The Routledge Companion to Vsevolod Meyerhold

Edited by Jonathan Pitches and Stefan Aquilina

THE ROUTLEDGE COMPANION TO VSEVOLOD MEYERHOLD

The Routledge Companion to Vsevolod Meyerhold brings together a wealth of scholarship on one of the foremost innovators in European theatre. It presents a detailed picture of the Russian director's work from when it first emerged on the modern stage to its multifarious present-day manifestations.

By combining an historical focus with the latest contemporary research from an international range of perspectives and authors, this collection marks an important moment in Meyerhold studies as well as offering a new assessment of his relation to today's theatre-making. Its dynamic blend of research is presented in five sections: Histories enlarges on more conventional subjects like the grotesque and Biomechanics, to overlooked topics such as Meyerhold's 'failed' projects and his work in film; Collaborations and Connections extends understandings of Meyerhold's well-known collaborative capacities to consider new cultural influences and lesser known working relationships; Sources engages with hitherto untapped material in Meyerhold's oeuvre by reproducing and contextualising previously untranslated primary sources on his work; Practitioner Voices offer lively, on the ground, testimony of the contemporary impact of Meyerhold's practice; Meyerhold in New Contexts maps the routes of his practice across continents and examines ways in which his work is being applied in a number of contemporary scenarios, such as motion capture, computer-based 3D visualisations, and the 'new normal' of digital pedagogy.

This is a key resource for students and scholars of European Theatre, acting theory, and actor training, as well as for those more broadly interested in the socio-political impact of theatre.

Jonathan Pitches is Professor of Theatre and Performance and Head of the School of Performance and Cultural Industries at the University of Leeds. He specialises in performer training, ecocriticism, and blended learning. He is founding co-editor of the journal of *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training*.

Stefan Aquilina is Senior Lecturer in Theatre Studies at the University of Malta and Co-Director of the Stanislavsky Research Centre. He has published extensively on modern theatre (especially Stanislavsky, Meyerhold, and amateur theatre), the transmission of embodied practice, and interdisciplinary performance.

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Stefan Aquilina is Theatre Studies Senior Lecturer at the University of Malta. His research focuses on modern theatre, especially Stanislavsky and Meyerhold, but he has wider interest in the transmission of embodied practice, amateur theatre, devised performance, and reflective teaching. Aquilina's publications include *Modern Theatre in Russia: Tradition Building and Transmission* (Bloomsbury 2020), *Amateur and Proletarian Theatre in Post-Revolutionary Russia: Primary Sources* (Bloomsbury 2021), *Stanislavsky in the World* (with Prof. Jonathan Pitches 2017), and *Interdisciplinarity in the Performing Arts* (with Malaika Sarco-Thomas 2018). Aquilina is also the co-director of the Stanislavsky Research Centre.

Michelle Assay is currently a research associate and the managing editor on the *Iranian Cinema* and *Iranian Women Poets* compendia at the University of Toronto. Born in Tehran and trained in piano performance at the Tchaikovsky National Academy of Music in Kiev, she obtained her PhD from the Sorbonne and the University of Sheffield. As a Leverhulme early career research fellow, she worked on the project Shakespeare and Censorship in Soviet/Post-Soviet Music, Film and Theatre at the University of Huddersfield. Her monograph, *Hamlet in the Stalin era*, is due to be published by Routledge in 2023. She is the founder and chair of the international research group on Shakespeare and music and hosts the podcast series *Sounds and Sweet Airs*. Alongside many publications in this area and on Soviet and post-Soviet music and culture, Assay is the co-author of a major life-and-work study of Mieczysław Weinberg (Toccata, in press) and is on the editorial board of *Carl Nielsen Studies*. She has recently founded the 'Music and Mental Health' group in affiliation with the Royal Musical Association. She has been developing a pioneering research project

on female Western classical musicians in Iran before and after the Revolution. Assay has also curated and performed in world premier performances, in particular for works of Weinberg, and she continues to appear in concert as a solo and chamber pianist.

Marie-Christine Autant-Mathieu is Director of Research at National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS), member of Centre Eur'ORBEM (CNRS/Paris-Sorbonne). A historian of theatre and specialist on Russian and Soviet theatre, her research concerns cultural transfers (tours, circulations of acting theories); the history of the Moscow Art Theatre; the genesis of Stanislavsky's System; and Soviet and Russian New Drama. Her publications include *Le Théâtre d'Art de Moscou. Ramifications, Voyages* (CNRS Editions, 2005); *Le Théâtre soviétique après Staline* (Paris, I.E.S., 2011); *Stanislavski. La Ligne des actions physiques* (Montpellier, L'Entretemps, 2007); *Créer, ensemble. Points de vue sur les communautés artistiques* (ed., Montpellier, L'Entretemps, 2013); *The Routledge Companion to Michael Chekhov* (ed. with Yana Meerzon, London/New York, Routledge, 2015). She translated and edited *K. Stanislavski, Correspondance* (Eur'ORBEM éditions, 2018) and has just published *Le Système de Stanislavski: genèse, histoire, interprétations* (Eur'ORBEM ed., 2022). For more information, see her website www.autant-mathieu.fr.

James Beale has been Artistic Director of Proper Job Theatre Company since 2002, and prior to that he was Artistic Director of Talia Theatre from 1997. Both companies have specialised in the use of Meyerhold's Biomechanics. James trained with Gennady Bogdanov for ten years (1995 to 2005) across Europe. This influence can be seen in most of his work; *The Trial* (2021), *Medusa* (2017), *Nosferatu* (2015), and particularly *Cycle Song* (2012), a large-scale outdoor opera awarded the Royal Philharmonic Society (RPS) Award.

Bryan Brown is Senior Lecturer of Drama at the University of Exeter, theatre-maker with ARTEL (American Russian Theatre Ensemble Laboratory), and director of Maketank, a cultural laboratory in the centre of Exeter, UK. He is also an editorial board member of *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training* and co-curator of the journal's blog. His research interests include ensemble and collective creation practices, performer training and the laboratory theatre tradition. He is the author of *A History of the Theatre Laboratory* (2018) and has been a contributor to *Encountering Ensemble* (2013) and *Collective Creation in Contemporary Performance* (2013).

Marcelo Bulgarelli is an actor and professor at Centro Internazionale Studi Biomeccanica Teatrale (CISBIT; Perugia, Italy, since 2008), coordinated by Gennady Bogdanov, whom Bulgarelli has also been assisting in the delivery of practical work sessions since 2011. In 2018 Bulgarelli was selected to participate in the International Study Group on Theatre Biomechanics, with the participation of nine actors from four continents. In 2017 he acted as an actor and playwright for *A2 Passos* (Rakurs Teatro, directed by Bogdanov) and also debuted the technical demonstration 'The stock fair – the principles of Meyerhold's Theatre Biomechanics in the construction of the action' at festivals in Brazil and Italy. He also acted in the solo performance *Dia desmanchado* (directed by Tatiana Cardoso, Brazil), for which he received the Açorianos Award for Best Actor in 2010. In 2013 Bulgarelli became a playwright and permanent artistic director of the La Fabbrica dei Gesti group (Lecce, Italy); for this group, he directed *Oltremundo* (Best Italian show 2016, Crash Festival) and *Arrivi e Partenze* (2016). Other performances to which he contributed as a director and playwright include *Animali da Compagnia* (Le Creature Group, in Florence, Italy); *Coreutica 2018* (music and dance concert in San Vito, Italy), and *Casa de Pólvora* (Grupo Contraponto, Jaraguá do Sul, Brazil).

Arlete Cavaliere is Professor of Russian Theatre and Russian Culture and Literature at the University of São Paulo (Brazil) in the Faculty of Philosophy, Languages and Human Sciences (FFLCH-USP), where she is also coordinator of the Graduate Programme on Russian Language and Russian Literature and coordinator of the Laboratory of Russian Studies (LERUSS). She was a Visiting Professor (2002–3) at Moscow State University (MGU) in Russia. Her research areas include Russian theatre (the acting theories of Stanislavsky and Meyerhold), the Russian avant-garde, and classical and contemporary Russian drama. Her major books include *The General Inspector of Gogol/Meyerhold: a spectacle-synthesis* (1996), *Russian Theatre: itinerary for a study of the parody and the grotesque* (2009), *Russian Theatre: literature and spectacle* (2011), *The Theatre of Gogol* (2009), and *Anthology of Russian Humor* (2018). She is also a Russian literature translator and has published in Portuguese several Russian authors such as Gogol, Chekhov, Bunin, Mayakovsky, Vladímir Sorokin, etc.

Franc Chamberlain is Professor Emeritus in Drama, Theatre and Performance at the University of Huddersfield, UK.

Burç İdem Dinçel is a postdoctoral researcher at the Trinity Centre for Beckett Studies, Trinity College Dublin. He has published extensively on theatre and translation studies and is the author of *Last Tape on Stage in Translation: Unwinding Beckett's Spool in Turkey* (2012), as well as the co-editor of *Metamorphoses of Ancient Myths* (2017).

Donatella Gavrilovich is Associate Professor of History of Theatre and Digital Technologies at the University of Rome 'Tor Vergata'. She is a scholar interested in Russian theatre, set design, visual arts, dance of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and in the digital cataloguing of theatrical performances. She was a member of the European Community for the ECLAP project, contributing as an expert to the European Portal EUROPEANA. Since 2012 she founded and directed the scientific publishing series entitled *Arti dello Spettacolo/Performing Arts* and, since January 2015, the online journal www.artidellospettacolo-performingarts.com/. Gavrilovich is the coordinator of the International project (2013–21) between the St Petersburg State University ITMO (Russia) and the University 'Tor Vergata', concerning the application of new technologies to the Cultural Intangible Heritage. In 2016 the Russian-Italian team published a Virtual Museum, dedicated to the Russian actress Vera Komissarzhevskaya (http://verakomina.ifmo.ru). She is a member of WG Theatralia DARIAH.EU, W3C PAIR CG of Toronto University (Canada), EURODRAM-MEO in Paris, and fellow of the C.E.R.C.L.E. of University of Lorraine. Her most important publications include: *Profumo di Rus'. L'arte del teatro in Russia. Scritti d'artisti, pittori e critici 1860–1920* (1993); *Nel segno del colore e del corpo. Il regista scenografo Aleksandr Golovin* (2011); *Vera Komissarževskaja. Una donna 'senza compromesso'. La vita e l'opera dell'attrice russa dal 1899 al 1906* (2015); and *Arts and Dance. Russian and Soviet Choreographers* (2017).

Antonis Glytzouris works as a professor of theatre history at the School of Drama (Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece). He is the author of the following books, all available in Greek by Crete University Press: *Stage Direction in Greece; The Rise and Consolidation of the Stage Director in Modern Greek Theatre* (2011); *Nikos Kazantzakis' Early Dramas and the European Avant-Garde* (2009); and *An Attempt to Establish A National Theatre in Greece (1910–11)* (2015). His essays in English have been published in *New Theatre Quarterly*, *Ibsen Studies*, *Theatre Histories Studies*, *Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Theatre Research*, *International Journal of the History of Sport*, *Italica*, and *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*. His current research focuses on the reception of

Realism and Naturalism in Modern Greek theatre as well as on the study of theatre and cinema entertainment in the refugee quarters of interwar Piraeus.

Rachel Hann is Senior Lecturer in Performance and Design at Northumbria University, Newcastle. Her research is focused on the material cultures of performance design, costume and architecture. She is author of *Beyond Scenography* (Routledge, 2019), and in 2013 co-founded the research network Critical Costume. From 2014–8, Hann was an Executive Officer for Theatre & Performance Research Association (TaPRA), having previously co-convened the Scenography working group (2010–3).

Chris Hay is Senior Lecturer in Theatre History and ARC DECRA Senior Research Fellow in the School of Communication and Arts at the University of Queensland, Australia. A PhD graduate in theatre and performance studies from the University of Sydney, Chris is an Australian theatre and cultural historian, whose research focusses in part on the origins of formalised theatre training in Australia between 1949 and 1975. He is also Associate Editor of the journal *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training*, for which he co-edited a special issue on performer training in Australia (vol. 12, no. 3, 2021), and he has published widely on actor training and failure in creative arts learning and teaching in journals including *About Performance*, *Australasian Drama Studies*, and the *Journal of Australian Studies*.

Małgorzata Jabłońska is a theatre researcher at the Jagiellonian University (Krakow) and the Warsaw Theatre Academy (grant from the Ministry of Education and Science 'Safe space. Good practices and tools for transformation of Polish theatre system', 2022–4). Jabłońska trained in Meyerhold's Biomechanics (with Gennady Bogdanov and Aleksei Levinski) and Gardzienice Theatre's methods, and she specialises in the study of performer training, body-based, non-verbal communication strategies in the theatre and the history of Polish alternative theatre. She is the founding member of the CHOREA Theatre Association and co-author of the *Physical Actor Training. From Individual Actions to an Ensemble* handbook (in Polish, Wydawnictwo PWSFTviT 2015). Jabłońska published on Gardzienice and Meyerhold in the following journals: *Konteksty*, *Performer*, *Polish Theatre Journal*, and *Didaskalia*. A collaborator of The Grotowski Institute in Wrocław, she was the main organiser of 'Vsevolod Meyerhold's Theatre Practice' international conference (Wrocław 2013), as well as the 2016 edition of the International Platform for Performer Training, in Wrocław. She is a member of the Polish Society for Theatre Research.

Anna Kovalova is an associate research fellow of the European University of St. Petersburg and a professor at the Free University (Moscow). In 2015–9 she was a senior lecturer at the National Research University Higher School of Economics in Moscow. Kovalova graduated from the Philological Faculty of St Petersburg State University in 2007 and received her PhD in philology in 2012. She is the author of *Kinematograf v Peterburge 1896–1917* (with Yuri Tsivian, 2011) and *Kinematograf v Peterburge 1907–1917: Kinoproizvodstvo i fil'mografia* (2012) and the editor of a volume of screenplays by the Russian playwright Nikolai Erdman (2010). As the head of the research team project 'Early Russian Film Prose', together with a group of graduate and postgraduate students, Kovalova created a most complete electronic database of early Russian narrative film texts, https://hum.hse.ru/ditl/filmprose/libretti.

Robert Leach is a prize-winning poet, theatre director, and academic. He has been Reader in Drama and Theatre Arts at the University of Birmingham and Senior Lecturer in English Literature at the Edinburgh University. Leach has acted professionally in Britain and the U.S.A.

and directed plays in Russia as well as in Britain. His production of *I Want a Baby* by Sergei Tretyakov at the Teatr u Nikitkikh Vorot in Moscow in 1990 was the Russian premiere of this 1920s play that was banned in the Communist Soviet Union for decades.

Leach has also written extensively about the theatre. *Theatre Workshop: Joan Littlewood and the Making of Modern British Theatre* (University of Exeter Press, 2006) was shortlisted for the Theatre Book of the Year in 2006. His two volume *Illustrated History of British Theatre and Performance* (Routledge, 2019) was also shortlisted for Theatre Book of the Year. Other books on Meyerhold and Russian theatre include: *Vsevolod Meyerhold* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), *Revolutionary Theatre* (Routledge, 1994), *A History of Russian Theatre* (with Victor Borovsky, Cambridge University Press, 1999), *Stanislavsky and Meyerhold* (Peter Lang, 2003), *Russian Futurist Theatre: Theory and Practice* (Edinburgh University Press, 2018), and *Sergei Tretyakov: I Want a Baby and Other Plays* (edited and translated, with Stephen Holland, Glagoslav Publications, 2019). His biography of Tretyakov, *Sergei Tretyakov: A Revolutionary Writer in Stalin's Russia*, was also published by Glagoslav in 2021.

Terence Mann (Chapman) is Senior Lecturer and Course Leader on the BA (Hons) Acting at the University of Central Lancashire. Since 1995 he has been a professional actor, director, and theatre-maker. His research interests include Meyerhold's Biomechanics and in particular its use in contemporary actor training. Since 2001 Terence has worked regularly with Gennady Bogdanov and, over the past 15 years, has collaborated with him to make Meyerhold's Biomechanics an integral part of the BA (Hons) Acting at UCLan.

Terence's written work on Meyerhold's Theatrical Biomechanics has included presentations at conferences at The University of Essex and The University of Hull. His publications include a contribution to *Encountering Ensemble* (2013, Methuen) and *Remembering Edward Braun* (1936–2017) ('Article') in *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training* ('Journal') 2017.

He is also a founder member of an international study group established in 2021 whose aim is to develop a common idea of Meyerhold's Biomechanics and deepen understanding of its theoretical and practical aspects.

Ian Maxwell is currently Head of the School of Literature, Art and Media at the University of Sydney. He is a graduate of the Victorian College of the Arts School of Drama, where he majored in directing. Subsequent to that training, he embarked upon academic work at the University of Sydney, where he completed his PhD – an ethnography of Hip Hop culture in the suburbs of Sydney in the 1990s – in 1997. He has published extensively on a range of topics, including his 2003 book, *Phat Beats, Dope Rhymes: Hip Hop Down Under Comin' Upper* (Wesleyan), chapters in several collections, and a number of journals. His current work is exploring the history of Australian avant-garde performance from the 1940s to the early 1970s. In mid-2022, Intellect will publish *A Holocaust Cabaret: Remaking Theatre from a Jewish Ghetto*: a multi-authored account of the reinvention, directed by Ian, of 'Prince Bettliegend', a cabaret originally devised in the ghetto city of Terezín during the Nazi occupation

Diana Monteiro Toombs is a freelance writer and theatre practitioner. She specialises in psychophysical actor training practices and her research focuses upon embodied practices and their application for performance. She founded DVM Theatre in 2012 and produced *SCRATCH*, a monthly work-in-progress showing of work from across the performing arts, based in South-East London, until 2016. She has worked on several shows, including *The Remains of the Day* (2010), *Blok/Eko* (2011), and *Don Quixote* (2011), as well as delivering theatre workshops to children in London and Devon. In 2018 she performed in *everything that rises must dance*,

produced by Complicité and created by Sasha Milavic Davies and Lucy Railton. Since 2019 she has reviewed shows at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. She is a regular collaborator and contributor to Dunami somatics and co-produced *The Spring Seedling* (2022), a one-day somatic and movement workshop exchange event. Diana writes articles on theatre and the performing arts, including performance reviews, which can be found at dvmtheatre.wordpress.com. She can be followed @DVMTheatre.

Anna Muza received her PhD from and taught at the State Institute of Theater Arts (GITIS) in Moscow, prior to joining the Slavic Department in Berkeley in 1996. Her research and publications have been focused on Chekhov and the Moscow Art Theater, Soviet stage and art of the 1920s and 30s, as well as contemporary theatre and culture. She has contributed chapters to the recent *Routledge Companion to Stanislavsky* and the volume *Chekhov and World Literature* in the *Literaturnoe nasledstvo* series and co-edited collections of Kazimir Malevich's and Sergei Eisenstein's writings.

Teemu Paavolainen is a research fellow at the Centre for Practice as Research in Theatre, Tampere University, Finland. He is the author of two books with Palgrave Macmillan, *Theatre/Ecology/Cognition: Theorizing Performer-Object Interaction in Grotowski, Kantor, and Meyerhold* (2012) and *Theatricality and Performativity: Writings on Texture From Plato's Cave to Urban Activism* (2018). He has published in *Performance Philosophy*, *Nordic Theatre Studies*, *Theatre Symposium*, *Näyttämö & tutkimus*, and the edited volume *Cognitive Humanities: Embodied Mind in Literature and Culture* (2016). Paavolainen's work has been generously funded by the Academy of Finland, the Finnish Cultural Foundation, and the Kone Foundation (current, 2020–3). His most recent project is tentatively titled *Plural Performativity: The Four Anthropo(s)cenes, Compulsory Capitalism, and the Ready Alternatives*.

Claudio Massimo Paternò graduated from the Drama School of University Theatre Centre – Teatro Stabile dell'Umbria (CUT-TSU), following which he worked there as a tutor of the professional courses. Under the supervision of Roberto Ruggieri (Artistic Director of the CUT-TSU) he researched Asian performing arts, while at the same time starting an in-deep study of Biomechanics with Bogdanov, with whom he founded the International Centre of Theatrical Biomechanics in Perugia (Italy). He guested at the University of Aarhus, University of Rome La Sapienza, University of Arezzo, University of Perugia, and Federal University of Porto Alegre and Rio de Janeiro. Paternò participated in a broad range of performances with companies like Teatro Stabile of Innovation – Fontemaggiore of Perugia, CRT – Centro di Ricerca Teatrale of Milan, Teatro di Figura Umbro, and Micro Teatro Terra Marique. He edited the translation of the monograph *Meyerhold* by B. Picon-Vallin, in collaboration with Fausto Malcovati, and he wrote *Manuale di Biomeccanica Teatrale di Mejerchol'd*.

Olya Petrakova is the artistic director of ARTEL (American Russian Theatre Ensemble Laboratory); executive director of Maketank, a cultural laboratory; and Lecturer at the University of Exeter. Her research interests include creative collaborative practices, the generation of 'scenius', and the role of the director within devising processes. She has acted as consecutive oral translator for Russian artists, directors, clowns, and ballet masters in Europe and USA. Her translation work has appeared in *Polish Theatre Perspectives* (2015), *Clowns: In conversation with modern masters* (2015), and *A History of the Theatre Laboratory* (2018). Brown and Petrakova co-wrote a chapter on Meyerhold, titled 'Educating the Director: Meyerhold's pedagogy for a theatre of conventions', for *The Great European Stage Directors, volume 2* (2018).

Dassia N. Posner is a theatre historian specialising in Russian avant-garde theatre, the history of directing, dramaturgy, and puppetry. Her books include *The Director's Prism: E. T. A. Hoffmann and the Russian Theatrical Avant-Garde*, which analyses the theatrical innovations of Vsevolod Meyerhold, Alexander Tairov, and Sergei Eisenstein, and she is co-editor of *The Routledge Companion to Puppetry and Material Performance*. Her online companion to *The Director's Prism* features nearly 150 fully annotated Russian archival theatre sources. She has recently co-edited a collection of translations and essays, *Three Loves for Three Oranges: Gozzi, Meyerhold, Prokofiev* (Indiana University Press) and is working on an artistic and political history of the Moscow Kamerny Theatre. She is Associate Professor of Theatre and Director of the Interdisciplinary PhD in Theatre and Drama program at Northwestern University.

Ralf Räuker is a specialist on Meyerhold's Biomechanics, with 30 years of teaching experience in this field. In 1988 he received a two years' postgraduate scholarship for his research on Meyerhold at the University of Arts, Berlin, and he worked from 1991–6 in close collaboration with Gennady Bogdanov on a long-term project documenting Biomechanics at the Mime Centre Berlin. He studied acting in Berlin and worked with Jerzy Grotowski in Italy (1985) and in France (1987), while also taking part in a number of editions of the International School of Theatre Anthropology (1986, 1994, 1996) and the Actors Laboratory at Odin Teatret, directed by Eugenio Barba. In 1993/4 he performed in *Wind* and *Suna no Eki*, a Japan–Germany collaborative work devised and directed by Ōta Shōgo. A theatre-maker/director with 25 theatre/performance projects under his name, Räuker also worked as Lecturer and Course-coordinator in Theatre Arts and Contemporary Performance at Edith Cowan University and graduated in 2011 with a PhD in performing arts at the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts, focusing on Bertolt Brecht's first play *Baal*. As Senior Guest Lecturer in Drama at the University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur in 2015/6, Ralf Räuker's networking with performing artists in Singapore, India, and Nepal resulted in the devising and directing of *The Himalayan Peer Gynt* at University of Hyderabad/India in 2019. He is currently working as a freelance teacher and director in theatre/performance in Australia and Germany.

Robert Reid is a theatre director and teacher of acting and directing at Concordia University in Montreal (Canada). He has trained in theatrical Biomechanics with Gennady Bogdanov since 1990, and he's part of the Meyerhold study group of *MicroTeatro* in Perugia (Italy). He also studied and trained in Beijing Opera at NACTA (National Academy of Chinese Theatre Arts) in Beijing with Suosen Lu. His research and creative work focuses on the underground relationships between theatrical traditions and contemporary dramaturgies. He wrote various articles, and he directed an issue of the magazine *L'Annuaire Théâtral* on that topic. He frequently gives workshops and conferences in France, Italy, and China on acting techniques and contemporary dramaturgies. As a theatre director he staged plays by Le Groupe de poésie moderne, Tankred Dorst, Shakespeare, Martin Crimp, Michel Vinaver, Edward Bond, and Witold Gombrowich. Since 2017 he's the director of *la porte rouge*, a cooperative of theatre artists based in Montreal.

Amy Skinner is Senior Lecturer in Drama and Theatre Practice in the School of the Arts at the University of Hull. Her research interests include Russian and Early Soviet theatre, theatre direction and scenography, and interdisciplinary connections among theatre, fine art, and early twentieth-century physics. She is also a theatre director and designer, specialising in contemporary stagings of multi-lingual texts and plays in translation. Her work on director Vsevolod Meyerhold includes contributions to *Great Stage Directors: Meyerhold, Piscator and Brecht* (Bloomsbury, 2019), *Encountering Ensemble* (Methuen, 2013), *Russians in Britain* (Routledge,

2012), as well as her edited collection *Russian Theatre in Practice* (Bloomsbury, 2019) and her monograph *Meyerhold and the Cubists* (Intellect/University of Chicago Press, 2015). She has also written on other aspects of Russian and Soviet theatre, including Socialist Realism and the theatre of Nikolai Okhlopkov (2017) and stage design during the Perestroika era (in *The Routledge Companion to Scenography*, 2017).

Phil Smith is a performance-maker, writer, and academic researcher, specialising in work around walking, site-specificity, and mythogeographies. With artist Helen Billinghurst, he is one half of Crab & Bee; following their exhibition and walking project *Plymouth Labyrinth* (2018/19) and publication of *The Pattern* (Triarchy Press, 2020), they have been making short films for The Box and UNFIX Festival. As company dramaturg and co-writer for TNT Theatre (Munich), Smith most recently premiered *Free Mandela*, co-authored with TNT's artistic director Paul Stebbings, about the end of apartheid in South Africa. He is a member of site-based arts collective Wrights & Sites. As well as co-authoring *TNT: The New Theatre* (2020) with Stebbings, his publications include *Making Site-Specific Theatre and Performance* (Red Globe/Macmillan, 2018) and, most recently, *Living In The Magical Mode* (Triarchy Press, 2022). He is Associate Professor (Reader) at the University of Plymouth.

Gabriele Sofia is Senior Lecturer in Theatre Studies at the Department of Philosophy, Communication and Performing Arts of Roma Tre University. He previously worked at the Paul Valéry University Montpellier 3 and at the Grenoble Alpes University and obtained the Habilitation à Diriger des Recherches at the Sorbonne Nouvelle University Paris 3. His research interests include the relationship between theatre and cognitive neuroscience, the history of acting techniques, and the works of Edward Gordon Craig and Vsevolod Meyerhold. He co-edited the book *Theatre and Cognitive Neuroscience* (Bloomsbury, 2016), and he is the author of *Le acrobazie dello spettatore. Dal teatro alle neuroscienze e ritorno* (Bulzoni, 2013) and *L'arte di Giovanni Grasso e le rivoluzioni teatrali di Craig e Mejerchol'd* (Bulzoni, 2019). He is a member of the Editorial Board of the review *Teatro e Storia* (www.teatroestoria.it).

Paul Stebbings trained in Grotowski's methods in Poland and Britain. He founded TNT theatre with dramaturg Phil Smith in 1980, which now, in collaboration with the American Drama Group Europe, may be the widest touring theatre company in the world. He was the first Western actor to play Stalin in the former USSR. He has directed a wide range of classics and new productions for TNT theatre ranging from *My Sister Syria* (in Arabic and English) to *Hamlet*. He is a regular director for the Shanghai Dramatic Arts Centre and Teatro Espressivo de Costa Rica. His Meyerhold-inspired directing style has had particular impact in Germany and China. This work in China is featured in Nancy Pellegrini's book *The People's Bard*. Festival appearances include the award-winning *Wizard of Jazz* at the Munich Biennale and the Off-Broadway Festival in New York City. He recently premiered a musical version of his grotesque *Frankenstein* at Munich's Deutsches Theater. His production of *Othello* can be seen throughout Europe in 2022. He co-wrote *TNT: The New Theatre* (published by Triarchy Press) in 2020. In 2014 Paul received an MBE for services to British culture.

Nathan Thomas, PhD, serves as Chair of the Department of Fine and Performing Arts at Alvernia University in Reading, PA (USA). He has taught courses, guest lectured, or conducted workshops on Meyerhold, Stanislavsky, and the pedagogy of Emile Jaques-Dalcroze at the Longy School of Music, Manhattan School of Music, Michigan State University, Centenary College of Louisiana, Stephen F. Austin University, and the Actor's Training Project Studio.

As an actor, Thomas gave more than 500 performances across America as a touring actor. His work stretches from Dogberry to Prospero with regional Shakespearean companies. He has twice directed his own translation of Chekhov's *The Seagull*. His translation of *Uncle Vanya* was produced by the award-winning Chesapeake Shakespeare Company in Baltimore, MD. Thomas has composed incidental music for professional productions of *King Lear* and *The Tempest*. His Christmas cantata, *Scenes from Christmas*, has been performed many times.

Min Tian holds his second PhD in theatre history from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, having secured his first PhD from the Central Academy of Drama in Beijing, China. He has taught as Associate Professor at the Central Academy of Drama and currently works at the University of Iowa. He is the author of *The Use of Asian Theatre for Modern Western Theatre: The Displaced Mirror* (2018), *Mei Lanfang and the Twentieth-Century International Stage: Chinese Theatre Placed and Displaced* (2012; Chinese edition 2022), *The Poetics of Difference and Displacement: Twentieth-Century Chinese-Western Intercultural Theatre* (2008), and *Shakespeare and Modern Drama: From Henrik Ibsen to Heiner Müller* (2006), and he is editor of *China's Greatest Operatic Male Actor of Female Roles: Documenting the Life and Art of Mei Lanfang, 1894–1961* (2010).

Darren Tunstall was a professional actor, director, and writer for 20 years before he became a teacher of acting at the University of Central Lancashire (2007–14). In 2015 he joined Guildford School of Acting at the University of Surrey, where he is now Head of Theatre. His research interests are Shakespeare and embodiment and acting technique, with a particular focus upon cross-disciplinary collaborations with the human movement and cognitive sciences. He has presented at conferences in Chicago, Los Angeles, Verona, Gdansk, Dublin, and across the UK. His publications include a monograph *Shakespeare and Gesture in Practice* (for Palgrave Macmillan) and chapters in *The Routledge Companion to Actors' Shakespeare*, *The Routledge Companion to Jacques Lecoq*, *The Routledge Companion to Theatre, Performance and Cognitive Science*, and *Time and Performer Training* (Routledge). He is currently working on a new book for the Palgrave Macmillan series *Cognitive Studies in Literature and Performance*.

Chloe Whitehead, PhD, is the CEO of Proper Job Theatre Company, whose theatre work specialises in the practical application of Meyerhold's Biomechanics in contemporary theatre. 2021 saw Chloe's return to the stage, acting in a new adaptation by Chris O'Connor and Richard Bean of *The Trial* (Kafka), which toured nationally. Chloe has also used Meyerhold's Biomechanics in her directing work, including *Dorian* (Andrew McMillan, 2019) and *Fewer Emergencies* (Martin Crimp, 2016). Chloe's previous publications include contributions to *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training*.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To undertake a project as complex as this Routledge Companion a certain wilful amnesia was needed from both of us. Even with a large project behind us (in *Stanislavsky and The World)* and with the clearest possible idea of how to deliver such a collection, we had forgotten that there are always factors lining up to derail you, and that was true *before* the seismic changes across the globe in the last two years. We decided to propose a Meyerhold Companion to Ben Piggott at Routledge, when we were last together in Gozo and Malta in the autumn of 2019. Groggy through lack of sleep and heading off to the airport in the very early hours of the morning, our guards were down, and we only thought of the exciting and nourishing elements of editing a Companion. This was the last time to date we have been able to collaborate face to face, as the 2020 global pandemic hit just weeks after the visit Jonathan made to work with Stefan and his performing arts team at the University of Malta. Since then, we and all our excellent contributors have been managing the most complex and challenging personal and academic circumstances, circumstances that have in very recent weeks become even more unstable, with war in Ukraine being conducted by the current President of Russia, Vladimir Putin.

As such, our deepest debt of gratitude is to the long list of contributors represented in this book, colleagues who have had archives closed, office resources marooned, practice studios barred, and numerous other challenges thrown at them. And yet still they have managed collectively to offer what we believe is a significant addition to Meyerhold studies. As well as this, both of us have undertaken significant new roles in our respective institutions, and we would like to thank everybody in the Schools of Performance and Cultural Industries in Leeds and Performing Arts in Malta for their support whilst we balanced our local obligations as Heads with our work on this book.

Finally, we would like to thank our families, who over the years have become friends: Ceri, Harri, and George and Yulia, Matthew, and Daniel. It is they who have had to put up with our absences, our late nights and early mornings, and more recently our passionate (and loud) Zoom calls discussing the content of the book.

Stefan Aquilina and Jonathan Pitches

POETIC FRONTISPIECE

Robert Leach

Meyerhold

Clown tumbling like water
Down the falls of futurism,
Acrobat absolute
In the prescience
Of now. Future
Perfect. Funny, too.
And a revolution unresolved,
Poised in pirouette.
Which way, history? Nineteen
Seven-
Teen. Twenty
One – two –
Three . . .

Everything
Knocked askew –
Upended, but
Unended. And now
How make
The new?

Lenin
Broods, Mrs Lenin
Stews, and howls:
'What a performance!' Stalin
Just sits

While one man
Remakes man. Meyerhold. His performance

– Life:
A part for every scene,
For every act
A gesture, *emploi*, silhouette,
Biomechanically made.

The work is play,
Play – work.
The new man is not a circus freak,
But he can do cartwheels, tread trapezes, dance.
Here are *études*, pantomimes,
Games with sticks tossed like wands
From hand to hand –
Unhitching
Time's Liberty horses.

And so they arrested him
(Arrest equals stop),
Tied him to a chair, bastinadoed
Body, back and head.
And in the days that followed
When my legs were bleeding from internal haemorrhaging
They used the rubber truncheon
To beat me on the red, blue and yellow bruises.
The pain was so great
It was like boiling water being poured
On the tenderest parts. . . .
Now this man, who renewed mankind, rekindled
Humanity's godlikeness, discovered
New capacity –
To cringe, writhe, howl
Like a dog.

On 2nd February 1940
They shot him through the brain.

Stalin winter froze
Many a mother's son –
And many a mother –
In those years. Perhaps
There was nothing special about Meyerhold.

But sleeping under the tundra of bad times
Biomechanics hibernated
In the muscles of his actors.
And when the thaw came –
Single melting drops
Dripping off the roofs of winters when

So many had lain hidden –
An actor or two,
An Igor Ilinsky,
A Nikolai Kustov, re-
Appeared, re-
Told how
To shoot the bow,
Throw the stone,
Slap the face
Of time.

Sticks are tossed in rehearsal rooms again,
Life canters in actors'
Hands, legs, brains.
The permafrosted age
Has melted. And waiting,
Waiting in the icy wings –
Now – emerging, re-
Making, bouncing
On the trampoline of time –
Meyerhold
Still insisting on
The performance,
The world,
The stage.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Stefan Aquilina and Jonathan Pitches

Rationale: A Word or Two on Companionship

Spending time with a companion is not the same as being with a friend. You might expect a friend to indulge you at times, tell the odd white lie, even, judging when to be plain-speaking and when, gently, to prevaricate. Companions on the other hand are both intimate and a little distant. They might be employed as such – to *perform* the duties of a friend – or they might be consciously acquired: a pet for instance, purchased to fill a gap. This distance is reflected in some of the many meanings and etymologies of the term: 'A person who is with another on a particular occasion, a journey'; one 'who shares in or partakes of the work, circumstances, experience, etc., of another' (OED).[1] From an academic point of view the distinction is productive and is worthwhile emphasising here, in this *General Introduction to the Routledge Companion to Meyerhold*.

With this publication, we seek to reveal new (and sometimes intimate) truths about the Russian director's practice, from when it was first emerging on the stage of world theatre at the beginning of the twentieth century to its contemporary manifestations in multiple contexts today. For the authors in this Companion these truths have been wrought from a deep immersion in the legacy of Meyerhold, as historians, theatre critics, and practitioners (often in all guises at once). For some this has meant whole careers dedicated to Meyerhold-inspired practice; for others decades of historiographical investigation and scrutiny. It has been our creative labour and profound privilege as editors to reflect these personal investments in the selection of chapters and lengthy drafting process, while ensuring that the utility of a Companion – the capacity for honest, straight talking, shall we say – is maintained. Without, we hope, labouring the etymological point, our purpose here speaks to a lesser-known definition of the term, one drawn from nautical history. Companion: 'Originally: a raised frame, containing windows, on the quarterdeck of a sailing ship, which allows light into the decks below' (OED).[2] Later, we outline how the structure and themes of the book have been designed to shed new light on Meyerhold's work. Here, we reflect briefly on the value of this collection more generally, in the context of the rapidly evolving intellectual field of theatre criticism.

A Companion needs to walk a careful line between two (mainly complementary) aims: to provide a thorough overview of the fundamentals and to offer new directions.[3] In truth and without apology we have favoured the latter in our selection of chapters, mindful that

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contemporary anglophone academic work dedicated to Meyerhold remains vigorous[4] and that the 'fundamentals' of a subject are always in state of flux, demanding to be placed in dialogue with wider movements in the field. One obvious indicator of those wider movements is the extent to which non-canonical sources and ideas may be brought into the mix. A practitioner-based volume (and this one following in the footsteps of those on Stanislavsky, Michael Chekhov and Lecoq), inevitably contributes in some way to the strengthening of an established canon of 'master practitioners', one still dominated by white Western males. However, in keeping with recent observations on some of the fruitful mechanisms for decolonising the history and practice of twentieth-century theatre practitioners, we have been mindful of the anti-canonical steps available to us – both in our original call for contributions and in our shaping of the volume as editors.[5] Cass Fleming, Mark Evans, and Sara Reed identify some of these mechanisms in their Editorial for Vol 11.3 of *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training*: 'Against the Canon' (Evans, Fleming and Reed 2020).

> Many previous publications', they argue, 'have tended to focus on canonical figures and the dominant historical performer-training narratives. Less attention has been paid to collaboration . . . and to the complex exchanges through which pedagogy and work has been developed and disseminated.
>
> (Evans, Fleming and Reed 2020: 245)

Later they challenge the trope of 'seeking to capture the "purity" of established methods', lamenting the fact that this view writes out of history: 'wider networks of artists who contributed to the development of these . . . practices' (Evans, Fleming and Reed 2020: 245). Recognising the intrinsic complexity of theatre-making, in word and deed, is, in short, a necessary counterbalance to canonical history-making. This view is perhaps most prominently reflected in the sections (identified in full later) on 'Collaborations and Connections', 'Practitioners Voices', and 'Interdisciplinarities'. But equally, it is evident in our newly translated sources (curated by Dassia N. Posner and Stefan Aquilina respectively) bringing hitherto obscured collaborations (with Vladimir Soloviev, as one example) to the fore. As such, we ask our Companion readers not to search for established orthodoxies, for they are few and far between, even if, as we identify in the next section, the foundations of Meyerholdian study are clearly documented.

We adopt two further strategies identified by Fleming et al. for the destabilising of dominant histories – the selective use of 'dynamic dialogue' (2020: 250) to represent, where possible and appropriate, multiple perspectives on the same phenomenon, as well as the presentation of 'intercultural strategies' (248). For the former, reflected in the rich practitioner conversations centring on Biomechanics, there is an evident tension between points of contact enjoyed through a common training and terminology and the diverse cultural contexts within which colleagues are practicing. For the latter, we offer a window on to the global transmission of Meyerholdian thinking, proving that any notion of source 'purity' is as misplaced as it is problematic.

Whether the line trodden between new perspectives and established foundations is straight enough will be for our readers ultimately to assess. For now, it remains to lay out the structure of the book and to offer a first parsing of its prominent thematics.

Structure and Themes

As editors and scholars interested in Meyerhold's work, we were both aware that Edward Braun's research in English, coupled with that of Robert Leach and others (see endnote 4), was certainly revelatory but not exhaustive – and that there are still plenty of areas of study in the Russian

director's work that deserve an exposition. Equally important was our wish to look beyond what Meyerhold had done, in order to uncover current interpretations, contentions, and applications of his many theatre tenets and approaches. The Companion, therefore, is broadly supported by these two Meyerholdian facets, that of a historical figure operating in the context of modern theatre and performance and as a stimulus for present-day practice and research. These two facets informed the overall choices of the chapters and their structuring in five parts, namely: Part I (Histories); Part II (Collaborations and Connections); Part III (Sources); Part IV (Practitioner Voices); and Part V (divided in two sections, Transnational Migrations and Interdisciplinarities).

As can be expected, several chapters tackle a number of familiar aspects in Meyerhold's theatre. These are the areas that one can expect to find in a Companion that carries his name and that Teemu Paavolainen here refers to as the 'staples of Meyerhold scholarship' (p. 102): stylisation, the grotesque, link to past theatrical traditions, Biomechanics, the interpretation of classics, and so on. It is perhaps inevitable to include these areas, especially when considering their weight in the creation of Meyerhold's persona as an indefatigable experimenter engaged in politically and socially relevant work, a persona that was already in place, even in Western circles, from as early as the 1930s.[6] Similarly, the major milestones of Meyerhold's career – the encounters with Stanislavsky, the experimentation at the Borodin Studio, his opera productions, the signature productions after the Revolution and steady decline thereafter – are all appropriately present and discussed.

What we are most excited to note, however, are the clearly alternative frames and points of views that authors bring to the fore when analysing these key tenets and moments in Meyerhold's theatre. The fluidity between the historical study on one side and the contemporary repurposing of Meyerhold's work on the other, for instance, allows for a renewed reading of his work and drives the Companion forward. The grotesque offers one example of such fluidity. Meyerhold's now-classic definition of the grotesque as a synthesis of opposites is cited in several chapters, and a number of practical examples are given to shed light on the ways in which he treated the grotesque as performance material (Assay, Paavolainen, Thomas, Leach, Sofia, Aquilina, Posner). Our understanding of the grotesque, however, is enriched in the Companion through the voices of those practitioners and theatre groups who through their work continue to dialogue with the philosophical, compositional, and ethical qualities of the grotesque. These groups include Proper Job Theatre (Beale et al.) and The New Theatre. In their essay on the latter, co-directors Paul Stebbings and Phil Smith argue that what they find particularly stimulating in the grotesque is its propensity to create 'sudden switches . . . simultaneously of tone and convention' (p. 305). This they direct not towards stylistic ends but rather towards nourishing a particular kind of spectator, one who participates in an 'intelligent yet disturbed, immersed and visceral spectatorship' (p. 305). The implications of the grotesque towards spectatorship is again evident in the work of PERFORMA TEATRO, a Brazilian theatre group led by Matteo Bonfitto. Crucial to PERFORMA's dramaturgical processes is what Arlette Cavaliere describes as 'a grotesque understanding of the world' (p. 426) – built on paradoxes, vulnerability, exasperation in lost meaning, etc. – with which spectators engage and to which they contribute in the moments of performance. This 'grotesque thread' across the Companion is only one example of the links that emerge between the chapters, and in this section we will identify a number of such connections as an invitation to the reader to likewise put the chapters in conversation with one another.

The fluidity between historical study and contemporary repurposing also informs the discussion about Biomechanics that is developed here. A cluster of chapters identifies several 'points of origins' for Biomechanics, to expand the range of sources which Meyerhold used when developing his practice. Typically, the origins of Meyerhold's Biomechanics are located in his Doctor

Dapertutto experimentation on past theatre traditions, with a crucial change of language (if not of the practical essentials) spearheaded by the more industrial tones of the Revolution (Pitches 2003: 32). Other influential practices and ideas on Biomechanics may, however, also be discerned. These include Pyotr Lesgaft's theories on physical education, which Małgorzata Jabłońska argues 'allows for a deeper understanding of the specificity of Biomechanics as a teaching tool and illuminates the overall intellectual process behind its formation' (p. 177). Another reference point is that of the Central Institute of Labour, led by Aleksei Gastev, where, Darren Tunstall argues, *biomeckhanika* was developed as 'a new discipline . . . in which the worker would be a manager . . . of his own body' (p. 472). The source which Gabriele Sofia identifies, on the other hand, comes straight off the boards of the theatre stage. It revolves around two hints which Meyerhold dropped on the impact of the Sicilian actor Giovanni Grasso - namely the subtitle 'Di Grasso' to the étude *Leap on the Chest* - and the statement, made in the 1930s, that he 'became aware of many of the laws of Biomechanics' (p. 160) after watching Grasso in performance.

When applied to contemporary performance-making, no holistic, all-encompassing interpretation of Biomechanics emerges in the Companion. Different practitioners place different accents on Meyerhold's practice, testimony to the adaptability of Biomechanics across borders, cultures, and time-frames and to its responsiveness to the specific needs of particular theatre-makers. This is an adaptability that Claudio Massimo Paternò contrasts with 'determined acting forms and rigid structures: '[Biomechanics on the other hand] adapts to the environment and context in which it operates and is able to embrace different "types of performance" while still staying true to its own identity' (p. 329). These biomechanical accents include composition (Bulgarelli), the creation of a bridge between training and performance (Chapman), the freeing of the actor or director from the material limitations of the stage (Reid), and the questioning of linear narratives and psychological characterisation (Cavaliere, Monteiro Toombs, Beale et al.). These accents are indeed diverse, though several of the practice-based essays presented in this Companion converge back on an audience-centrism within which they locate Biomechanics and which informs their work as directors and performance-makers (Paterno et al, Bonfitto, Beale et al., Brown and Petrakova, and Räuker; the latter goes as far as stating that 'to use Biomechanics in creating new performance seems the only way to keep it alive' [p. 341]).

Another aspect of Biomechanics tackled here is that of terminology. References to *tormos* (Tunstall, Beale et al., Maxwell and Hay, Pitches) and the tripartite structuring of *otkaz*, *posil'*, and *tochka/stoika* (Thomas, Jablonska, Paterno et al., Beale et al., Cavaliere, Pitches, Tunstall) are evident. The lesser-known term of *obraz* is given a detailed exposition in Donatella Gavrilovich's chapter on Savva Mamontov's influence on a young Meyerhold. *Obraz* is linked to Meyerhold's theatre of convention and involves the use of stylised images from paintings in the process of mounting productions and creating stage characters. The practice also makes an appearance in my own essay on Meyerhold's female collaborators (Aquilina), indicating the transmission of *obraz* from Mamontov to Meyerhold to his actors and to its validity as a practical working method. Two further terms worth adding to our biomechanical lexicon are *samozerkalenie* (self-mirroring or self-awareness; Tunstall) and the Anglicised 'explication' (Brown and Petrakova). Part director's exploration and part developed collectively in group rehearsals, the explication is that 'enigma' or 'riddle' that is encoded in a text and that a director must resolve if the production is to converse with a text rather than overwhelm it with overt-theatrical (and, one can say, formalistic) effects. Other related areas of Biomechanics, such as the link with Taylorism (Paavolainen, Autant-Mathieu, Jablonska, Leach, Stebbings and Smith, Monteiro Toombs, and Tunstall) and the N = A1 + A2 formula (Paavolainen, Autant-Mathieu, Jablonska, Sofia, and Monteiro Toombs) are also mentioned in the Companion.

Where the Companion seriously expands the field of Meyerhold scholarship, however, is in the new areas of knowledge that it uncovers, underscoring how there will always be untapped areas of investigation within the oeuvre of a theatre-maker of Meyerhold's complexity. First among these contributions are the primary sources on Meyerhold's work at the Borodin Studio, translated, edited, and annotated for the first time by Dassia N. Posner. These sources are a veritable gem: they reveal core ideas and exercises which Meyerhold was developing at the time, including in the area of collective creation which has somehow been downplayed in previous expositions on the Studio. With her work on the translations and accompanying introduction, Posner also clarifies 'the overarching purpose of Meyerhold's theatrical training: to unlock the fullest physical and creative-intellectual expression of each artist's unique improvisatory inventiveness' (p. 212). The second selection of primary sources brings together a number of Meyerhold's letters, essays, and speeches spanning his entire career, texts that I selected and edited (Aquilina).[7] Taken together, these texts construct a specific narrative, that of Meyerhold's work on playtexts and how he infused this with improvisation, physicality, theatricality, musicality, and stylisation. The construction of such a narrative, framed around a particular point of reference, underscores how historical research is at its core always (though not only) interpretive, and that spurious legitimacy claims, for example of the 'authentic', 'real', or 'unique' Meyerhold, can only be met with suspicion. As Thomas Postlewait (2009: 6) argues, 'the plurality of interpretations [is] . . . an incontestable fact, which the historian must accept', and it is within this open spirit that the Companion has been conceived.

A Companion on Meyerhold was always bound to refer to his most well-known (and comprehensively documented) productions: *Don Juan*, *The Forest, The Magnanimous Cuckold*, *The Government Inspector*, and *Lady of the Camellias*, among others. More than reconstructing these performances, however, chapters tackling such productions are striking for the alternative points of view that the authors put forward to illuminate the historical material, such as musicality (Thomas), cinefication (Kovalova), and political theory (Paavolainen). Other lesser-known productions of Meyerhold, however, are also referred to, like *A List of Assets* (Muza, Kovalova, Leach), *Natasha* (Skinner, Aquilina, Sofia), and *One Life* (Skinner, Thomas, Sofia). Meyerhold's early, formative years are also given due attention and construed as a series of encounters with senior artists around whom Meyerhold gravitated, like Stanislavsky (Autant-Mathieu), Mamontov (Gavrilovich), and Chekhov (Sources). Stanislavsky's case is representative of the thematic threads that develop across the Companion. Marie-Christine Autant-Mathieu's chapter goes into great detail about Meyerhold's relationship with Stanislavsky, underscoring its various phases in order to underline how the convergence of their working approaches became a key contributor to Meyerhold's rehabilitation. Stanislavsky, however, is also featured in several other essays (Assay, Muza, Paavolainen, Aquilina, Gavrilovich, Jablonska, Beale et al., Stebbings and Smith, Maxwell and Hay, and Tian) to reveal the often dense networks that emerge when studying theatre histories.

Other chapters respond directly to pressing issues in contemporary theatre and performance studies. Much is made today of the need to destabilise cultural, patriarchal, and methodological biases in our scholarship, what Steve Tillis (2020: 21) refers to as a veritable 'challenge' to the view whereby realities not fitting comfortably into the mainstream are 'relegated to the status of an afterthought or curiosity'.[8] As already suggested, the Companion takes up this challenge in some very concrete ways. Along the lines of our other edited collection of *Stanislavsky in the World: The System and its Transformation across Continents* (Pitches and Aquilina 2017), where an alternative map of Stanislavsky's transmission beyond the well-trodden paths of the US and the USSR was suggested, case-studies about the transnational seeding of Biomechanics in countries as different as China, Australia, Turkey, Greece, and Brazil are presented. As a consequence, the

potential of Meyerholdian practices to blend with local theatre cultures is brought to the fore, as is the tendency of Meyerhold transmission to become entangled in broader political scenarios (see especially Tian, Glytzouris, and Dinçel) or, by contrast, local educational needs (Hay and Maxwell).

The application of alternative perspectives to the study of Meyerhold also abounds throughout the Companion. Here, we are using 'perspective' as a 'tension, between an external, notionally objective set of concerns and the personal, self-driven imperative' (Pitches 2011: 2). A perspective, in other words, allows a researcher to put in motion his or her own background, ideologies, and objectives when investigating a particular area of study, while at the same time keeping a sense of impartial distance to facilitate criticism. My own application of feminist perspectives exemplifies this (Aquilina). The chapter in question discusses the contribution to Meyerhold's formation of a female group of collaborators, namely the actresses Ekaterina Munt, Valentina Verigina, and Alexandra Smirnova.[9] It also responds to New Modernist Studies' efforts to uncover alternative histories beyond the typical male-dominated models (see also Introduction to Part V.1). Elsewhere (Aquilina 2020: 171–4), the rediscovery of female voices has been juxtaposed with early Soviet efforts to redefine the role of women as active participants in public life. This redefinition, dubbed 'The Woman Question', is referred to here by Robert Leach in his discussion of Meyerhold's connection to Leon Trotsky. Leach argues that The Woman Question was among a number of Trotsky's ideas that chimed with Meyerhold's theatre, with the latter's aborted staging of Sergei Tretyakov's *I Want a Baby* being a case in point.

That *I Want a Baby* was never performed reflects a series of chapters that also discuss a number of Meyerhold's projects that similarly remained unrealised.[10] In her chapter on the importance of visual spectatorship in Meyerhold's theatre, Amy Skinner argues that the fact that these projects remained unrealised – she devotes a substantial portion of her essay to *I Want a Baby* – does not mean that they were unimportant or theatrically weak.[11] Instead, unrealised projects have the potential to uncover a different research space, 'an hybrid form of engagement for the theatre historian, to uncover aspects of the director's practice that cannot be understood from his publicly performed works alone' (p. 80). Other references in the Companion to Meyerhold's unrealised projects include: Michelle Assay's discussion of Meyerhold's life-long wish to produce *Hamlet*, which she posits as a leitmotif that cuts across his career; a post-revolution film adaptation of Ivan Turgenev's novel *Fathers and Sons* (Kovalova); a production of *Boris Gudonov* (Muza and Thomas); and the planned theatre building that Meyerhold was promised and that Rachel Hann reconstructs here using computer-based 3D visualisation.

It is not coincidental that we make reference here to Hann's project. Gilli Bush-Bailey claims that we can only 'connect with the past through present consciousness' (Bush-Bailey and Bratton 2011: 107). While Bush-Bailey is here making reference to the conceptual strategies we bring in when trying to make sense of the past (theoretical frames mainly), We extend her emphasis on *present* methodologies to the digital and technological tools that we possess today and that lend themselves to the interpretation of historical material and its contemporary application. Hann's use of the 'investigative qualities of computer-based visualisation [as] . . . a [research] methodology [for] identifying, analysing and proposing an argument on what [Meyerhold's new] theatre would have looked had it been realised' (p. 452) is among the most contemporary of these tools. It allows her to include a number of newly rendered images of the building and to contextualise these within a detailed discussion of the possible architectural, dramaturgical, and scenographic considerations of the new theatre.

Hann is not alone in using contemporary tools. My own chapter (Pitches) on Biomechanics during lockdown builds on previous efforts in transferring embodied training to the digital world, in this case, the practice of études and other biomechanical components to a

massive open online course (MOOC). The potential of digital pedagogies in the transmission of body-based training is certainly worth exploring further, though the temptation might be to indulge in the application of digital tools, especially when they are uncritically seen as 'digital = new = good' (see Allain 2019: 175). Focusing on the learning objectives, however, is important to counter a superficial enamouring with digital platforms: experience has shown, for instance, how when applied in blended learning environments digital platforms become helpful tools for their 'essentially collaborative, network-building capacity' (p. 490). Darren Tunstall's chapter on Biomechanics and Movement Science has an equal contemporary edge, though the author can be seen overturning the needle of the compass: instead of treating the impact of present-day tools on the study or transmission of Meyerhold's theatre, Tunstall makes a strong case for the abilities which an actor trained in Biomechanics brings to a motion capture studio. He describes how biomechanically trained actors worked on a motion capture project in a 'disciplined, precise, bodily self-aware manner' (p. 476), to the extent that they completed the task at hand in an untypical efficient manner. Tunstall's chapter is also valuable in that it expands the overall impact that Biomechanics (and consequently actor training) have on sectors beyond theatre, an important consideration, we feel, for the performing arts to thrive further in an increasingly connected world.

From the summary given previously, it is clear that there are a host of strong themes and shared territories across the essays collected in this Companion. These are given shape by our sectioning, but readers will want to find their own meeting points and prompts for further research, working across (or against) the structure. While the term 'Companion' confers a certain status and definition to the chapters collected here, this is to be treated with a timebound scepticism. Foundations *and* novelties are in essence contingent and what might be seen to be new knowledge in this volume may settle into orthodoxy in a few short years. Like the sunlight passing over the window on the quarterdeck, the light shed below is bright for a relative moment before inevitably the shadows lengthen again.

Notes

1 www.oed.com/view/Entry/37402 (accessed 22 February 2022). Granted, as a polysemic word, there are definitions that stress the more intimate side of companionship. For instance: 'A person with whom one eats or drinks regularly or convivially; a person who is good or boisterous company when drinking and dining; (hence) a reveller, a carouser' (Ibid).

2 www.oed.com/view/Entry/37403

3 Taken from Routledge's own Companion proposal guidelines.

4 Edward Braun's definitive editing of the primary source in English, *Meyerhold on Theatre,* entered its fourth edition in 2016. Continuing interest in practitioner research may be gauged by the recent reissue of the 22-volume 'RPP' series (with the Meyerhold revision published in 2018), along with new collations of their contents (Chamberlain and Sweeney 2022). Primary sources, in addition to *Meyerhold on Theatre*, have also been reissued in this period, including Paul Schmidt's *Meyerhold at Work* (2014), and Law and Gordon's *Meyerhold, Eisenstein and Biomechanics* (2012). Contributors to this volume have also made significant recent contributions to Meyerhold criticism, including (Skinner 2015, 2019), (Posner 2016), (Aquilina 2020), (Brown and Petrakova 2019), and (Leach 2018). Recent digital resources (Pitches 2014–) an online course on biomechanics on the FutureLearn platform and the Routledge Performance Archive (with a section on Russian biomechanics master, Alexei Levinsky) are also evidence of this vigour.

5 A number of suggested themes from the original call may help to illustrate our intention to challenge canonical views of Meyerhold, all of which figure in some way in this final collection: Meyerhold and his overlooked contemporaries; Meyerhold as inter-disciplinarian; Meyerhold and amateur practice; Meyerhold in the provinces; Meyerhold's migratory practices (beyond Russia); new sources on Meyerhold; Meyerhold and technology; novel applications of Biomechanics today.

6 This is an argument developed elsewhere (Aquilina 2020: 160–7) by using newspapers published in the West, especially in the United States, as source material.
7 The chapters are translated by Alex Trustrum Thomas.
8 Tillis speaks primarily of the need to question a Eurocentric theatre history.
9 Verigina and Smirnova are also two important chroniclers of Meyerhold's work. Extracts from their writings are also reproduced in Posner's collection of sources.
10 *I Want a Baby* was eventually premiered as late as 1990/1, with a production by Robert Leach at Moscow's Teatr u Nikitskikh Vorot (Leach 1994: xiv–xv).
11 Skinner discusses *I Want a Baby* (and *One Life*) to develop an argument about the political implications inherent in watching performance, i.e. 'how the act of looking itself can shape their [the viewers'] political and social engagement with the dominant ideologies of the culture' (p. 81). Compare with Muza's chapter, which develops a similar discussion about political implications in relation to speech.

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PART I

Histories

INTRODUCTION

Stefan Aquilina

The study of theatre history and its historiography has often been postulated in terms of the difficulties that it advances. These difficulties include a concern for the invariable absence of the events that it studies (Franko and Richards 2000: 1–2), the ethical implications involved – especially when coupled with issues of what is 'truth' (Cochrane and Robinson 2016: 3–6) – and even the overarching value of historical study itself (Wiles and Dymkowski 2013: 3–6). Thankfully, the crises that R.W. Vince (1989) spoke of, in terms of a dwindling number of historians and questions over professional identity, is now a thing of the past.[1] It is, in fact, heartening to note a scholar like Jim Davis (2011: 97) taking a much more positive stance when arguing that 'theatre history has undergone not so much a period of crisis as a process of regeneration'. He goes on to read historical research in theatre and performance as a dynamic and open field of investigation:

> The study of theatre history and historiography is something of an adventure, not so much a survey of what was, as an investigation of what might have been. It is about questions not answers and it should continually allow new approaches and new possibilities.
>
> (Davis 2011: 97)

Underpinning this sense of openness is the awareness that historical research of theatre is at its most engaging when it nurtures a dialogue among different concerns, methodologies, and approaches, brought together around the conviction that theatre history, or histories (see later mention), matters. It is perhaps worth summarising briefly these concerns as follows:

- a problematisation of periodisation, leading not to its outright rejection but to an understanding that historical periods can hardly be bookended through precise start and end dates. This is because ideas and practises typically cross-fade, overlap, or even spill across different contexts and time frames
- a foregrounding of microhistory and its deep focus on a single event or reality, which it interrogates from every possible angle through the support of the broadest range of sources and voices possible

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- the questioning of dominant narratives in theatre history, the 'theatre canons' so to speak, not only to unpick the mechanisms involved in their creation but also to uncover those voices that scholarship might have silenced; this questioning is often allied to calls for a 'world theatre history' and for 'decolonising the curriculum'
- the awareness that the reconstruction of past theatre events will always be partial, that there cannot be an objective 'truth' awaiting discovery, and that the plurality of interpretation is a precondition of work that a historian has to accept. It is for this reason that today we easily speak, following the work of Phillip Zarrilli et al (2006; 1st ed.), of theatre *histories* (and *historiographies*, for that matter)
- the application of critical theory as a tool to interpret historical phenomenon, what Jackie Bratton referred to as 'theorised theatre histories' (2003: 4)
- the use of body-based, practical approaches as a potent mode of scholarly enquiry of the theatrical past.[2]

With the exception of the final, practice-based approach,[3] the chapters collected in this part signal the broadness of theatre historiography as it stands today. In several concrete ways, they also expand the potential reach of these historiographical approaches. Take periodisation, for example. Periodisation is often set in motion to organise theatre history into substantial epochs, geographical areas, or even overarching themes. It is a necessary if knotty part of historical research. As Christopher Balme argues, historical periods are 'today regarded by many scholars as necessary cognitive constructs. . . . Although there is certainly no easy solution [to periodisation], it is essential that theatre historians take cognizance of the problem and consciously position their work in reaction to it' (Balme 2008: 110). Such positioning is evident when elsewhere (Aquilina 2020a: 196) I argued that periodisation can flow downwards from large-scale historical constructs to the work of individual practitioners. This 'practitioner-oriented periodization' is particularly profitable when underscored by an overarching theme, one that brings together different work contexts or phases (recurrence) but that still mutates across extended periods of time (difference).[4]

Nathan Thomas' chapter, titled 'Meyerhold, the Musician', offers one example of this kind of periodisation. The essay opens with a bold statement, that 'Meyerhold was a musician' (p. 41) and builds up from there by signalling how music was consistently at the centre of his theatrical practice. To achieve this, Thomas identifies four areas in Meyerhold's career, which he links to the movements that typically constitute a classical symphony. The first three are the exposure to Chekhov's *The Seagull*, Mikhail Gnesin's study on the rhythm of language, and Dalcroze's movement pedagogy; like the structure of a symphony, where the themes from the first three movements are interweaved in the finale, Chekhov, Gnesin, and Dalcroze are threaded together in the final section to 'examine what Meyerhold did with these musical tools in multiple productions over more than three decades of work' (p. 42). The essay raises the issue of what musicality is – an important concern in contemporary theatre studies, especially when related to the modernists (Roesner 2015; Frendo 2014). In the first instance, Thomas argues, musicality provided Meyerhold with a shared vocabulary (forte, moderato, crescendo, etc.), which he could use with his actors. In the second, musicality became a potent compositional tool, evidenced in Meyerhold's preference to compose directorial 'scores' rather than production plans. The potential of the former is in the collaborative space that it nourishes, leading to 'creative harmony with all the voices of the production coordinating into an orchestra full of meaning' (p. 42). Amy Skinner (2013) describes Meyerhold's theatre as one that was 'more than the sum of [its] parts', and Thomas' chapter sheds valuable light on the role which music played in achieving this harmony between the work of actors, dramatists, composers, set designers, and so on.

When periodisation flows downwards to the work of a single practitioner it invariably brings with it issues related to microhistory, focused as the latter is on more contained research units, be they a particular event, reality, group of people, or, in actual fact, individual. Sascha Bru, De Bruyn and Delville (2016: 199), for example, contrast microhistory with the 'scaling up of historical imaginations' from where broad historical periods emerge, arguing in turn that microhistory's aim is 'to zoom in on a particular event', possibly (even if not necessarily) 'tied to a [single] person'.[5] This zooming in is enabled further when it is funnelled through a clearly articulated research theme, as is the case in Anna Kovalova's chapter on 'Meyerhold and Cinema'. Given its focus on cinema, one might consider our placement of Kovalova's chapter at the opening of this part as slightly odd. The chapter, however, is representative of the underlining objective across this Companion to consistently problematise expectations surrounding Meyerhold (see General Introduction). Certainly, Meyerhold's engagement with cinema is more than a scholarly footnote, given its consistent mention in broad surveys of Meyerhold's career (e.g. Braun 1998: 135–9), but Kovalova's 'zooming in' approach allows her to excavate extensive new detail on the subject.

Kovalova's chapter also signals another imperative of contemporary historical research, that of striking the delicate balance between rigour and imaginative interpretation, the former rooted in the precise sourcing of materials and skilled application of pertinent methodologies, the latter framed by the researcher's own background, ideologies, and objectives. As Davis says:

> [I]n accepting history as a form of narrative and dismissing positivist and essentialist approaches to the past, it should not be assumed that good historiographic practice can eschew careful and detailed exploration and evaluation of sources or of archival evidence, in whatever forms these may take. Any observation made by historians must at least be grounded in evidence. But it is very difficult – perhaps impossible – to write history in which some form of speculation or imagination does not occur, either in making connections between sources or in assessing new evidence that has been unearthed or in filling in the gaps when evidence is unavailable.
>
> (Davis 2011: 92–3)

Kovalova's essay deftly strikes this balance between rigour and interpretation. It is grounded in deep scholarly work, bringing in a variety of sources to the discussion (Meyerhold's own assertions, newspaper reviews, secondary sources in Russian, iconographic materials, etc.). Her objective, however, is only initially reconstructive, as she interprets this range of material to argue that the three movies that Meyerhold directed before the Revolution (*The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *The Strong Man*, and the unfinished *Phantom Spells*) form an unintended trilogy, one that shaped Meyerhold's relationship with cinema for many years to come. The second key area that Kovalova addresses is that of the 'cinefication of theatre'. Given the increasing visibility of cinema in the 1920s and after, Meyerhold would have been hard pressed not to expose his theatre to cinematic developments. Thus, the use of a screen did become a feature of his theatre, though Meyerhold's cinefication cut much deeper: it was embroiled, Kovalova argues, in the wider composition of performance through the use of intertitles, montage, slow tempi, and cinematic light.

Another chapter with a strong interpretative slant is Teemu Paavolainen's 'Performing Communism, or, What if We Took Meyerhold's Politics Seriously?' Paavolainen even goes as far as calling his reading a 'caricature', one that contributes 'a potentially interesting metalevel (or "companion") to some of the other contributions that stick closer to his [Meyerhold's] actual practice' (p. 100). What allows Paavolainen this sense of 'playfulness' is his application of

twenty-first-century political theories developed by writers like Silvia Federici, Jodi Dean, John Holloway, and, especially, David Graeber. While there might be a certain ambivalence around the application of theory in historical studies – Jackie Bratton and Jim Davis see it as a necessity, while Thomas Postlewait cautions against its overuse and possible straightjacketing of the historical material[6] – it becomes necessary in Paavolainen's case in order to advance his objective 'to remain conversant with communism', as well as discussing how imagination becomes the driving political ontology of the Left. On a theatrical level, the use of theory also allows Paavolainen 'to reinsert some politics to what have often been reduced to merely aesthetic commonplaces' (p. 101), namely Meyerhold's use of character, acting, objects, and scenography.

Perhaps, one of the strongest voices in contemporary historiography speaks of the need to rediscover theatre and performance realities that, mainly for political and aesthetic reasons, have received an undeserving scholarly side-lining. This is a point I reappraise in other sections of the Companion,[7] though here I would like to reassert briefly the importance of going beyond well-trodden areas of investigation and to direct this call towards a slightly different area. The scope of periodisation has been extended previously to incorporate the work of individual practitioners; a similar extension is evident when efforts are made to uncover new materials within the oeuvres of individual and well-known practitioners like Meyerhold. Uncovering these obfuscated areas is certainly interesting and enriching because it expands our knowledge of the practitioner in question, though perhaps even more revealing is to ask why these areas were side-lined in the first place. Was it because of a lack of sources? Or a predilection to trumpet successful moments or a 'good story'? Were other political and contextual factors at play? Answering such questions typically imbricates theatre work further in surrounding contextual matters.

Michelle Assay's and Amy Skinner's chapters (titled 'Meyerhold's *Hamlet*: An Unrealised Dream' and 'Looking at Meyerhold's Unseen Theatre' respectively) are informed by this search for new areas in Meyerhold studies. Assay starts her journey from Meyerhold's plea to have the following inscribed on his gravestone: '[H]ere lies an actor and director who never acted and never directed Hamlet' (p. 68). More than a throw-away statement said in half-jest, Assay digs deeper around Meyerhold's words and makes 'the dream of staging Hamlet . . . a leitmotif of his entire career' (p. 68), a recurring idea or objective that not only traverses several instances or phases of Meyerhold's career but also links them together. That Meyerhold's dream to produce *Hamlet* appears at regular intervals in his career serves as a prism to read his changing outlooks and approaches to theatre-making. The play, in other words, becomes a metaphorical Russian nesting doll where preoccupations and concerns of different scales interweave into each other:

> the shifts in attitude throughout Meyerhold's numerous references to the play reveal the evolving nature of his approach to Hamlet and to the theatre in general, as well as reflecting changes in the political-cultural climate of the time and artists' obligations to manoeuvre accordingly.
>
> (p. 68)

In later years, *Hamlet* became very much a battleground for Meyerhold, especially in his defence against accusations of formalism and 'Meyerholdism'. During a 1933 public debate, he argued as follows:

> We say that the actors need to be agile, precise in their movements, and athletic. They have to possess acrobatic skills. Moreover, we also say that the actor has to understand that his work is in a predetermined space and that consequently he needs to have architectural knowledge of this space. All this was misunderstood. For example,

> acrobatics, clowning, and grotesque processes have not been understood correctly and a hellish confusion has emerged. Subsequently, it is believed that the 'To be or not to be?' monologue has to be performed in the following manner: once on stage, the actor performs a somersault, which is followed by part of the speech and a stretch at centre-stage, after which the actor walks on all fours, like a bear. Finally, he stands up and continues to act. . . . [W]e are misunderstood and the opposite of what we suggest is carried out.
>
> (in Crino 1975: 192)

In particular, Assay directs Meyerhold's qualms towards two contemporaries of his – Nikolai Akimov and Sergei Radlov – and their interpretation of the play. In doing so she reveals an alternative way in which Meyerhold informed the theatre context in which he operated, not so much through direct influence or collaboration but more through a sense of rivalry and conflict.

Meyerhold's dream to stage *Hamlet* is not the only unrealised project of his that merits scrutiny. Amy Skinner's essay, in fact, discusses two other such projects, *I Want a Baby* (1927–30) and *One Life* (1936–7). That the two projects are located in Meyerhold's last ten years or so of work shows the increasing difficulty he was facing at a time marked by ever-increasing political scrutiny and censorship. *I Want a Baby* is relatively well discussed in literature about Meyerhold, though the emphasis is usually more on the gender issues at stake (the play revolves around a woman's decision to have a child out of wedlock and to raise him on her own).[8] Skinner, however, shifts her attention to the process of theatre-making that was going into the production and that was well documented in the primary sources (the same was the case with *One Life*). In postulating for unrealised projects not as failures but as possible areas of investigation that expand our knowledge of the practitioner in question, Skinner effectively contributes to Davis' call to broaden the field of historiography. It all depends on the particular lens that the historian adopts. In Skinner's case, her focus on Meyerhold's unseen projects allows her to interpret the documentation from a distinctly visual point of view, underscoring how even looking at performance can be shaped by political and ideological ends.

Political, ideological, and other contextual considerations are at the foreground of the last chapter being introduced here, Anna Muza's 'Meyerhold in the 1930s: Language, Text, Performance'. Muza argues that the approaches to dramatic text and verbal delivery in performances that Meyerhold had developed up to, say, *The Government Inspector* (1926) – cuts and revisions to canonical scripts, integration of unexpected musical pieces, poetic rather than realistic speech, and so on – became 'framed by and drawn into a new, unprecedented situation in the rhetorical sphere' (p. 55). Muza is making reference here to what we call the public sphere, that space where individuals can freely come together to discuss important matters and influence political action but that Soviet Russia of the 1930s developed in a completely opposite direction: conscious political action from above leading towards the recasting of an entire society. With its possibility to serve as 'a medium imitating and representing live human speech' (p. 56), theatre in general and Meyerhold's in particular became caught in this recasting. Muza's chapter is relevant to the historiographic discourses suggested earlier not only because of its imbrication in contextual considerations but also because of the sources which she uses to develop her study. She particularly relies on Meyerhold's remarks delivered to his casts at rehearsals. Far from being regulated by official verbal forms, these remarks come across as spontaneous exchanges used to meet the specific here-and-now requirements of particular rehearsal situations. Muza describes such remarks as 'among the few minimally restrained exchanges in the cultural sphere' (p. 56), creating in turn a space where Meyerhold could tactically elude political regulation.[9] They join the range of sources and historiographical approaches which the chapters in this part foreground in their collective effort to shed new light on the historical figure of Meyerhold.

Notes

1 On the contrary, Claire Cochrane and Jo Robinson (2016: 1) have more recently celebrated what they call the 'current strength of disciplinary confidence. The exponents of theatre history no longer have to struggle, as R.W. Vince claimed, "for a sense of professional identity". We are no longer uncertain "'of defining our study as an independent branch of knowledge, of professing a kind of knowledge and a kind of truth intrinsically valuable"'.

2 The following are some relevant sources that question current historiographic practices and on which the list of points above was based: Postlewait and McConachie (1989); Bratton (2003), Balme (2008: 96–117), Postlewait (2009), Postlewait and Sušec Michieli (2010), Davis (2011), Cochrane and Robinson (2016).

3 For a developed discussion about practice-based experiments to investigate tenets from Meyerhold's theatre see, for example, Bryan Brown and Olya Petrakova's chapter in Part IV.

4 Recurrence and difference is how I frame Meyerhold's career in a different study, arguing that recurrence 'extracts persisting and cross-cutting elements across disparate realities, contexts and work practices. Within the oeuvre of a particular practitioner, recurrence often takes the form of a deep-seated quality which recurs as a work staple. Difference, on the other hand, prevents recurrent practices from becoming myths, impeding a one-dimensionality to a practitioner's career which figures like Meyerhold did not have' (Aquilina 2020a: 139).

5 Postlewait refers to this zooming in as 'delving inwards' (in Wiles and Dymkowski 2013: 240).

6 For a summary of this historiographical debate around theory see Aquilina (2020b: 22–3).

7 See the General Introduction and the Introduction to Part II. My own chapter (also in Part II) on Meyerhold's female collaborators is a further contribution to the diversification of modernism.

8 See Robert Leach's essay in Part II of this Companion.

9 I used 'tactically' in the sense developed by Michel de Certeau and which I applied to make a similar reading to Muza's but in relation to Stanislavsky. His use of everyday images in rehearsals allowed Stanislavsky to 'elude appropriation by Soviet authorities' (Aquilina 2013: 229) because they could not be pinned down in the same way as terminology, for example.

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1

VSEVOLOD MEYERHOLD AND CINEMA

Anna Kovalova

In 1915, when Vsevolod Meyerhold's career in cinema started, the leading Russian film periodical *Sine-Fono* welcomed his debut with great enthusiasm: 'Let Meyerhold's name in time present a new era in cinema art' (Lur'e 1915: 62).[1] This prediction came true: Meyerhold's influence on Russian cinema lasted for decades; he became a crucial point of reference in the history of the Soviet avant-garde film. Many prominent Russian film directors of the 1920s considered Meyerhold to be their mentor; Sergei Eisenstein, a pioneer in the theory and practice of montage, was his closest pupil. Moreover, Meyerhold's work in cinema greatly influenced his theatre projects and thus influenced pre-War Russian culture more widely.

It is therefore unsurprising that the various connections between Meyerhold and cinema have been widely discussed by film and theatre scholars. Alexander Fevralsky, who worked with Meyerhold in the 1920s and 1930s and knew him well, has produced the most fundamental study of the subject. His excellent book *Puti k sintezu: Meierkhol'd i kino* [*Paths to Synthesis: Meyerhold and Cinema*] (Fevral'skii 1978) remains until now an indispensable guide for scholars and everyone interested in Meyerhold. Later, film historian Vladimir Zabrodin contributed significantly to research on Meyerhold's relationship with cinema. His works on the subject include the edited volume *Eizenshtein o Meierkhol'de. 1919–1948* [*Eisenstein on Meyerhold. 1919–1948*] (Zabrodin 2005b), and articles and documents published in books and journals.[2] Before his sudden death in 2018, Zabrodin had compiled a unique collection of documents and texts regarding Meyerhold's work in cinema. This groundbreaking project had not been completed, but hopefully Zabrodin's colleagues will prepare it for publication in the near future.[3]

In this chapter, I will summarise the scholarship on Meyerhold's films, his work as a cinema actor, and the role of cinema in his theatre projects. I will devote more attention to those aspects and facts that have been underexplored or require revision. I will argue that the three films Meyerhold directed before the October Revolution (*Portret Doriana Greiia* [*The Picture of Dorian Gray*], *Sil'nyi chelovek* [*The Powerful Man*], and the unfinished *Nav'i chary* [*Phantom Spells*]) form a trilogy that shaped Meyerhold's relationship with cinema for many years afterwards. The chronological start of the director's work in cinema became the focus of vital future endeavours in the field.

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The Pre-revolutionary Trilogy

Before I discuss Meyerhold's pre-revolutionary films, I must emphasise that neither he nor critics and scholars called them a trilogy. It does not look as if Meyerhold intended to create a cycle of films. However, in retrospect, the deeply connected *The Picture of Dorian Gray, The Powerful Man*, and *Phantom Spells* might be presented as elements of a single whole. I intend to debate this assumption below though this task is undoubtedly challenging: all three films are considered lost.

In his first film, the adaptation of Oscar Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Meyerhold presented himself as a film director, a screenwriter, and an actor: he played the role of Lord Henry. This triple debut was a sensation and surprised the Russian public who had known Meyerhold to be a dedicated opponent of cinema. In March 1910, at one of baron N.V. Drizen's 'literary Wednesdays', he gave a talk in which he contended that cinema could not become an art.[4] These ideas were later discussed in Meyerhold's essay 'Balagan' [The Fairground Booth]: 'The cinema is a dream come true for people aspiring to photograph life, a clear instance of attraction to quasi-naturalism. While having undoubted significance for science, cinema, when called upon to serve art, itself feels its own helplessness and tries in vain to join the ranks of what is called *art*' (Meierkhol'd 1968: 221–2; emphasis in original).[5] In the 1900s and early 1910s, Meyerhold in all probability strongly disapproved of cinema. Alexander Fevralsky, who was able to interview Meyerhold's daughter Tatiana, points to a shred of interesting evidence: 'Father did not think that his daughters' aesthetical education might benefit from going to the cinemas. He said that the shooting conditions do not provide an opportunity for creating works of art' (Fevral'skii 1978: 7).

Meyerhold's opinion of cinema seems to have been unchanged in 1915 when he started work on *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. In an interview for *Teatral'naia gazeta* (*The Theatre Newspaper*), he admitted: 'My attitude toward present-day cinema is significantly negative' ('V. E. Meierkhol'd o kinematografe' 1915).[6] Yet, he considered the screen a challenging and productive field: 'My next task is to investigate cinema devices, unused for now, but undoubtedly hidden in it' (Lur'e 1915: 62). Meyerhold signed a contract with Paul Thiemann and Freiedrich Reinhardt's studio that was producing the Russian Golden Series of films: this trademark, primarily orientated towards adaptations, was considered one of the finest and most respected enterprises on the Russian screen. In 1915, this studio faced a severe crisis due to anti-German repressions caused by World War 1. Thiemann, a German subject, was exiled to the Asian part of the Russian Empire. His wife, Elizaveta, who by that time had worked for the studio as a producer, actress, and even film director, had to find a way for the company to survive. It was probably she who invited Meyerhold and turned his attention to a new Russian Golden Series project.[7] Citing an interview that Meyerhold presumably gave to *Sine-Fono*'s editor-in-chief Samuil Lurie, the journal remarked:

> Here [in cinema], just as in theatre, he will, first of all, find the form into which to pour the piece he is directing. . . . All the quests should be directed towards the very essence of cinema, the combination of light and shadow, and should be based on the beauty of the line.
>
> (Lur'e 1915: 62)

According to what we know of the film, Meyerhold's intentions were fully realised. When *The Picture of Dorian Gray* came out, some journalists ridiculed the casting: a woman, actress Varvara

Yanova, played the leading part.[8] But truly perceptive critics recognised the significance of the film's visual form; the art critic Iakov Tugendkhol'd noted:

> Basil's workshop, Lord Henry's study with its giant armchairs, Dorian Gray's sumptuous alcove, wonderful screens, carpets, and Chinese silks – all this bears most strongly the impression of authentic British aestheticism and does not resemble the usual eclectic and cheap cinema furnishings. On the other hand, the skillful use of the black-and-white gamut of the screen and its contrasts of light and shade produced many beautiful moments constructed on a clear silhouette or play of light. The black silhouettes of Basil, Gray, and Henry against the background of the light studio are especially memorable.
>
> (Tugendkhol'd 1915: 225)

The Picture of Dorian Gray was widely discussed not only in the film and theatre journals but also in the general press. The scholar Anna Dautova has collected many printed references to the film and published this selection in the journal *Kinovedcheskie zapiski* (*Film Scholar's Notes*) (Dautova 2018). The film has naturally attracted the attention of film and theatre scholars.[9] New materials on the film have appeared quite recently. Among them is the one surviving extract from Meyerhold's script and a list of the film's intertitles (Meierkhol'd 2018; Meyerhold 2019). Another helpful source is the most complete collection of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* promotional photographs representing the film's visual outlook (Kovalova 2019). Despite all the work that scholars have done in researching this significant lost film, many important things about *The Picture of Dorian Gray* remain unknown or need to be re-examined. These include, for example, the information that we get from the memoirs of cameraman Alexander Levitsky. This text was a crucial source for early cinema historians for many years, but with time, it has become evident that the memoirs are significantly inaccurate. For example, Levitsky gives a detailed description of Vitol'd Akhramovich taking part in the work on *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Levitskii 1964: 79–86). No other source confirms that Akhramovich, who later played an important role in Russian film history, did work on this film.[10] On the contrary, in Meyerhold's diaries, 'making the acquaintance of V. F. Akhramovich' is dated to 16 July 1916, when *Dorian Gray* had been already shot and distributed. Akhramovich became a key figure for the next part of the trilogy, Meyerhold's *The Powerful Man*.

The Powerful Man was an adaptation of the novel trilogy (*The Powerful Man*, *Liberation*, and *The Holy Grove*) by the Polish writer Stanislaw Przybyszewski. All three novels first came out in Russia in the early 1910s, translated by Akhramovich.[11] Although Przybyszewski is not particularly well known today, he was very popular in Europe and Russia at the beginning of the twentieth century.[12] In his book *Predtechi i sovremenniki* (*Forerunners and contemporaries*), literary critic Evgeny Anichkov described Przybyszewski as one of the brightest Symbolist writers (other chapters of the book are dedicated to Emile Zola, Knut Hamsun, Anatole France, Oscar Wilde [sic!], and others) (Anichkov 1910). Before Meyerhold's *The Powerful Man*, a few other adaptations of Przybyszewski's works had appeared in Russia: *Bezdna* (*The Abyss*; 1916, directed by Vladislav Lenchevsky), *Belaia roza* (*The White Rose*; 1916, directed by Petr Chardynin), *Radi schast'ia* (*For the Sake of Happiness*; 1916, also directed by Chardynin). It is also notable that, besides Akhramovich, two other prominent Russian screenwriters translated Przybyszewski and were very much interested in his work. Symbolist writer Alexander Kursinsky, who worked closely with the Russian Golden Series before World War 1 and wrote scripts for some notable pre-revolutionary films, translated a book of his 'aphorisms and preludes' [Pshybyshevskii 1902].[13] Alexander Voznesensky, the leading early Russian screenwriter, published several translations of Przybyszewski's works[14]; moreover, he knew Przybyszewski personally, organised his lectures, and wrote articles about him.[15] The visual, cinematic nature of Przybyszewski's

writings is probably reflected in a verse that Maria Paper dedicated him: 'Oh, sweet shadows, how beautiful you are!' (Paper 1911).

Scholars have studied Meyerhold's theatre adaptations of Przybyszewski's works quite thoroughly.[16] But very little has been written of his lost film *The Powerful Man*. We know that the film represented the first part of Przybyszewski's trilogy (*The Powerful Man*) and featured very few scenes from *The Liberation* and *The Holy Grove*. This structure did not meet the approval of *Kino-gazeta* (*Cinema Newspaper*); its correspondent noted:

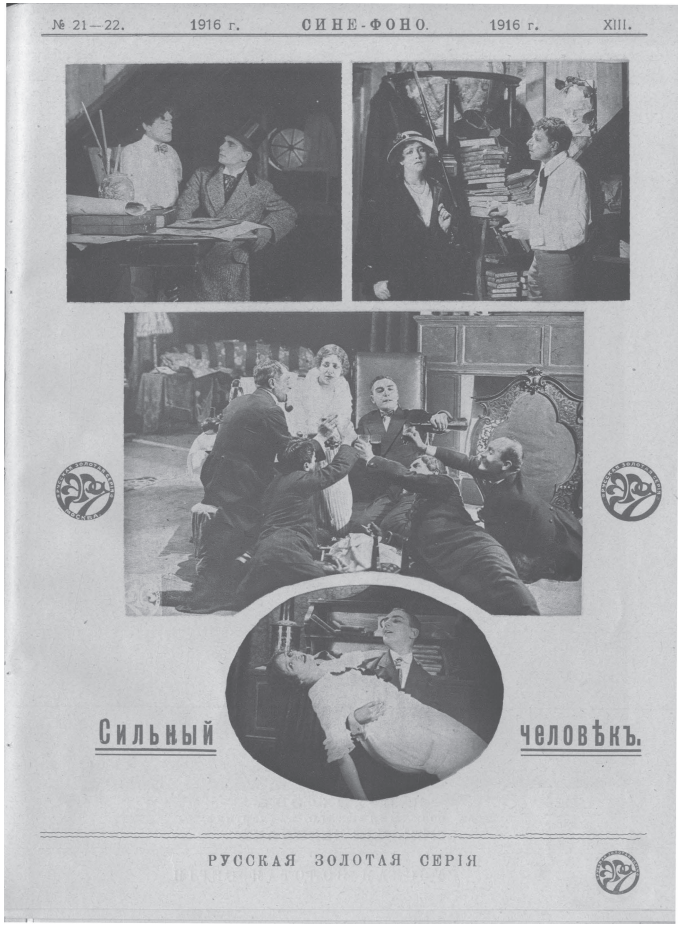
> On the screenwriter's whim, Przybyszewski's plan was crumpled. Almost the entire second and third parts of *The Powerful Man (Liberation* and *The Holy Grove*), where Ada Karskaia plays an important role, were excised. The drama is now focused on the relationship between Beletsky, Lusia Shumskaya, and Gursky.
>
> (Binom 1918)

It must have seemed odd that Meyerhold's film did not stress the femme fatale plotline. Furthermore, *Liberation* and *The Holy Grove* contain plot twists that were in high-demand in 1910s cinema: romantic adultery, a duel, and suicide by throwing oneself under the train. According to viewers' expectations, those scenes should have been the first to be adapted. Instead, Meyerhold stuck to the less thrilling events of the first book, which were the starting point for the whole story. Unfortunately, both the screenplay and the intertitles are lost, so one must reconstruct the storyline using the novel in Akhramovich's translation. The ingenious writer Gursky is deeply depressed and wants to commit suicide. Journalist Biletsky brings him poison and inherits his unpublished manuscripts, later presenting them as his own writings. Meanwhile, Biletsky's friend Borsuk, another genius, paints a portrait of the femme fatale, Ada Karskaia. Biletsky begins an affair with Ada and persuades her to burn Borsuk's paintings that had been insured for a large sum of money. The plagiarist Biletsky does not trust his mistress Lusia, who knows the secret of Gursky's manuscripts. He takes her to Italy and kills her. *The Powerful Man* ends with the triumphant opening night of Gursky's play: Biletsky becomes famous. The film contained some scenes from the later novels; Biletsky was unmasked, as happened in *The Holy Grove*.

In this overview, it is easy to see a strong connection with the *Dorian Gray* plot. Biletsky appears to be a projection of Dorian torn between a new Lord Henry and Basil Hallward: the writer Gursky seduces him with vanity and fame while the 'good' painter is destroyed by Biletsky himself. Lusia becomes a new Sybil Vane, who has to die so as not to impede her lover's further rise and success.

Both *Dorian Gray* and *The Powerful Man* are set in Europe, which was not typical for pre-revolutionary Russian films. Before World War 1, it was possible to shoot in European locations; for example, some scenes of the popular film *Kliuchi schas'tia* (*The Keys of Happiness*; 1913, directed by Vladimir Gardin and Yakov Protazanov) were shot in Venice.[17] Due to the political situation, Meyerhold could not afford such luxury; theatre scholar and writer Nikolai Volkov (1929: 439) cited him: 'All Venice should be built in an atelier – this is not a joke'. This scene later found approval in the journal *Teatr i iskusstvo* (*Theatre and Art*), although the review did not give credit to the film as a whole:

> Mr. Meyerhold . . . has worked hard. He has failed to give anything new in terms of the screen interpretation of the plot, but he has shown an interesting effect: the veiling of the scene when it is necessary to hide some shooting details. For example, to transfer 'a Venice scene' to Moscow, the director fills the screen with a smoky fog through which only outlines of objects and people may appear, giving a hint, letting us guess what is going on.
>
> (Khronika 1917)



Figures 1.1 and 1.2 Promotional photographs for *The Powerful Man* (1916)

A few promotional photographs for *The Powerful Man* were published in *Sine-Fono*[18]; these illustrations provide some information on how the film stills might have looked (Figures 1.1 and 1.2). In this promotional section, one can also find portraits of the actors playing the main characters (Figures 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, and 1.6). Meyerhold as Gursky is particularly interesting. It is productive to compare this portrait with the film poster of *The Powerful Man*.[19] Both images accentuate the character's eyes but on the photo, they are Gursky's, whereas on the poster we can see Biletsky's eyes. It might be assumed that in the film both characters had these bright and scary eyes, and that this detail stressed that they were doubles, like Dorian Gray and Lord Henry (also played by Meyerhold). The four portraits published in *Sine-Fono* (Meyerhold as Gursky, Mikhail Doronin as Borsuk, Konstantin Khokhlov as Biletsky, M. Zhdanova as Lusia) confirm that the storyline was tailored to reflect *Dorian Gray* more vividly. Binom from *Kino-Gazeta* was right to point out that Ada Karskaia was in the shadow: her portrait is missing in the promotional section although she was played by the famous actress Varvara Yanova. Yet, a very important character from *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Alan Campbell, did not feature in *The Powerful Man*; one can find his reflection in the protagonist of the third part of the trilogy, *Phantom Spells*.

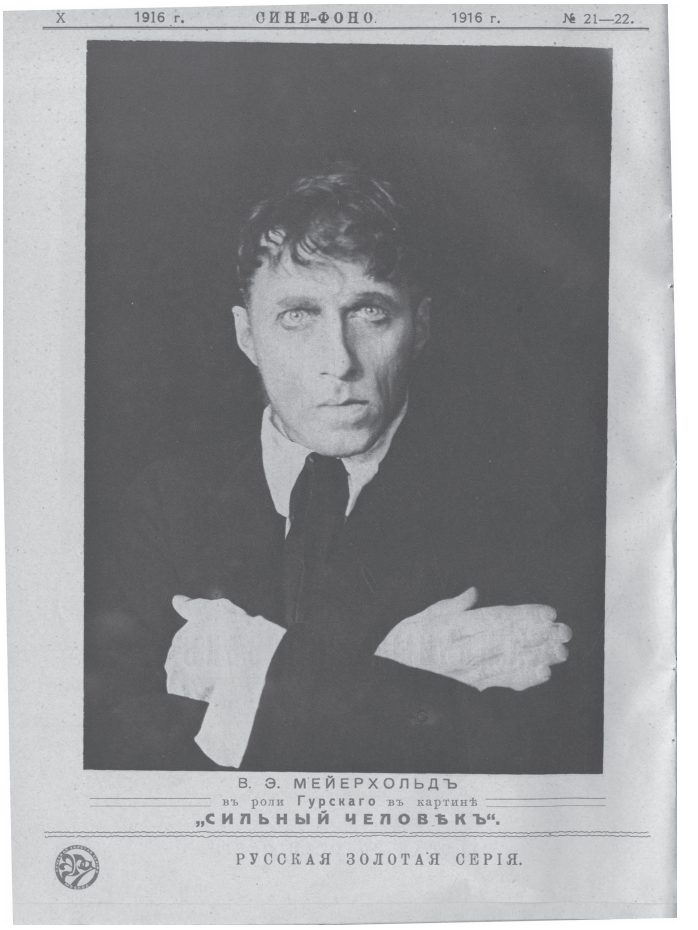


Figure 1.3 V. Meyerhold as Gursky in *The Powerful Man*

Figure. 1.4 M. Doronin as Borsuk in *The Powerful Man*

Figure. 1.5 K. Khokhlov as Biletskii in *The Powerful Man*

Figure. 1.6 M. Zhdanova as Lucia in *The Powerful Man*

Alan Campbell, the chemist whom Dorian blackmailed to destroy the artist's body, seems to have been a significant character for Meyerhold. In a lecture delivered to the Studio of Screen Art (*Studiia ekrannogo iskusstva*), the director noted:

> Did you notice the acting of the artist who was playing Alan in this film? His acting is obvious in its correctness and consistency. The fact is that the man portraying Alan is not an actor, but part artist and part poet. He is a very educated man who knows how to enter a salon, how to carry himself, to sit, stand, and so on. He calculates his every step (and it is this that distinguishes well educated people from badly educated ones). He flaunts his every movement, his form, and he is full of self-confidence and beauty. His entire performance is on the level of form, and he has no need to experience Alan's situation. He came in confidently, knowing that the public would admire his beautiful parting.
>
> (Meierkhol'd 1965: 21)

Elena Kochneva, a researcher at Pushkin House in St Petersburg, has established that the role of Alan Campbell was played by Boris Shaposhnikov, an avant-garde artist, subsequently a prominent museum figure from the 1920s to the 1950s (Kochneva 2016).

Meyerhold's interpretation of Campbell as a poet, an artistic chemist, was different from what is presented in Oscar Wilde's novel: 'He was an extremely clever young man, though he had no real appreciation of the visible arts, and whatever little sense of the beauty of poetry he possessed he had gained entirely from Dorian. His dominant intellectual passion was for science' (Wilde 2010: 105). The rare type created by Meyerhold and Shaposhnikov must have been reproduced in *Phantom Spells*, Meyerhold's next film based on the novels by Fedor Sologub, a major Russian Symbolist writer. Its main character Trirodov is also a poet and an artist (a photographer) who can make chemical wonders. Almost like Alan Campbell, he has to hide a human body using his outstanding knowledge of chemistry (this time it is a body of a political agent provocateur): 'The liquid, injected into his blood, acted strangely. The body contracted in proper proportion, and wasted very quickly. Within several hours it lost more than half of its weight, and assumed very small dimensions; it became very soft and pliant' (Sologub 1916: 219).

It remains unknown whether Meyerhold was inclined to include this scene in the film. Yet, in his notes on the *Nav'i Chary* shooting, which are preserved in the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art (RGALI), Meyerhold mentions Trirodov's 'laboratory' as one of the film's settings. Moreover, in these notes, the director characterises Trirodov as 'a poet and a chemist' (Meierkhol'd 1917).[20] The protagonist's dual nature seems to have been very important for Meyerhold.

Meyerhold's notes are written in the form of a concise diary. This document presents information on what Meyerhold had filmed, and it is of great interest to scholars. Fevralsky published extracts from the notes, arranging the scenes Meyerhold had mentioned according to Sologub's plot. The film structure he reconstructed might be incomplete but indicative; it shows that Meyerhold was going to focus on the first part of Sologub's trilogy *Kapli krovi* (*Drops of Blood*), adding a few scenes from the third part *Dym i pepel* (*Smoke and Ashes*) (Fevral'skii 177–9). This is very close to the approach he took when filming Przybyszevski's trilogy: as I have already mentioned, that adaptation was based on the first novel *The Powerful Man* with very few scenes from the later books.

For many years, Meyerhold's notes were the primary source for studying this unfinished film. Recently the scholar Anastasia Sysoeva has found and published another essential document, a fragment of Sologub's screenplay (Sysoeva 2011, no date). This text and Fevralsky's earlier publications present an overview of the film's history. However, a lot remains unknown. We do not know precisely why the film remained unfinished. According to Fevralsky, Meyerhold explained this as follows: 'The work started, we had done the outdoor shooting in the Moscow suburbs, but we never constructed the pavilions. We had to stop work because the film factory was being closed due to the [revolutionary] events' (Fevral'skii 1978: 66). However, according to the trade press, in 1917, when Meyerhold was filming, and even in early 1918, the Russian Golden Series was very much alive and active.[21] Reports that Thiemann was ceasing film production in Russia appeared only in the middle of 1918.[22] It looks as if Meyerhold had time to finish the film; there probably were some inner reasons for stopping production. It is regrettable that we do not have any visual materials on the film. While what has been shot is lost, and no photographs have yet been found in the archives or in the press, one can get some idea of what Meyerhold was filming by exploring the Gorenki estate that became the principal location set. In July 1917, Meyerhold wrote to Sologub: 'I have found a good estate near Moscow. Several exterior scenes have already been filmed there. Some wonderful grottoes and underground passages could be spotted there' (cited in Fevral'skii 1977: 180–1). Contemporary Gorenki photographs made a century after the filming surprisingly seem to reflect traces of his poetic enterprise.[23]

The Second Vanishing Point of the Trilogy

Meyerhold's trilogy did not develop step by step, from *The Picture of Dorian Gray* through *The Powerful Man* to *The Phantom Spells*. The idea to adapt Sologub had appeared no later than in February 1916 (Kino-khronika 1916), but then Meyerhold replaced *The Phantom Spells* with *The Powerful Man* before returning to Sologub in 1917. Thus, the three films should be discussed as dialogically connected parts of one picture rather than as three separate stages. It can be argued that the vanishing point of this picture is the adaptation of Oscar Wilde's novel that was the start of Meyerhold's cinema career. Significantly, Meyerhold was watching *The Picture of Dorian Gray* while working on *The Phantom Spells* (Meierkhol'd u ekrana 1916); he also shared his copy of the *Dorian Gray* screenplay with Sologub assuming that this would help with the new project. But if we continue discussing the trilogy in terms of painting and perspective theory, we shall see that it has a second vanishing point that is invisible and located outside the picture. This hidden vanishing point is the screenplay *Hop-Frog*, an adaptation of Edgar Allan Poe's 1849 story that was never produced.

Fevralsky was the first to draw attention to this noteworthy project:

> Among Meyerhold's papers, there is an envelope with the inscription 'Hop-Frog. (Based on a story by Edgar Poe.) A Script for Cinema.' This envelope contains the text of a script in fourteen scenes. The text was written in the old orthography, which means that the script belongs to the pre-revolutionary period. The division into pictures (nearly each of them was connected with a certain location) and the absence of cinematic instructions or comments suggest that Meyerhold wrote this script at the very beginning of his cinematic career.
>
> (Fevral'skii 1978: 58)[24]

It is now possible to date the text more precisely; in July 1916, *Teatral'naia gazeta* reported that: 'Meyerhold's adaptation of Sologub's novel *Phantom Spells* will not be produced. Instead, Meyerhold will adapt one of the works of Edgar Poe or Villiers de l'Isle-Adam' (Khronika 1916).

It looks as if Meyerhold was taking his work on this adaptation very seriously. According to his correspondence, he was reading a lot about Poe at the time. It was typical for Meyerhold to work hard on the texts he was adapting; for instance, while writing the script and intertitles for *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, he used several Russian translations of the novel (Kovalova 2019: 70–3). In his message to artist Olga Safonova dated 28 May 1916, Meyerhold mentions re-reading Poe's letters (Meierkhol'd 1976: 179). A week later, he wrote to Boris Alpers: 'Recently I have read: aesthetic and critical experiments by Vyach. Ivanov ("Furrows and Boundaries," Moscow, publishing house "Musaget," 1916) and Edgar Allan Poe's bio (by Konstantin Balmont) in the fifth volume of Poe's collected works. I highly recommend both' (Meierkhol'd 1976: 180). Meyerhold's interest in Poe's ego-documents partly explains why he chose to adapt a story that was relatively unknown in Russia. In Balmont's bio, it says: 'In his scary tale *Hop-Frog* . . . Poe describes the horrible impact of a single glass of wine on an ugly cripple (one cannot help assuming that this is autobiographical)' (Bal'mont 1912: 74). In Poe's story, the cripple Hop-Frog is a king's fool who responds very badly to alcohol; that is why the king enjoys making him drink:

> Poor fellow! his large eyes gleamed, rather than shone; for the effect of wine on his excitable brain was not more powerful than instantaneous. He placed the goblet

> nervously on the table, and looked round upon the company with a half – insane stare. They all seemed highly amused at the success of the king's 'joke'.
>
> (Poe 2014: 434)

Interestingly, Biletsky does something very similar by making Lucia drink while she feels sick of it (Pshybyshevskii 1912: 39–45). When the king insults Trippetta, who had tried to defend Hop-Frog, Hop-Frog exacts his revenge: after being put in charge of a big masquerade, he makes the king and his ministers dress like beasts, causes a fire, and runs away with Trippetta.

Hop-Frog is an actor, a theatre director (he stages the masquerade to have his revenge), and, given the autobiographical context, a writer. His story is that of an artist and of the incredible power of art. If we take another look at the trilogy of films, we can see that all its parts were similarly focused on this theme. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is the only one of the many screen adaptations of the novel in which the artist Basil Hallward becomes the main character (or at least is not in the shadows). This was indicated, for example, in some reviews:

> The operetta-like Dorian and Lord Henry, impersonated by Mr. Meyerhold, were unable to grab the attention of viewers in the early scenes, and it was directed at the actor who played the role of the artist perfectly. The second character eclipsed the first.
>
> (Granitov 1915: 94)

By limiting Biletsky's story that Przybyszewski had told in three novels to *The Powerful Man*, Meyerhold put the two artists, painter Borsuk and writer Gursky, at the centre of the plot; thus, a story about plagiarism turned into a story about art. In *Phantom Spells*, the protagonist is a poet. In *Dorian Gray* and *The Powerful Man*, artists become victims of life: Basil Hallward gets killed, Gursky commits suicide, and the loss of his paintings destroys Borsuk. However, Trirodov from *Phantom Spells* comes through all the trials; moreover, his art and science help him fight death and gain supernatural power over life. One can see this pattern in *Hop-Frog* even though it was never shot. This invisible vanishing point of the trilogy is particularly close to its third part in one other way: it brings out the theme of rebellion and social changes. In his cinema trilogy, Meyerhold had mirrored a revolution that had not happened yet but would later greatly influence Russian culture and give a new direction to art.

On the Soviet Screen and Behind It

After the October Revolution, Meyerhold performed only one role in cinema: in Yakov Protazanov's *Belyi orel* (1928, *The White Eagle*), where he played an evil Tsarist high official (*sanovnik*). This film is an adaptation of Leonid Andreev's novella *Gubernator* (*The Governor*, 1905). Andreev spent his last years in Finland as an émigré, opposed to the Bolshevik government. In the 1920s, his works were not particularly popular in the Soviet Union. On the other hand, Andreev was extremely famous before the Revolution. In the 1910s, numerous adaptations of his works appeared on the screen; primarily because of his articles (Andreev 1912, 1914) and his involvement in the early cinema industry he gained a reputation as the Godfather of Russian cinema.

For the late 1920s, the idea of adapting Andreev's novella about a governor who blames himself for shooting a peaceful demonstration should have seemed old-fashioned and poorly timed. While critics wrote favourably of Meyerhold's performance (Volkov 1928; Arsen 1928), many noted that the whole film was archaic in different ways. Adrian Piotrovsky, a major Soviet film