next thing which is radiation. This is a quite natural continuation of the ability to concentrate on something; and with the ability of concentration to create some image and then to satisfy our own natural desire to show it to the world and by incorporating it by means of the outer appearance, we feel it is not enough and that we must radiate. This is a natural and necessary sequence, and it lies in our nature organically. Therefore, in forming our Method I have done nothing to influence or to inject anything into it. It lies in our creative spirit, and the whole Method is none other than one to help you to open the doors.

There are many methods for developing the actor which are unnatural and which not only do not develop our nature but constrict and distort it. In our Method there is nothing of this. Therefore, radiation is our more or less subconscious desire - each actor wants to radiate just as each person who loves wants to radiate. Love is a tremendous radiation, and when it is fulfilled to the last degree, it becomes a sacrifice - to give to such an extent that it is the sacrificing of one's whole being. The same is true of art. Art is not possible without love. If I hate my profession or my partners or my audience, then what am I? I must love my profession and everything in it, even

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the smallest exercise. I must love my audience, my part, and everything which is in connection with it. Then I will be giving out in the finest way - which we call radiation; and by being able to radiate more and more, I come to the highest ideal of sacrifice.

Exercise for radiation:

You must radiate an atmosphere - take it as a new exercise with the feeling of doing it for the first time, then you will get much from it - an atmosphere of expectation. Try to radiate the atmosphere of expectation of something very gorgeous. Now try to radiate it and at the same time think about love as far as it is known to you. It is known to each of us to a certain extent. Love - radiation - some idea about sacrifice. Put them together, and they will give some fruits in time.