

Michael Chekhov

December 8, 1938

REHEARSAL FOR FINAL PERFORMANCE IN THEATRE  
SPANISH EVENING  
Dartington Hall

(Rough notes taken during a rehearsal which was for the purpose of exploring ways and means for presenting the performance to the audience.)

Michael Chekhov's speech, given after L. K. Elmhirst's speech. Terence Morgan, Michael Chekhov, and Henry Lyon Young on stage.

Michael Chekhov: Good evening. Before I begin, I have the honor of introducing to you Henry Lyon Young, the author of this play, who collaborates with us, and Terence Morgan who is the assistant director for this play. And I will present to you the whole group. (Students enter).

We will take some separate scenes, and will try to demonstrate to you one of the possible approaches to a rehearsal. This approach will be what we call "taking a ground upon which to rehearse." We mean by this that the "ground" is a certain thing which leads the rehearsal. We try to avoid rehearsing as such - accidental rehearsing we deny - therefore one of our approaches is that each time we rehearse even the smallest scene, we have to be led by something, and this is what we call a "ground."

Now we will take the first scene, which is the love scene between Pierrot, Flaminia and Scaramouche, with the help of the Carpenter. This scene, like those that will follow, is an attempt made by a group of Commedia dell'Arte actors. The Manager, who is

M. Chekhov

December 8, 1938

psychologically always sitting on a chair in the corner, is physically represented by the author himself.

Let us begin. I would suggest that we take as a ground or a leading impulse, the atmosphere which we have to awaken through our imagination. I would suggest that you read your text, so that it will give you the opportunity to imagine all these characters, and their business, in the atmosphere which envelopes the whole scene. The atmosphere is night, moonlight, love and romance. Please read. Repeat, but more in the atmosphere. Imagine yourself as Pierrot doing this scene. Go on. Imagine it in the atmosphere of romance. Imagine yourself and each other. Envelope it more in the atmosphere.

Everyone must help by creating the atmosphere, and spreading it over the stage and keeping it. Sometimes the lights and settings help the atmosphere very much. I would suggest this time that we use certain lighting effects to help the atmosphere. Anna, please arrange something which will remind us of moonlight. Be truthful; don't exaggerate. Increase the atmosphere; it will not come during the performance if you do not exercise it in the rehearsal. Enter in staccato, and disappear legato.

We have shown you one ground, and now we will try to do another scene on a different ground. Terence, what scene have you chosen?

Terence Morgan: I have chosen the love scene between Angelica, Teresa, the Barber and the Sacristan. Angela is married

M. Chekhov

December 8, 1938

to an old man and she has a love affair every time he goes away.

As we do not have the actor for the husband, we will ask Mr. Young to read the husband's lines. I am going to give you another ground which must lead you during the rehearsal and inspire you as it were. For Angelica and Teresa the ground will be that of the quality of insatiable desire, and for Reponce, the Sacristan, we will give another ground which is called the psychological gesture.

The psychological gesture is a gesture which can be produced physically, but it is actually a psychological movement or a movement of the psychology - the psychology of the human being; or again we may say the psychology expressed in the form of a physical gesture. As the character is modest and shy, I would suggest you take the gesture of "enclosing." Your arms, hands and legs enclose themselves. When you do the gesture several times you will awaken the psychology. On these two different grounds we will do the scene.

Terence: The loving wife day-dreams of love.

Michael Chekhov: Now I think we should show another scene, with another ground. This is a soliloquy which takes place in the second part of the play. The playwright will explain.

Henry Young: The curtain goes up on the second act. The actors come back from the tavern slightly drunk. Angelica comes back late and comes on stage in a hurry, and proceeds to act for the Manager.

Michael Chekhov: This time I will give the ground, which we call "to take the objective." This means was invented by Stanislavsky, and we use it in our Method. To take the objective means

M. Chekhov

December 8, 1938

to have an aim which is the character's main desire at the moment, or for the scene, or for the whole play. It depends. Being able to have this main aim, we, as actors, have a real basis during the rehearsal on which we put all our actions and emotions.

The objective for this particular character is, "I want to live." On the basis of this main desire, Angela must put all her efforts to create the character. For Teresa I will give another objective, which is much smaller than the other, but it will show that we can take the objective in the bigger or smaller scale. One of these objectives embraces the whole character, but the other embraces only the given situation, "I want the people around me to remain asleep." Do the scene on the basis of these objectives.

We will leave this ground, and take another means of rehearsing which we use sometimes, and which we call "flying over the play." This time I will try to combine two means; flying over the play, and another ground which is the style of the play. Try to imagine the style of the play. Try to imagine the style; everything light, easy, all the characters are like children, with butterfly, sparkling qualities.