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Rehearsal Protocols for *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare at the Second Moscow Art Theatre¹

Edited and Introduced by Andrei Kirillov and Franc Chamberlain

Introduction

There are few documents available that address the details of the day-to-day practice of what Michael Chekhov called his ‘new technique of acting’ in the production process and this is, perhaps, particularly true of the work developed during the 1920s prior to his exile from Russia in 1928. ‘Rehearsal Protocols for *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare’, of which extended extracts are published here for the first time in English, is one such documentary source and provides valuable information on the incorporation, at an early stage of their development, of Chekhov’s new acting exercises into the rehearsal process of *Hamlet* at the Second Moscow Art Theatre (MAT2).

The thirty-two surviving protocols, which consist of shorthand notes taken by Viktor Gromov in his role as secretary to the board of directors, cover the early stages of the *Hamlet* rehearsals, from 2nd October to 11th November 1923. In English, the complete protocols run to over 26,000 words and had to be reduced significantly by the editors for publication; just over half of the original text is included here. It was a difficult task to select which notes to keep and which to cut and whatever we decided it was inevitable that something important was going to be left out and that some distortion would result. For example, throughout the protocols, there are discussions and directions for each of the major roles and groups of characters. If we chose to remove an equal amount of material on each character, it would have meant losing much, if not most, of the detailed throughline for each. On the other hand, significantly reducing the exploration of some characters and not others would make it appear as if Chekhov and his colleagues didn’t give adequate attention to these other characters at the beginning as well as appearing to emphasize the individual over the ensemble. In the end, we opted for the second path with the result that the investigation of the roles of Laertes and Polonius, in particular, has been mostly edited out. This is a problem we faced in all aspects of the protocols. We have, as another example, edited the conversations recorded between actors and directors in such a manner that Chekhov’s voice is given slightly more emphasis but have attempted to keep at least some of the exchanges so that it is possible to get a sense of the collaborative dimension of the process. MAT2 was under the leadership of Chekhov, so it is, perhaps, not inappropriate to give more weight to his words but the risk is that we emphasize Chekhov’s speaking over his listening, his directing over his participating in discussion. On the other hand, to reduce Chekhov’s words would risk losing some of the detail of the way in which he was presenting and openly reflecting on his technique in the early stages of development.

¹ The following is an edited and revised version of a literal translation by Nicky Brown, commissioned specially for *TDPT*. The protocols are published in Mikhail Chekhov: *Literaturnoe nasledie*: V 2-h

Also, because the focus of this journal is on training, we have tried to keep as many of the practical exercises in the document as possible, but a simple description of an exercise doesn't provide an adequate contextualization in terms of the purpose of the exercise in the specific rehearsal, its relevance to the aims of the production in general, or in its place within a theory and technique of acting. Therefore we have also attempted to include as much as possible of the discussion that has a bearing on the exercises and the philosophy informing them.

At times the exercise notes are very brief. It is as if they are just there as *aides mémoire* for anyone involved who would immediately recognize the exercise from the name or the very brief description. The note-taker himself, Gromov, had been a student of Chekhov's in his personal studio and also played the Second Gravedigger in this production of *Hamlet* and so was intimately involved in the practice and not a detached observer making laboratory notes so that others could replicate the experiment. An example is the opening of the seventh protocol which opens with the words: 'The "Throwing Balls" exercise is performed'. This is the first time in the protocols that any exercise with balls has been mentioned and there is no further description at this point in the text. Reference to throwing balls recurs throughout the later protocols and includes further instructions, but these instructions include explicit variations and developments but leave the original instructions hidden. It's 'the' throwing balls exercise, a way of expressing it that suggests that its form and rules are common knowledge. Chekhov does, in *The Path of the Actor*, state: "One of the first exercises in the rehearsals for *Hamlet* involved *balls*" which, whilst it doesn't add anything to the information in the seventh protocol it doesn't present any contradiction. But then he adds:

We would silently throw balls to one another, investing our movements with the artistic content of our roles. The text of the play was read to us slowly and loudly, and we embodied it by throwing balls to one another.

(Chekhov, 2005 p.107)

This is not something that is explicit in the protocols where there is no reference to the actors throwing the balls to each other whilst the text was being read aloud by other members of the company. Some iterations of the exercise would seem to exclude this dimension, for example, the second mention of the action, in the eighth protocol, is: 'The "Throwing Balls" exercise is performed to music'. It is possible that the text was read aloud over the music, but it would seem unlikely at this early stage in the process. Perhaps the exercise as Chekhov describes it in *The Path of the Actor*, is what is meant by "Throwing Balls" the first time it is mentioned in the protocols, but we can't be sure. There is no reason to doubt Chekhov's description, but we are left with the fact that either the exercise is inadequately presented in the protocols or that the exercise in this format was only used outside of the period they document. After all, the production did not open until 20th November 1924, over a year after the rehearsal documented by the last surviving protocol. What we are left with, though, is the general idea of an exercise in multiple variations without a clear sense of the developmental sequence in which it was deployed. Was there a point in the rehearsals did the actors stop using variations of "Throwing Balls", or did they continue to use it as a way to: "sense the deep connection of movement with the words [...] and with the emotions" (Chekhov, 2005 p.107) even throughout the production run before going onstage?

Whilst the protocols raise as many questions as they answer about the precise details of the exercises and provide impulses for future research and study, it is important not to get lost in the details and to keep in mind the place of this document in the general context of Michael Chekhov's development of his technique.

The main value of the protocols consists, not so much in the resulting production nor even in Chekhov's outstanding performance as Hamlet, but in the fact that, for the first time, Chekhov systematically formulated the general principles of his new 'method of imitating the image'. During the rehearsals of *Hamlet* he began to develop and master the 'new acting technique' with his colleagues and the whole rehearsal process, which included many exercises suggested by Chekhov, proceeded in accordance with these principles and techniques.

Michael Chekhov dedicated the greater part of his artistic life to the search for this technique, establishing its effectiveness, and passing it on to others, firstly in Russia and then, after his emigration in 1928, in Europe and America. From the early 1920s Chekhov considered this as his main work and even, to some extent, his mission as an artist. The main principles of Chekhov's original approach formed the basis of his famous book *To the Actor: On the Technique of Acting* published in USA, initially in Chekhov's own Russian-language version (1946) and then in its English-language variant (1953) which was done by Chekhov with the help of his American pupils and colleagues and was adapted for the perspective and needs of American actors.

Whilst there is a clear line from the work recorded in the protocols to the material presented in *To the Actor*, the document isn't important simply because it ultimately leads to the book. The process of discovering, applying, and testing the principles is equally important for an adequate comprehension and mastery of Chekhov's approach. From where and why do these principles appear? How do they appear and how do they work? What hinders and what assists their mastery? Answers for these and other such questions can help us to a better understanding of both the nature and spirit of Michael Chekhov's theatre method and its practical 'mechanisms' and 'tools'. Not separately but in their unity because only those 'nature' and 'spirit' provide specificity for the 'mechanisms' making them not simply 'gymnastics' or 'training' but an approach to *artistic acting*.

Konstantin Stanislavsky founded The First Studio of MAT in 1912 for the development and teaching of his own approach to acting which only began taking shape at that time. This system was based on provoking and using the personal feelings and sensations of the actor. "True" actors' feelings seemed to Stanislavsky to be not only the best tool to enliven 'stage reality', but also the highest aim of acting. Michael Chekhov soon became the best and beloved pupil of Stanislavsky on this path. Stanislavsky found some of the principles of his new approach in individual work with Chekhov, tracking some 'natural', spontaneous, impulses of his acting. Michael Chekhov's sensitive, perceptive, responsive personality was the 'material' which seemed to be the best for, and most amenable to, Stanislavsky's experiments and explorations. Chekhov considered Stanislavsky as his theatre 'guru' and his approach as the only universal theatre religion.

Unexpectedly for both, teacher and pupil, Chekhov's sensitivity, his emotional responsiveness and passion, soon appeared to be a major obstacle in his artistic work whilst, at the same time, indicating the limitations of Stanislavsky's teaching.

Increasing the tension of the inner contradictions of his characters – that ‘engine’ of theatrical action – and uncovering and sharpening his personal feelings and emotions – that ‘material’ for ‘true’ acting – Chekhov reached the climax of his poignant psychological crisis and had to leave theatre work for some time. In that period of his crisis (1917/18) Chekhov began his early efforts at theatre pedagogy (‘Chekhov Studio’ in Moscow, 1918-21) and for the first time got an opportunity to relate to acting ‘objectively’, from ‘outside’. After his crisis was resolved, a new actor-Chekhov entered the stage and revealed himself as a grotesque actor in his famous Khlestakov in Stanislavsky’s production of Gogol’s *The Inspector General* at the MAT in 1921. A year later, after Evgeny Vakhtangov’s death, Chekhov accepted the artistic leadership at the First Studio and led his colleagues, actors and recent pupils of Stanislavsky, in the quest for a new technique of acting. This new approach was to be an alternative to Stanislavsky’s primarily through the rejection of personal feelings and emotions as appropriate material for acting. Chekhov made a radical shift in reorientation of the actor from his personality onto the image of the character and embodiment of that image. It is why his method is known as the method of the imitation of the image. Rehearsals for *Hamlet* under Chekhov’s artistic leadership became the first practical step on this new way.

Another important event which gave Chekhov a strong impulse and direction in his artistic and spiritual search, was his meeting (and subsequent friendship and collaboration) with the great Russian poet and writer Andrey Bely. It was Bely who introduced Chekhov to the ideas of Rudolf Steiner and Anthroposophy. Steiner’s work gave Chekhov *sui generis* substantiation for the ‘ideal’ spiritual nature of the human being and of art. This burgeoning interest in Anthroposophy was a major factor in his choice to stage Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* as Spirit ‘actually’ acts there. For Chekhov the main conflict in the play is the fight between real and ideal, spiritual and earthly and that is why, during the rehearsals they only referred to the Ghost as the Spirit (*dukh*). Such a shift was very important for Chekhov’s concept of the play because he considered the Ghost to be the representative, the embodiment, of the spiritual world, Spirit itself. It was that spiritual world with which the ideal beliefs of Hamlet were connected. The entire path of Hamlet they considered as the path from the earthly to the spiritual. Hamlet was not only the main character but also the very centre which indicated the real meaning of all the significant motives in the play. Hamlet’s mission was to access Spirit and to provide its triumph over the earthly inwardly and outwardly. It is why Bely in his letters later described performance as a new *mystery*, the mystery of Hamlet. And speaking with the words of the directors of the production: ‘*Hamlet* is regarded as a tragedy of Humanity undergoing a cataclysm’. Although Chekhov was not officially listed as the director, in reality he was the production’s artistic leader, taking the most direct and active part in shaping the concept for the performance.

Gordon Craig’s concept for *Hamlet*, which he produced jointly with Stanislavsky in 1911 at the MAT, could be considered as another indirect source which influenced the production of MAT2’s choice of the play. Craig considered Hamlet as the ideal representative of humanity. Although MAT’s *Hamlet* appeared to be contradictory in its practical realization, Craig’s original concept was symbolic and monistic. Craig intended to show all the characters and events of the play as the realization of the inner vision of Hamlet. The main obstacle for the realization of Craig’s concept was the acting style of Stanislavsky’s MAT performers. They were too ‘real’, too ‘personal’, too psycho-naturalistic for the symbolic production. Unlike Craig,

Chekhov approached *Hamlet* primarily as an actor rather than as a director, and considered collective work as a quest for new means of acting, as a laboratory of a new acting technique. And these searching and pedagogic efforts were at least as important to him as the task of producing the play. To a great extent the production of *Hamlet* was the pretext for the development of the new technique of acting.

Work on *Hamlet* officially began on 12th April 1923 with a meeting of the performance's directors: Valentin Smyshlyaev, Vladimir Tatarinov and Alexander Cheban. All of them were close collaborators and artistic confederates of Chekhov in his theatre belief but not profound directors themselves. After Vakhtangov's death there was no director-leader of MAT2 and performances were often staged by a group of actors taking the role of directors. *Hamlet* became the first experience of such kind and was found by the majority of theatre reviewers as a contradictory and eclectic production although Chekhov's performance of Hamlet they recognized as an obvious triumph. It is necessary to mention that the artistic success of Chekhov did not reduce the ideological pressure on, rather the opposite, and *Hamlet* was the production after which Chekhov became an object of ideological attacks for his 'idealism', 'mysticism' and 'apology for individualism' from the critics of communist orientation.

The texts of the play had to be combined because no artistically satisfactory Russian translations of *Hamlet* existed at that time yet. The final version of the text was a compilation of three translations: of Andrey Kroneberg's (primarily) and Nikolay Polevoi's and Piotr Gnedich's (to a lesser degree). Throughout the version of the protocols presented here we have kept with translations of the words that were recorded and have resisted the temptation to replace them with Shakespeare's 'original'

Fourteen scenes remained in the new stage version of *Hamlet* and they were separated into three acts and drawn up in such a way that the action towards the finale would acquire the most impetus. The directors radically reduced the text of the tragedy, getting rid of everything that might have impeded the rapid, whirlwind development. Also the idea was to reveal Hamlet's tragic destiny not so much with the words but in its actual sweeping flow on stage. As a consequence of this aim, the majority of Hamlet's monologues were radically reduced.

The première of the Chekhov/MAT2 *Hamlet* took place on 20th November 1924. In the roles were: Michael Chekhov as Hamlet, Alexander Cheban as Claudius, Vera Solovyeva as Gertrude, Alexander Shakhalov as Polonius, Maria Durasova as Ophelia, Ivan Bersenev as Laertes, Serafim Azanchevsky as Horatio, Ippolit Novsky as Rosencrantz, Viktor Kliucharev as Guildenstern, Andrey Zhilinsky as First Player, Boris Afonin as Marcellus, Georgy Muzalevsky as Bernardo and Kuz'ma Yastrebitsky as Francisco.

Hamlet remained one Chekhov's favourite roles and he continued to explore it, both as an actor and as a director throughout his time in Europe. He regarded work on Shakespeare's tragedy 'as the first step towards bringing a new theatre into being' (2005 p.160). The following protocols mark the beginnings of that process.

The Protocols

PROTOCOL No.1

2 October 1923

Valentin Smyshlyaev: [...]The approach to *Hamlet* is a philosophical one: *Hamlet* is regarded as a tragedy of Humanity undergoing a cataclysm. The tragedy is, therefore, in three parts: (i) the presentiment and premonition of this cataclysm, (ii) the struggle with and the realisation of the mission received at the moment of this cataclysm, in other words at the moment of the encounter with the Spirit, and (iii) solace through death. [...]

Smyshlyaev speaks of the need for the production to be musical, talking of rhythms, melodies and musical incompleteness. In addition to this, the production should be monistic since it is the tragedy of Humanity and everything else is just the “circumstances of this tragedy”.

Michael Chekhov: The incompleteness referred to by Smyshlyaev should be understood thus: what we are intending to perform is so great that it is impossible to tell it “in full”. We should approach the play as though made up of hieroglyphs, of signs, and we must personally force our way up through these to eternity as Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko said². There is nothing commonplace in the play. During the encounter with the Spirit, for example, rather than just playing animal fear, one needs to play such a condition as if one has found oneself in hitherto unknown worlds with “nothing to seize onto”. In this sense, it really is necessary to “go out of one’s mind”. A new acting technique needs to be sought. In terms of acting, we are trained in those emotions which relate to the animal sphere. We now need to make it extend so that it is not us performing but, rather, forces higher than us which are performing through us, and we must selflessly yield to these forces. To accomplish this, it is necessary: (1) to be filled with the enchantment of this mystery, this incompleteness, and (2) to feel repugnance for the so-called *delicate performance*, since this kind of performance is wholly situated on an animal level and is unsuitable for *Hamlet*. We need to fill ourselves with *Hamlet* to such an extent that we are able to perform it without words. In order to do this, we need to approach *Hamlet* with a *spiritual logic*. A catharsis, a purification, is required of the actor, otherwise we will be unable to offer this purification to the audience. “Inspiration is a momentary insight into truth.”³ We have all the required elements within us, of course, they just need to be called to life.

Alexander Cheban: [...] *Hamlet* is a tragedy of a person that belongs in the spiritual realm. It is not the characters that are important in *Hamlet*, but the distances that are revealed beyond these characters. In order to perform it, *spontaneous aspirations* need to be taken as the basis for everything. So Hamlet himself is not an everyday person, for example, but rather the chosen one, a hero, a genius of a man. In order to play this

² It appears that Chekhov is referring to statements made by Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko on 18th April 1923 during a meeting with the board of directors. (Original Russian Editors’ note)

³ [Editors’ note] Chekhov is slightly mis-quoting here from the critic Vissarion Belinsky’s article of 1838 “*Hamlet*, drama by Shakespeare. Mochalov as Hamlet”. Pavel Mochalov – a famous Russian actor (1800-1848).

tragedy in the realm of the Spirit, certain secret hiding places within yourself need to be exposed. *Hamlet* is a *dynamic myth*, a *specific philosophy*. We are therefore talking about musicality, about music, because music places us into the realm of the Spirit more powerfully than anything else.

[...]

Vladimir Tatarinov: “Perception of the world through reason has come to an end and perception through intuition has begun.” To begin with, that should astound us. [...] Everybody understands on an intellectual plane, which is why loneliness sets in. This is even more so for Hamlet as he is unable to talk about his own new perception of the world. One is able to sing about it, or act or moan, but that person is unable to talk about it. It should shake us that the continuity has been broken, that, from a certain moment in a person’s life, it is as if a new being is standing behind him. [...]

Chekhov: It seems to me that everyone feels tormented when they are being born into a new world, into this new perception of the world. And if we sense the presence of this new being, we can no longer be as we are now.

Serafima Birman: I am worried that the acting will become lost in pure mysticism and philosophy. It is the actor, after all, who creates with his art those conditions in which *active dreams* can be made brought to life. This vague “something” frightens me.

Chekhov: We will not be losing our former skill; instead we will be reinforcing it many times over. In this regard we are looking more for spontaneity than any kind of “monastery, sanctimony, veil”. A theatre based on craftsmanship must certainly become a hundred times greater.

[...]

I must give you exercises in connection with our work on *Hamlet*. I am counting on your desire to do these voluntarily. I can only talk about their meaning, about their enormous significance and about where they came from, if your will to do these exercises and your genuine belief in them allows me to talk about this. For now, all I can say is that if Konstantin Stanislavsky’s system is a gymnasium, then, through their own significance, these exercises are a university.

1st exercise. Normally in life we make movements under the influence of external conditions, the “need” arises to make one movement or another. From now on, we should practise making movements for the sake of the movement itself and in doing so receive aesthetic enjoyment. To begin with, one must make meaningless movements.

Conditions:

1. Do not sink into sugariness.
2. Do not check your own achievements (through the eyes of others).

[...]

Work on the characters

Smyshlyaev: All the characters here are divided into either friends or enemies of Hamlet. The guards are friends of Hamlet. [...] This bond of friendship runs through the entire play, revealing itself chiefly through Horatio.

The entire court, the King, and Polonius are all distinct and specific obstacles in Hamlet's path towards the Light.

The most important and fundamental obstacle is the King, and the Spirit singles him out openly. The Queen and Laertes are also obstacles, but of quite a different kind.

Ophelia stands beside Hamlet, she is one of his friends, but at the same time she is an obstacle, which is why Hamlet rejects Ophelia. Polonius is a passive instrument in the hands of the King.

The King is, therefore, the most important. Although he is not a schematic figure, the King is a man who personifies the aspiration of evil.

So we want to take everything that is said as a basis for the characters. Everything needs to be regarded through the prism of Hamlet, through his tragedy, since the play is titled *Hamlet* after all.

[...]

Chekhov: The theme of this production is the desire of Hamlet's soul for the Light. Everything else is not individual insofar as it reflects Hamlet. Everything is for the sake of Hamlet, for his tragedy, for his joy. But the perspective on the characters is provided by Shakespeare. Each character is exactly as he appeared to Shakespeare. Monism to me sounds first and foremost like the through-action.

Smyshlyaev: [...] The play provides us with a full dramatic picture of Hamlet's struggle, his path. And the clearer, the more defined each individual character is, the more useful it will be for the fundamental line, for Hamlet's line. It is important to find an overall composition, a fundamental line, and this is undoubtedly Hamlet. [...] On the subject of monism, I would like the greatest and ultimate realisation of Hamlet as the through-action - both in the inner line and the whole outer picture. [...]

Chekhov: The through-action is Hamlet. Yesterday we discovered that there are no ordinary "animal" feelings; instead there are spontaneous, extraordinary flows. I suggest that we go through the scenes and find out intuitively what each one provides in terms of the through-action.

[...]

Act One, Scene Two

Chekhov: [...] The trick here is that the King feels there is a struggle taking place against him by the powerful [...] Spirit. And the King is battling with this Spirit with all his might because of the Court, which is a symbol of worldly prosperity and greatness. Hamlet's presence alone bewilders the King. [...]

The sense of incompleteness comes from the fact that it is impossible to play the Spirit definitively. "Not seems but is, exactly" is a very important phrase. Hamlet is aware of the Spirit's presence.

[...]

They continue to read Scene Two_ "O, if you, the fetters of my soul, would"

Chekhov: It is an extraordinary moment in that it unites the Spirit and Hamlet.

Cheban: I think it is important to show the dynamite in Hamlet's monologue, that the appearance of the guards was terrifying. The meeting between Hamlet and Horatio is a ritual, full of meaning. The delay only accentuates the horror of the moment. Hamlet experiences both *shock* and desire in this scene, and the meeting with the Spirit will be the resolution, the cataclysm itself. [...]

They read Scene Three: Laertes, Ophelia, Polonius

[...] Ophelia needs to call upon all her heart's innocence, her love exceeds all bounds. Ophelia is being torn to pieces in front of the audience's very eyes. Laertes says to Ophelia, a person who does not understand how it is possible not to love Hamlet: "Do not love Hamlet!" This scene represents what is earthly about Hamlet. The Spirit is hanging over Ophelia here, he is summoning her to help Hamlet. They are all afraid of the Spirit; they are afraid of the spiritual or, by their own volition, the possessed Hamlet. Here, in this room, the Spirit wields complete power and Laertes and Polonius are rushing around, not knowing what to say to Ophelia who is ready to go to Hamlet with her love, and they tear Ophelia apart. The Spirit reaches them as their fear of the possessed Hamlet. Each in his own way is unable to communicate with the Spirit. [...] This scene shows the non-acceptance of Hamlet by the earth, of what is earthly. [...] Ophelia represents vast intuitive wisdom, purity, and the element of love. And the same time immense naivety: she has faith in everything. It is as though she has only just been born. [...]

Polonius [...] senses the Spirit and in his own way is firmly and confidently protesting against the Spirit. He senses the Spirit's terrible danger. He insists very forcefully, repeating over and over to Ophelia the danger of the Spirit.

[...]

Chekhov: [...] The existence of the Spirit should be shown using each character, including Polonius. Polonius senses the Spirit, of course, senses his enemy and struggles with this force that is counter to himself. Polonius' fear is not immediate but is rather an indirect, reflective fear. Polonius' fear is a fear of incomprehensibility. [...]

PROTOCOL No.3

4 October 1923

They read Act One, Scene Four

[...] Here the Spirit seizes both time and the earth. Everybody is starting to become aware of the Spirit. It is important that Hamlet follows the Spirit. Everything was focused on not allowing Hamlet to get to the Spirit.

[...]

They read Act One, Scene Five

“Whither lead me? I’ll go no further.”⁴ This is Hamlet feeling the limits of his own powers, a sense of eternity. There are no words to define this scene. The only thing that can be said is that it is the supreme point. “The time broke up!”⁵ is especially important. It is the loss of Hamlet’s earthly foundation. [...] “That ever I was born to set it right?” is the critical moment he becomes aware of his mission. It is ‘The Agony in the Garden’. Hamlet accepts his Cross. [...] The monologue: “I will remember you”⁶ is Hamlet’s renunciation of the past and his acceptance of the mission. [...]

They read Act Two, Scene One

Chekhov: Ophelia acts on the good and is still unable to distinguish between good and evil on earth. She embodies the elements of love, naivety and purity of such a force that she does not understand the earthly. She is being corrupted by the earthly in every way possible; it comes out as the humiliation of a child. Ophelia is the part of Hamlet’s soul which is in the hands of the earth. There are two Hamlets: one is called Hamlet, and the other - Ophelia. Why was the part of Ophelia written? In order to show a different plan: and so you, people of this earth, do not try to corrupt her, she does not find herself upon this earth, but leave her alone, “she is going mad”. Ophelia is the action. Why exactly does Hamlet reject her? Hamlet is rejecting the embodiment of this element. “Get thee to a nunnery!” should really sound: “Do not be personified, do not fall to earth!” If Hamlet is rejecting Ophelia because of his mission, how exactly is Ophelia hindering Hamlet? It is with earthly love, the love of one corporeal body for another. Furthermore, Hamlet is unable to entrust even a part of his mission to somebody else. Hamlet’s love for Ophelia is an obstacle to his mission. Rejecting Ophelia is the first step along Hamlet’s thorny path. [...] The whole tragedy is that he loves her - and rejects her. There is profound wisdom in the refusal, but it is a victorious wisdom rather than a defeated one. The act of rejection, of sacrifice, strengthens Hamlet’s love for Ophelia: he loves her with a love that has lived through renunciation. [...] What does this scene bring in terms of through-action? [...] The audience should see *which* obstacle represented by Ophelia is being defeated by Hamlet. [...] Ophelia, and this scene in particular, was written to show the scope of Hamlet’s rejection, the height of his ascent. Hamlet is rejecting both the King and Ophelia. But Ophelia’s line is that it is the moment Ophelia merges with Hamlet’s spirit. It is as though Hamlet somehow took an angel from Ophelia’s soul and carried it away with him. Therein lies the tragedy, the tearing apart of Ophelia. The scene could be called: “Hamlet’s rejection of earthly beauty.”

Act Two, Scene Two

⁴ Shakespeare: “Whither wilt thou lead me? Speak! I’ll go no further.”

⁵ Shakespeare: “The time is out of joint”

⁶ Shakespeare: “Now to my word: It is ‘Adieu, adieu! Remember me.’ I have sworn’t”

Why is it impossible to perform *Hamlet* without the Queen? Why, really, is the Queen important? What is the mission of this role? The Queen represents the instinctive desire to uphold moral principles, traditions. Hamlet has to forgive his mother's sin. [...] The mother is the object over which the Spirit, which arrived on earth through Hamlet, is waging his battle. [...] She is the only person Hamlet does not reject. [...] what is important is Hamlet's influence over the Queen, the tragedy that has taken place within her as a result of this, the way she is being torn between the King's evil and Hamlet's spirit; the element of womanhood is directed towards the King while the element of motherhood is towards Hamlet. [...] The Spirit wants Hamlet to accept his mother's sin and forgive her. If Hamlet were to forgive his mother it would mean that Hamlet is forgiving a human being and not accepting the evil represented by the King. Included in Hamlet's mission is finding an attitude towards a human being: "Direct him and forgive him!"

[...]

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern: [...] They are just instruments in the hands of the King. Why are there two of them? Because they are legion. They are completely faceless, astonishingly alike. They are the pawns in a chess game. And therein is yet another new aspect of evil: it is terrible when there is no "I", no individuality.

PROTOCOL No.4

5 October 1923

Act Two, Scene Two

This scene is a parallel with, and in contrast to, the first scene. As the Spirit fills everything with goodness in Scene One, so here everything is filled with the spirit of evil. It is a mobilisation of all the dark forces: the spy department is beginning its work. The whole scene is impregnated with the desire, the yearning to know, to find out about one's enemy. The King is acting under the influence of the dark, evil spirit as much as Hamlet is under the influence of his father's Spirit [...]

The scene with Hamlet and Polonius

[...] This scene is being driven by the counteraction - Hamlet in the spy department. Therein lies the dynamics and the singularity of the scene: the earth has apprehended the heavens. Hamlet as essence is absent here: the body is being interrogated, but Hamlet himself is absent. If he is actually fighting then it is chiefly through his own passivity. Hamlet is completely fixed upon the King and is pulling down the obstacles *along the way*. But Polonius is operating completely frantically. The King is trying to take away Hamlet's powers bit by bit, while Hamlet himself is trying to *reach* the King without spilling any of his powers.

The entrance of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and the Players

This scene is a continuation of the preceding line. The Players are the "milk white messengers", the ideal image of art. All of the three elements - joy, wisdom and

will - must be presented really vividly. The entire auditorium should get to their feet to applaud, gripped by this powerful outpouring.

[...]

Hamlet caught hold of the Players with neither his head nor his mind: he felt an influx of strength from the spiritual world. The meeting with the Players is acceptable to Hamlet as a meeting with a cast which is not involved in the evil surrounding Hamlet. [...] Hamlet wants to touch this source. [...]

It needs to be taken into account that after receiving the mission, Hamlet is walking a thorny path of disintegration and formation; it is not a procession for an already mature and serene knight. Hamlet did not just receive his mission from the Spirit to "Go and kill the King!" Hamlet also discovered that the whole world is evil. The chief thorn on Hamlet's path is the doubt regarding [...] the Spirit [...].

The path of God-seeking and theomachy is a path of tragedy, but bearing God is not a tragedy, it is a procession. Having received his mission from the Spirit, Hamlet still does not know *how* to act, and that is why in his soul, which is overflowing with dynamism, there is a blackness building which flows out into the monologue about the Player. Hamlet talks of the *futility* of his own words [...]

PROTOCOL No.5

6 October 1923

[...]

Act Three, Scene One

It is a rejection, a renunciation, of what is beautiful in an earthly sense. [...] The point of the scene is that the battle is still going on. The scene's poignancy lies in the fact that the hostile nuclei are drawing nearer to each other. The King himself is already acting as a spy here [...]. At this moment there are two edges: the King hears his own "To be or not to be" in his soul. In the monologue "To be or not to be", Hamlet *comprehends* a human being's existence and he *accepts* this path, he accepts existence. Rather than its reveries about suicide, the importance of this monologue is that it raises the question of existence: Hamlet is resolving the question and accepting existence [...]. The answer itself is clear: "To be! And to take action!" [...] Hamlet isn't accepting life in this monologue, he is accepting his own cross, the need for the battle. "That makes calamity of such long life!" - with these words Hamlet accepts the sufferings and moves towards them. "To be or not to be" is a direct continuation of the monologue "O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!" [...] The most important thing about Ophelia is that she alleviates Hamlet's suffering through renunciation of herself, everything she does and endures is for him [...] And just as Ophelia is about Hamlet, Hamlet also worries lovingly about Ophelia and wants to protect her from the influence of her father. It should be the *ultimate love scene*. Their "angels" have merged together and their earthly words are strange to the outside ear. The King should be frightened of the spiritual heights he sensed during Hamlet and Ophelia's meeting. "The fair Ophelia! Nymph" is an appeal to Ophelia's "angel". [...] Ophelia's monologue "O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown" is the first step towards Ophelia's madness. [...] What is Horatio's element? He is Hamlet's moon, the satellite of Hamlet's soul, his protector. He is the only real eye on Hamlet and the

only one whom Hamlet trusts. Horatio is necessary so that there are places where the real Hamlet is heard, since Horatio is the only one with whom Hamlet speaks openly.

Act Three, Scene Two

It is especially important for Horatio's line that Hamlet told him everything the Spirit revealed to him [...]. Horatio empathizes with everything that Hamlet is going through and the only difference is in the degree of comprehension. Horatio carries the element of genuine, pure and sacrificial friendship. If Hamlet is a hero then there is something in Horatio that is stopping him from being a hero: he is not fighting, only standing guard over the fight. [...]

Chekhov: Horatio represents great earthly reason, an earthly wisdom. Such is Horatio before Hamlet's meeting with the Spirit, but he changes in harmony with the development of Hamlet's tragedy. The element of friendship permeates Horatio's entire path. Horatio is in the play in order to show that Hamlet is higher than wisdom. [...] He is noble and wise, but he is of this earth. He can only accept Hamlet's wisdom and is by no means able to go through the same himself. [...] It is possible to be an epic character and that's Horatio, but it is also possible to be spiritual and that's Hamlet.

Horatio contains the very heights of what one is able to reach in earthly ethics and wisdom. Hamlet, on the other hand, bursts into immeasurably higher spiritual planes. [...]. Horatio has the right to enter into spiritual planes but at present Hamlet and Horatio are on different planes. Otherwise, the whole structure of the play would fall apart. All the *elements of earth* accompany the hero of the tragedy on his path - from the very lowest to the very highest - and that is Horatio.

Protocol No.6

7 October 1923

“The Mousetrap”

It is interesting to lay out the development of the action piece by piece: (1) Horatio, (2) Ophelia and (3) “The Mousetrap”. [...]

How can the conversation with Ophelia be accounted for? Hamlet is using all of these conversations to take refuge on an earthly plane. On the surface he is adapting himself to this “prison”. It is intentional buffoonery. But Hamlet's entire soul, his entire element is fixed upon “The Mousetrap”. [...]

It is highly important for the whole scene that Hamlet begins some kind of magical procedure here; he is already beginning to uncover evil spirits.

[...] It is as though the King and Hamlet are using the performance to examine each other. The King is already doomed when he arrives to watch the play; he is very much on his guard. Both spirits are present in this scene and it is really between them that the battle takes place. Everyone who in this scene is being overwhelmed by this battle, they are being unconsciously subjected to it, subdued by it.

The Queen's state: it seems she is close to an awakening, some kind of glimpse, of recollection. And because of this, of the simultaneous influence of both spirits, the Queen is rushing about and she is more anxious than anybody else in the

scene. [...] The Queen is the only person in whom the battle of all good and evil beings is taking place. [...] She is *not giving support* first to the King, and then to Hamlet one by one; she is *under the spell* of one, then the other. Her will has been taken away from her.

[...]

The Players do not know why they are performing. They are representatives of a true, pure and apolitical (in the broadest sense of the word) art.

Horatio. This is the moment of flowing together with Hamlet. They are both in battle. The monologue ‘O time of shadows!’⁷ counterbalances other places, the monologue “O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!” in particular. It is a monologue of activity. It is a transition, the start of the action. Through “The Mousetrap”, Hamlet is raised up to the edge of events, he is aflame with his mission, but before starting, before rushing to act, Hamlet should stop and think through *how* he is going to act in order to conquer evil and forgive Humanity.

[...]

Act Three, Scene Four

[...]

Chekhov [...] This is the scene in which the Queen finds out from Hamlet that the King is a murderer. And the tragedy of the Queen is made more acute by the fact that she knows about the crime but is unable to reject the King. The Queen is quite a different person following this message. The amplitude of her fluctuation between the King and Hamlet becomes even greater. The Queen is lit up by the light that Hamlet brought her, but the influence of evil is so strong that the Queen is once again drifting off into somnambulism. [...]

Protocol No.7

9 October 1923

The “Throwing Balls” exercise is performed⁸

They read Act Four, Scene Three

[...] This scene is a caricature of all earthly methods of battle. The methods of battle being used against the Spirit are mechanical, which is why all the effort is going to waste without succeeding. This provides the scene with a certain tinge of comedy: they fight against Spirit with the ‘machine’. [...].

[...] Hamlet is placed under guard. Physically, Hamlet is unable to do anything at this moment. [...] Hamlet’s energy is increasing as a result of these physical obstacles. Hamlet’s entire tone in this scene is motivated by rising “activity”. He is showing the King that it is not all just trickery, that even the King himself is impotent against the Spirit. The point of the conversation is that the Spirit is talking

⁷ Shakespeare: “‘Tis now the very witching time of night”.

⁸ See Introduction

about Matter. It is a creative moment for Hamlet. Significantly for the scene: the King is very protective of his own body and is attacking Hamlet's body, Hamlet is not even thinking or worrying about his body and is attacking the King's spirit. This scene is important in terms of Hamlet's line of growth as the moment of the *battle with evil*.

[...]

Act Four, Scenes Five and Seven

What is important in this scene is the action of a new earthly element against Hamlet – Laertes. [...] When Laertes appears he becomes the centre, the pivot, of the scene. And the King is entwined around this pivot taking Laertes into his camp. [...]

The line of Ophelia. Following the scene “Get thee to a nunnery!” it is as if Ophelia finishes her own line and follows Hamlet. [...] Ophelia needs the Queen because it means a continuation of Hamlet's mission on earth: Ophelia acts as a conscience for the Queen. Hamlet cast the seed into his mother's soul but this seed needs to grow and Ophelia nurtures this seed. [...]. *Love* runs through this entire scene [...]. It is not “madness” but [...] enlightenment. This scene should be captivating - beautiful and touching. There is no detestable emotion of suffering here, no tears or hysterics, [...]. Ophelia's suffering got her moving; it is suffering passing over the edge of calm. Above everything else in this scene is the Spirit, which we want to permeate the entire production.

[...]

The Queen is a victim, but Ophelia is sacrificing herself. The suffering is so great here that torment and the joy of suffering have merged together. The scene: “the departure of Ophelia's soul”. Ophelia sees eternity. And the effect of this departing soul is one of captivating music.

The King is merely present in this scene, he watches through [...] lifeless, eyes as though understanding nothing. The audience should see someone who is looking at the unintelligible. The King is being “blinded by light”. And therein is the spontaneous collision of the King with the Light. [...]

Protocol No.8

10 October 1923

The “Throwing Balls” exercise is performed to music. When doing this exercise, you need to search for a centre in your chest, as if there is some kind of being present in your chest.

The second exercise involves imagining that your hands are two long rays emanating from this centre in your chest. **Chkhov** asks that you practice whilst striving to refine your hands, since hands are enormously important in our work and we should at the very least begin to avoid habitual, everyday hand movements. As regards the results, they will become apparent in proportion to the work: the hands themselves will respond to this care being taken over them.

Act Five, Scene One. In the churchyard

What does this scene bring in terms of through-action? The message inserted into this scene is: “How hollow and insignificant everything earthly is.” Hamlet is

once again rejecting the earthly; he comprehends the insignificance of the earthly. And this comprehension of the earthly, this forgiveness of evil, is so great in Hamlet that it is as though he is losing his intense desire to kill the King. The tone of Hamlet's letter clearly shows that a change has taken place in Hamlet, something new has appeared in his tone. The action is not fading because here we see Hamlet not walking but "flying at full speed" to fulfil his mission - the murder of the King. [...]

Serafim Azanchevsky: [...] With our interpretation, it works out that Hamlet acts without making any mistakes. I think that by the time of his death, Hamlet has become completely entangled in his searches and struggles.

Chekhov: Our only difference is that you want to see the whole tragedy in one person, whilst we are seeking to achieve this with all of the characters, with the whole scene. Hamlet is entangled in the first act, but by fulfilling his mission he is not entangling, he is disentangling everything and moving to a different plane through death. Hamlet's path is a thorny and difficult one [...] every step is given to Hamlet through the struggle. It is exactly these thorns that concern us in this production.

In the scene with Laertes, it is not just a clash with Laertes but yet one more victory for Hamlet: the audience should see how much more superior Hamlet's grief is in comparison with Laertes' tears. [...] Hamlet carries out his mission through the comparison between his own and Laertes' love for Ophelia: he leads Laertes to the Spirit.

[...]

The scene with the gravediggers

How should the gravediggers be interpreted? [...] It would be really interesting to combine the comic with the satanic. [...] These figures should be humorous. If the First Gravedigger is a philosopher, then the Second is the very essence of sincerity, truth, life; he is a flower growing on a grave. [...] What are the elements? Perhaps there are the elements of cynicism and stupidity here to contradict Hamlet's wisdom and Ophelia's purity. The Gravediggers somehow resolve all issues. There is a certain wisdom and simplicity in their stupidity. [...]

Act Five, Scene Two The Duel⁹

In this scene is an unusually quiet and enlightened Hamlet alongside the King's great convulsion. In general: there is a convulsion in Hamlet's surroundings. It starts, however, with a celebration of prosperity. It is like the "finish" the King has been longing for. [...]

According to Hamlet's line, the "express train" is not stopping. Hamlet does not kill the King immediately because he has a debt to settle first: to fight Laertes in a duel.

[...]

⁹ The scene with the duel begins in front of the curtain with a conversation between Hamlet and Horatio, then the curtain opens to reveal the King and courtiers. (Original Russian editor's note)

Exercise. Learn a poem, understand its meaning, begin to read the poem with as much fervour as you are able to put into it. Little by little, imagine there is somebody standing next to you listening to your reading and get to the point where your “I” has passed completely into this “listener”. It is a complicated exercise requiring a great deal of patience.

Material: Pushkin, Shakespeare (in the original), Novalis (in the original), Vladimir Solovyev.¹⁰

Base your work on this exercise in the confidence that it is better to strengthen yourself through faith than place obstacles for yourself through a lack of faith, a distrust, in what you are doing.

Protocol No.9

11 October 1923

Do the exercises:

1. “Throwing Balls”
2. “Hands - Rays”.
3. Find the feeling that you are singing the melody being played at the time with your hands.
4. Find the feeling that your hands have light wings and use this feeling to search for different hand movements.

Further work on the play will consist of us reading through the roles, making sure to observe the following two conditions:

1. Understand the sense of what has been read as for the first time.
2. Strive to fulfil the fundamental principle of creativity - to imitate your own fantasy.

The most important thing when doing so is ease. You need to shift your centre of gravity¹¹ from yourself to somebody else, to some genius of the theatre, of art, of our studio in particular. When imitating and portraying what your fantasy has produced, do not strive to find yourself within this image, since by doing so an actor ceases being an artist and turns into a madman. “Portraying” does not mean playing artificially: it is only possible to imitate your fantasy when you have definitely seen or heard it (the moment will come when you hear the image). [...] When putting questions to our images, we should ask how it is possible for us to act “spontaneously”.

Chekhov warns against the mistake of starting to remake the image your own way as soon as you have seen it. Caution is therefore needed as well as obedience, spying and eavesdropping on the image¹².

They attempt to read Act One, Scene One in this way.

¹⁰ Solovyev Vladimir (1853 – 1900), Russian philosopher, theologian, poet, literary critic

¹¹ See Chekhov *To The Actor* p. 7-8; pp. 80-2

¹² See Chekhov *To the Actor* pp. 21-34

Each director's comment should be passed on to "him", to the image you are spying on, and rather than carrying out the task yourself you should try to see and hear how this task would be performed by the image. During the performance, you should have an uninterrupted vision of this image. Together with the image there can appear a vision of the place where the action is happening. In time, the image will provide answers to every question: What is the through-action? What are the movements? etc. The actor should arrive at the point where he is able, in his creative process, to switch off his consciousness or, to be more precise, his rationality. Do not forget that the most important thing *in our work* is ease.

[...]

Is it possible and obligatory for the director to share his own "answers", i.e. what the director has eavesdropped on himself?

The director is in no way obliged to stand on ceremony; the director makes all the usual demands of the actor. The whole human language is suitable: requesting, demonstrating and achieving is needed as before. All the director's requests are only able to inspire the actor, forcing him to address the image more and more actively. It is out of the question that these 'stops' by the director could put an actor off. Of course, it is possible to put a person off, but to put an image off is impossible.

[...]

While carrying out this new method, we should chiefly be fighting against the practice of 'potboiler experience', which is in direct contrast to what we are trying to achieve now. We are moving towards the supra-emotional; emotional theatre should move out of the way. Due to the fact that we are beginning to look through real eyes, we can start reading the play, and start working on it from any moment. The feeling will gradually emerge - maybe even following today's rehearsal - that there is a new being near to you, and this is your Marcellus, or your Horatio, or your Francisco and so on. You will have the feeling of inseparable friendship with him. You should get over all cases of misfortune or hardship with the help of laughter: at yourself, at others - it does not matter.

Marcellus. I continuously feel as though I am "on guard": my "exploratory rays" are searching all the time, like feelers, waiting for the Spirit's appearance.

Exercise. Listening to music, chromatic scales: 1. with the chest; 2. with the stomach, 3. with your right hand, 4. with your left, 5. with your right foot, 6. with your left.

At home: tense and release the left part of your chest, as though turning it into a powerful conductor. Do not do the whole exercise at home, just as you should not do this exercise without music because the essence of music is extremely important here.

[...]

Act One, Scene Two

The dream is the desire to create an image yourself, but we should be able to surrender ourselves to the image. When an actor prepares for a role in three days, he does not even reach the point of the first glimpse of an image, he merely organises his own supply of external experience. We will only be able to act when we can see the image so clearly that we will be unable not to act. The image is a being which exists independently and it is in no way my representation, my invention. When working with an image, it is not an invention but something received and accepted from above. It is important to acknowledge this process and always know how to set about finding an answer from the image.¹³

[...]

There is no need to use the whole voice now, you merely need to imply, to make the picture a sketch so that you do not make it difficult for yourself with any kind of obligation. If this is the case, if you have the right *not to shout* then you will yell out when you *really* want to. This method of working enables you to unearth any place in the role. And therein lies flavour and ease.

Exercise. Take a monologue from Shakespeare or Goethe (in the original). Read the monologue extremely carefully - through the images. Try to see what your image was doing while you were reading. Notice that two minutes were spent on this process, for example. Then for ten minutes - for five times as long in other words - play through the same thing again internally. This should be done at night before you go to sleep. Then in the morning, go through the same bit but in reverse order.

Protocol No.10

12 October 1923

The “Throwing Balls” exercise is done to music. Small movements are also made to music in order to nurture within themselves the feeling that it is possible to do any movement with aesthetic enjoyment.

Chekhov [...]. In general, we need to do away with the practice once and for all that everyone is a “policeman” for everybody else. We need to give ourselves the full right to make mistakes, to fail, to sink into the most logical tone, perhaps, whilst seeking a way to imitate our image. In addition to this, we need to feel the ease of showing within ourselves. [...]

They read through the roles in the scene with Laertes, Polonius and Ophelia.

Notice the presence of the Spirit in the room.

[...]

Schematically it should work out that the conversation between the director and the actor is somewhat ordinary, but they are talking about beings higher than themselves.

[...]

Any question raised by the director needs to be seen only as guiding.

[...]

¹³ For more details, see *ibid.*

If you do not see something in the image, you need to formulate the question more clearly. If you do not see the whole image, it is possible to put it together piece by piece.

[...]

Act One, Scene Two **The meeting between Horatio and Hamlet**

The actors' apparatus should only be used as an auxiliary, to help detect what comes from the image. Try to strip yourself of this image, leaving just the acting behind - in its usual, self-contained form; an enormous responsibility and panicky desire to organise, to make *something* will surface immediately, while there will be an emptiness lying hidden underneath this *something*.

[...]

The scene with the First Player

The Player adopts Hamlet's mood. Hamlet himself begins the monologue in the kind of tone in which he would like to live. The Players are 'light' people: one reads and all the others read with him. They act together as one. The Players are all vigorous.

[...]

While reading, the Player grows, grows and stands over everyone like an enormous, beautiful being.

This new method of working eliminates any disputes between an actor and the director and consequently saves an exceptional amount of time.

Protocol No.11

13 October 1923

Chekhov: Let us try to understand one small aspect of the exercise with the ball. We have the following spheres in our inner apparatus: thinking, feeling and willing. The real power of each of these spheres is enormous, but in life, we are unable to open up the entire power of them within us; and only in the creative moments is the curtain concealing the entire force of feeling, thinking and willing opened slightly. On the other hand: I can be unattractive but still harmonious in a certain way. The harmony of the body is an essential condition for all three spheres to reveal themselves more brightly. Try to wake up harmoniously early in the morning and you will feel it. As artists, we should receive images from the world of aesthetics and we should know that this world will only reveal itself if there is harmony within each of us.

Exercises to music.

1. "Throwing Balls".
2. Sense as acutely as possible that there is a "centre" in your chest. Try to move, walking forwards and backwards: because the "centre" is moving, it also engages you. Try to sense that the "centre" is drawing you down towards the earth.

3. “Throwing Balls” with one new condition: move constantly as though there are continuous currents and waves in the room which you are sensing through your “centre”.

4. Listen to chromatic scales with your body.

They read through the roles in Act One, Scene Four.

Hamlet on the platform

[...]

Azanchevsky: In order to imitate the image, I firstly need to prepare myself somewhat, to bring myself to where the image is. And secondly, I definitely need tasks.

Chekhov: If you need tasks then find one, send it to the image and watch, keep an eye on how the image acts. And you also need to look for a task that corresponds with the image.

Tatarinov: It is impossible to get hold of an element straight away. Put questions to the image. In this way you will bring yourself closer to it, you will see it more vividly.

Azanchevsky: What should I do about the fact that often I do not accept what I see in my image with my reason.

Chekhov: Ask the image questions about everything you do not accept.

Cheban: There is no need to put yourself in place of this image because then the necessity “to experience” will immediately arise, by which is meant a return to what was before.

[...]

For Horatio, it is important to note the following: the premonition of the terror, the misfortune for Denmark, and the desire to solve the mystery of the Spirit through Hamlet. [...] For Horatio, Hamlet is the chosen one, the only one.

You must not leave the image resting. One should not strive to see in the image what has already been seen. The image should be showered with questions. Strive to see new features, new qualities in it.

[...]

Hamlet gravitates towards the Spirit spontaneously, he gives himself to the Spirit completely. “I want unravel this” and “My life for me is nothing”¹⁴ - there are no obstacles at all, Hamlet rushes after the Spirit spontaneously. Underlying these words is the joy of being liberated from everything preventing him from following the Spirit.

[...]

Protocol No.12

14 October 1923

¹⁴ Shakespeare: “Say, why is this? Wherefore? What should we do?” and “I do not set my life at a pin’s fee”.

Chekhov: If you are not very persistent in doing at least one of the exercises, the exercises will not yield any results at all.

Exercises.

1. The “Throwing Balls” exercise to music.
2. Listen to a long series of rising chords and, while doing so, try to find which living energy, which walk corresponds to a particular chord. When the sign is given, an endpoint is made. The energy ‘caught’ with the last endpoint should be maintained for as long as possible during the rehearsal. Later it will be necessary to try to reach the point where the body becomes fatigued as little as possible.

[...]

Ivan Bersenev: How can the *incompleteness* of the visualisation of an actor’s image be improved?

Reply. Directors should be watching for this, constantly stopping actors and asking them leading questions.

Before the rehearsal, Chekhov suggested to everybody that they see an image of the whole production of *Hamlet* directorially and then see their own image (role) throughout the whole play.

“The Mousetrap”

[...]

Azanchevsky: I really worry about the absence of “Horatio’s attitude to Hamlet”, “Horatio’s eye on Hamlet” as it were.

Cheban: Help yourself in this way: try to overhear this attitude as a sounding of Horatio’s soul, like music, like strings resonating on Hamlet. Horatio is spontaneously *unable not to be* with Hamlet. [...]

Everyone is expecting the inconceivable, the horrifying, the hyper-improbable, from Hamlet. Every single movement he makes has enormous significance because of *what* it is that underlies this movement. The acuteness of Hamlet’s stake has already been made clear at the beginning, during his conversation with Horatio. [...]

The Players have the joy of self-contained acting, acting which is divine and purifying. Every one of the slightest manifestations - a gesture, a word - is agreeable and brings an aesthetic joy. They are romantics. We would want there to be prominent, profound tasks in this romanticism. The Players must take advantage of the whole range of dramatic expressiveness.

[...]

The scene with the King’s prayer

Look for the spontaneity. [...]. The monologue includes two attempts to find a way up, to ascend to heaven, followed by tumbling, more painfully, back to earth again. The King is thrashing between heaven and earth. [...]

“My words fly up, my thoughts remain below” - everything inside the King has frozen over and become rigid like a lump of rock.

This is the only and final chance for the King to force his way to heaven and after it fails to succeed, an irrevocable numbness sets in.

[...]

Act Two. “What do you read, my lord?”

Exercises before the rehearsal.

1. “Throwing Balls” exercise to music.
2. Listening to chords.

To Polonius: evaluate this as a scene of counteraction.

[...]

The monologue “To be or not to be”

Stress the tempo: “Now I am making a decision.” To evaluate the supreme activity of this moment. He is holding poison in his hand. The solution and the rejection of the solution alternate with each other acutely: both existence and non-existence are equal, they are terrifyingly similar, [...]. Finish the monologue actively: “to be” and “not to be” are equal and Hamlet actively accepts his mission.

[...]

The scene with the gravediggers

Images: they are earthy people, moles, they only scramble out into the light for a moment very occasionally. The race of gravediggers: twenty four generations have been digging graves. they are unborn, unfinished people, people without a psychology. The second gravedigger is the “gravedigger” amongst gravediggers. [...]

PROTOCOL No.14

17 October 1923

Exercises.

1. Listening to chromatic scales with your body: I love with my chest and my stomach, I hate with my stomach and my chest. Condition: feel as if you composed these sounds.
2. The “Throwing Balls” exercise to music. You need to hear the music with the “centre” in your chest.
3. “Hands - Rays”.
4. Start moving (in single file) whilst trying to achieve complete ease.

[...]

PROTOCOL No.15

18 October 1923

A new exercise is given: be able to find something funny - in people, in things, in everything - at any particular moment. The aim of the exercise: to break the already ingrained lifeless attitude towards the outside world. At the same time you need to be able to stop involuntary, natural laughter so that you will be able to find something important, serious and significant in the object which made you laugh. Such

(voluntary) stopping of laughter should be the end of this proposed exercise, when it has succeeded, when the object really has made you laugh. They try to find the comical in a chair. Explanation: if the chair provokes a smile then that is enough for the time being, since it is important that your attitude towards the chair has already altered.

Exercises.

1. Listening to chromatic scales. Listening with your whole body.
2. The “Throwing Balls” exercise to music. Condition: stop your face expressing any joy or delight derived from the game. Try to feel it with your whole body, excluding your face.
3. Walk around with the feeling of complete ease: to music to begin with but then beyond rhythm, without music.

The scene with the Spirit

What does talking with the Spirit mean? The Spirit has no definite place of existence. “I’ll go no further” - Hamlet has reached the edge, he is unable to bear any more physically. The Spirit’s words are not uttered by one single person; the whole space should be filled with these words. The Spirit will not be visible like matter, perhaps it will be a patch of light, a beam. The words of the Spirit are real sounds which resound here, there -- everywhere. The choir is one of the Spirit’s colours, but it is still necessary to find other colours. The Spirit’s existence is *real*.¹⁵

[...]

Smyshlyaev: suggests, in place of the words “Sleeping within my orchard”, showing a picture which the King would then see later on during the performance.

Chekhov: No, it might destroy the most important thing - the significance of the Spirit’s presence. Something should appear, a dull patch of light. A really soft, delicate lighting effect, definitely. I see the scene as being really dark. I cannot see the whole figure of Hamlet, just a single face which keeps appearing first here, then there.

Durasova. In my opinion, the whole trick is in the great simplicity. [...] Let it be just a gust of wind, a whistling, the sound (alone) of a string. It needs to be achieved with minimal resources. Maybe we should produce a musical “arrow”, a really bright sound, aiming upwards, which cuts off abruptly -- maybe it should be left unresolved – and then the curtains open to highlight the silence. [...]

Cheban: And what if Hamlet himself speaks the Spirit’s words?

Chekhov: Then the Spirit will not really exist, it will only be Hamlet’s state of soul.

¹⁵ In the performance, the scene with the Spirit was resolved thus: “During the very first words of Bernardo’s story, muffled bursts of sound begin to be heard in the air. These sounds, which fill the whole space along with beams of light which first flare up then fade away, accompany each appearance of the Spirit on stage. The sounds and the light intensify when his approach is imminent and fade away as he disappears. [...] They resound all around, from all sides, and fill the whole space to the powerful rhythm of an unseen choir made up of male voices. Hamlet hears the story of this absolute outrage told phrase by phrase. He repeats it phrase by phrase, preserving their slow rhythm, melody and intonation. But at the same time his own exclamations, full of pain and horror, burst impetuously into the measured pace of the story (KS14087, pp. 13, 32).

Cheban: The dialogue should be put together in such a way that the Spirit is approaching, is materialising, before the audience's very eyes. Hamlet can already hear the Spirit when the scene begins, but at that point the audience still cannot. Only very gradually does the audience begin to make out the Spirit's words and is finally able to hear them. We need to achieve the realisation of the Spirit in Hamlet, the merging of the Spirit and Hamlet. Because of its gradualness, the moment of realisation will be striking and short. More variety is needed in order to give just the idea of the Spirit. We need to use contrasting means.

[...]

PROTOCOL No.16

19 October 1923

Exercises.

1. Listening to chromatic scales. It is essential to know that we need accumulated will impulses for emanation, for creative radiation.
2. "Hands - Rays". You also need to sense the power of the emanations in this exercise. They do this exercise with "stops" in order to sense the power of the "rays" even more strongly.
3. "Throwing Balls": a) they split up into two camps. The first camp sends out their power and strength and the second receives it. It is as if there are two camps of Goliaths, of giants; b) both camps approach each other, enter into each other's *sphere* - and then separate. It is really important here to sense this "entry into the sphere", this "performance world" as deeply as possible.

The scene before Hamlet and Laertes' duel

[...]

Hamlet's aim: the desire for an end, a dénouement. And it means that he is very active. [...]

Chekhov: In contrast to my general feeling of Hamlet, that he is fluid with points of great endurance, here I see Hamlet as being agitated, unable to find any points of rest. It is as though Hamlet is not alone here but surrounded by beings of some sort. His movements are not fragmented and that is why they are not small. And after this, to the words "Come, Hamlet, come, and take this hand from me", a complete sense of calm sets in, an acceptance, the beginning of the end.

Cheban: [...] I see Hamlet as being completely frozen at certain moments during this scene so as to emphasise this agitation even more. If Hamlet is moving then I see Horatio as being stationary.

The scene with Hamlet and Laertes' duel

When the King enters, Hamlet quite clearly hands himself over to Fate, there is already no way to turn back. [...] "I am reconciled in my soul"¹⁶ - this is the first time that Laertes has seen Hamlet anew. And from that moment it is as though Laertes is already poisoned: he begins the fight with Hamlet already doubtful, with a trembling hand. [...]

¹⁶ Shakespeare: "I embrace it freely".

The Spirit is reigns completely here. The King has, therefore, already been drained here, there is the body only; his evil spirit is no longer there.

The duel between Hamlet and Laertes essentially comes to an end with Hamlet's line "Forgive me, Laertes"¹⁷ and the fight using foils is only a form. Hamlet, his Spirit, has already won and is "pointing towards the end-points". [...] Hamlet fights calmly with his foil, he is already a stranger. And Laertes had already "lost his heart" as the saying goes, lost himself, lost his self-control, before the duel.

The King dies but he passed away before his real death, his spirit having left him [...] The manner of acting should change as the play progresses -

1. The blacks: start really pushily and take up the whole stage. And the further it goes, the more clumsy and wooden they become until finally they have completely withered.

2. The whites: to start with they are reserved, motionless, even weeping, and by the end they sort of blossom and occupy the stage. [...]

Is the need for apotheosis felt? The apotheosis of Silence. The apotheosis of Light. The light becomes brighter and brighter on stage, then in the auditorium, and then in full light the curtain closes cheerfully. We need to remember the important element of the play: the presence of the Spirit. The apotheosis of a ceremonial ritual: the banners are lowered respectfully. Since we want Hamlet's victory rather than his burial, we also need to keep this in mind as we're looking for the point of the performance.

Smyshlyaev: In principle I see here an overwhelming major key.

Chekhov: I am really wary of a cumbersomely superficial end, with fanfares, spotlights, etc.

The scene in the Queen's bedroom

Three bits:

1. The meeting. The first lines. The vehement clash.
2. The appearance of the Spirit.
3. Hypnosis, suggestion.

The Queen is unwillingly enslaved; [...] her reason has been turned off and her soul has been taken possession of. [...] Hamlet is in error at first, having fallen into the element of revenge. It is uncertain how it would have ended if the Spirit had not appeared. He comes to take vengeance, maybe even to kill, and it is only the Spirit's appearance which changes Hamlet's state. It is as though the Queen wakes up in this scene, as if the spell of the King's power has been removed.

[...]

PROTOCOL No.18

21 October 1923

The work is entering a new phase. Only one scene will be undertaken and studied each day. The exercises will be done separately in two rooms - for those who

¹⁷ Shakespeare: "Give me your pardon, sir. I have done you wrong".

are in the scene and for those who aren't. For the second group. "Hands - Rays". "Throwing Balls". Walk: while walking, sense your whole leg from the hip and carry your body freely and smoothly (see the two comments at the end of this protocol).

Act One, Scene One

The singularity of it all. Expectation. Silence. Night. Clouds. Wind. "Hands - Rays". The sword/spear is the ray, it is power, it is strength. You need to be intoxicated by all this: do not think about *how* you are going to say it, just let it manifest itself. There are new senses of self, but the means to express them have not yet been found. There is already valuable material for this scene - a seed, a sense of the sphere. We need to organise it. To begin with we need to become infatuated with and captivated by this image. We need to allow ourselves to make mistakes. More activity should come from the directors: they need to shape the *mise-en-scène*, intonations, everything. Not from the plane of affective memories and obligations, however, but from the plane of enthusiasm for, and captivation by, the image. Mistakes are permitted. The rehearsal should be enjoyable. Only then will we manage to contact the world of images.

[...]

Chekhov: [...]. Right now it is important to try, to make mistakes, not to crumble and not to suppress nature. Become intoxicated by it all, immerse yourself in this enjoyment. The most important thing is not to fall out of tune with it, not to fall into the area of "psychology".

To begin with we need to shape a "ritual". Take the singularity of the "ritual" from the exercise "giants". Why a ritual? Because there is danger.

[...] Francisco is a frozen, solidified giant. There is a consciousness of enormous strength; the potential for struggle. Extraordinary, elemental circumstances are all around.

Chekhov: There are distinct spheres within our bodies. We will talk about these in more detail later. But for the moment we need to understand that this scene hails from the lower, erotic-mystical sphere.

Try to pass through all four spheres indicated, at least "I don't want to!" Sense the importance of the entire essence with the whole of your body, sense the chromatic scale with each of its points. Francisco's stress has reached the last degree, there is a whole night of deathly silence behind him. A faint sound is heard, like thunder.

The director's comments should be made *rhythmically*. The actor shouldn't be showered with comments, he should be given the time and the opportunity to inspect them, to let them flow through himself. The director should *rhythmically* strive to get an actor to achieve the task.

Ask: how do Horatio and Marcellus arrive?

Director's questions are asked a few times as continual reminders; it doesn't mean, at all, that what has been demanded should necessarily be found and acted straight away. *Words* can also only prove a hindrance if you want to perform everything immediately, at once.

Everything will be revealed through rhythm rather than meaning.

Francisco should hear questions continually, since his whole essence is pierced with expectation and questions: "When... From where... How... will the Spirit

make his appearance". Try to catch the rhythm, the pulse of this meeting, this tremolo in the basses with your entire being. Hold the endpoints in this "meeting of giants". The issue here is not in each other but in the surroundings, the anticipated Spirit. The pauses are filled by the Spirit and this is also where the rhythm will emerge from. The thing is that they are staring intently with their whole being, waiting for the Spirit.

Comments on the exercises.

1. The giving and taking game. There are two types of actors: the first type gives when they act, they are radiating. An audience watches actors like these calmly and meditatively. The other type domineeringly takes hold of the audience, captivating them for himself. Taking into account everything that has already been said about acting, we should definitely aspire to the second type of acting. And you have already been preparing yourselves for this, particularly with the "Throwing Balls" exercise.

2. The difference between our new approach to working and previous "experiencing" is also that we should always amass joy, vivacity and will within ourselves beforehand and only with this charge of compressed energy can we begin to convey the necessary emotions.

PROTOCOL No.19

23 October 1923

Exercises "Throwing Balls". The ball should be an expression of what Hamlet might dispatch to Polonius, the King to Hamlet, Hamlet to the Queen and so on; and vice versa, for the one who is catching, this ball is an expression of what Polonius might receive from Hamlet, Hamlet from the King and so on. The most important aspect of the exercise is the *exchange* of subtle vibrations and first sensations, still without words.

Act One, Scene Two

This is the first time the King ascends to the throne. He is hamming wellbeing. He does not know how it might all end. "For all, our thanks" is a turning point, from this moment onwards he has gained a foothold on the throne. The joy of grandeur, the element of power. The more anxiety there is over Hamlet's presence, the greater the superficial lustre and grandeur of his throne-speech becomes. And the second, contrary, colour of this scene is Hamlet's mourning. [...]

The Queen. Extremely passionate, extremely temperamental. She blossoms magnificently in her joy and she passionately wants to convince Hamlet more quickly that everything is wonderful and happy. [...]

Hamlet is frozen here by the King's radiance which surrounds and dazzles him. [...] What Hamlet saw here has shocked him into a state of terror. The breakthrough: "Seems, madam? Nay, it is. I know not seems". From this moment on, the attention of the whole auditorium should move to Hamlet; from this moment on it should become clear to the audience that everything will now come from Hamlet, that every single one of his words will become somewhat magical.

[...]

The entrance of Horatio, Bernardo, Marcellus

The meeting with Horatio is the element of friendship. Everyone who arrives is full of what they have just seen. [...] Horatio has an inclination towards Hamlet. Hamlet himself has a “scream” left from the whole of the previous scene (the monologue) and is in an almost clairvoyant-like state. The naturalness and ordinariness of the meeting is being violated because it is not bodies that are meeting but charged centres. And these charges are not spilling over but are protecting themselves. [...]

PROTOCOL No.20

24 October 1923

General exercises.

1. Make small movements in order to sense the volitional charge.
2. “Throwing Balls” - for the accumulation and exchange of will.
3. Two camps of giants.
4. Easy, free movements.
5. “Hands - Rays”. Feel your hands extending out from the centre in your chest rather than your shoulders. Assess the power of the rays - movements should not be made too quickly.

Act One, Scene One

The scene is prepared for in the same way as yesterday, i.e. trying to detect the undercurrent by throwing the ball. After that they start the rehearsal.

Do you feel the Spirit and are you afraid of it with your whole being? [...] There should be no respite. The Spirit has disappeared but he is with me. Examine *how you look at* the Spirit. Is there anything habitual in it? The Spirit is first and foremost a Spirit: he is vast, he is everywhere. [...]

It has been suggested to the directors that every day after the rehearsal of each scene, the actors should be given a number of questions to which an active answer will be expected at the next rehearsal.

1. Marcellus: note “the cock’s crow”.
2. Note the moments *for everybody*: “We are with the Spirit in space” and “We are alone on earth”.

Act One, Scene Three Ophelia, Laertes and Polonius

They start an exercise by throwing a ball in character.

The aim of the exercise: to discover mutual relations. To discover will impulses; “charges” of will. The chief comment is not to hurry. Is the Spirit present at the parting? In what lies Ophelia’s strength? Perhaps love – as Ophelia’s strength? The element of love?

Why is it impossible to believe Hamlet? Because he is possessed by the Spirit and that is inconceivable to Laertes. Consider that Ophelia hears this warning regarding Hamlet *for the first time*. Laertes has already bid farewell but comes back from the door because he is unable not to say what he is feeling. It is an active task with regard to Ophelia. Also as passing waves: passing waves of activity, doubt,

foreboding, sensing the Spirit pass through in his soul. He checks how his words are affecting Ophelia and looks for reasons again and again, as if there is no way he can obtain the right to leave. Besides her distress, doesn't Ophelia also have a firm decisiveness of some kind?

[...]

After our exercises, moments like these are going to set in: surges of will suddenly occur throughout the day. These *definitely* need *not* to be taken advantage of in life. You need to learn to pour out this will only on the stage or, more widely, in creative work. In life it is also possible to pour out this will for very serious matters; to help someone in something important, for example. In addition it is definitely necessary to do at least some work at home.

[...] What (kind of task) is worrying Ophelia at this moment? How is this scene driving the play right now? Thorns are springing up for Hamlet here - they are tormenting Hamlet through Ophelia. [...]

The gradation of Ophelia's role is possibly contained in the *extent* to which she is being torn away from Hamlet in each of her scenes. [...]

Polonius' element is also that he does not remotely understand what is happening with Ophelia; he chuckles at her words regarding Hamlet's love.

[...]

How an actor lives is extremely important. If an actor lives egoistically, lives for himself, then this is already going to hinder our work significantly. As soon as a person becomes pure he starts to see everything: he will see dirty tricks and will be able to play a wretch better than anybody else. It sometimes happens that actors are efficient and adroit - but not captivating. It means that this actor is "impure" in life. The highest measure of impurity: to perform through anger, hatred. It is not art, although there are many that it conquers and contaminates. The less engaging an actor is, the narrower his range. There is nothing for an "impure" person to act with. Hysterics are a bad sign, because a crude form of suffering is being demonstrated. It is possible to perform completely purely what you have overcome within yourself.

How can the means for "imitation" be developed?

Exercise. Take hold of somebody. Every human being is inspired. You need to try to penetrate, to sense, what kinds of forces created just such a face, such a forehead as this person has. While as you are trying to understand the forces which created that face, that forehead etc. there will be forces growing inside you that will enable you to imitate this image exactly. At the exact moment I got to know these forces, I stirred up forces within myself through which I will be able to imitate some human being or other. The fact that Azarin only imitates Moskvina and Chekhov means that he is a dilettante at these two or three images. We must become specialists in imitation. And depending on the development of forces of this order, the images we receive will be more significant and more substantial than they are now. And what exactly are narrators on a variety stage - soulless imitators? They perform following just the body memory. It is not a process of imitation but a repetition of form. [...]

Occasionally we work correctly, but unconsciously. Our work consists of bringing awareness to this process.

Exercise. “Throwing Balls”. It is necessary at the same time to keep track of the sensation of “centre” and that your hands are rays. They take up, without music, different rhythms and states: of grief, power, ease and merriment, satire (not malicious), quiescence, natural anxiety and then quiescence again, but quiescence that is potentially active and able to defeat natural anxiety and disharmony. In doing so try to overcome your enchainment to the floor, to the earth.

Act One, Scenes Four and Five Hamlet on the platform

The introductory exercise with the balls is performed and a first attempt at the scene. [...]

Hamlet arrives onto the platform impetuously; there should be a mutual magnet here: the impetuosity of Hamlet’s response to the Spirit’s summons and the impetuosity of the Spirit towards Hamlet. [...]

What is Hamlet’s attitude towards the King’s trumpets and guns in this scene? Consider “*I see my father*”.

Chekhov: I have a premonition of the Spirit as immense, but at present I do not consciously want to touch on this. The fact of the matter is that it is *not a questionable* moment; it is significant particularly because it is impossible to discuss it. It is necessary to wait for him.

Tatarinov: Raising a question has the aim of getting a *spontaneous answer*. Every question moves us closer.

Chekhov: That’s true. But we still haven’t found a *new* question in this scene since I am asking all the questions of my image.

Tatarinov: What kind of Spirit is it? Ask about a “mournful Spirit”. It seems to me that not every word affects you [...]

Cheban: [...]. The most important thing is the sphere, the marble boulders, and they have already been outlined.

The following is important for Hamlet’s line: 1. His commitment to the Spirit and 2. The call of fate. Take note that “As you are [...] soldiers”, is the first active moment. Which is why the line further on - “There are more things...” - is not philosophising but *action*. It does not rule out emotion, but that is not what it is about.

Cheban: I think it is necessary to help the actor with the boulders now; they need to be given the most basic framework. An actor should not be worn out with details and directors should really take this into account and keep an eye on it. It is impossible to talk about every single letter at rehearsals, one can talk about that, and there will be the need to talk about it at the twentieth performance. And that is the reason why detailed questions should wait. But basic, “boulders” notes should be given by directors pointedly and quickly. It is important that the actor takes action, not that he turns into an interlocutor.

Chekhov: First question: who is guilty in the current matter of my protest against questions regarding the meeting between Hamlet and the Spirit? The actor is guilty, because he did not become transparent, so to say, because he did not allow all those questions which are still not understood and have not yet been accepted, flow through himself and did not hold in himself those questions which are already yielding something today. Second issue: regarding the “boulderness” of questions. It is assumed that during this period of work the director will, of course, ask questions which are essential and grounded. Subsequently it is the actor’s choice: to accept the question or to let it pass through himself completely if it seems unnecessary at that particular time. The director’s task is to infect, not to tell; to force the actor to take action and not just listen. The director should be able to do it in such a way that the actor *wants* to take action. A director should not let the actor know about a task but should kindle this task within the actor. As well as this, the director has the right to pester an actor with one and the same question a hundred or even a thousand times. The director should definitely take into account the sequence of questions. The director should possess the method of successive cultivation. The director makes remarks sparingly *as a teacher* and the actor is free to accept the director’s question or not. “In my opinion, the director is merely an actor’s second ‘I’” (**Tatarinov**). [...] The director should be sure to take into account the individuality of each actor. And therein lies the director’s greater wisdom in comparison with the actor.

What is the significance of each actor’s personal qualities? The images that we are contemplating exist irrespective of us, of our personal characteristics. And when imitating an image it is possible to act everything; it depends exclusively on the spiritual purity of the artist. Ideally an actor is able to act everything he can contemplate. Entering a contemplated image might interfere with an actor’s personality. Often an actor shoves his personality into the image when he needs to be impersonal and contemplative. [...]

It is obviously difficult to believe in the attitude of spiritual cleansing with respect to acting. But in the meantime it is like this: it is enough to remember the difference between a cultured and an uncultured actor of roughly equal talents. A great talent is already a breakthrough into spirituality: so now we are double.

PROTOCOL No.22

26 October 1923

Exercises.

1. Increasing vital tonus - without moving, staying in one place.
2. “Throwing Balls”. Keep an eye on the “endpoints”. Feel the music emanating from your “centre”. During the “endpoint”, wait for the music with the feeling that this *new* music is originating from you. Thanks to this our artistry is becoming enriched. The ability to switch from one sphere to another teaches us the ability to act out moments of surprise in which an actor usually loses his way (and plays hammily) and which in principle are not that different from moving from one sphere to another.

Act Two, Scene Two The King, Queen, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern

[...] The elemental desire of this clockwork toy (Rosencrantz and Guildenstern): greed for a new winding mechanism; they are only listening to the Queen for formality's sake; as far as they are concerned they can still hear the King in what she is saying. Consider that both of them are *one thing*, they are *the same*, *one clockwork toy*.

[...]

It is important that the actor doesn't leave the rehearsal placidly, but with a new concern each time. That is the reason why "tricky" questions are so often necessary (Vladimir Tatarinov).

[...].

For Rosencrantz and Guildenstern: it is not the "clockwork toy" smiling but the person being amused by it (in this case the prince).

Sense the strong activity (the tin clockwork toy with the *powerful* spring). Look for the sensation of this spring as your own "centre" towards which is being directed all your attention.

[...]

PROTOCOL No.23

30 October 1923

Exercises.

1. Increasing vital tonus.
2. "Throwing Balls" for aesthetic enjoyment to begin with and then for the transference of will. From here, move on to the third exercise.
3. Two camps exchanging power, will.
4. "Hands - Rays". Find a way to follow the movement of these

enormous rays and receive a charge of cosmic will and power from them. It is only this power that gives you the right to be on stage. Having closed your eyes, send out the rays sharply and pierce the opposing camp with them. The most important thing when doing this is to sense the communication through these rays.

[...]

Act One.

Comments. Don't tie yourself down with a tempo, don't rush to look for either a sphere or particular fragments.

[...]

Nothing comes from sensing the Spirit because essentially there is no *object*, no point of departure. The steadiness of searching for this sensation is required so that one does not fall into the mistake of evading the object, telling yourself "The Spirit is everywhere!" without sensing the Spirit itself at all. Horatio is going through a huge range of suffering and torment and through this is arriving at a perception of the Spirit and the possibility of talking with it. Everything regarding sensing the Spirit also concerns everybody else in the picture: Marcellus, Francisco and Bernardo.

Act One, Scene Two

This scene is important because apprehension continuously increases here. The apprehension does not desert anybody for a second, increasing through a whole series of upsurges and outbursts. [...] Every word should be heard distinctly in this atmosphere of explosions. Rather than speaking, be astounded by all the events taking

place. [...] Chekhov's suggestion: The King should be in a state of struggle from the very first moment. A writhing creature. Not unperturbed for a second. His throne speech is a torture on the throne. In the true sense of the word it is possession by an evil spirit. And hereafter the already clearly-defined work is proceeding. The throne speech is an overture before a closed curtain, and the opera itself is to follow.

Polonius. At present it seems he is neither a dangerous nor a detestable figure. There are even flickers of placid moments. It should all be quite the opposite.

[...]

The Queen. The mechanics of the role are, firstly, I ACCEPT and secondly, I YIELD. That is where the activity is.

A new exercise is given for the Queen's elements. Two play ball, passing Will, love, power etc. etc. back and forth between them. Everybody else splits up into two groups and inwardly imitates the two playing ball as though they were images.

For Horatio: search for the feeling that there is somebody in the room (an enemy; maybe several people) to help yourself at those moments when he sees the Spirit.

PROTOCOL No.24

31 October 1923

Exercises.

1. "Throwing Balls" - sending the mood you are in right now. Aim - to heighten this mood and see your own dependency on and subordination to this mood clearly. And by doing this help yourself to overcome it.

2. There are three steps: a) receiving creative power from a higher world, b) checking your own, c) passing on the creative power.

3. The "Throwing Balls" exercise to music.

[...]

Durasova asks about the scenes of Ophelia's madness. The first moment of extreme shock, the beginning of the madness: "O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown!" The songs depict her torment, her attitude to what has happened. [...] The melodies should be keenly expressed. Everybody should be fascinated by these songs, not understanding them but perceiving a new tale in them which has been revealed within Ophelia. Ophelia is not settled as yet but she is becoming so. She is wisdom itself; she is Sophia, all-comprehending, all-conciliatory. Her gestures are therefore calm, classical.

[...]

Polonius unravels more and more completely with each new scene. [...]

PROTOCOL No.25

1 November 1923

Exercises.

1. Increasing vital tonus

2. "Hands - Rays." "Centre."

3. "Throwing Balls"

4. Two camps.

Act One, Scene One

Increase the space. Dissolve in this space. Francisco - look for the elements: a giant on the edge of an abyss. Sense this with the whole periphery of your being. Sense your weapons, your power.

Tatarinov: The scene is not coming along because at the moment you are spending time on small feelings but you need to [...] search uninhibitedly, allowing yourself to make big mistakes, in order to find something.

Observe the awful everydayness of the movements. Ask yourself: are you “part of the event” or are you just talking?

Nobody is aware of the poignancy of the scene. The Spirit is everywhere, of course, but there should definitely be moments, so to speak, points of the Spirit’s appearance. Otherwise it will turn out to be a state without an object.

It is especially important to take note of the *activity* of the images: infiltrate, penetrate and interact with this Spirit. Dynamic Activity will then makes its appearance as a result of this spontaneous action. It also means you will find the maximum saturation of each word. Feel the effectiveness of the pauses. Avoid hamming. At the moment you are “playing by the letter”. Everything should be simpler. Seek it through *rhythm*. The Spirit can appear *any second*. “Stop it, Marcellus!” - this is the beginning of the *earthly war* with the Spirit. [...] It is only possible to understand this scene once you have “gone mad” in a creative sense. Before addressing the Spirit, Horatio should take a moment: “I am summoning up all of my strength”. Do not forget that as artists, you should transform the entire room: portray the whole scene using your voice, words and rhythms. And become *fascinated* with this portrayal, with this imitation of the whole scene’s image. There are three forms of imitation:

1. At the beginning: staccato - the rhythm of apprehension.
2. Insanity: the Spirit - the rhythm of madness.
3. After the Spirit: legato - in the silence, the rhythm of silence.

Fall in love with the pauses! Let the sound carry through the space and the abyss. A ritual part needs to be found more clearly and simply. Rigidity should emerge from the element of apprehension.

Horatio. Try to find the instinctive desire to understand the Spirit, the eagerness in the questions to him. The phrase “I invoke you!”¹⁸ should ring out magically.

People here are thinking in terms of events: each thought is an event; each word is the creation of worlds.

Ways of searching the scene: 1. rhythms, 2. tempo, 3. events, 4. spontaneous breakthroughs, 5. sketching of the scene, 6. timbres, 7. ossification, 8. pauses, 9. space.

Intonations lower and reduce the sphere.

PROTOCOL No.26

2 November 1923

Exercises.

1. Increasing vital tonus.

¹⁸ Shakespeare: “I charge thee speak!” (Act I sc.i)

2. “Throwing Balls”. After a game using several balls, one ball is kept out and everybody plays with this one ball but with one main condition: to empathise with the one throwing the ball, to imitate his soul. Feel that the music is *yours* that the chords are emanating from the “centre” in your chest percussively and are forming themselves into figures of some kind (like sand on a plate, along the edge of which a bow is being scraped) and filling out the space.

Act Two. The scene with Hamlet and Ophelia

Here both Hamlet and Ophelia are set upon renunciation: Ophelia for the sake of beauty and love, and Hamlet for the sake of love and the Spirit. Ophelia is the inner light of a strong force.

[...]

Act Four, Scene Three

The direct outcome of “The Mousetrap” in this scene is the complete candidness of Hamlet and the King: they relate openly. [...]

Chekhov: It seems to me that Hamlet has *creatively* found himself in the position of Satan here, operating using not completely innocent methods.

[...]

The most important thing in the scene: Hamlet being surrounded by guards and detained. In particular it emphasises Hamlet’s activity and power and the worthlessness of the King’s party.

Regarding the scene with Hamlet and Ophelia

Cheban: It is *essential* that we assess this scene within the overall composition of Hamlet’s role. “Yes – yes”.¹⁹ “To be or not to be.” Hamlet surveyed the battlefield and after the monologue he makes his decision and begins to take *action*. At that point he was accepting the mission and now he is carrying it out. Before this he was only faced with the tasks at hand and was terrified by their enormity, but now he is starting to complete them.

It is while giving back the gifts that Ophelia starts to go mad (which is to say she starts to leave the earthly plane). The scene shows how agonizing it is to tear oneself away from the earth. Ophelia is a part of Hamlet’s soul. Therein lies the height of her image, her strength.

The images - Ophelia, the King, Hamlet - are convincing in and of themselves by virtue of their own impulsiveness. And the sense of incompleteness in this scene comes from the breakthrough to such a subject that is still impossible to fully explain with words. The audience should not judge and discuss the images, they should receive a *revelation*.

PROTOCOL No.27

3 November 1923

¹⁹ Shakespeare: “Ay, truly.” Act III sc.i

Chekhov is ill.

Exercises.

1. Increasing vital tonus.
2. Imitation of the person playing ball.
3. The “Throwing Balls” exercise to music.

“Keys to the roles”

The King. The predominant features of the role: 1. the natural state of a murderer who has committed a great crime and 2. the awareness of his enemy within Hamlet.

The Queen. The eternal ‘not this’. The constant search to find where the enemy is, where the cause of the grief is, but the impossibility of finding it. And so not finding it, she dies. [...]

Polonius. The unraveller of “tangles”, the intriguer. He is continually “discovering world truths”. His nature: the mission to serve the throne, his steadfastness.

Act Two, Scene Two

At present the scene is conveying an emotional everyday tone. Yet there should be a “Black Mass” here; three devils, hopping and snickering over the letter; a sadistic humiliation. The scene is in the Goyaesque style.

[...]

Act One, Scene One

Increase the feeling of “matter”: soldiers are of steel, of iron. The picture should be clear and angular but not smoothly continuous. The failure of today’s rehearsal results from the fact that the actors have not assessed and worked on everything that was done in the previous rehearsal. Once an actor arrives at a rehearsal with nothing, without having worked on anything beforehand, the rehearsal becomes empty and turns into the repetition of an external drawing.

PROTOCOL No.28

6 November 1923

Exercises. Pass through four spheres (areas): 1. Satanic, 2. sunny, 3. the sphere of excitement, – sphere of the solar plexus, 4. erotic-mystical.

The first sphere is localised around the head; its manifestation provokes intensified mimicry; it is notable for its keen, angular emotions (“arrows”); Satanism and clowning are the extremes of this sphere; the manifestation of this sphere accordingly corresponds to acutely bending the entire body. The second sphere is localised in the hands, in the shoulder girdle and in the chest; it is notable for its width and scope as well as the insignificant depth of its emotions. Enlightenment is characteristic of this sphere. The third sphere is localised in the stomach area. The solar plexus is its centre, its “brain”. It is the sphere of emotion, composure, determination, strength and enunciation. The fourth sphere is localised in the lower part of the stomach and incorporates the genital organs. It is the sphere of eroticism in

its most profound meaning, the sphere of mysticism, the sphere of everything unknown, unearthly and ineffable. Each sphere can include within it the most varied emotions. And at the same time each sphere has its own *element*.

The most valuable and significant aspect of our work and at the same time that most favoured by the actors themselves is the transition from one sphere to another. They attempt to do these kinds of transitions. Condition: to do these transitions forcefully, boldly and with passion, while being sure to act out some scene or other, be it the role of Ophelia, Hamlet, Juliette, Othello or some other, or one you just dreamed up yourselves, it is all the same.

[...]

PROTOCOL No.29

8 November 1923

Exercises.

1. Increasing vital tonus.
2. “Throwing Balls” with transitions from one sphere to another.

Comment: keep a strict eye on yourself and do not let yourself just proceed to the “throwing balls” only - continually feel the music as emanating from your “centre”, each chord, each note should be yours.

3. Two camps of giants.

The scene with the Players

The Players are in the second sphere and to a certain extent in the third. The Players are not in the first sphere at all. Their acting should be first-rate artistry. [...] All the *mise-en-scènes* should be clear and well-defined. It should all be done to music. The music merges with the actor into one harmonious picture. [...]

Isaak Rabinovich: I think that it would be dangerous to emphasise the style, to emphasise the fact that they are play-actors. It will prevent the performance from reaching its utmost expressiveness. It seems to me that there are times when it is as if the performance is becoming real life [...]. I do not think of the stage on a stage quite so accentuated, I do not see the external demarcation. It would be more beneficial if every now and again there will be an illusion that Claudius and Gertrude are acting and not the Players [...]. At one and the same time it produces a sense of reality and unreality, as well as the poignancy of what is happening. At certain points the Players reach such a high level of inspiration that they forget they are acting. They are being unconsciously infected by the atmosphere which reigns in the audience. The pantomime is an incredibly significant moment, a turning point. And at the same time, the pantomime should be performed easily, colourfully and skilfully.

Smyshlyaev: I also do not feel that the Players’ are separate from the courtiers, but [...] the difference will be in the skill, craftsmanship, pathos and conviction that the Players will have. The difference between art and life should be exceptionally clear.

To what was said earlier about the Players should be added the fact that the Players, while being infected by the King, the Queen and others – by the third sphere as it were - are starting to get increasingly carried away and imbued with the play's *content*.

Do not look for the craftsmanship straight away, look for the sphere.

[...]

Act One, Scene One

What is Horatio's sphere? At the beginning he is in the third sphere and then later on he is in the fourth. At the moment neither the sphere nor the tempo are correct. Look for the sphere now and try the form. Until the appearance of the Spirit, Horatio's sphere is still the third, strong, imperious sphere but then when the Spirit appears, the fifth sphere sets in which represents the loss of all the spheres and, like a cloud, it floats and is not localised anywhere. And then it is from this state that Horatio moves over into the fourth sphere.

[...]

PROTOCOL No.31

10 November 1923

Exercises.

1. Choose one note on the piano from anywhere in the middle octave and make this note resound in your whole being and reveal itself in your walk, in your movement. The sounding of a note in this way will not only suggest an appropriate rhythm and tempo unmistakably but also the *characteristics* of the movements. It is possible to find such a note for each role and this will help towards an even deeper understanding and mastery of that role.

2. Playing with one ball. Imitation of the soul of the person playing. Alongside this - transitions from one sphere to another.

Comment: assess and perform the transitions fully.

[...].

The monologue "To be or not to be"

The beginning of the monologue is a moment of discovery, of revelation: after everything he has gone through, all these questions suddenly open up before Hamlet, completely, dazzlingly and he does not have the time, he must resolve all of these questions *right away*, he must make a choice *right away*. The whole monologue is made up of topical moments rather than philosophical ones, a living specificity. There are momentary, vital sensations of these elements, these paths. It is necessary to shift this "theory" onto a physical plane.

Through-action: "What is higher?" It is the desire to aim higher. It is a deeply mysterious moment, a lunge into the hearts, a lunge into the audience - and that is also why outwardly it seems to be moving, directly to the audience. This monologue is the

last time that we see Hamlet as a human being, in all the subsequent scenes Hamlet is something quite different.²⁰

Chekhov: I am worried about whether I might be falling into Erik's sphere?

Reply. There is common ground which is the passion. This needs to be overcome by moving into a higher sphere. "To be or not to be" is not a question but the *answer to everything*. Every word subsequently is only a fuller acknowledgement of this answer and "Ophelia, oh nymph"²¹ is the concluding moment. Hamlet is gaining tonus here and is even changing outwardly.

The scene of Ophelia's madness

When Ophelia goes mad she is no longer on earth but in the cosmos. Ophelia is the soul. Her arrival is the sound of the soul. And this music resounds in her whole body and captivates everyone around her. Ophelia is an incorporeal spirit, she is in the spheres of the cosmos. We need this "soul to sing" so that it is a vibration of the cosmos, the music of the spheres. And this sound should begin even before the appearance of Ophelia, and its character should be one of tantalizing searches, appeals and inconstancy [...] After Ophelia's exit "her sound" is left behind and involves everybody, it leaves its mark on the following scene and then stops abruptly when Ophelia drowns.

PROTOCOL No.32

11 November 1923

It is possible to divide actors into two groups: those who "make" a role and those for whom the "role accomplishes itself". Our method of working is a desire for the second type of acting. Spying and eavesdropping on the image is a guarantee that the role will "accomplish itself". (Examples: the actor Kachalov "makes" a role, while for Moskvina and Leonidov²² the roles "accomplish themselves".) This does not negate the skill of acting. However, the significance of the image and the impression made on the audience is able to increase to the fullest extent possible.

Exercises.

1. Finding "tonus" from certain notes.

²⁰ In the performance, the monologue "To be or not to be" was resolved thus: "Hamlet makes his appearance in the background, on the right, behind a grating. Wrapped in a cloak, his head bowed, clasping his hands to his chest, he slowly and mechanically walks along the length of the grating. He is deeply absorbed in his own thoughts. After stepping over the threshold and taking two or three steps forward, he stops and raises his head. His hands fall down, having smoothed out the creases in his cloak. He slowly drops the words of the monologue, with pauses, with repetitions. It is possible to follow and feel the entire flow of his thoughts, their entire process. With an enormous yearning for peace, he says with his whole being: "To sleep..." During the course of the monologue you see how the thought moves on its own way and the words merely follow it" (ibid., ll. 60). (Original Russian editor's note)

²¹ Shakespeare: "The fair Ophelia! Nymph..." (Act III sc.i)

²² Vasily Kachalov (real surname Shverubovich, 1875-1948); Ivan Moskvina (1874-1946); Leonid Leonidov (real surname Vol'fenzon, 1873-1941) all are the famous actors of the Moscow Art Theatre.

2. Playing with one ball with the imitation of the person who throws the ball and shifting from one sphere to another. These transitions should nurture will and strength within the actor as well as the belief in the power of his own influence over the audience.

3. Sending of will.

4. Two camps: men and women.

[...]

Comments on the exercises. In the exercise “sending of will” you need to perceive this will as that which the actor is transmitting from the stage to the audience. The “endpoint” moment (when the music pauses) is a moment which is absolutely analogous with those moments on the stage when the actor pauses and compels the audience to stop suddenly in expectation. Energy, will and activity should be being accumulated during the “endpoint”.

References

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