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1 Introduction

2 Notes on myself

2.1 Contrariness

2.2 Cripples

2.3 A Psychotic Girl

Teacher picks a flower from the field, notes to girl that the flower is beautiful. Girl says that all the flowers are beautiful, teacher says the picked one is especially so. Girl is incensed. That the teacher would attempt to enforce categorization/selection is abusing their power to distort students' perceptions.

2.4 'Education' as a Substance

2.5 Growing Up

2.6 Emotion

2.7 Intelligence

In one moment I knew that the valuing of men by their intelligence is crazy, that the peasants watching the night sky might feel more than I feel, that the man who dances might be superior to myself—word-bound and unable to dance. From then on I noticed how warped many people of great intelligence are, and I began to value people for their actions, rather than their thoughts.

2.8 Anthony Stirling

The implication of Stirling's attitude was that the student should never experience failure. The teacher's skill lay in presenting experiences in such a way that the student was bound to succeed.

2.9 Being a Teacher

Reluctant/withdrawn students.

One day I took my typewriter and my art books into the class, and said I'd type out anything they wanted me to write about the pictures. As an afterthought, I said I'd also type out their dreams—and suddenly they were actually wanting to write. I typed out everything exactly as they wrote it, including the spelling mistakes, until they caught me. Typing out spelling mistakes was a weird idea in the early fifties (and probably now)—but it worked. The pressure to get things right was coming from the children, not the teacher

2.10 The Royal Court Theatre

When I considered the difference between myself, and other people, I thought of myself as a late developer. Most people lose their talent at puberty. I lost mine in my early twenties. I began to think of children not as immature adults, but of adults as atrophied children. But when I said this to educationalists, they became angry.

2.11 Writers' Group

2.12 The Royal Court Theatre Studio

2.13 Getting the Right Relationship

- The first thing I do when I meet a group of new students is (probably) to sit on the floor. I play low status, and I'll explain that if the students fail they're to blame *me*. Then they laugh, and relax, and I explain that really it's *obvious* that they should blame me, since I'm supposed to be the expert; and if I give them the wrong material, they'll fail; and if I give them the right material, then they'll succeed. I play low status physically but my actual status is going up, since only a very confident and experienced person would put the blame for failure on himself. At this point they almost certainly start sliding off their chairs, because they don't want to be higher than me. I have already changed the group profoundly, because failure is suddenly not so frightening any more. They'll want to test me, of course; but I really will apologise to them when they fail, and ask them to be patient with me, and explain that I'm not perfect. My methods are very effective, and other things being equal, most students will succeed, but they won't be trying to win any more. The normal teacher-student relationship is dissolved.
- 'progressive desensitization' of stage fright/performance anxiety

3 Status

3.1 The See-Saw

- Normally we are 'forbidden' to see status transactions except when there's a conflict. In reality status transactions continue all the time. In the park we'll notice the ducks squabbling, but not how carefully they keep their distances when they are not.
- In formal group photographs it's normal to see people guarding their status. You get quite different effects when people don't know they're being photographed.
- the 'see-saw' principle: "I go up and you go down."

3.2 Comedy and Tragedy

- When a very high-status person is wiped out, everyone feels pleasure as they experience the feeling of moving up a step.
 - > he must never look as if he could accept a position lower in the pecking order. He has to be *ejected* from it.
- Tragedy is obviously related to sacrifice. Two things strike me about reports of sacrifices: one is that the crowd get more and more tense, and then are relaxed and happy at the moment of death; the other is that the victim is *raised* in status before being sacrificed.

3.3 Teaching Status

- Status is played to anything, objects as well as people. If you enter an empty waiting-room you can play high or low status to the furniture. A king may play low status to a subject, but not to his palace.
- Non-defence is exploited by the wolf who exposes his neck and underbelly to a dominant wolf as a way of ending a losing battle.

3.4 Insults

3.5 Status Specialists

3.6 Space

- High-status players (like high-status seagulls) will allow their space to flow *into* other people. Low-status players will avoid letting their space flow into other people. Kneeling, bowing and prostrating oneself are all ritualised low-status ways of shutting off your space. If we wish to humiliate and degrade a low-status person we attack him while refusing to let him switch his space off.
- Every movement of a body modifies its space.
- Imagine that two strangers are approaching each other along an empty street. It's straight, hundreds of yards long and with wide pavements. Both strangers are walking at an even pace, and at some point one of them will have to move aside in order to pass. You can see this decision being made a hundred yards or more before it actually 'needs' to be. In my view the two people scan each other for signs of status, and then the lower one moves aside.

3.7 Master-Servant

- a master-servant scene is one in which both parties act as if all the space belonged to the master.
- 'keeping the servant on the hop'. In this game the master objects to everything the servant is, or says, or does. The servant accepts the master's statement, and then deflects it.
- Another game involves the servant getting himself into trouble.
 - > There is a *lazzi* that I use in teaching this game. It's a particular pattern of master-servant dialogue in which the servant is so guilty that he overconfesses. I got it from Moliere.
- I introduce pecking orders as clown games, oversimplifying the procedures, and creating complex absurdities which 'cartoon' real life. Orders and blame are passed one way along the hierarchy, excuses and problems are passed the other way. So far as possible each person is to interact with the one next to him in rank.
- Desmond Morris, in *The Human Zoo*, gives 'ten golden rules' for people who are Number Ones. He says, "They apply to all leaders, from baboons to modern presidents and prime ministers." They are:
 1. You must clearly display the trappings, postures, and gestures of dominance
 2. In moments of active rivalry you must threaten your subordinates aggressively.
 3. In moments of physical challenge you (or one of your delegates) must be able forcibly to overpower your subordinates.
 4. If a challenge involves brain rather than brawn you must be able to outwit your subordinates.
 5. You must suppress squabbles that break out between your subordinates.
 6. You must reward your immediate subordinates by permitting them to enjoy the benefits of their high ranks.
 7. You must protect the weaker members of the group from undue persecution.
 8. You must make decisions concerning the social activities of your group.
 9. You must reassure your extreme subordinates from time to time.
 10. You must take the initiative in repelling threats or attacks arising from outside your group.

3.8 Maximum Status Gaps

3.9 Text

4 Spontaneity

4.1

- You have to be a very stubborn person to remain an artist in this culture. It's easy to play the role of 'artist', but to actually create something means going against one's education.
- Many teachers think of children as immature adults. It might lead to better and more 'respectful' teaching, if we thought of adults as atrophied children. Many 'well adjusted' adults are bitter, uncreative, frightened, unimaginative, and rather hostile people. Instead of assuming they were born that way, or that that's what being an adult entails, we might consider them as people damaged by their education and upbringing.

4.2

- Once we believe that art is self-expression, then the individual can be criticised not only for his skill or lack of skill, but simply for being what he is.
- People may seem uncreative, but they'll be extremely ingenious at rationalising the things they do.

4.3

4.3.1 Psychotic Thought

- Most people I meet are secretly convinced that they're a little crazier than the average person. People understand the energy necessary to maintain their own shields, but not the energy expended by other people. They understand that their own sanity is a performance, but when confronted by other people they confuse the person with the role.

4.3.2 Obscenity

- Most people's idea of what is or isn't obscene *varies*. In some cultures certain times are set aside when the normal values are reversed—the 'Lord of Misrule', Zuni clowning, many carnivals—and something similar happens even in this culture, or so I'm told, at office parties for example. People's tolerance of obscenity varies according to the group they're with, or the particular circumstances (*pas devant les enfants*). People can laugh at jokes told at a party that they wouldn't find funny on a more formal occasion. It seems unfortunate to me that the classroom is often considered a 'formal' area in this sense.
- The first school I taught at had one woman teacher. When she went out shopping at lunchtime, the men pulled their chairs round and told dirty stories non-stop. Down in the playground, as usual, the children were swapping similar stories, or writing 'shit' or 'fuck' on the walls, always correctly spelt; yet the staff considered the children 'dirty little devils', and punished them for saying things which were far milder than things the teachers would say, and enjoy laughing at.

4.3.3 Originality

Striving after originality takes you far away from your true self, and makes your work mediocre.

4.4

4.5

Many teachers get improvisers to work in conflict because conflict is interesting but we don't actually need to teach competitive behaviour; the students will already be expert at it, and it's important that don't exploit the *actors'* conflicts. Even in what seems to be a tremendous argument, the actors should still be *co-operating*, and coolly developing the action. The improviser has to understand that his first skill lies in releasing his partner's imagination. What happens in my classes, if the actors stay with me long enough, is that they learn how their 'normal' procedures destroy other people's talent. Then, one day they have a flash of *satori*—they suddenly understand that all the weapons they were using against other people they also use inwardly, against themselves.

4.5.1 'Working' Someone

4.5.2 Blocking and Accepting

- I call anything an actor does an 'offer'. Each offer can either be accepted, or blocked.
 - > A problem for the improviser is that the audience are likely to reward blocking at the moment it first appears.
 - > 'Your name Smith?'
 - > 'No!'
 - > (*Laughter.*)
 - > They laugh because they enjoy seeing the actors frustrated, just as they'll laugh if the actors start to joke. Jokey TV or radio programmes usually stop for a song, or some animation, every few minutes. The improviser, who is committed to performing for longer periods, gags or blocks at his peril, although the immediacy of the audience's laughter is likely to condition him to do just this. Once the performers have been lured into gagging or blocking, the audience is already on the way towards irritation and boredom. More than laughter they want *action*.
- Interesting offer: creates knowledge of some situation which remains to be resolved (contrast: dull offer)
- Scenes spontaneously generate themselves if both actors offer and accept alternately.
- Good improvisers seem telepathic; everything looks prearranged. This is because they accept all offers made—which is something no 'normal' person would do. Also they may accept offers which weren't really intended. I tell my actors never to think up an offer, but instead to assume that one has already been made. Groucho Marx understood this: a contestant at his quiz game 'froze' so he took the man's pulse and said, "Either this man's dead or my watch has stopped."
- Once you learn to accept offers, then accidents can no longer interrupt the action. When someone's chair collapsed Stanislavsky berated him for not continuing, for not apologising to the character whose house he was in. This attitude makes for something really amazing in the theatre. The actor who will accept anything that happens seems supernatural; it's the most marvellous thing about improvisation: you are suddenly in contact with people who are unbounded, whose imagination seems to function without limit.
- These 'offer-block-accept' games have a use quite apart from actor training. People with dull lives often think that their lives are dull by chance. In reality everyone chooses more or less what kind of events will happen to them by their conscious patterns of blocking and yielding. A student objected to this view by saying, "But you don't choose your life. Sometimes you are at the mercy of people who push you around." I said, "Do you avoid such people?" "Oh!" she said, "I see what you mean."

4.6

Specific games

4.6.1 'Two Places'

4.6.2 'Presents'

4.6.3 'Blind Offers'

4.6.4 'It's Tuesday'

4.6.5 'Yes, But...'

4.6.6 Verse

5 Narrative Skills