

4 June 1979

## READING 4

## OBSERVATION OF ATTENTION

## PART 1

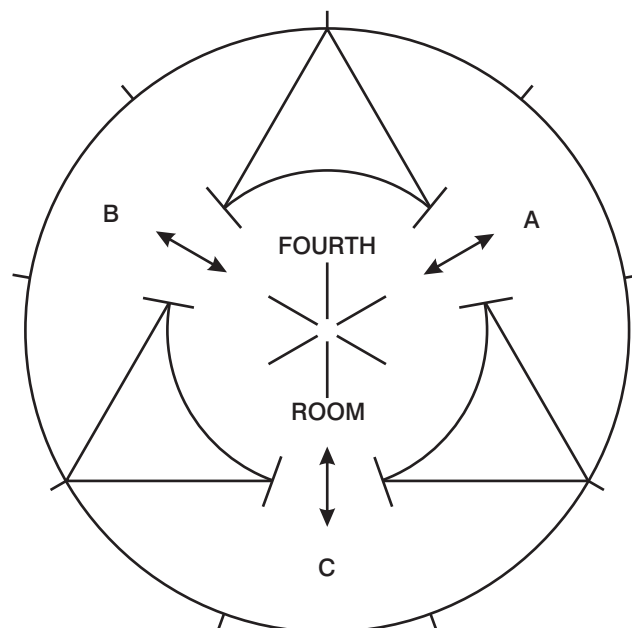
Reading 2 quoted a remark by Ingrid Benning made at Dr. Connell's group on 10th May which related 'attention to a balance between the two sides of the mind – the inner and the outer'. It is of great practical value to re-examine Mr. Ouspensky's teaching on attention in the light of this and other discoveries not available to ordinary people in his day.

Let us start with what we already know – for example, 'every schoolboy knows that unless he attends he will not remember'. We know too that if the subject is dull, attention is difficult to maintain, but that some emotional element like interest or the thrills of competition or danger immediately sharpens all three – attention, memory and efficiency. Each of us has a vast fund of experience in any familiar work on which to draw, as actor Tony Anholt showed at that same meeting:

If the actor doesn't pay attention, the performance will be only mechanical. But if he is using his memory (because having rehearsed the whole play, when playing a particular moment he knows the future as well) with the right awareness and knowing his aim, he is likely to give a good performance. And presumably this is so in life.

No, we *don't* know the future, and an actor must act that way.

So here we have another application of our symbol of the triangle within a circle<sup>†</sup> (use it or not as you prefer!) Along the right side (A) of the triangle lie all those mechanical skills which, once learnt, proceed by themselves without any attention; along the left side (B) the inner, emotional, element which comes from enjoyment or interest; and along the base (C) of the triangle such intellectual components as awareness, choice and control – cart, horse and driver.



Anholt's observation also fits beautifully into Mr. Ouspensky's description (5th Psychological Lecture) of the division of any of our major functions into 3 parts – mechanical, emotional and voluntary ('intellectual').

<sup>†</sup> The Symbol, which was not printed in the original paper is included here for clarity.

This is the chief criterion in studying the levels of any function. If we take any function from the point of view of attention we shall know at once which part is in use. Without attention, or with attention wandering we are in the *mechanical* part; with the attention aroused and kept on the subject by interest or absorption, we are in the *emotional* part; with the attention controlled and held on the subject by purpose or will, we are in the *voluntary* part.

(adapted from *Psychological Lectures*, P.D.O.)

Though there are myriads of different kinds and degrees of skill as evidence of partial or imperfect attention; real attention demands the right balance and order of all these three, and certain skills require no less than this.

(Pause to make sure we have got this right!)

## PART 2

This is a brief statement of the bare bones of the subject to which Mr. Ouspensky gave life by taking each of our major functions in turn. We have started with the 'art of the actor' which belongs to what Mr. Ouspensky called the 'moving centre', of which this was one of his descriptions:

In the moving centre the *mechanical* part is automatic. All skills that have been learned (and a few simple external reflexes and aptitudes that are inborn) belong to it, as well as the capacity for *imitation* which plays such a big part in life.

The *emotional* part of the moving centre is connected chiefly with the pleasure of movement. Love of sport and of games should normally belong to this part (but it spills over into other centres, especially in the 'spectator sports').

The higher ('voluntary' part) of the moving centre is a very important and a very interesting instrument. Everyone who has ever done *well* any physical work, whatever it may have been, knows that every skill needs many *inventions*. One has to *invent* one's own small methods for any but the simplest things one does. These inventions are the work of the higher part of the moving centre and many other inventions (scientific, technological) and artistic skills also need this part. The power of imitating *at will* the voice, intonation and gestures of other people, *such as actors possess*, also belongs to the higher part of the moving centre; but when this power is highly developed, it works along with the higher part of the emotional centre.

(*ibid*)

It would be repaying now to re-examine Anholt's first-hand observation. Then prepare to continue the subject next week by bringing first-hand observations of one's own from 'any physical work one does well'. And the reason for all this emphasis on 'observation' is that it is a good way of training the higher part of any function to act as a 'silent observer' and to play its part *without interfering* either with the inner (emotional) component (B) or the outward performance of a sequence of skilled actions (A).

There are some immediate questions we need to answer. For instance, was Ingrid Benning right when she said: 'The main thing is balancing the inner and the outer. We are not trained to do this; our education is geared to using just one side?' Also Dr. Dale Beckett's question last week: 'Can good impulses be seen if the observer is not present?'

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