



**John Heilpern. 1999.**

**Conference of the Birds: the story of Peter Brook in Africa.**

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Excerpt referencing Moshe Feldenkrais.

First thing in the morning Brook put the actors back to work - six hours of exercises immediately after breakfast ... In some ways Brook is a disciple of the great Russian director and theorist Stanislavsky. And perhaps in one way in particular. 'Inspiration is born of hard work', wrote Stanislavsky. 'It is not the other way around.'

Musical work, sound, movement, ancient Greek and Japanese, new African songs, Tai Chi, acrobatics, bodies, jaws, throats, tongues, exercises in rhythm and timing, balance, awareness, concentration - everything was worked on for many hours as Brook sat cross-legged on the edge of the carpet, watching. ...

One of the exercises for the body involved lying on your back as you worked through a series of horny hip movements. Brook usually joined in, and I followed him. As a general rule he told me to try everything he did. ... I found that I tended to lose concentration during the hip exercises. It could get embarrassing. I had to think of stainless steel pocket calculators. I don't think Brook would have approved. And Moshe Feldenkrais.

Moshe Feldenkrais invented the movements and teaches the group in Paris. A silver-haired Israeli with a spectacularly rich career, he was a leading physicist in England during the war, a former judo champion of France, who evolved a world famous science of body movements. For a while he was influenced by the famous cult figure, F. Matthias Alexander, founder of the Alexander Technique of body awareness, founder of the Alexander Technique of body awareness and better health that influenced Bernard Shaw and Aldous Huxley. Feldenkrais now uses his own system of therapy - General Dayan was among his pupils and orchestral conductors have studied under him, as well as many deprived people in America. Basically he works to increase awareness of the natural function of every part of the body. A transformed understanding will liberate the muscles to the point where the body can move with minimum effort and maximum efficiency. The ultimate aim is the transformed state of what Feldenkrais calls a 'potent state of mind and body'.

It's arduous work and it comes through practice - just as the ethereal Tai Chi movements raise both mental and bodily power through constant demanding repetition. But Feldenkrais does not work to a system, which is why Brook finds him so valuable. Brook does not believe in any system or school. He wants to liberate the actor from methods. For any one method would clash with the other. Or create an imbalance, overdeveloping one skill at the expense of the rest. In the same way the voice isn't trained through traditional techniques, but song. Stamina isn't developed through physical exercise, but the more creative Tai Chi movements. Everything Brook does links eventually. Everything searches for unity. Everything is used to create.

But there's danger involved. The organic actor takes years and years to develop. The fully creative actor - creating nothing from nothing as a painter fills a blank canvas - I don't think the fully creative actor actually exists. It's why Brook believes it's a crucial area to work on. Why not try? But you need the patience of Job. Brook kept telling me to be patient.