Nikolai Demidov

Becoming an Actor-Creator

Edited by Andrei Malaev-Babel and Margarita Laskina

Nikolai Demidov

At the time of his death, Konstantin Stanislavsky considered Nikolai Demidov to be "his only student, who understands the System." Demidov's incredibly forward-thinking processes not only continued his teacher's pioneering work, but also solved the problems of an actor's creativity that Stanislavsky never conquered.

Despite being one of the original teachers of the Stanislavsky system, Demidov's name was little known either in his native Russia or the wider world until the turn of the twenty-first century. Since then, his extensive works have been published in Russian but are yet to find their way to the English-speaking world. His sophisticated psychological techniques, stimulation of creativity, and methods of developing the actors themselves are now gaining increasing recognition.

Nikolai Demidov: Becoming an Actor-Creator brings together Demidov's five volumes on actor training. Supplementary materials, including transcriptions of Demidov's classes, and notes make this the definitive collection on one of Russian theatre's most important figures.

Nikolai Demidov (1884–1953) was co-founder of the Moscow Art Theatre School, and one of the original teachers of Stanislavski's system. Demidov's radical approach saw him ostracized from Moscow and his role in Russian actor training largely wiped from the history books. The efforts of his celebrated pupils – including Maria Knebel, Boris Livanov, and Margarita Laskina – have seen his work gradually return to recognition.

Andrei Malaev-Babel is an actor, director and scholar, a graduate of the Vakhtangov Theatre Institute in Moscow. He serves as Head of Acting at the FSU/Asolo Conservatory for Actor Training, and on the board of the Michael Chekhov Association. He is the editor of *The Vakhtangov Sourcebook* and author of *Yevgeny Vakhtangov: A Critical Portrait*.

Margarita Laskina is a noted Russian theatre scholar. She served as Aleksandrinsky Theatre's literary manager and editor-in-chief for the Leningrad Television. As assistant to Nikolai Demidov, she learned directly from the teacher, and as keeper of the Demidov archive, she edited his fundamental four-volume *Heritage* (2004–2009).

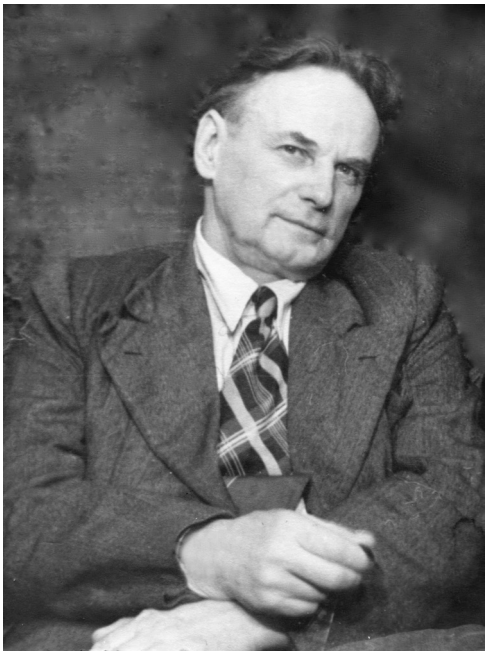

Figure 1 Nikolai Demidov, Moscow, 1951

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All these books are but a modest wreath on my father's unknown tomb. Early in my childhood he planted in my soul the golden seeds of artistic truth. Thanks to him alone I could perceive correctly what I heard from all my voluntary and involuntary teachers. This solitary, phenomenally pure and proud man, this enormous natural talent, remained in the shadows only because he was deprived of those human shortcomings required to build a career and obtain fame in the theatre world. When it comes to other art forms, artists like him meet their appreciation after death – for what remains after them; in our art, however, we leave nothing behind.

Nikolai Demidov

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She is grateful to God for being able to complete this work.

Last, but not least, Dr. Laskina will always remain thankful to destiny for bringing her together with her husband Oleg Okulevich (1921–2006) – a brilliant actor and Demidov's closest student. Although he is no longer with us, she continues to seek his advice daily.

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A Note on the Text

This collection contains the fundamental works of one of the most outstanding figures of Russian theatre pedagogy, Nikolai Vasilyevich Demidov (1884–1953). A close collaborator of Konstantin Stanislavsky, Demidov pioneered the "organic acting technique" belonging to the art of "genuine creative living onstage." This volume is designed for students and teachers of theatre schools, but also for anyone seriously interested in the art of the theatre and the actor. It includes Demidov's five major books, in an abridged format. (Cuts in the text are not specified.) The Glossary of Terms and Exercises further clarifies key Demidov terms and techniques, and it offers guidance for practical exercises, which are essential to the mastering the organic technique.

In translating Demidov, we tried to remain faithful to the author's original language and style. The colloquial nature of Demidov's writings was preserved by the translators. All emphases in quoted materials have been added by the author, Demidov.

The names of students, and those of the "etude characters," are kept as original Russian names. This might present a certain challenge for some readers. On the other hand, we felt it was important to set the Demidov classroom in his native Russia, in the period between the early 1920s to late 1940s – rather than introducing English and/or contemporary equivalents. This is why we preserved Demidov's use of masculine "he" (instead of "they" or "he or she") when generally referring to an actor.

The third book, *The Art of Living Onstage*, presented special challenges, as it is rich in dialogues between the teacher and his students. In order to better set off these dialogues from narration, we introduced the use of bulleted dialogue – specifically for this book. This device is not used in the other four books.

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Nikolai Demidov

A Creative Biography

From the Editors

Konstantin Stanislavsky (1954: 8), in his Introduction[1] to *An Actor's Work* extends "sincere gratitude" to Nikolai Vasilyevich Demidov for helping him with the "creation of this book." "He gave me," Stanislavsky writes, "valuable guidance, materials, and examples to illustrate my points, he critiqued my book, and exposed my mistakes." *Guidance?! To Stanislavsky himself!? Mistakes?! Surely not grammatical mistakes!* What did Stanislavsky mean? And who is this individual who dared point out to Stanislavsky his mistakes?

This is how Stanislavsky (2009a: 460) himself portrays Demidov in a document circa 1926:

> This is a man full of genuine love for the art, and a selfless enthusiast. From the time we met [in 1907], . . . he continuously helped me develop the rich and complex subject of the actor's creativity. At the moment, I think he is one of the few who knows the "system" theoretically and practically.
>
> For four years he worked in my Opera Studio as a director and a teacher.
>
> For two years he headed the Art Theatre's School, where he led (after Sulerzhitsky and Vakhtangov) educational work and training based on the 'system.'

"I've known N. V. Demidov through our mutual work for approximately 30 years," says Stanislavsky (2009b: 487) in yet another document (circa 1937). "He is an extremely valuable artist and is my closest associate in teaching and research."

In fact, by the end of his life, Demidov had 40 years of hard work behind him as a teacher of theatre, a director, and persistent researcher of the actor's creativity – the man who succeeded penetrating the very depths of the creative process and discovering its strings. Is this not the highest achievement for a man, a scholar, but also an artist? Decades of pedagogical practice alone don't bring about such results. It is, in fact, an artistic achievement – the fruit of a gifted artist's intuition.

The decades of Demidov's research and practice resulted in a series of written texts. His thoughts are surprisingly deep, original and . . . modern. Composed 60, even 80 years ago, these texts manage to transcend the present and take us into the future.

The other founder of the Moscow Art Theatre, Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko (1858–1943), echoed Stanislavsky in highly praising Demidov's work and its immense creative potential. As early as the 1920's, Nemirovich (2009: 462) had the insight to describe Demidov as "an authority in the psychology of stage art, who is continuously moving forward, *discovering many new ways that will enrich future theatre schools and the theory and practice of creative psychology* [emphasis added]."

Then how is it possible that, for so many years, the name of Nikolai Demidov remained Russian theatre's best kept secret? The answer to this inherent question is finally being supplied by time, the theatre of the future, unbiased analyses of archives, and, presently, by Demidov's own works.

***

The roots of Demidov's love for theatre and his practical knowledge of the stage can be traced to his childhood and young adulthood. He was born on December 8, 1884 (November 25, according to the old calendar) in the town of Ivanovo-Voznesensk, to the family of Vasily Viktorovich Demidov (1825–1908). A bright and talented individual in many respects, including as an actor, Vasily Demidov was the founder of Ivanovo-Voznesensk's Popular Theatre. He was a self-taught man, and his phenomenal artistic growth was a tribute to his own efforts. In his Popular Theatre, he was simultaneously an actor, director, and administrator. He wrote several plays on the everyday life of common people. Staged in this theatre, his

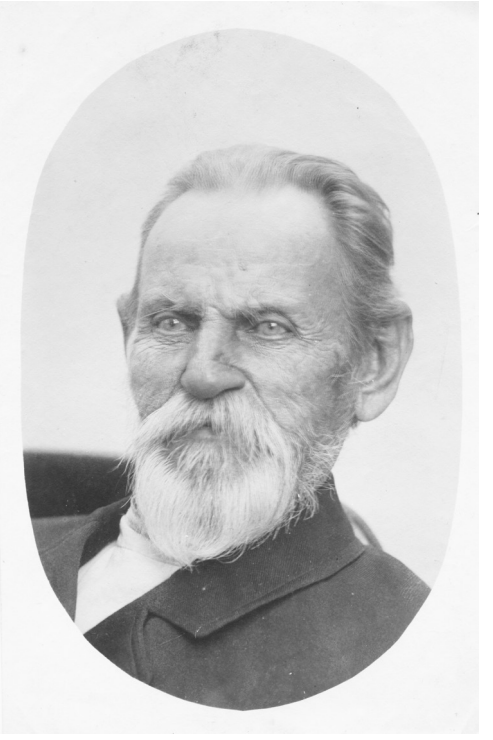

Figure 2 Vasily Demidov, August 1904. Courtesy of Margarita Laskina.

plays were published and acclaimed by the famed Russian playwright Alexander Ostrovsky (1823–1886). In the city of Ivanovo, there is still a street named after Vasily Demidov.

Vasily had three sons; among them his youngest, Nikolai, actively and passionately participated in his father's theatre. He later insisted that his theatre tastes and his point of view on the art were largely formed under his father's influence. "He planted in my soul," Demidov (p. v) writes about his father, "the golden seeds of artistic *truth*" [emphasis added].

In parallel with his theatre work, the young Demidov was seriously involved in athletics. Having reached record results in heavy weight lifting, he organized the Ivanovo-Voznesensk chapter of the St. Petersburg Athletic Society, where he developed and taught his own system of training. Notably, Demidov's system included moral education of athletes. It is also important to note that Demidov and his brother Konstantin (1869–1941) resorted to the teachings of yogis – both for sports and stage art. The results of their mutual experiments, carefully recorded by Nikolai, were presented to Stanislavsky as early as 1911. Demidov's records are currently kept in Moscow, at the Stanislavsky section of the Moscow Art Theatre's Archive (Fund 3, inventory 44, item No. 59).

In 1907, upon completing high school, Demidov moved to Moscow and was accepted to the Moscow University's Medical School (with a focus on psychiatry). Here in Moscow, Demidov was attracted to theatre with renewed force – especially to the Moscow Art Theatre. His close friendship with the MAT director Leopold Sulerzhitsky[2] (1872–1916) allowed Demidov to

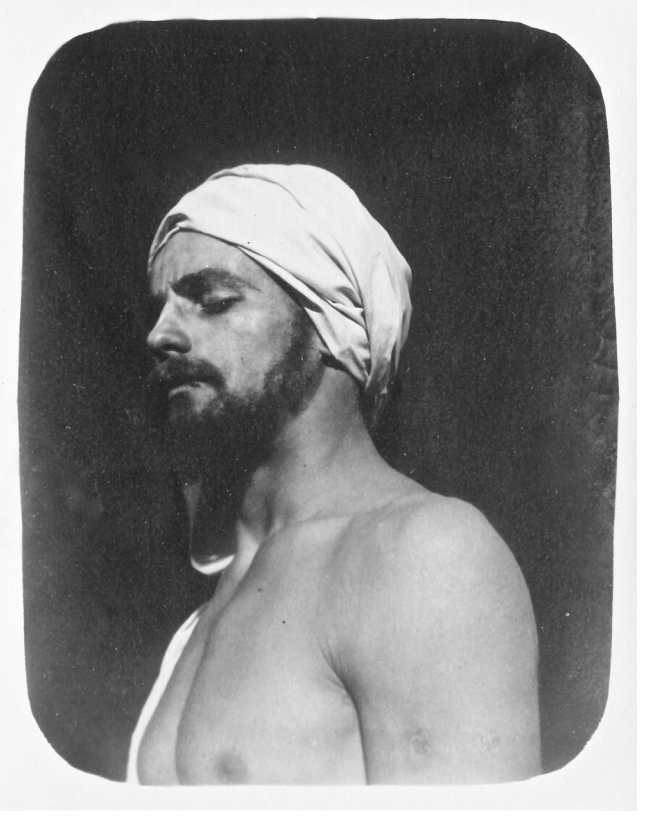

Figure 3 Nikolai Demidov – *Meditation*, 1915–1916. Courtesy of Margarita Laskina.

Figure 4 Leopold Sulerzhitsky, Konstantin Stanislavsky and Nikolai Demidov, Kislovodsk, Caucuses, 1910. Courtesy of Margarita Laskina.

enter the inner world of the Moscow Arts Theatre, and to find a valid pretext for personal closeness to Stanislavsky.

The 25-year-old medical student, fascinated by the theatre arts, interested Stanislavsky. In fact, Stanislavsky's respect for Demidov was so high that he entrusted Demidov with his son Igor's physical and moral education. Igor Alekseyev (1894–1974) and Demidov kept their friendship for years to come. For several years, Demidov traveled with Stanislavsky's family on summer trips to France, Caucasus, Crimea, Shafranovo village (in Bashkiria), and Lubimovka Estate (just outside of Moscow). During these trips, he constantly discussed with Stanislavsky the nature of acting; at Stanislavsky's request, he helped him collect scientific material on this topic. Demidov suggested to Stanislavsky to pay close attention to yoga practices (see Tcherkassky 2013: 14).

The company of doctor Demidov was a great asset to Stanislavsky who, during these years, was forming his "system" of actor training. Extremely timely for Stanislavsky was Demidov's training in natural sciences and philosophy, as well as his talent for teaching and passion for research. A truly uncommon addition to all these qualities was Demidov's practical knowledge of theatre, from early childhood. Already in 1911, Demidov began to assist Stanislavsky in his work with actors.

From 1913, upon graduation from the University, Demidov practiced at Dmitry Pletnyev's Clinic, where the legendary guru Pyotr Badmaev (1851–1920) introduced him to Tibetan medicine. At the same time, Demidov continued to deepen his knowledge of yoga philosophy and practices, and he studied homeopathy. In 1919, however, Stanislavsky convinced Demidov to leave the medical profession and dedicate himself entirely to theatre.

For four years, Demidov helped Stanislavsky with the Opera Studio at the Bolshoi Theatre, serving as director and coach on the production of *Eugene Onegin*. In 1921, Demidov organized the 4th studio at MAT, which he continued to head until 1925. Demidov's reputation as the leading authority on the "system" secured him invitations to teach acting at the Proletkult

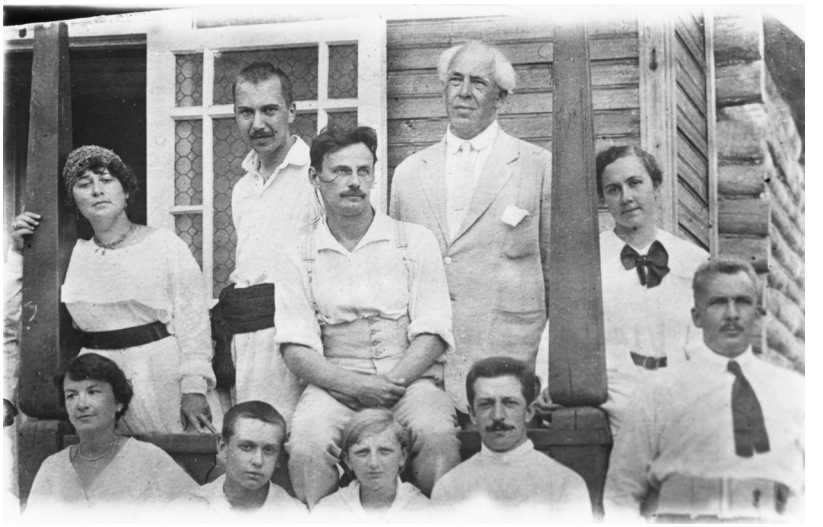

Figure 5 Demidov (center) with Stanislavsky's family (to Demidov's left – Igor Alekseyev, to his right – Konstantin Stanislavsky), Shafranovo estate, summer 1917. Courtesy of Margarita Laskina.

Theatre. In addition to that, he was invited to the newly established Georgian Studio in Moscow, and to the National Institute of the Spoken Word.

In 1922, the MAT troupe embarked on a two-year tour of Europe and the US. Before departing on the trip, Stanislavsky insisted that Demidov assume the leadership of the Moscow Art Theatre School. With Sulerzhitsky and Vakhtangov (1883–1922) both dead, Demidov remained the only original teacher of the "system," who commanded Stanislavsky's trust and respect.

Stanislavsky and Demidov served the same artistic God – the theatre of "experiencing," i.e. the theatre of genuine life onstage. According to their deep-seated convictions, such a school of theatre was unparalleled in its force and depth of impact. This ideal united them in the pursuit of a common goal: " . . . to find a way to *truly live onstage* – as *the world's greatest actors did in their finest moments*" (p. 141).

But how does one reach this state of creativity at the heart of every gifted actor's art? How does one achieve this unrestrained freedom and inspire the workings of the creative subconscious, organic transformation and genuine life onstage?

"The subconscious through the conscious, the involuntary through the voluntary" – such was the way of the "system," as stated by Stanislavsky (1954: 24).

Analyzing "the creative state of the actor," Stanislavsky extracted its defining "elements": "attention," "object," "task," "communication," and others. He suggested that the actor could be trained to control each of these "elements" separately, while their future integration would lead to the sound creative state.

In one of his books, Demidov speaks of his early years of teaching at the MAT. In that time, he was training students strictly in accordance with the Stanislavsky "system," i.e. training each of the elements individually. In doing so, he ran into an insurmountable problem. It took a tremendous effort to achieve freedom and spontaneity (involuntariness) in a rehearsal, and they were lost the very next day. In the following day's rehearsal, he had to start this work again from

Figure 6 Three original teachers of the Stanislavsky System: Leopold Sulerzhitsky (standing), Yevgeny Vakhtangov (sitting, in white hat) and Nikolai Demidov (standing), Yevpatoria, Crimea, 1915. Courtesy of Margarita Laskina.

scratch. At best, the actors would try to repeat and fixate the external manifestations of their "yesterday's" emotional state. Therefore, they would arrive at an outcome totally opposite to what was expected – at "presenting the role" (as Stanislavsky called it). As such, Stanislavsky's (1954: 25) objective – "live a role, i.e. experience the character's emotions every time the role is repeated"—was not achieved. (Stanislavsky himself faced the same problem, as Demidov witnessed.) Of course, such a state of affairs satisfied neither Stanislavsky nor Demidov.

Practice itself brought Demidov to question the fruitfulness of the "system's" purely analytical method (i.e. the dissection of the integral creative process into individual "elements"). Demidov observed that the students trained in separate "elements" resembled the unfortunate centipede from the fable: one day, the centipede started considering how each of its 40 legs worked, and it forgot how to walk. Demidov began to seek the root of the mistake, and he came up with the following answer: "*by rationally dividing into elements the indivisible creative process, we murdered the main thing: spontaneity and the involuntary nature of life onstage, i.e. we murdered the creative process itself*" [emphasis added] (p. 163).

Demidov asked:

> Is it not possible to structure the training itself, from the very first steps, in such a way so as, first of all, to set the actor on the path of this "natural creative state," and second, *make this state so familiar and organic that it would always be present onstage with the actor*? (Demidov 2009: 68; emphasis added)

This is when Demidov realized the necessity of the *synthesizing approach* for actor training, *in contrast to the analytical one*.

According to Demidov, actor training should begin with the cultivation of uninhibited freedom, as it is the true essence of the art:

> The foundation being built out of this freedom – so firmly as to become the actors' second nature, their only way to exist onstage – such a foundation allows us to later affix to it the analysis and rationality of a commonly accepted approach to a role. Moreover, even in those cases when a certain measure of the imperative (command and order) is affixed – even then it does not extinguish the most important aspects of an actor's creative process – its freedom and spontaneity. In many cases, this will even prove to be fruitful and necessary. (p. 156)

While trying to answer these questions in theory, Stanislavsky, nevertheless, did not practice the *nurturing* of the student-actor. Instead he worked with actors as a director, in the process of preparing a specific role for the stage. By contrast, Demidov, as a born researcher and teacher, considered his main objective to unearth a student's natural talent. He worked almost exclusively to cultivate a genuine actor-artist, an independent creator possessing the ability to truly live onstage in the process of transformation – each and every time, for each and every rehearsal and performance. (Moreover, Demidov observed that this quality was characteristic of all distinguished actors of all times.)

While following the path of "synthesis" in actor training, Demidov created his "etude technique" which helps uncover and develop the student's specific gift as an actor. If etudes are properly facilitated, in accordance with Demidov's method, the creative state of the actor awakens, ripens, and grows freely. Demidov's etudes are training exercises that cultivate *the creativity of the actor* – a genuine actor, in fact, rather than the "improviser of text," or an "actor-director," who "constructs" the etude from the inside. Both of these tendencies, by the way, are quite common in the Stanislavsky-based etude work until this day.

Needless to say, the new method was not formed right away. It was slowly perfected and enhanced by Demidov over time, throughout his many years of teaching.

However, when Demidov (p. 483) merely mentioned to Stanislavsky a possibility of "training the actors in a different, completely new way – he [Stanislavsky] was surprised and dismayed: what does this mean? Does this mean without 'tasks?!' Without 'objects?!' . . . and without any 'elements' at all? How is this possible? . . . He resisted. He did not want to hear this, was outwardly upset and decisively *blocked the idea* at all costs" [emphasis added].

From that moment, Demidov begins to encounter obstacles in his way – and they keep multiplying.

In 1925, the school of MAT was closed and Demidov found himself "outside of the MAT." The Georgian Studio was moved from Moscow to Tiflis. The MAT's 4th Studio transformed into the Realistic Theatre, and Demidov resigned. The educator from God . . . ("Our school, prepared by Demidov, most likely hosts God in it" – said Stanislavsky (1999: 167)). This educator from God is suddenly denied any type of teaching practice, and simply finds himself unemployed.

However, in 1926 – according to Demidov himself – he begins his scientific-literary work. Demidov starts collecting materials for his series of books on the creative work of the actor. In these books, he integrates and arranges his new discoveries - into a sound system.

The forced unemployment did not last long (even though it was felt strongly in a mundane, material sense). Soon Alexander Tairov (1885–1950) invited Demidov to the Kamerny Theatre to teach and direct in his company's "experimental workshop." In Tairov's (2009:461) opinion, Demidov was "*a rare teacher-educator, with ability to awaken in the actor a love for true art, and teach him true mastery of the internal technique*" [emphasis added].

Demidov had to accept Tairov's offer, even though he did not share Tairov's views on theatre. He participated in the staging of Eugene O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms* (premiered in

Figure 7 Nikolai Demidov, 1914–1915. Courtesy of Margarita Laskina.

1926; this production created a stir in Russia and abroad). In addition to his work as a director, Demidov conducted classes in actor training for the Tairov troupe.

In 1928, however, Demidov received an invitation from Nemirovich-Danchenko to join him at his Musical Theatre. Demidov left the Kamerny in a wink. Once again, he was suddenly overwhelmed with teaching: in parallel with Nemirovich's theatre, he taught acting to the Moscow Conservatory's opera students. He also began experimenting with acting for the radio at the Research Institute of Radio Broadcasting and Television. He taught a course titled "Directing Technique – Theory and Practice" for the Soviet Union's leading film studio, Mosfilm. Such was the list of Demidov's teaching activities in the late 1920s and early 1930s, and it is still incomplete.

Students and actors preserved the warmest memories of Demidov – wherever he taught. For example, in October of 1930 the Moscow Conservatory students sent Demidov the following address:

> You worked hard and tirelessly . . . You never forced your opinion onto students. You were always concerned with the development of our own individualities. Patiently and in a friendly manner you managed to find in each of us our inherent artistic self. You

> masterfully instilled in everyone the foundation of a sound creative state for the stage. You cultivated our artistic taste and taught us to hate stereotypes in art, and the vulgar "theatrical market."
>
> Because of your attentive and delicate care, even a small spark of talent and abilities began to flare . . .
>
> You taught us to work independently, and now we feel the strength to facilitate our own work – rather than merely wait for the director's orders and passively execute his tasks . . . If it weren't for the habit of independent thought, experimentation, and creativity instilled by you, we would not have found what is most important . . . (Demidov 2009: 463–464)

In the meantime, Demidov dreamed of creating a troupe of actors trained, from the very start, according to his technique. For that purpose, one of Demidov's students, Elena Morozova (?–1947), gathered a group of young theatre enthusiasts. For a period of four months, she worked with them two to three times a week – under Demidov's supervision and according to his method. After this short period of time, the young people appeared to be well prepared to rehearse a play. For a traditional theatre school, such a readiness was unheard of – so early into the training process. The work of the group was demonstrated to Stanislavsky. The results he saw stunned him. Stanislavsky, who previously rejected Demidov's proposal to train actors in a new way, now even gave permission to feature his name as one of the founding members of Demidov's new venture – the Creative Studio Theatre.

Stanislavsky saw firsthand the fruitfulness of Demidov's ideas, and their relationship was revived. At that time, Stanislavsky was preparing for publication his new book, *An Actor's Work*. Once more, he sought Demidov's help – as the book's editor. Demidov agreed to assist Stanislavsky in completing the manuscript, as he transferred the artistic directorship of the Creative Studio Theatre to one of his colleagues. For two and a half years, he fully immersed himself in the new project. Simultaneously, Stanislavsky engaged Demidov at his Opera Theatre as a director-teacher. Once again, a period of close collaboration between Demidov and Stanislavsky began: at the theatre, in rehearsals, and at home, while working on the book.

Stanislavsky's description of this work is already familiar to us: ". . . He gave me valuable guidance, materials, and examples to illustrate my points, he critiqued my book, and exposed my mistakes." Demidov tried to convince Stanislavsky about the necessity of the synthesizing approach in the actor training method. He offered synthesis as an alternative to the rational and analytical approach. This approach, embedded in the system, failed to deliver desired results for both of them, and Demidov was ready to share his own findings. It appears that Stanislavsky knew the validity of Demidov's ideas (he saw it first hand), however, he was unable to "cross out" what he had already written. He simply lacked time to begin everything anew. Restructuring his system would take years of new research (a journey already completed by Demidov). In the meantime, all publishing deadlines had expired – the book had to be completed. Stanislavsky needed the money from his American publisher in order to pay for his ailing son Igor's treatment abroad. What could be done?

"*He [Stanislavsky] thoroughly reconsidered and revised everything he wrote in his book*," [emphasis added] Demidov recalls (Fund 59 of the St. Petersburg State Theatre Library. The Demidov Archive [uncatalogued]).[3] Stanislavsky even wrote the additional, final chapter XVI, dedicated to the role of the subconscious in an actors' creativity. In this chapter, he stated:

Figure 8 Stanislavsky and Demidov in rehearsal, Moscow, 1935. Courtesy of Margarita Laskina.

> In total opposition to some teachers, I believe that students, beginners . . . should . . . *be led immediately toward the subconscious*. This *should be done in the earliest stages* . . . . Beginners should know *at the very start*, albeit in isolated moments, the happiest of moods an actor can have as he is being *creative*. [emphasis added] (Stanislavsky 2008: 330–331)

In his Introduction, Stanislavsky [1954: 6] highlighted that "one should pay special attention" to chapter XVI, "as it contains the essence of creativity and of the entire system."

Unfortunately, the rest of the book contradicted the conclusions in chapter XVI. The system as a whole offered a completely different path . . . Stanislavsky felt this, and he became nervous . . . In a letter to his brother, he complained:

> . . . I am stuck on a couple of chapters, cannot make a move backward or forward . . . . I already fear that I will have to redo what has already been written. I must admit, I got myself into some messy business. I started something unachievable and now I am paying for it. I do not know how I will find a way. I do not sleep well. I am exhausted – trying to do the impossible. (Stanislavsky 1961: 412)

Stanislavsky is already convinced that, in fact, one should develop a normal creative state in actors from the very start of training. But *how? How* does one lead them "*immediately toward the subconscious*"? *How* does one do it "*in the earliest stages*"? This question remains open for Stanislavsky and his "system." His book only covers the so-called "lures" for the creativity. Meanwhile the "keys" to this problem were already in Demidov's hands – in the etude technique he developed.

In September of 1935, the ultimate argument took place between Stanislavsky and Demidov. According to Stanislavsky (as quoted by Demidov [2009:485] in his letter to Nemirovich-Danchenko), their "creative paths divided" . . . For some time they still worked together; however, when the book was given to the publisher, Demidov was no longer listed as the editor . . . there was only an acknowledgement of him for his help, as quoted earlier.

Their "creative paths divided," and Demidov, just as in the late 1920s, found himself in "exile." "Faithful followers of the system," the ones that built their prosperity around it, crossed out Demidov's name from the history and practice of theatre for many years to come.

After Stanislavsky's death in 1938, the attitude towards Demidov becomes more intolerable. In fact, it borders on persecution: his name was completely eliminated from the history of the MAT and from the Russian theatre history at large. Demidov was fired from the Maly Theatre's Shchepkin School, where he was teaching in the late 1930s and early 1940s. One year after Stanislavsky's death, Demidov quit the Stanislavsky Opera Theatre, quoting, in his resignation letter, a misalignment of his creative views with those of the theatre's leadership.

When, in the early 1940s, Demidov submitted the manuscript of one of his books on the new method (*The Art of Living Onstage*) to the *Iskusstvo* publishers, he faced a slew of grave "internal reviews" swarming with accusations of "idealism," "mysticism," "lack of proper ideological orientation," etc. All accusations were, of course, consistent with the Soviet dogmas of the time. One of the authors of such a review accused Demidov of "creeping empiricism," "agnosticism," "intuitivism," "physiologism," and of being a proponent of the "free-run theory." He ended his review, written in the style of "report to the authorities," with far-reaching conclusions: "If the author of this 'system' is teaching anything to anyone, it is critical to step in and end these teaching activities at once" (Fund 59).

Even under such difficult circumstances, Demidov continued his work. In 1940, a group of his students graduated from the Glazunov School of Music and Theatre. Approximately at the same time (in 1939 and 1940), Demidov recruited two groups of students for the Maly Theatre's School. On the eve of the war with Nazi Germany, Demidov directed Gorky's drama *The Last Ones* in a production featuring these students alongside the Glazunov School graduates. The Gorky production was intended to lay a foundation for a new, young theatre, but . . . the war shattered all of Demidov's plans.

At the end of 1942 the government of the Karelo-Finnish Soviet Republic invited Demidov to head the Finnish National Theatre in Petrozavodsk. Demidov accepted, despite the wartime challenges. At the time, the Finnish Theatre had to work in Belomorsk after being evacuated from Petrozavodsk. After a few months of special training with a newly created troupe, Demidov produces *Nora* – a performance based on Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. The local press, along with the experts that arrived from Moscow, acclaimed the production. Irja Viitanen (?–1944), the actress who played the title role in the play, was equated to the great Russian tragic actress Komissarzhevskaya (1864–1910). In Moscow, in the Russian Theatre Society's section of national theatres, theatre critic Georgy Shtain (1911–?) gave a report on Demidov's production. Demidov was commissioned to Moscow to speak on the methods he used at the Finnish Theatre. After Demidov's talk, it had been decided to show the production in Moscow. And . . . as fate has it, in the autumn of 1944, the wonderful Nora, Irja Viitanen, tragically committed suicide. With her death, Finnish Theatre's *Nora* also ceased to exist.

Figure 9 Demidov in rehearsal, with his students – Ester Volodarskaya (1918–1995) (to his left) and Vladimir Bogachev (to his right), Moscow, 1941. Courtesy of Margarita Laskina.

Shortly after the end of the World War II, in 1945, Demidov (his heart beginning to weaken in the northern climate) transferred the artistic directorship of the Karelo-Finnish National Theatre to the directorial board and returned to Moscow. There, he served as the artistic director of the touring Studio theatre. Then, once again, it was time for a new journey, to the northern island of Sakhalin – now as the artistic director of the Regional Theatre of the Soviet Army in the city of Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk. However, two years of work in Sakhalin did not do any good for Demidov's health. His heart "revolted," and Demidov had to go back to the main land. The city of Ulan-Ude, the Buryat-Mongol National Theatre and its drama studio was

Demidov's last "mission field." Throughout his life in exile, Demidov furthered his research into the actor's creative process. Carefully, step-by-step, he tested his pedagogical, practical, and scholarly findings, his vast experience summarized in his writings.

Serious heart problems and, eventually, a heart attack forced Demidov to return to Moscow. Often bedridden, he dedicated the last three years of his life to his five books. Simultaneously, he attempted to break through "the wall" built around him – in order to publish at least one of the books. Unfortunately, the "opposition" was too strong. He offended the all-powerful "devotees of the 'system,'" and encroached on their territory.

The only formal accomplishment of his last three years was Demidov's participation in the so-called "debate" on the "Stanislavsky System." It took place in 1950 and 1951 in the *Soviet Art* newspaper. In it, on January 27, 1951, Demidov published the article titled "The Stanislavsky System and Actor Cultivation." It was a "lone voice crying in the wilderness . . ." The "debate" was quickly terminated.

"One way or the other, sparing a catastrophe, I will complete the work I began. I feel what a bullet must feel once it's been fired at a target: it can no longer be stopped, and there is no other way." Demidov (2009: 484) wrote these words at the end of the 1930s in a letter to the Moscow Art Theatre's star Ivan Moskvin (1874–1946). To his very last day, Demidov remained dedicated to his work. He felt the pure necessity to give people all he was able to discover in his study of the creative process. He was convinced that the future of theatre lies with the school of "experiencing" – this traditionally Russian approach. Inherently human, it will live as long as humanity itself. To this end, Demidov remained the same "selfless enthusiast," "a man full of genuine love for the art," as Stanislavsky described him.

Nikolai Vasilyevich Demidov passed away on September 8, 1953. Only death was able to stop his work. "Don Quixote . . ." were his last words.

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Figure 10 Demidov with the graduates of the Buryat-Mongol Theater's Studio, Ulan-Ude, 1949. Courtesy of Margarita Laskina.

The extensive Demidov archive contains, in addition to other documents, manuscripts of three completed books, and also materials prepared for his fourth and fifth books. Demidov sorted these materials, according to themes.

In his first book, *The Art of the Actor: Its Present and Future*, Demidov established the creative standards of the theatre art, while analyzing the reasons behind their decline. Moreover, in his first book Demidov revealed the potentialities of the actor's art, including those of the theatre of the future. The reader should pay particular attention to this book, as Demidov's thought and methodology would be impossible to grasp without the clear understanding of his ideals.

The next book, *Actor Types*, is dedicated to the analysis of the differences in the quality of an actor's giftedness (as opposed to its quantity). Demidov was the first to connect the quality of an actor's talent with the Ancient Greek physician Hippocrates' teaching on the four types of human temperaments. By doing so, he extracted four types of actors: affective, emotionally-willful, imitator, and rationalist. Moreover, Demidov noticed that each of these actor types requires their own methods of training and cultivation, on behalf of a teacher, as well as different directorial techniques.

The third book – *The Art of Living Onstage* – is dedicated to Demidov's specific method of early actor cultivation, based on his signature "etudes technique." One must note that Demidov's early etudes are not dedicated to an actor's work on a role, but rather meant to cultivate an actor's specific creative qualities.

The significance of Demidov's "etude technique," as the foundation of the actor training, is difficult to overestimate. By virtue of their synthesis, Demidov's etudes cultivate a *sustainable* actor's creative state. They encompass the basic tasks of "training and drill." By doing so, the etudes develop and maintain the "psychological technique" of the theatre of experiencing. Due to a specific methodology of these etudes, an actor's most essential *qualities* are *developed* and trained from the very first lesson. These qualities are: freedom and involuntariness of life onstage, a skill of *not interfering* with one's tangible perception of the environment and imaginary circumstances; the ability to freely "green-light," i.e. *not to impede one's first, spontaneous reaction*. "There, in the first reaction, lies the *source of creative imagination and faith*," wrote Demidov (p. 293).

These etudes also facilitate the initial "shift" toward organic *transformation*. Actors who learn not to interfere with this shift, as observed by Demidov, develop a new *sense of self*. They begin to feel themselves as someone else, while the circumstances of this imaginary new life "transform them."

Moreover, Demidov's etudes automatize the creative state: upon entering the stage, the actors are automatically ready to create. In addition to that, the actors trained in the Demidov approach are able to maintain the process of life onstage and, if necessary, adjust it.

These are the basics of the technique inherent to an actor of the "theatre of experiencing."

But the basics alone are not enough for the actor-creator. Genuine ARTISTIC endeavors are impossible without constant *striving* towards the *ideal*; lofty achievements – without *mastering the skills of the* "*higher psychological technique*."

All outstanding actors of the "affective type" (or tragedians) utilized such methods, and they continue to do so – consciously or subconsciously. Demidov's pedagogical practices set an objective – to uncover these heightened techniques and to study their nature, to discover their laws, and to master them.

Much of this has been thought through by Demidov, and practically tested. His two completed manuscripts record some of his findings on the "higher psychological technique." The bulk of these discoveries, however, can be found in the materials for the next two books: *The Artist's Creative Process Onstage* and *Psychotechnique of the Affective Actor.*

These materials include, in part, some fully completed chapters, but also Demidov's notes that chronicle the travels of his thoughts. He called them his "travel finds." Demidov recorded his finds on separate pieces of paper, and he collected them into separate folders – by topics.

These materials did not amount to a coherent presentation. To assemble them in two books was not easy – even with the help of preliminary plans sketched by Demidov. Apparently, Demidov himself faced the difficulty of organizing his last two books.

In the Introduction to *The Artist's Creative Process Onstage*, he wrote:

> In order to make a complicated (and indescribable) process more comprehensible and tangible, it is necessary, firstly, to examine it from different sides. Secondly, it is necessary to extract individual laws from it, one by one, and to describe them as if they exist independently and separately (which in reality is not true, of course). These ideas and notions, by their very nature, nuzzle together, endlessly shaping and permeating one another. Yet we have to put them into a certain order, with each step in the sequence conclusively linked. (p. 425)

It is clear that the process of creating the fourth and fifth books, was still underway. However, the available materials in the Demidov archive are so new, intriguing and important that it was essential to make them available to readers. So many people of theatre can benefit from them: teachers and students, actors, directors, theatre critics, as well as scholars of the actor's art. Not to mention the broader audience – anyone faced with questions about the development of one's creative abilities.

The reader is bound to discover that the literary "texture" of the last two books differs from the previous three. The "colloquial" nature of these texts will not come as a surprise to the reader. The informal way of presenting problems is inherent to Demidov's literary style as a whole. It helps him to demystify even the most complex issues. The reader is, at times, caught up in a confidential talk with the author; at other times, in a dispute with an invisible opponent. At times, the reader comes to witness Demidov's dialogue with himself, as he continues to question his own conclusions, in search for the truth.

Demidov's presentation can become even less formal due to the emotional intensity of some of his texts. Periodically, it pours out in a passionate dramatic monologue, imbued with his sincere love for theatre, and for the art of the actor. Demidov's heart was bleeding over the unfortunate state of theatre art, and he deeply cared about its future. The problems Demidov felt so deeply remain current – it feels as if his texts were written today.

The "unfinished" nature of Demidov's final two books allows us to literally follow the curve of his thought, as he delves deeper into his topics. A multifaceted and an independently minded thinker, Demidov never believed that the results achieved by his study of the creative laws are the ultimate truth. He believed in the progress of science. "There will be new knowledge," Demidov wrote in the preface to his book, *The Art of Living Onstage*, "and, in its light, our present knowledge perhaps will seem ignorant" (p. 144).

The reader will notice that *The Artist's Creative Process Onstage* often references the following book: *Psychotechnique of the Affective Actor*. At the same time, both books contain references to new methods and exercises that are not featured in either of the texts. The completed Demidov heritage was supposed to include new book sections, such as *Scene Study* and *Directing*, and new titles, such as *Reflexology*, etc. Fortunately, the preliminary writings for these new sections and books survived in the Demidov archive. They contain the "unidentified" terms and exercises referenced in the two final volumes.[4] This allowed the editors to compile an extensive Glossary of Terms and Exercises. The reader is encouraged to consult the Glossary on all subjects and

terms, especially those referenced in the last two books. In addition to exercises outlined throughout this collection, the Glossary can also be used as a guide for further practical work. It contains over 30 new exercises connected with the higher spheres of the actor's creativity.

Of special interest in the final two books is Demidov's pioneering study on character facilitation – the most private and "intimate" aspect of the actors' work. This includes the formation of the subconscious embryo of the role, and its development. Among other problems featured in the book are those connected with a specific relationship between the character and the actor. The technique of "psychological breath" stands out among other "aerial stunts" of the actor's creative process. Based on the "guild secrets" of the great nineteenth- and twentieth-century tragedians, this method is indispensable for work on Shakespeare and other classics. It is integrally linked with Demidov's discoveries in the area of subconscious (non-analytical) perception – those means allowing the creative impression to reach the deepest layers of the actor's psyche.

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In his studies, Demidov relied primarily on his deep understanding of Stanislavsky's teachings on the school of "experiencing." He admired Stanislavsky's quest to discover the laws of the actor's art and master the process of creative living onstage. He equated Stanislavsky's work to heroism, and always considered Stanislavsky to be his teacher.

One of the challenges in bringing Demidov to the English-speaking reader lies with the variations on the Stanislavsky System terminology. Since the time when the first English publications of Stanislavsky's writings appeared in the 1920s, different translators and teachers offered various translations of the same terms. For the sake of consistency, and to bring the terminology closer to our contemporary time, editors and translators decided to feature Stanislavsky terms as they appear in the unabridged translations of Stanislavsky's major works created by Jean Benedetti and published by Routledge in 2008. The only exception is stipulated in the Glossary of Terms.

Prior to meeting Stanislavsky, Demidov was deeply influenced by his father, who guided him through his early theatrical endeavors. "Thanks to him alone I could perceive correctly what I heard from all my voluntary and involuntary teachers," – Demidov (p. v) wrote about his father. One should also remember the importance of Demidov's early practices in the application of yoga and other spiritual practices to acting. In these experiments, conducted around 1910–1912, Demidov often played the role of assistant to his brother Konstantin – in the future, a noted Russian actor.

To understand the process of actors' creativity, and to reveal its laws, one has to look up to the highest creative achievements in the realm of acting. As such, Demidov's attention was constantly drawn to the works of the luminaries of theatrical art – the great tragic actors, such as Russia's Pavel Mochalov (1800–1848) and Maria Yermolova (1853–1928), Italy's Eleonora Duse (1858–1924), Tommaso Salvini (1829–1915), and Ernesto Rossi (1827–1896), and England's David Garrick (1717–1779). Ira Aldridge (1807–1867), American and British actor (of African-American descent), known for his Shakespearian roles, was of special interest to Demidov, due to Aldridge's rare talent of combining inspiration and intellect, passion and restraint. Among Demidov's contemporaries, Alexander Moissi (1879–1935), a German actor, Albanian by descent, served as a close focus of Demidov's observations. Last, but not least, Demidov studied the work of MAT's own outstanding actors – Leonid Leonidov (1873–1941), Ivan Moskvin, Mikhail Tarkhanov (1877–1948), and others.

Furthermore, Demidov was deeply interested in the so called flashes of "inspiration," as described by the genius artists, writers and poets, such as Praxiteles (4th century BC), Leonardo

da Vinci (1452–1519), Raphael (1483–1520), Michelangelo (1475–1564), Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832), Alexander Pushkin (1799–1837), Honoré de Balzac (1799–1850), Fyodor Tyutchev (1803–1873), Nikolai Gogol (1809–1852), Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821–1881), Lev Tolstoy (1828–1910), Oscar Wilde (1854–1900) and Anton Chekhov (1860–1904), as well as great composers and musicians – Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791), Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827) Niccolò Paganini (1782–1840) and Pyotr Tchaikovsky (1840–1893).

The scope of Demidov's research also encompasses the process of scientific creativity, especially, the moments of "epiphany," as experienced by eminent scientists, such as physicist Isaac Newton (1643–1727), chemist Dmitri Mendeleev (1834–1907), rocket scientist Konstantin Tsiolkovsky (1857–1935), inventors James Watt (1736–1819) and Thomas Edison (1847–1931), physician Hermann von Helmholtz (1821–1894), mathematician Carl Friedrich Gauss (1777–1855), and others.

Demidov's heartfelt friendship with the Moscow Art Theatre director, a remarkable theatre educator and the founder of the 1st Studio of MAT, Leopold Sulerzhitsky, became a life-giving source for Demidov's work. Demidov and Sulerzhitsky shared common ideals in the areas of theatre art and education.

A graduate, with honors, of the Moscow University's School of Medicine, Demidov received a solid foundation in the fields of physiology, psychology, and psychiatry. This knowledge ultimately helped him in his research of the creative process.

The field of physiology was rapidly developing in Russia in Demidov's time. Demidov closely followed the highly influential teachings of the Russian physiologist and psychologist Ivan Sechenov (1829–1905), and those of his followers Nikolai Vvedensky (1852–1922) and Ivan Pavlov (1849–1936).

Of considerable importance to Demidov's work was his personal acquaintance (through Sulerzhitsky) with the influential Russian physiologist Alexei Ukhtomsky (1875–1942). Ukhtomsky's (2002: 112) teaching, "The nature of our being can be created and cultivated," was the impetus and the leading principle behind all of Demidov's work. After Ukhtomsky, Demidov constantly argued that human nature can be perfected and, therefore, a theatre teacher can and should help the student develop his existing acting skills to meet his talent, or even genius. Needless to say, Demidov was well aware of Ukhtomsky, in 1911, introducing the notion of *dominant*, a certain "chord" of constant influence that causes sustained excitation of certain areas of the brain. Apparently, this concept was later developed in Demidov's teachings on the need to create and strengthen certain "automatisms" in the actor. As a result of such "automatisms," an appropriately trained actor, when entering the stage, is automatically ready for the creative act to commence – this readiness triggered by the evoking of a sustainable creative state (see Book 5: chapter 5, *Unity*, chapter 6, *The Subconscious Nature of Creativity*, and chapter 7, *Automatisms*).

From Sulerzhitsky, Demidov also received a personal introduction to George (Georgy) Gurdjieff (1866–1949) and his colleague Thomas de (Foma) Hartmann (1885–1956). A noted psychologist, philosopher, and magician, Gurdjieff was popular in Russia in the beginning of the twentieth century for his psychological experiments with hypnosis, meditation, and the method of self-regulation. Demidov closely followed the work of Gurdjieff and Hartmann.

An attentive reader will find in Demidov's works numerous links to the teachings of historically significant psychologists, physiologists, psychiatrists, and philosophers. Among those – the American psychologist and philosopher William James (1842–1910), known for his insistence on the close connection between a person's external physical actions and internal psychological state. (Demidov suggested that James' teachings inspired the famous American motto: "Smile!" According to James, we don't smile because we are happy, but rather we are happy because

we smile.) Russian translations of James' *Psychology* (issued in 1911), and his *Introduction to Philosophy* (1923), undoubtedly influenced the development of Demidov's views on creativity. In these two works, James stresses the important role played by instincts in our psychological processes.

German psychiatrist Ernst Kretschmer (1888–1964) believed that imposed action stops all natural processes (see Kretschmer's *Hysteria, Reflex, and Instinct*, 1923). Kretschmer's conclusions are quite consistent with Demidov's views. Demidov was also interested in the works of French neuropsychologist Pierre Janet (1859–1947). His *L'automatisme psychologique* (*On Psychic Automatism*, 1889) suggests the possibility of one's complete transformation into a different persona. Demidov believed that a physiological probability of such a transformation, albeit pathological, points out to a real chance to achieve an equally immersive *creative* transformation.

The original theory of the "set" (*ustanovka*) was introduced by the Russian-Georgian psychologist Dimitri Uznadze (1886–1950). His theory asserted the existence of certain connectivity and manageability of all processes of perception, memory, imagination, etc., originating in the subconscious mind of a man – a certain "set" that defines a given individual's reaction. This theory is echoed in Demidov's works. Moreover, Demidov creatively developed Uznadze's theory in light of his own understanding of this phenomenon, in its application to an actor's art (see Book 5, chapter 5, *Unity*).

The same can be said of the Austrian philosopher Rudolf Steiner's (1861–1925) teachings. Steiner's works, including his 1894 book *The Philosophy of Freedom*, became popular in Russian theatre circles in the 1920s. Direct references to Steiner had been found in Demidov's archive. Chapter 6 of *The Art of the Actor* features the subchapter titled "The Ability to Marvel and Venerate." Notes found in the Demidov archive indicate that this subchapter had been written under the direct influence of Steiner's ideas. Some of Demidov's contemporaries, such as the Russian actor Michael Chekhov (1891–1955) were fascinated by eurhythmy – "the art of visible speech" – an integral part of Steiner's teachings. Demidov was also familiar with Steiner's concepts of eurhythmy and speech formation. He creatively developed these ideas by Steiner in his own method of the "literal pronunciation of words." Demidov had been clearly attracted to the futuristic aspects of Steiner's anthroposophical teachings. What connected him with Steiner (and with Chekhov) the most, was their desire to reach the highest manifestations of human spirituality, and their faith in the hidden, subconscious human potential. Needless to say, Demidov never mentioned Steiner in his books – for purely "political" reasons.

The influence of Yevgeny Vakhtangov is felt in Demidov's work on the subconscious perception. Vakhtangov's own highly developed intuition was a result of persistent practices, some of them based in yogic principles. Demidov's technique of "submerging text, circumstances or tasks into the subconscious" is based partly on Vakhtangov's experiments with the subconscious perception of tasks. Among Vakhtangov's productions, Demidov admired his tragic masterpiece *The Dybbuk*, staged by Vakhtangov in 1922 at the Moscow Habima Studio (the future National Theatre of Israel).

So many philosophers and scholars attracted Demidov's attention, it would be presumptuous to attempt analyzing all these connections in a short introductory article. Nevertheless, several other names must be mentioned. Demidov's works reference German psychotherapist Emil du Bois-Reymond (1818–1896), French psychologist Maurice de Fleury (1860–1931), Russian psychoanalyst Nikolai Dahl (1860–1939), as well as Russian philosopher, author of *Genius and Creativity*, Semyon Gruzenberg (1876–1938). A slogan borrowed from the English poet Edward Young (1683–1765) – "Too low they build who build beneath the stars" (Young 1854: 157) – became Demidov's personal motto. He must have derived it from the works by Helena Blavatsky (1831–1891), an influential occultist, author, and world traveler. Demidov's

frequent advice to all those who have dedicated themselves to the arts, was borrowed from Blavatsky's *The Voice of the Silence*.[5] This advice was to keep "the body agitated, mind tranquil, the Soul as limpid as a mountain lake" (Blavatsky 1909: 339).

A deep analysis of Demidov's writings in the light of those basic teachings available in his time – such is the future task of researchers, physiologists, and psychologists. These scholars, especially those of them dealing with the issue of creativity, will discover many such correlations, just as they will find in Demidov the foreshadowing of contemporary scientific studies.

For the purposes of this article, it would suffice to note that Demidov always remained a uniquely original and independent thinker. When referring to scientific opinions, he was mostly seeking to confirm his own practical insights. In other instances, he used those concepts and premises unacceptable to him in order to further develop his own, unique point of view.

In comparison to what had been achieved by Stanislavsky, Demidov made a decisive step forward by discovering the new "synthesizing" way to master the actor's creative process (as opposed to the "analytical" path of the "Stanislavsky system"). As early as the 1920s, Demidov offered a method that allowed the actor to train the automatism of freedom and organic life onstage, and thus be able to create onstage – instantly, without dissecting the creative process into separate elements. At that time, the idea of *unity*, as a newest stage in the study of creativity, had been thick in the air, and on the minds of scientists from various fields. This was true, for example, of medicine – a science closest to Demidov. Thus homeopathy, as well as allopathic medicine (both practiced by Demidov), viewed a patient's body as a whole – rather than focusing their treatment on isolated diseases.

As it turns out, the most important discoveries occur at the intersection of various sciences. For example, physical chemistry, biophysics; but also psychology, physiology, and pedagogy can no longer do without each other. In the meantime, the science of art is also in dire need of professional help from other scholarly fields. Demidov's desire to find a scientific basis for his practical discoveries and hypotheses is then nothing but his desire to progress on this new path.

This is why Demidov sought not only theoretical but also personal contacts with physiologists and psychologists. In a letter to Nemirovich-Danchenko, Demidov wrote that he shared the content of his (then yet unpublished) book, *The Art of Living Onstage*, with several modern scientists, professors of psychology:

> I read them some of the chapters of my book, and they said: "This is terribly interesting, compelling and new . . . or will be 5 years from now – in the present day psychology we see only the seeds of what you explain quite definitely and practically." One of them said, "publish it soon, or you hold my work back: I will need to reference your book."
>
> *(Demidov 2009: 486)*

Demidov modestly does not mention the names of these psychologists, but it is possible that it could be Ukhtomsky and Lev Vygotsky (1896–1934), with both of whom Demidov was personally acquainted. Vygotsky taught at the Kamerny Theatre's "experimental workshops" alongside Demidov (in 1926–1928.) At that time, Vygotsky had just finished working on his book, *The Psychology of Art* (completed in 1925).[6] However, both books – Demidov's *The Art of Living on Stage*, and Vygotsky's *The Psychology of Art* – saw the light only in 1965, when both authors were long gone. This may explain the absence of alleged links to Demidov in Vygotsky's works, and vice versa.

The Demidov archive preserves his letters, circa 1952, to the physiologists Anatoly Ivanov-Smolensky (1895–1982) and Lev Fyodorov (1891–1952), where he requests a meeting, and

offers to collaborate on a study of an actor's creativity, in light of the teachings of Pavlov. Unfortunately, Lev Fyodorov, who used to work under Pavlov and was one of the founders of the Institute for Experimental Medicine, died just two months after receiving Demidov's letter.

Demidov's own death was followed by a long period of struggle, on the part of his students, to publish *The Art of Living Onstage*. In the meantime, the so-called "internal reviewers" spared no efforts trying to block this publication. Fortunately, several Russian scientists actively interfered on behalf of Demidov's work. Among them, Professor Boris Teplov (1896–1965), an outstanding psychologist, the founder of the school of Differential psychology, and a member of the Academy of Science. He wrote:

> It seems to me that Demidov's book as a whole is an interesting and creative development of Stanislavsky's ideas . . . The merit of the author is that he is not limited to merely "preserving" Stanislavsky's legacy, . . . but rather seeks to further develop and enrich it.
>
> The great achievement of Demidov is "the first spontaneous reaction doctrine," as I would call it. His chapters *The Significance of the First Reaction*, *The First Reaction as a Source of Imagination and Faith* and *On the Development of Imagination*, attract attention due to the subtlety of psychological analysis.
>
> *(Fund 59)*

Upon detailed analysis of Demidov's book, Teplov concluded that "the basic theoretical principles at the foundation of the Demidov curriculum should be recognized as scientifically valid and valuable" (Fund 59).

In 1965, 12 years after Demidov's death, with the help of his widow Yekaterina Knishek-Demidova (1885–1968) and his students – Vladimir Bogachev (1921–1984), Fyodor Sokolov (1911–2001), Oleg Okulevich (1921–2006), and Margarita Laskina – an abridged version of Demidov's *The Art of Living Onstage* was finally published in Moscow. The book was introduced by two celebrated students of Demidov's – the Moscow Art Theatre star Boris Livanov (1904–1972), and Maria Knebel (1898–1985) – one of the most influential Russian theatre teachers and scholars, who taught at the State Institute of Theatre Arts (GITIS).

Theater specialists and scholars did not respond to this publication, out of fear of violating the Stanislavsky system monopoly, and offending its powerful proponents. The influential TEATR Magazine took three years to review the book. When the review finally appeared, it belonged to professor Solomon Gellershtein (1896–1967) – an important psychologist and biologist, and Vygotsky's closest associate in creating the school of psychotechnique. Gellershtein wrote:

> *In this book we find true signs of foresight into ways in which the future science must research the creative process* [emphasis added]. It demonstrates an unusual (for a director and theatre scholar) breadth of vision and depth of psychological approach to the analysis of creativity. To witness this, it is sufficient to read the chapters on the subconscious mind, on imaginary actions, on entering the creative state ... on those qualities necessary for creativity, on preparing conditions for free, spontaneous reaction, on the unity of perception and action with the dominant role of perception, on the ratio of voluntary and involuntary, and so on.
>
> *(Gellershtein 1968:77–78)*

The 1965 edition of Demidov's book instantly sold out and became a rarity. In 1967 Yekaterina Knishek, Demidov's only heir, transferred the enormous Demidov archive to his favorite student Oleg Okulevich and his wife Margarita Laskina, who was also Demidov's assistant. In doing so, Knishek fulfilled Demidov's own will, entrusting Okulevich and Laskina with

the laborious task of sorting the archive, and preparing it for publication. However, further attempts to publish Demidov's books remained fruitless for decades to come. "The Initiative Group" comprised of students and followers of the Demidov School, continued the fight, trying to bring awareness to Demidov's theatrical heritage. They printed "*samizdat*" publications of articles on Demidov, and fragments of his works.

Many of Demidov's students, directors, actors and teachers, remained faithful to his lessons. Among them, MAT's Mikhail Yanshin (1902–1976), Sergei Blinnikov (1891–1969), Vladimir Gribkov (1902–1960) and Anna Andreyeva-Babakhan (1923–1997), Vakhtangov Theatre's Nikolai Plotnikov (1897–1979), Buryat Drama Theatre's Fyodor Sakhirov (1928–1915), Kirov Theatre's Nikolai Pechkovsky (1896–1966), Bolshoi Theatre's Elena Kruglikova (1907–1982) and Valentina Naydakova of the East-Siberian Academy of Culture and Art. Among Demidov's students, Oleg Okulevich deserves special mention – not only as a keeper of the Demidov archive, but also as an outstanding artist. Having deeply absorbed Demidov's lessons, Okulevich went on to create a gallery of classical characters, such as Hamlet, Othello, Raskolnikov, Ivan the Terrible, Boris Godunov, and many others. He performed at St. Petersburg's leading stages, such as Lenkom, Lensovet and Komissarzhevskaya Theatres. Okulevich also took his art to the Russian provinces – in search of artistic freedom, substantial roles, and audiences hungry

Figure 11 Oleg Okulevich as Boris Godunov, Pskov, 1973–1974. Courtesy of Margarita Laskina.

for genuine art. In a way, he continued the tradition of the traveling tragedians of the old – Demidov's favorites.

This prolonged effort to publish Demidov's literary heritage finally came to fruition at the dawn of the twenty-first century. Beginning in 2002, the State Theatre Library in St. Petersburg, while accepting Demidov's archives for safekeeping, organized the publication of his *Creative Heritage* in four volumes (Margarita Laskina, ed.). This publication featured all five of Demidov's books, his articles, fragments from his correspondence, and other biographic and creative materials. The first volume of the Demidov *Heritage* came out in 2004, while the final, fourth volume was released on Demidov's 125th anniversary, in December 2009.

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Nikolai Demidov's legacy – Russian theatre's best-kept secret – is swiftly spreading and influencing the theatre world. In Russia today, the Demidov School is featured at its top-five theatre schools, such as the St. Petersburg State Academy of Theatre Arts (SPgGATI) and the Russian University of Theatre Arts (GITIS/RATI) in Moscow. One of the foremost Russian teachers of acting, Veniamin Filshtinsky[7] (2006: 139), refers to the Demidov School as "pedagogy of the future."

In the US, at Florida State University's Asolo Conservatory for Actor Training (one of America's top 10 graduate schools for actors and one of the top 25 in the English-speaking world), Demidov's methods have been utilized extensively since 2008. Since then, the Conservatory's work with the Demidov technique has been shared with observers and visitors from institutions such as Peter Brook's CICT/Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord and the University of Windsor's School of Dramatic Art (Ontario, Canada). Lectures and workshops in the Demidov Technique have been presented at forums and institutions, including The Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA), The Royal Central School of Speech & Drama, The University of Exeter, Rose Bruford College and its Stanislavski Center (UK); Association for Theatre in Higher Education (ATHE), University/Resident Theatre Association (URTA) and Stanford University (US), as well as the Stanislavski Institute (Brazil).

The experience of the FSU/Asolo Demidov-based training also inspired interest in Russia. Extensive master classes in the US-based Demidov curriculum have been presented for actors, directors and teachers at the St Petersburg State Academy of Theatre Arts. Some 100 years after Stanislavsky's innovations began to bridge Russian and Western theatre, the legacy of his close collaborator and successor Nikolai Demidov also begins to transcend cultural barriers. Due to its immense creative potential, it promises to foster international dialogue and exchange between theatre practitioners, scholars, teachers and students. As the interest toward Demidov grows internationally, one can hope that the Demidov School, with its origins in the renowned Russian theatrical tradition, will earn a prominent place in contemporary theatrical practices – both in Russia and around the world.

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It would be wise to point the reader's attention to the essential prerequisite of succeeding with the Demidov School. Its methodology can be applied exclusively under the condition that *the teacher herself masters the "psychological technique."* Demidov shared his teaching practices with the reader, suggesting an entire series of pedagogical and self-cultivating techniques to which one must pay utmost attention.

There is another important stipulation. The psychological "transparency" acquired by actors who master Demidov's technique inevitably reveals either the depth of their soul

Figure 12 Nikolai Demidov, Moscow, 1951. Courtesy of Margarita Laskina.

onstage, or its primitive and crude nature. As such, the question of the student-actors' spiritual development arises – seeing that the depth of soul and its inner significance are the prerequisites for the birth of an artist.

Margarita Laskina, PhD
Andrei Malaev-Babel
Head of Acting,
FSU/Asolo Conservatory for Actor Training
Translated by Svetlana Tikhonov

Notes

1 Curiously omitted from all English-language editions of Stanislavsky's book, also known as *An Actor Prepares*.
2 Demidov and Sulerzhitsky met at the Athletic School, run by Vladislav Pytliasinsky (1863–1933) – a famous Russian athlete and wrestler, and a world champion.
3 Further referred to as "Fund 59."
4 It is also possible that some of these materials were meant for *The Artist's Creative Process Onstage* and *Psychotechnique of the Affective Actor*. As mentioned earlier, at the time of his death Demidov was still working on the structure of these two books.
5 According to Blavatsky, her book was comprised of unknown texts of Buddhist and pre-Buddhist origin.
6 Vygotsky was also specifically interested in actors' creativity, as evident from his article titled "On the Problem of the Psychology of the Actor's Creative Work." Completed in 1932, it was not published until 1936.
7 Stanislavski Award Laureate, Chair of the Department of Acting and Professor of the St. Petersburg State Academy of Theater Arts.

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Book One

The Art of the Actor

Its Present and Future

Translated by Alexander Rojavin and Andrei Malaev-Babel

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Introduction

Nature, to be commanded, must be obeyed.

Francis Bacon

When Mochalov acted, the following often happened: the curtain would fall, and only then did the audience notice that they were on their feet. To a man.[1] How did it happen? When did they get up? How long had they been standing?

Nobody knows!

Have you ever seen anything similar in our theatres? If somebody even tries to stand, you'll be the first to make him sit back down so that he doesn't get in your way, doesn't ruin your view. And this isn't because everyone has become a disciple of order, but simply because we haven't had the opportunity to become so immersed in the theatre. We can't even imagine such abandon.

Have people become different? Colder? Not at all. All you have to do is go to some sort of contest—let's say soccer—and you'll see such abandon that you won't believe your eyes! No. There's no need to blame the public. It's quite capable of forgetting everything there is to forget. All it needs is a *reason* to forget. If it's capable of forgetting itself because of their sympathies and dedication to some soccer team, then it's quite capable of forgetting itself for Ferdinand and Louise (from Schiller's *Intrigue and Love*), for Hamlet, Othello, or Lear.

It doesn't even take all that much: all it takes is for Ferdinand, Louise, and the others to become as familiar and dear as these, truth be told, total strangers – enormous, charismatic guys trying to hammer a ball into each other's goal. The requirements aren't that great. But all the same, although we do feel some excitement, we still watch somewhat half-heartedly how Louise signs the terrible letter orchestrated by the evil Wyrm, how, without suspecting a thing, she drinks the poison . . .

"But what will come of it?" some orthodox disciples of theatre ask with indignation. "If the audience will behave themselves like this, then what will come of it!? What kind of a theatre *is* that?! It'll be chaos! Bedlam!"

Not true! That's when theatre will become what it should be: a mighty, incomparable educational tool . . . The greatest of artistic delights, which combines into one the writer, musician,

designer, costumer, carpenter, electrician, and, finally, the actor himself, playing the most wondrous of all instruments: his own human soul!

Is this not the most perfect of all art forms? Is it not the strongest and most comprehensible?

Having opened a book, you'll only see words written in a consistent, standard font on dead paper, but here you'll hear the tremulous, live speech, you'll see the flickering of eyes, you'll delve into the souls of the suffering, loving heroes . . . They affect you with the music of their voices, with their magnetic power, and they enthrall you . . . And here are the results:

> No quill, no brush will ever depict even a cheap imitation of what we have seen and heard here. All these sarcasms, directed at poor Ophelia, at the queen, and finally at the king himself; all these curt phrases spoken by Hamlet sitting on the bench next to Ophelia's chair as the play was being performed – it all breathed with an invisible, but palpable force – like that of an oppressive nightmare. The audience's blood grew cold, and everyone – people of different ranks, characters, inclinations, education, tastes, ages, and sexes – fused into a single, enormous mass, brought to life by one thought, one single feeling. With their mouths open, with enchanted eyes, with bated breath, everyone gazed at this short, black-haired man, pale as death, casually half-lounging on the bench.
>
> Heated applause would start up and end unfinished; hands raised to clap were lowered again from enervation; people stopped the hands of others; strangers forbade other strangers to express their delight – and nobody thought this was strange. (From Vissarion Belinsky's [1811-1848] article: *'Hamlet,' Shakespeare's drama. Mochalov as Hamlet* [Belinsky 1953: 321].)

Does theatre understand its own power? Does the actor know this strength inside of him? He has to know. He *must* know! Art isn't a job for the uncaring, especially the art of the actor.

Figure 13 Pavel Mochalov as Baron Meinau in the Maly Theatre's performance of Kotzebue's *Misanthropy and Repentance.* An oil painting by an unknown artist, based on Vladimir Karapalpakov's drawing circa 1837. Courtesy of Alyona Shchukina.

Whether he wants it or not, his art has an effect: it elevates thoughts, feelings and morals up to the stratosphere, or lowers them to the abyss of mediocrity, pettiness, lies, insignificance, and vice.

Since you've set upon this work, then at least know what sort of work it is.

It isn't simple, nor is it peaceful. You hold in your hands deadly things: explosives and fire. Like it or not – you're a Grenadier. You have no choice, no excuses. It's out of the question.

When an actor puts out his fire by means of apathy, of sloth and thoughtlessness; when he quenches his torch in the swamp of mundane worries and life; when he spills the precious explosives along the way, or uses them to fertilize his garden – is he not an embezzler and a criminal?

Some 30–50–100 years will pass, and television will come to every apartment, in every corner of the world . . . As evening comes, every family will eagerly sit in front of their television . . . That's when theatre will have its victory! That's when we'll be able to spread our wings, show what we are capable of! To the whole world! Without any exaggerations: go ahead, act – the entire world, all of humanity is watching! What more can you ask for?!

Only . . . by then, what will you, the actor, be able to show "all of humanity"? How can you impress them? In 100 years, are we really intending to feed people the same primitive art that we're feeding them now? What are we counting on? Humanity's boundless patience? This sort of theatre won't be passed down through the generations. It doesn't deserve it. What will be passed down are acrobatic numbers, ballet, vocal recitals, music, and, evidently . . . film.

No, actor, you don't know the strength of your art, and you fail to see its beautiful, glorious future.

It might seem that this is all just irresponsible fantasizing. Not at all. Only reality, only practice. The aforementioned moments with Mochalov happened, didn't they? They did. Were there other, similar ones? Hundreds, thousands! Each one of us has observed glimpses of talented acting. Although much weaker than the mighty explosions and flights of Mochalov, they were nevertheless of a similar nature. You're watching a show, and suddenly, you're caught up in the moment, and you've forgotten that this is theatre. A second has passed, and you've come to your senses. You did, but what does that prove? It happened, right? Then it's possible? Then this second can be prolonged?

And you, actor! Haven't you ever seen these flashes of enlightenment, when, all of a sudden, you got this inkling – that's "IT" . . . *this* is "IT!" . . . Of course you have! It's for these moments that you threw yourself into theatre in the first place.

Not at all for what you ultimately found in it . . .

So, these seconds, these fleeting moments aren't fantasy; they are completely real. And never mind that you're not in power to control them. We'll observe them, think about it, and then contrive a way to catch the elusive firebird.

Are we up to this task? Maybe it's not even worth trying, and we're just deluding ourselves with false hopes.

We've all had minutes, and if not minutes, then at least seconds of "inspiration," when we were "on fire," when we were "at our best." And so we hope (at first) for these seconds to visit us more often and last longer. That's all. And the problem isn't that we're so bold to hope, but that we give up so easily.

I can already hear someone objecting: "art isn't science. It's impossible to approach art as straightforwardly and narrowly! Art is a field of specific giftedness: of Talent. Art is . . ."

In a word, it's a forbidden zone that is accessible only to extraordinary individuals.

However, in practice, that's not how it happens at all: art is the domain not just of thousands, but tens, if not hundreds of thousands of people. This is easily confirmed – just ask the unions.

What does that mean? That these are all great, chosen talents? Unique in their giftedness? No. There are very few talents. More often, you see *ability*. Greater ones, lesser ones, different kinds . . . In the proper, favorable environment, they can develop and shine. In unfavorable ones, they fade and deform . . . Not talent, not genius, but ability – is what makes up the greater portion of those who constitute the force of our art.

Be it good or bad, but it's a fact. This is why it's necessary to tirelessly learn to make the most of the abilities, to *develop* them and *not to suppress* them.

And what if we were seeking our talent, or even genius?! What's wrong with that?!!

Note

1 See page 616.

1

Reasons for the Fall of the Art of the Actor

Enthusiasm for a Production

It must be that the path of any progress, especially the one in art, isn't a straight and simple path, but is winding, going up and down, with many possible losses and discoveries.

Let's speak about an art form that is more closely related with acting – singing.

In Greece, in Italy, there was always great singing. The climate predisposed people to it. They sang well, and they called it simply: singing – *canto*.

But, little by little, the maestros of vocal work came to the point when they started trying to achieve a certain kind of sound. A sound that is, put frankly, magical. A singer trained in this art would go onstage, sing a single note – some "A-a-a-a-a . . . !" and it immediately pierced the listener's very heart. It would instantly melt all the ice, unlock every secret chest or lockbox and, out of nowhere, tears would start flowing of their own volition.

The singer didn't sing about soul-rending suffering, he didn't tell an intricate tale of sorrow, longing, or happiness . . . he sang about something very simple or even less than that: he would just let out a single uncomplicated vocalization – "A" – and nobody was able not to dissolve in that sound. Nobody could hold back a flood of emotions and feelings, and the flood would come – unexpected, stormy, vivifying, and cleansing . . .

This amazing sound opened up all of the listener's depths as a result of some sort of specific resonance . . . It would give rise to delight and inspiration . . . from the depths of their souls, all of their best qualities would rise, clean, wholesome, and they would come up as tears, sighs, heightened senses, and a feeling of immense joy . . .

This sort of singing wasn't simply called *canto*, but *bel canto* – beautiful singing.

Now, when you watch old Italian operas of that time – you're seized by bewilderment, you don't know what to think.

Here "he" comes onstage, and, as it was done back then, stands right at the proscenium, facing the audience, incessantly sings about his love for "her." The melody is primitive, the words even more so . . . He'll sing a little, sing some more, and leave. "She" comes out. Stands to face the audience in the exact same spot and incessantly sings the same thing about her own love for "him" . . . "He" comes out yet again, and now they sing together, but they're still facing

the audience (so that they're heard better), and, without looking at each other, sing about their love. "I love you, you love me, we love each other. . ." etc. 30–40 pages of this unoriginal and uncomplicated outpouring of love.

The audience used to melt from delight.

But . . . take a breath before making fun of them. Let's keep investigating.

Given the power of the vocal art, the singers didn't need to concern themselves with making the melody richer or more complex, especially since any such complications didn't reflect well on what was most important: the ease and perfection of *bel canto*. So, singers not only didn't look for new, richer melodies, but on the contrary, met any novelty with protests.

However, as beautiful as the singing may have been, music didn't stand in one spot, it developed. Impressive composers stepped out onto the field, like Glück [1714–1787], who demanded that singers perform more complex melodies, that librettists write more complex stories. This all got in the singers' way. Singers probably could have found a way to resolve their differences with composers and come to a consensus, but that would have taken too much effort. And what for? Their singing was still very popular and easily put bread on the table!

This is how the war between musicians and singers began. The musicians demanded that the music that they wrote be performed – the singers resisted. And if they performed new operas, then they performed them their own, more convenient, way. The war was heated and difficult for both sides. Music won. Progress won.

And *bel canto*, the magical *bel canto*, unable to keep pace with progress, was forced to cede its primacy to the new ruling force.

The fault lies not with singing itself, of course, but with the singers who were unable to adapt themselves to both art forms. And so, *bel canto* started to wither . . . Additionally, its masters – singers and vocal maestros – the "alchemists" of the art, were dying one by one, carrying their magical sounds with them into the grave.

Musicians weren't concerned in the least: now, singers performed all of their requests without complaints, and the music – complex, rich, sometimes genius music – ruled supreme.

Gradually, the theatrical structure of opera was also perfected, and it reached the heights of psychological musical dramas and comedies.

Now, it's become the norm that everything is SUNG in opera – phone conversations, business discussions, invitations to "have a seat," "take a walk," "see you later, alligator!" etc.

We haven't had the good fortune to hear *bel canto*, but imagine that today, in the middle of our dramatic vocal performance, i.e. operas, you'd hear the singer let out this hitherto unheard (by you), delightful sound – "Stop, stop!" you'd want to yell, "Stop moving around that furniture, doing whatever it is you're doing, and babbling on about your nonsense! I just heard something that made my heart flip . . . Do it again! Sing that sound again! It tore through the eternal darkness like a ray of light . . . Having heard it, I can't hear or see your previous gimmicks and showing off . . ."

That's what you would say.

And the ridiculous, empty librettos of old Italian operas instantly become understandable. And really, wouldn't a storyline, action, and psychological webs only take away from what's important?

Then, after you had gotten enough of this godly sound, maybe you would want to return to the best that exists in our operas today. But once you've heard *bel canto*, you can't do without it. You would want to combine that vocal wonder with today's best. But . . . it no longer exists. It

is lost. A miraculous art form is lost, and can we truly find it? We probably can. We just need to apply enough willpower and know how to search.

But for now, it's gone. The trace has gone cold. The greatest support for this assertion is that you can hear "*bel canto*" everywhere, third-rate singing teachers tell their students about *bel canto*. And why not? Nobody knows the true *bel canto*.

Everybody uses this term simply to describe a sound that is more or less beautiful. And they say: "now this is *bel canto*." Well, that's that then, time to reap laurels.

Now, let's ask ourselves a question: why *isn't* anyone looking for it? The *Italians*, after all, looked for it and found it. The answer to this question is simple: they found it because nothing was distracting them; they didn't have more interesting librettos, complex staging, all they had was singers and their singing. And the public loved the opera. And so, the restless souls that must search, must perfect everything that they touch – they accidentally started running into some specific, unprecedented, electric, calling sound – it would echo for a moment and be gone the next. What's the matter? They began experimenting, searching furiously. They observed it, overheard it from nature, and transformed it into a "technique."

But today, you won't even think about searching for something UNPRECEDENTED. Why bother? Our age asks for something different. Today, you need for the singers to produce a musical phrase, to relay a THOUGHT, to accurately convey the psychological pattern of an aria or romance; they have to "grasp" the personality of their "character." And, of course, they have to sing correctly and rhythmically, and possess a beautiful, strong, technically adept voice.

This is how, in search for the new, we get carried away, and lose our interest in the old, even if it's valid . . . This isn't true of everyone, of course. This "rule" only applies to average, not particularly capacious minds. It's possible that there might have been at some point a singer who was able to combine music, thought, character, and *bel canto* in one, but he died, and his miracle-doing died with him.

***

Now, let's get back to our own topic – dramatic theatre.

The same thing happened to it. Mochalov's brilliant flights, Yermolova's inspired acting, or Duse's boundless authenticity and depth – that is our dramatic theatrical magic. Our *bel canto*. It could be seen in our old theatres, and, apparently, it wasn't so rare. It was beautiful – true art, perfection of an actor's artistic powers. But everything that surrounded it was so tasteless, helpless, and detestable that there was only one way to bear it: try not to notice it. These amateur, talentless actors with whom the touring star would often have to share the stage, these extras, found on the street to play a crowd, these set pieces – three, four identical "box sets" for any show, and much, much more! . . . The audience forgave all this for the moments of delight that they got from the brilliant actors' performance. They were used to this strange interweaving of mediocrity with greatness, a den of iniquity – and a temple of art. They couldn't imagine it any other way.

But then, the Meiningen Company[1] showed up, and it became abundantly clear that the crowd had to act, that every man in the crowd is an actor, not a dead extra; that it would be better if the stage had set design that complemented each play and each act – set design that gave the impression of the place that was assumed by the author, not the omnipresent standard "box sets" and "forest landscapes"; that it would be better if a play were organized, according to the playwright's wishes, by a single person – the director – than if it were organized on the run, by whomever had an idea at the time.

However, the Meiningen Company made one grave mistake. Paying such great significance to the set, props, costumes, makeup, they turned the actors into . . . things. Necessary, important things, but still just things. For the director Chronegk, an actor was simply a medium, an executor of his will. For every actor, Chronegk and his assistants thought everything through to such an extent that the actors didn't have anything left to do – just go according to the director's plan and vision. Willingly or not, they gave themselves completely over to the director's will. Meanwhile, he, enthused by his new idea, trained and drilled them until they performed their roles exactly as he told them. In this manner, they turned into a mass of obedient marionettes. Creative freedom, live, spontaneous moments, explosions of passion that we've grown used to in our own actors – this was all out of the question.

The progressive aspects of the Meiningen Company's art could not leave our directors uninterested, and a new stream poured into theatre. The directors' new main concern became the creation of a harmonious show.

The Meiningen Company brought with them something entirely new: the ensemble. Complete coordination between the actors.

Although, not all ensembles are made equal.

Having understood the value of an ensemble, our innovating directors couldn't fail to notice the Meiningen Company' main weakness: the mechanical style of their acting and its soullessness. In order to avoid making the same mistake, they started treating their actors differently. Together with the actors, they not only thought through every scene, every moment and every line of their role, or searched for and found the truest and most expressive actions. They also wanted the actor to be full of truth, so that he not only understood every moment of his role, but felt it too. So that he was as natural as in life. Special techniques were developed to this end. A whole system of techniques.

It seemed that everything was progressing along properly: both sides of the show and the roles, external and internal, were reaching the necessary heights. But the director's chief concern was still the creation of a show. And this concern (possibly subconsciously) created a hard line of action: everything was done for the show. The actor was only a single part of the show. Regardless of however much the directors helped him, how they supported him – in the end, he was still shut in and denied artistic freedom.

This sort of directorial custody, and more importantly: the compulsive fixation of anything that was found during rehearsals – however collaboratively – led to the actors' freedom being shackled. This killed their spontaneity. Everything is thought-through and pre-decided; all you have to do is repeat your actions and words in exactly the same way (with once and for all established intonations). What kind of *spontaneity and involuntariness*, i.e. what sort of *truth* is there to even speak of? To make everything *seem* like the truth – create the impression of the truth – that's possible. But that's it. That is, not the truth, but the appearance of truth. And that's what happened.

As for freedom of creativity and any sort of onstage "improvisations" on the part of the actor – that became not only unnecessary, but detrimental and dangerous. These improvisations might, accidently, coincide with the director's pattern of the scene, but what if they don't? What if they break it? What will your partner do then? "Improvise" too? Where will that lead the show? And why did we have the tens and hundreds of rehearsals, then? Why did we have the hundreds and thousands of great ideas?

Even if actors were to act on inspiration, like Mochalov or Yermolova, little good would come of it – the higher they would rise, the more they'd ruin the show's structure with their flight.

This is how completely new demands began to arise for the actor, gradually and unnoticeably. And with them, came a new school. It demanded not the truth from the actor, not

freedom, not inspiration, but the ability to accurately and believably perform actions that were found in rehearsals beneath the watchful gaze of the director's vision; actions, blocking, a.k.a. *mise-en-scenes*, and even intonations.

And if we call the Meiningen Company' ensemble an ensemble of marionettes, then our ensemble became an ensemble of verisimilar actors.

What is this? Is this progress? Of course it's progress, without a doubt. The most important thing in the theatre should be the show – a holistic performance, not random, individual parts. In this respect, everything was developing correctly. At the same time, is it right to sit and watch the actors lose all their freedom to create in front of the audience; inspiration lose its place in theatre; authenticity and truth be replaced by verisimilitude; the actor forced to second and then third place with regards to importance, and turned into an executor of the director's will?

If this is how things will progress going forward, then it isn't long before our dramatic wonderworking sinks into oblivion, just like the magical Italian *bel canto*.

But how do we combine the harmonious, unified production with artistic freedom, even improvisation onstage?

The Director: His Excessive Power and Ignorance

There have been theatrical collectives that have successfully been formed by very strong actors who did not need the help of a director: they grasped the play and the roles very well on their own; additionally, they helped each other out with advice, and everything worked out. The director took on the roles of rehearsal administrator and general organizer.

There are examples of brilliant touring actor-directors. Like, for example, Ira Aldridge, who travelled across most of Russia's provinces [in the late 1850s and early 1860s], performing his roles alongside both professional Russian actors and amateurs. And the plays were such that they needed a director: *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, etc. He staged the shows himself, directed them, taught, patiently explained everything, and didn't give up. This was necessary for him, at least because, otherwise, the incompetent amateurs and actors would have gotten in his way onstage. Additionally, he knew, understood, and loved Shakespeare so much, that he couldn't allow for him to be played poorly and untruly.

Imagine a director so talented, enlightened, and charismatic, who is, on top of that, a brilliant, unsurpassed performer – appearing among actors and amateurs who long for art. It's easy to imagine the power his newfound troupe accords him.

And such directors – lawmakers, leaders, and absolute monarchs – weren't the only ones of their kind. They existed when the theatre was headed by Garrick, Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko, and Sulerzhitsky (not well-known, but of the same category of directors). Under their leadership, the theatre would produce highly artistic works, full of harmony, and oneness of thought, power, and poetry.

The general level of these people's development and talent surpassed those of the troupe members to such an extent, that the actors felt themselves as no more than students in the hands of great artists. They unquestioningly heeded and obeyed, not because their "masters" demanded their obedience, but because they were enthralled and captivated by their directors' talents. And the wise, keen, and astute director – knowing what lies in an actors' souls – didn't abuse them, but artfully awakened the actors' dormant powers of creativity and fantasy . . . he didn't scare them, didn't break them, but inspired them and led them to the simple and true path (which, without such an intervention, would be difficult) – a path of stage playing.

To a lesser – to a significantly lesser – extent, some of their students, who inherited the greatest part of their skills and knowledge, did the same thing. The history of theatre will name other similar artists as well. It's not my job to list them all. Even though there haven't been that many. Their high culture and enormous creative strength gave these directors hitherto unheard of power. They became the absolute monarchs of theatre. Moreover, the power of their personalities, and the success of their work, were such that their influence expanded far beyond the walls of their personal theatres: they elevated the director's authority so high that the director is now, *without exception, considered the most important player* in any theatre.

He doesn't always elevate the theatre to great heights – not everybody can become a great person at will – but he always uses the *privileges* that come with the territory: he is a dictator, invested with absolute power, and a lawmaker.

But if he is weak in one respect or another, then his power and unlimited freedom lead to pitiful results. For the most part, these directors have powerful personalities. Maybe even aggressive ones. And the less they know, the less talent they possess, the more aggressive they happen to be.

On account of their insensitivity to the actors and lack of expertise, their demands of the performers are most often unnatural and evoke overt and silent protests on the parts of the actors. In order to preserve their dignity and authority, they are forced to use extreme measures: this is how it will be! No protests, discussion, or questions! . . . I'm the director, I know everything, and I *am* everything!

Given such leadership and directorial practices, there is no point in expecting the actors to act well. Which is exactly what comes to pass. The actors are occupied by executing various "assignments" which have been given to them by the director, and which are at severe odds with their own creative desires. Therefore, creativity, intuition, and freedom are all out of the question.

For the most part, these people pile on mistake after mistake with regards to staging and interpretation of a play. This happens because of a desire to make a show more flashy, sharp, and topical, and for other similar motives, which would never seduce a real artist. And so, the director starts employing various tricks, like mobile set pieces, deafening sound design, a thousand people onstage at a time, playing *Hamlet* in tuxedos, exploiting the audience's lesser instincts – feeding them pornography and vulgar farce, etc.

You might protest: how can this be? What about the public, the audience? They won't go to such a show. Of course they will! And they'll drag you along with them. They'll *enjoy* it.

Leisurely critics will say that there are new discoveries, brave artistic choices on the part of the director here . . . Only a true theatre expert sees the hopelessness of this kind of a show and its impeding effects on the development and growth of the art form. Others don't notice it. Especially since directors of this kind are very adept at perfecting a show's external attributes – the blocking, the opulence . . . Everything is clean, smooth, exact, like a clock, everything is without snags and so dynamic that there is no opportunity to even think. There is no room for an average audience member to evaluate whether it's good or bad.

Unless you come another time, once you already know the show, once you've seen all the tricks . . . then you might notice all the patches and thread and holes – it's not the same this time around! But their goal isn't to make the show good a second or especially a third time. It just has to be a success once.

The audience that comes to the theatre is always in a state that is advantageous for the director and actor.

They believe in advance. They already expect something wonderful, worthy of attention.

This state is supported by the theatre's atmosphere: hundreds of people have come together, leaving their business behind. They've all sat down, expectant . . .

And if the actors onstage are speaking in a certain artificial manner, not quite normally, if they're moving and gesturing somewhat strangely and unnaturally, then . . . maybe that's how it should be? There's no other way? Otherwise, it wouldn't be the theatre!? And the audience tries to adapt itself to what's happening onstage.

Soon, the audience grows used to the unnaturalness, is drawn into it, and (if the text is written well) is taken by the play. Any blanks that are left are filled in by the audience, what's bad isn't picked up on. The play ends, and the audience is fully convinced that everything happened onstage exactly as it was supposed to. The audience is pleased.

The audience members thank the actors, give them their curtain call, applaud them. Sometimes the actor deserves the applause, but how many times is it undeserved!!! The audience is applauding themselves! The audience was *doing half of the work for the actors*.

The Director: Time Pressures and Other Objective Reasons

Now let's imagine an honest and gifted director and theatre manager, a person of integrity. He's enthusiastic about his job, he loves it, lives for it . . . it would seem that that's all anyone really needs.

But he encounters his first obstacle, which turns out to be much more serious that it seemed from afar. This obstacle is the actor. The person who's supposed to supply the most pleasure and redemption is what turns out to be the main obstacle. Either the actor isn't prepared properly or experienced, and literally needs to be carried; or he's too experienced and has a wagonload of bad habits, bad taste, and is also so spoiled in terms of egotism that it's impossible to tear through all this trash; or the actor is simply talentless and ended up onstage as a result of a misunderstanding or pulled strings . . . In a word, the actor "doesn't get it," no matter how hard you work him!

Given the desire, it's possible to make an actor do wonders. It's possible to not just lead him along, but even completely remake him. Remake his whole acting apparatus. But for this, you need a combination of three exceptional conditions.

The first: the ability to do this.

Aside from tact and desire, in order to do this, you also need an appropriate "school" with a multitude of tried-and-true methods. But where is it? What you *have* learned has failed to be useful or has turned out to be fruitless theory, or, conversely, such an abusive practical approach that you had to abandon it. And so you're left with nothing. You won't get far with amateur work.

The second condition: you need energy. Fanatical levels of energy and patience. A painter applies the paints he needs, comes back to it another day – they're still there, he can just continue. But with a live person, with an actor, it's much more difficult: today, you manage to get him to where you need him, but tomorrow, nothing is left, all the "paint" has faded, slid off, gotten mixed together . . . The actor tries to evoke yesterday's emotions, but they're gone, and he's forced to hastily repeat rough external expressions of yesterday's feelings: yesterday's poses, gestures, smiles, intonations . . . i.e. starved, bloodless form.

And the third necessary condition: time.

In order to create something authentic and truly deserving of being called a "work of art," you typically need months upon months. Even if you're an experienced and skilled director and pedagogue. In order to make good theatre, you need whole years. A week, a month isn't enough to remake people or develop talent. But in this field – you're on a time crunch, the show must go up!

And so, all virtuous intentions are put off until "later," while in the meantime, you're forced to employ much more simple methods, all in order to not delay the show's premiere.

These simpler methods are well-known: *dressage*, giving line readings to the actor, "drilling," and other atrocities, which have nothing in common with directing or pedagogy or art. If you don't have a temperament – scream as loudly as you can, clench your fists, strain yourself until you turn red! Stomp your feet, punch the wall!

Are you emotionless and nothing affects you? So what! Don't feel anything. Just smile, show your teeth and speak like this – delicately, drawlingly – repeat after me.

Not like that! Again!.. Again!.. Again!.. This is how an actor is trained, just like a canary is trained to sing like a nightingale.

They'll train him, drill him, then dress him, and put him in make-up. Now fire away! Lay out what's been knocked into you.

I've often talked with directors about this difficult situation. Many of them complain that while working this way from year to year, day to day, they lose their sense of the truth and artistic perfection. Despite all previous aspirations, they turn into craftsmen, production workers, and hacks, out of necessity and habit . . .

And that when they look at craftsmanly shows like the ones they make, they like them. Previously, they would disdainfully turn away from such "art," but now . . . they're used to it . . . and it's no big deal . . . as if that's how it should be.

"But what to do? What should be done?" they would ask. "Schedules . . . time crunches . . . the actors' lack of readiness . . . their inertia . . . And my own lack of ability . . . and you sink lower and lower . . . on a daily basis! . . ."

There's only one piece of advice to give here (which is what you do): under no conditions should you allow yourself to sink, you constantly have to support the artist in you. If you cannot bring your show to complete perfection, then take one or two scenes and bring them to the state of complete perfection. Spend as much time and strength as you can on them. Then the fire of creativity won't die in you, despite the fact that all other work will be deadly for you. Maintain life in yourself all the time, don't let your heart stop. Else you'll die and not even notice it. There are many such cases. Sad cases.

The Director: Subjective Reasons (Dilettantism, Professional Craftsmanship, Charlatanism)

There probably isn't and has never been a director who didn't start with the highest of dreams, lofty speculations about art, creativity, truth, and perfection of form.

But it's one thing to dream about a beautiful end result, and another to know the path there and have the strength to reach it.

The craftsman-professional knows that if he doesn't meet some minimal expectations, then his "craft" "won't sell." This knowledge is not only useful, it's *vital* for the artist as well.

For example, quiet, incomprehensible speech onstage, unbelievably long pauses – these are mistakes that are made by young and inexperienced actors, as well as talented ones. The craftsman-professional would be indignant. He'd say that an actor's first job is to speak loudly. Everything must be heard, understood, and seen! And would he be wrong? He'll be wrong with regards to something else. Volume for volume's sake isn't the answer – the true problem lies in *the actor's improper creative state or in the wrong interpretation of the scene*. Fix this, and everything will be loud enough and understandable. If instead you require an actor to be loud – he might do as you ask, but this will consume all of his attention. He won't have time to live in the circumstances of the character, and his chief concern will be only to speak louder.

Or here's another example. An actor drags the show out, pauses, slows everything down . . . It's necessary to get rid of the root of the problem, which is either in his incorrect

internal technique – his brakes, his **preoccupation** – or in the fact that he doesn't understand the scene's circumstances; fix this, and everything will be just fine. But a craftsman only knows one thing, he'll just keep yelling: "Faster, faster, don't slow down! Tempo, tempo! Rhythm, rhythm! Pulse, pulse!"

Craftsmanship and professionalism aren't bad because they require volume, clarity, expressivity, or speed and rhythm from an actor – they're bad because, first of all, they approach everything very primitively, and secondly, because they despise any kind of *pursuits*. Searching, testing, altering – in a word, everything that identifies a true, demanding artist, they commonly consider to be simply *lack of skill and inexperience*.

They're so used to following recipes and stencils that they don't ever have to search – they already know everything: everything is established by tradition. This is why a craftsman-professional can stage any play in a month or less. Searching for hidden depths or secrets in a play . . . Digging deep . . . refining the details of the characters' personalities . . . and on top of all of this, helping each actor find qualities that are necessary for his role . . . Why? What is all that for? It's all just fads and inventions . . . That's what happens when someone doesn't understand the "job." "In practice," everything is much easier and simpler, all you need is experience and skill! And what is there to do for more than a month, anyway?! Read the play, cast it, have a read-through, then "block" the actors (show them where to stand), and the job's done. For "deeper" work, you can show the actors what "intonations" to use when speaking their lines. Then everything is truly done, the job is over. If the actor plays poorly even then, then it means that the actor is bad: everything has been showed to him, explained – all that's left is to repeat it and that's it . . .

If this kind of director is given the opportunity to work on a show not for a month (as he's used to), but for a year, then he'll be faced with a dead end: he won't be able to do anything more! All that will be left is to endlessly repeat the same things over and over, mechanize it so that everything flies off the tongue.

These craftsmen-professionals are, for the most part, the ones who call for quick deadlines. An artist won't do this: he always needs more time. He always has more to do, because his ideal is always looming ahead of him.

There exists a more sophisticated kind of craftsmanship. You won't even immediately understand that it doesn't involve a drop of creative juices – just arithmetic and mechanics.

While acting in the finale of the first act of *Poverty Is No Vice*, a shoddy craftsman behaves very simply and primitively. Ostrovsky's [1917: 90] play says:

> Mitya. *(Walks towards the door and takes the letter out of his pocket)* What can she have written? I'm frightened! – My hands tremble! – Well, what is to be will be – I'll read it. *(Reads)* "And I love you. Liubov Tortsova." *(Clutches his head and runs away.)*

And he does everything exactly as written: approaches the door, takes out the letter, makes his hands shake, says the words, skims over the letter, and, without properly reading what exactly is written in there, hastily tries to depict some superlatively powerful emotion on his face – be it horror or joy – grabs his head, and runs out of the door to some other unclear place for some unclear reason. This happens in less than 5–6 seconds.

An actor who works by the truth – one who is immersed in the play's circumstances – does everything differently. Starting with the fact that he won't immediately grab the letter. Liubim Tortsov is in the room – if not for him, the letter would have been read long ago. Finally, the guest finishes his didactic tales and falls asleep. But you have to check whether he's really fallen asleep – otherwise, you might take out the letter, and he'll see you. And for some time, Mitya

will cautiously observe the guest and check on his breathing. Meanwhile, his hand seems to be reaching for the letter of its own volition . . . it's in the pocket . . . the breast pocket. He's asleep! Tip-toeing, so as not to make any noise, not to wake him up, but quickly – he goes to the door, farther away from Liubim and closer to "her" – after all, she called, she sent an invitation to go upstairs. Mitya rips the letter from his pocket and suddenly stops, afraid of something: "What could she have written?" He twirls the letter (or rather, the note) in his hand, investigates it from outside: "I'm frightened!" But he cannot wait – his hands have begun to unfold the paper and, from excitement, do not heed him. Without granting it any significance, consumed by the anticipation of what's in the letter, he blurts out: "My hands tremble!" It's obvious that he's not expecting anything good, probably thinks that it's a rejection. The letter is opened.

His hand gives a jerk as if to hold the letter up, but suddenly it recoils! And his head too suddenly leans back from the letter. It turns away, afraid that it might read something awful. He stands for a second or two, refusing to read it, but then he makes up his mind: "Well, what is to be will be – I'll read it." He brings the letter to his face and leans forward to better grasp its content.

The same agitation that froze his hands as they unfolded the letter, now clouds his eyes, as they struggle to make out the words. And his lips mechanically speak: "And I . . . love . . . you . . . Liubov . . . Tortsova . . ." He reads it . . . He freezes . . . doesn't understand anything . . . Looks at it again . . . something clicks . . . he understands, and in his surprise, he feels fear – horrible fear!

Even his hand jerks away from the letter, as if burned! Ow! A man stands there with widened eyes, and is seemingly not thinking at all – he's frozen in horror . . . Then he gradually calms . . . slowly holds up the letter, his face lightens up . . . reads it again . . . now he understands everything in its entirety . . . his expression is unclear: he might be about to laugh, or maybe cry . . . he grabs his head (one hand still holding the letter), squeezes it, but his eyes are staring forward, not seeing anything. Then . . . the thought of "her" – she's upstairs . . . he looks up and flies to her.

A craftsman of verisimilitude will do everything in practically the same way: he'll observe, and listen to Liubim to check that he's really fallen asleep, after which he'll tip-toe to the door, and hesitate in exactly the same manner and order: should he or shouldn't he read the letter? He'll make up his mind, read it, not understand it at first, then start to think . . . first, he'll be afraid – there's something too big about it – it doesn't fit, then he'll digest it, and finally believe his luck . . .

Everything will be the same. At least, the movements are identical. Identical to how things would look in life: the same "logic and sequence," everything is accurate. But one thing will be missing: authentic emotion and some imperceptible subtle movements of the face, eyes, hands, the whole body . . . the thing that you can't fake and which is so enthralling in the art of the actor.

But . . . for an audience that isn't too demanding, this is enough. And people will say: "He's so realistic! He's experiencing the emotions so truly!!" And if the whole show is so assiduously staged as well, and there is such coherence between the rest of the theatre workers (the set and costume designer, the composer, the sound designer, etc.), and everything is surrounded by an opulent exterior, as if by an astounding, blinding, golden frame that can cause the painting itself to start shining like the real thing (unless you take a good look at it) . . .

If, on top of all of this, there is also a dazzling advertising campaign, then success is guaranteed. And the director is triumphant.

You can employ whatever praise you will when talking about these people: practical, realistic doers, deft, inventive, and whatever else you want.

From the point of view of the progress of art, theatre leaders who support this approach destroy what's most important in theatre.

They make imitation, forgery – a cornerstone. No matter what significant results they achieve, they are mere charlatans. When it comes to art – they are demolishers; they destroy its very foundation.

Some of their names might even pop up in the annals of theatre history . . . not for long, of course, but still, it's possible – life is a great comedy.

What conclusion can we draw from all of this? That the director is *bad* for theatre? Is that it?

The theatre needs an incorruptible artist, a good, talented director who is well-versed in his job – as we need oxygen. And the actor needs him like oxygen too. He's the leader, the inspiring force, the soul of a show. But a bad director, mediocre, ungifted, a usurper, a dilettante, a charlatan is harmful. Harmful for theatre, harmful for the audience (encouraging a bad taste), and most of all, harmful for the actor.

He's the one whom theatre has to thank that the art of the actor is dwindling, that the actor's significance and position have shrunk to the level of a pitiful marionette. This is the beginning. If a proper school of directing isn't established soon, then the actor will be completely murdered. The only people who will take the stage will be those who respond well to *dressage*. Obedient puppets.

On the Actor's Responsibility and Heroism

You think the director is the only one guilty of the professional craftsmanship? What about the actor?

The actor is where this all begins. Although the director is now everything, he's a relative newcomer. Before him, the actor was everything. The actor is the one who first noticed (he couldn't help noticing) this advantageous quality of the theatrical stage – the ability to enthrall the audience, to stoke their imagination, their creativity, and eclipse their critical gaze. He noticed it and immediately took advantage of this intriguing mechanism. The director is simply his worthy heir and successor.

Say what they will about the "good ol' days," praise them or degrade them as they may, we can say only one thing with total conviction: back then, actors weren't blocked off or embellished (as they are now) by directors' magic tricks, the "ensemble," and staging. Even the sets were very primitive: an interior room, the woods, a hut – they were only useful insofar as to let the audience understand more or less where everything was happening ("in a house," "in the woods," "in a palace") and not be confused. The heart of the matter was the acting. Which is why its good qualities, as well as its shortcomings, were more evident. An actor's strengths and weaknesses weren't dimmed by anything. And, willingly or not, he had to show everything he was capable of. He was the crux of theatre. He was what people came to see.

He knew this and thought: I am the show! He saw that, in practice, that was the truth, and decided: I am the theatre!

Responsibility caused him to rise up, which turned him into a hero . . . And if his soul hid the fire of talent, then it was stoked. If the actor's soul was exceptionally deep, then the fire raged like a forest fire, like an indomitable storm.

And, seeing these flares, the audience of the "good ol' days" understood: this is art!

Audiences that had seen such actors had very clear criteria: what is "real" and what is fake.

Today, the actor is put in calmer and more comfortable conditions. He doesn't come out "one on one" against the whole audience. Now, he is only a part of a great and complex theatrical machine, just a single soldier out of the full forces. Pretty often, he doesn't even know

what his commander – the director – has in store for him, and simply does what he's told. And the audience has grown used to this as well, no longer watching just the actor, but the whole show – the "staging," the general ensemble of acting, attained by the "director's" assiduous work . . . Everything is put together, everything is hitched very well . . . The actor is, of course, a part of it, but only as a single ingredient. Sometimes, not even the main one.

This new way of things has completely changed the actor's psychology. He no longer takes responsibility for the show (to say nothing of responsibility for theatre or for art!). He has become calmer . . . there is no longer a need for flares . . . and talent, whose little fire is quietly moldering in his soul's depths, will molder all the way to the grave. What need is there to flare up? Who needs saving?!

Not to mention that an actor might get himself into trouble by performing heroic fits. A show is now so tightly regulated that if you step over your bounds, you might botch the most important thing – the director's cunningly woven "pattern."

The audience has grown used to such shows and has lost the old criteria of judging acting ("real" and "fake," great and small), they've acquired new criteria: "an interesting show," "a boring show," useful, harmful, properly reflecting the author, improperly – distorting him.

This is how the demands of the audience and experts have changed.

There is one more circumstance in the actor's life and work that has drastically changed when compared with the "good ol' days" and has had enormous consequences.

The thing is that there used to be very few theatres; they survived entirely on the box office proceeds, nobody helped them. Nobody respected actors, people considered them to be outcasts, freeloaders, buffoons . . . There was little that was attractive about the profession. Only those who had an enormous desire to go there would ultimately go into theatre. People would go there to test themselves, as if to a trial. They would go there after throwing caution to the winds. These people's whole lives were a constant feat. A feat and a battle. A battle against the poverty, barbarism, and mediocrity of the crowd, against the vices of their unworthy colleagues, and, finally, against their own lack of skill. Many couldn't take it, stepped out; many fell, crushed by vices and life.

This is how, through natural selection, talents and heroes were chosen! Of course they were heroes! One man goes out, alone against hundreds of audience members . . . Alone, respected by none, despised, he goes out . . . Armed with what? Only with his bared heart. And he conquers them all in this battle. If you don't emerge victorious – pack your bags and off with you to another town.

How much love, endurance, and heroism was necessary in order to live like this? And how much fire and talent did you need to constantly emerge as the victor!

Note

1 A German theatrical company, formed in the late 1860s by Georg II, Duke of Saxe-Meiningen. It was directed by Ludwig Chronegk (1837–1891), and it toured extensively in Europe, and in Russia (in 1885 and 1890).

2
Truth

It might seem suspicious: Mochalov, Yermolova, Duse . . . all deceased . . . isn't that a sign of senescence?

Those who are old and senile always think that, in the old times, in their time, everything was better. And the author is sighing on every page: "The good old days! That's when we had art. It's not the same anymore – art is gone."

No, that's not how I think, my dear young colleagues. I don't believe that art existed and then vanished. On the contrary, I think that art as a stable achievement has yet to truly exist. There have been individual flights; there have been Praxiteleses, Raphaels, Paganinis, Mozarts, Beethovens, Garricks, Mochalovs, Yermolovas, Aldridges . . . They flew over the world like a shimmering comet, shone through our darkness, and hid again, leaving only bewilderment in their wake.

True, after every comet, art could not stay in the same place, it would shift. But this shift would be incredibly small. And it would affect only the most basic laws of art. For example, in the West, after Garrick (and for us, it was after Mochalov), it became tasteless to play tragedies with the help of false declamation, howling, and striking poses.

There arose a need for *truth*, *authenticity*, and *naturalness*. It's a shift, but it's still a long way from the blinding truth of Mochalov, Garrick, Yermolova, and that of others.

That you should be *truthful* in a tragedy – people understood this. Only, they failed to note one other thing: in addition to simplicity, true tragedians also have *power*. It is a very rare quality. Here, at any rate, it was missing. And when the theatres were in pursuit of truth and naturalness, while some of them declared any sort of pathos as harmful and started playing tragedy in an everyday manner, "simply" – then there was much confusion. The elevated, high essence of tragedy crumbled, and we were left with a mundane drama, and in places, it was even something like a casual conversation over a cup of tea . . . This "simplicity" disappointed everyone's expectations. It didn't come through.

At that point, others, without thinking about it, and only seeing that nothing was coming of the "simplicity," ran in the other direction: as far away as possible from mundanity. Without knowing or finding the springs of great passions, they completely crossed out any sort of "truth" they may have had, and, in the search of tragedy, started howling, yelling, running across the

stage with clenched fists, with bulging veins . . . even scarier and worse than those who ran and howled before them. But they didn't convince anybody with this either, didn't save tragedy, and didn't open the gates to the secrets of art.

Finally, a third group, without overthinking things, began to copy the tragedians. They liked their power, unbridledness, the storm of passions . . . they felt that the actors that affected them opened up onstage to their very core, that they lived and trembled with their bare souls . . . In their simplicity, they decided that it was enough to not tie themselves down with anything, to give themselves unlimited freedom, then to agitate, shake, fire themselves up, and . . . their "gut" will speak.

That's what they did. But this resulted in some unsightly pathology: either raving madness or intoxication with debauchery – furniture would break, costumes would rip, they would get bruises, broken bones, blood would spill, and it was unpleasant to view all of this.

Maybe their "gut" turned out to be unattractive – not like those of the great tragedians, or maybe they didn't do what they should have . . . but these keys also failed to unlock the heavenly gates to inspiration.

This is how the appearance of a genius goes by almost for nothing, leaving only confusion in the heads of "specialists."

The genii themselves most likely were privy to these secrets. At least, when they had to, they could always summon up heightened creativity in their favorite roles, which would irresistibly affect the audience.

Each one of them had his own techniques and methods. Some of these methods even reached us, but most of them vanished without a trace. Partly because these methods are very intimate and tied to the actor's personal life, and, naturally, he didn't want to tell everybody about them . . . Partly because they didn't know how to describe them. They did *something*, they pushed some button, they turned something on inside themselves – but what *exactly*, they didn't know.

Truth in art . . . there are so many arguments and misinterpretations around this word: *truth*.

A perfect work happens only when a master artist imbues it with his soul, only when he becomes carried away by it, when he melds with it.

In a word, when, in the moments of creation, the thing he is creating is the *truth* for him.

In his journal, Lev Tolstoy wrote that what he writes is good only when his inkwell contains blood, and not ink; when, dipping the quill, he writes with his blood. Anything written in ink is dry, boring, and deserves to be destroyed.[1]

In this way, truth is not the goal of art. Truth isn't the goal of the master. His goal is the creation of a perfect work of art, which presents humanity with a new idea or a new joy, or inspires new deeds and works.

Truth is only a method. A method with whose help a master enters the realm of true art. Not even a method, really, but more specifically: *the foundation of a method*. The method consists of the means, which help the master enter this realm.

However, when you listen to an actor or a director – supporters of the art of experiencing (or read their works) – it turns out that their whole goal (and the goal of their art) is to be truthful.

Tolstoy needs "blood" in his inkwell in order for his writings to be effective and vivid. For the same reason, the actor needs authenticity and sincerity – so that his creation (i.e. his acting) immersed people, affected them, evoked trust, and, in general, was a complete work of art.

We should add that there are different kinds of truths. This is best shown in painting. A portrait in which the costume's every thread is shown, every little detail of the ring, and in

which the person's personality is accurately conveyed, his eyes sparkle with thought, a familiar smile crosses his lips – this sort of portrait can be authentic truth. Next to this is a caricature portrait, a cartoon, cobbled together by several miserly, but sharp, strokes; this could be such keen and vivid truth, it could say so much about a person, that no realistic portrait could ever hope to say as much.

It's the same in theatre: on one hand, realistic comedy, drama, or tragedy; on the other – vaudeville, caricatures, allusions, sketches, and jokes. Both can be full of truth.

Beauty Is not Relative

"Beauty," "truth," "the real" . . . But how can we discuss all this? Is it really concrete enough, completely set in stone once and for all? People might not agree with each other – we all have different concepts of beauty, truth, etc. It turns out that this problem isn't just complex, but impossible to solve.

However, it only seems complex and impossible.

"Beauty," "authenticity," "truth" – these aren't relative at all – they are *functions of a person's internal development*. "Beauty," "authenticity," "artfulness," etc. aren't the same for everyone at the same time, this is true. They are conditional. But they're only conditional on a person's internal development: a low level of development leads to very small demands; a higher development results in stricter demands.

People might say: but what about Praxiteles, Phidias?[2] Two thousand years ago, they created such beauty that is unattainable even today. Aren't things the other way around? Isn't art being lost? No. Loss isn't the issue here – the simple fact is that Phidias is Phidias, and Praxiteles is Praxiteles. Not everybody sculpted in their time as they did. They were unique. A genius always outpaces his contemporaries so much that either nobody understands him, and he is cast out, or he is deified. Praxiteles and Phidias outpaced humanity's art by two, maybe even three thousand years – that's all there is to it. For centuries, humanity looks at a genius's mesmerizing work, is awed by it, copies it, imitates it, but *how* it's made, by what means? – that remains a mystery.

That's how Praxiteles and Phidias stand before us for 2,000 whole years, while the vast majority of our sculptures do their work as if there never was a Phidias, or a Praxiteles, or a Michelangelo, or a Canova.

Painters paint as if there never was a Raphael, or a Leonardo, or a Rembrandt.

And there is nothing surprising or shameful about this: neither paintings nor sculptures reveal the secrets to their making and magic. The artist breathed into them a part of his soul . . . But ***how*** did he do this? And how to get such a soul? Nobody can say. Rather, they might say a whole lot, but nobody's said what's important so far.

To us, a genius' works of art seem like perfection, but to the artist that made them, they seem like pitiful attempts to capture what was in his imagination.

We're inclined to interpret this **self-appraisal** as modesty. It isn't modesty at all – it's just that his understanding of perfection is so much higher and stricter than ours. From his point of view, our understanding of it is childish.

That's how it is. And the problem isn't at all that "beauty," "perfection," "authenticity," "truth," "artfulness," and all such concepts are relative, but that many of us do not make the demands that we should make based on what has *already been shown* to humanity through many beautiful things. It's time to judge art not by low standards, based on what you see every day, but by high standards, based on what the genii have shown us.

Let's take an example that is close and palpable from the theatre.

Stanislavsky spent his whole life fighting against falsities onstage, against "cliché acting," "craftsmanship" . . . his whole life, he promoted "authentic experiencing" and "truth" onstage. He searched for paths to this end. He achieved that truth, and he led others to it.

You would think that his students and followers should have taken up this most important of his pursuits and developed it further . . . After all, every student begins where his teacher ends. The teacher has dug a hole, fertilized it, planted the seeds – all that's left is to let it grow and reap the harvest. (And then, if you can, keep planting.) If you can't do even this, then of course you're a bad student. But in practice, students not only don't surpass the teacher – they are incapable of getting into their heads what he tries to hammer into them on a daily basis over the course of many years. The teacher's great thoughts don't fit inside their small skull. In order to receive them, they cut them down, swallow them, and digest them in a reduced form. The words remain the same: "truth," "life," "experiencing," but their meaning is so far removed from the meaning relayed to them by their teacher that it's completely unrecognizable.

So read this – these are practically the last lines of the last page of the last book that were written by an old Stanislavsky [1954: 375] – the result of a lifetime of teaching: "I've worked in the theatre for a long time, hundreds of students have passed through my hands, but I can call *only a few of them* my followers who understood the heart of what I dedicated my life to."

If you take a look now at the works of some "pupil" of his, as well as the works of those who declare themselves his true believers, if you listen to their self-confident speeches, you'll be amazed: how much they've mutated the simplest, most obvious of ideas. And the most important thing—the *truth*, which is what dominated their teacher's life. The very same truth we observe during the world's very best actors' very best minutes, is the saddest part of their work . . . Their "truth" is as far removed from what their teacher wanted as paper flowers are from authentic roses and orchids.

Truth and Naturalism

Go ahead, listen to any discussion of a show. People of all levels of expertise get together – "experts," connoisseurs, the most ordinary of people – and . . . they discuss it. They discuss everything: the faithfulness or lack thereof of the interpretation, the positivity or negativity of the characters, the dragging or excessive speed of the rhythm, what should be underlined more, what should be mitigated . . . What *don't* they discuss, what details *don't* they go over – while they should be discussing something completely different!

I don't remember after what battle Napoleon called his artillery commander and sternly asked him why the artillery remained silent despite his orders. The commander replied: "Your Majesty, there were 63 serious reasons for it." "Name them! In detail!" "Reason number one: there was no powder." "Enough! Explain the other 62 reasons later . . . some other time."

Same thing here. Most often, you shouldn't be discussing character interpretations, but how the actors aren't acting well – how they ape around and say empty words "a la truth" (i.e. also ape around, only not as insolently and crudely). The first of the 63 reasons deserves to be discussed – the other 62 are merely consequences of the first. But almost nobody ever does. The main engine – an actor's internal powder – is almost never taken into account. So when actors don't have any powder at all, it goes unnoticed. Everything is in place, after all: the interpretation, characters, rhythm, etc. . . .

However, if, for some unknown reason, an actor's giftedness suddenly shines through onstage, and the truth is let out, then it is a pleasant surprise, which is noted and rewarded. Even for this one flare-up, some inaccuracies in performing the "director's vision" are forgiven.

But in general . . . this isn't that important. It's more of an accident . . . cute pranks of an actor's capricious nature.

In this way, truth is steadily being pushed out of our theatres. As for "sober-minded" professionals – it's almost completely out of their reach. Although, they're not very concerned about it and have even come up with an excuse: the truth is good only for simple things, but in tragedies, heroics, romanticism – you won't get by with just truth; you need breadth, temperament, power . . .

They think that the truth is good for sweeping the floor, shining shoes, drinking tea, knitting stockings, and other similar activities. When a keen, sensitive, and demanding artist achieves truth before their very eyes, they are, at first, surprised and don't believe their eyes; then they become embarrassed, but only for a single, very short moment; being "practical" individuals, the last thing they see is the beauty, power, and grandeur of the work of art. Instead, they pay attention to the danger it presents . . . the danger to their own success. A danger: what if people will start demanding more of them? Everything, every little thing is real! It's incomprehensible . . . How can this be? Life! And no mistakes . . . Nothing wrong to point out . . . What should I do? . . . And it's so powerful, so mighty . . . Life? Wait a second! That! That's what I should point out!

Suddenly happy, they let out a tireless howl: it's naturalism! It's ignoring the foundations of art! What use is there that it's life? Art demands that life in it be cleansed! The truth of life, mundaneness, everyday existence – that's not the domain of art!

Most often, they like to invoke the claim that art isn't a photograph, but *transfiguration*. At this point, they typically bring up a painter as an example: like Shishkin [1832–1898] – he's not an artist, he's a copier. He copies nature. His pines are just pines, so they don't say anything either to your intellect or to your heart. Art should be full of ideas. It should call you to something, teach you, it should explain nature, life, people!

All this is true. But in order to execute its charge, can art be built on a foundation of falsities and imitation? Can it be perfect if its own creator doesn't live with its ideas and its truth?

After all, what does it mean – to convey nature exactly? Let's take the same pine. To draw a living pine, present it on canvas exactly as it is in the woods is hardly possible – you have to be more than genius in order to do that. You would have to paint a *real pine!* And paint it in such a way that you could feel the flow of its juices, so that rays of sunlight would glimmer and dance among its needles, so that it would (just barely perceptibly) sway from the wind, so that the air, infused with its scent, would swirl around it. It would have to live, breathe, grow warm and cool. . .

That's how a pine is in the woods. That's its *nature*.

Have you ever seen a tree drawn like that?

Of course, in order to paint all this, the painter needs to feel quite a lot, think a lot of things through, keenly feel his own connection to nature. And then, if such a painting existed, it would evoke thousands of thoughts in the viewers and reveal eternal truths and awaken the most lethargic of souls.

Not many people feel nature, not by far – just leave the city on a nice summer day and what will you see? Everywhere, crowds of people sit on the grass, eat, drink, play guitars . . . Loners read, whittle . . . but none of them really see the nature . . .

But if such an everyman were to look once, twice, three times at the magically painted pine, then he'll see what he didn't see in the forest, what had been closed off to him. He'll see wondrous life in it, the beauty . . . he'll feel the breath of nature, the harmony, the power . . . Mundane concerns will leave him, and, possibly for the first time in his life, having gotten away from his everyday worries, he'll ponder the continuity of life . . . the inviolable

laws of eternity; his heart will shudder, and – in response to the millions of voices of nature – a new, hitherto untouched string will vibrate in his soul.

If only landscapes were so "naturalistic!" If only portraits were so naturalistic that blood would pulse beneath the warm skin, that thoughts would wander behind people's eyes, that eyelashes, lips, fingers would quiver from the feelings running through them, that shadows would flicker across their faces, along with the life of imagination and a kaleidoscope of desires . . .

He who is afraid of "naturalism" cannot see, cannot hear – what is most important in nature and life is hidden from him.

I think that there's nothing new here. Wasn't it said long ago:

> Nature is not what you think of it:
> She's not a mold, not a mask –
> She is made of soul, and of freedom
> She's got love, she's got a tongue.
> *(Tyutchev [1966: 81])*

Nature is complex, nearly beyond a painter's power. This is why he paints it "approximately," in passing, in general terms or suggestions. He'll sense something in it that is, at the moment, vibrating in tune with his own soul, and he'll try to convey this "language of nature" with the help of sketches, spots of color . . . This is better, of course, than making a "mold" or a "mask," but it's far from the heights of the art of painting.

In exactly the same manner, in the art of the actor, you see how directors begin *searching for the truth* with the best intentions . . . But anyone can begin – after a few steps, they become tangled in the impenetrable labyrinth of an actor's complex psychology. They exercise their wits, give their imagination free rein, make things up – this doesn't help. Then they launch into an argument, spouting smart terms, telling various anecdotes from their life in theatre . . . "Here's how real actors used to act. And what are *you* doing?" They personally demonstrate to the actor how to do it . . . but they do it poorly and only confuse the actor even more.

Before you know it, everything has turned into craftsmanship, and the truth is hidden somewhere far, far away, no closer than the other hemisphere.

More about Naturality and Naturalism

There was a time (after the Meiningen Company) when theatres were very interested in naturality. When it was applied to large productions with a horde of people, it was very satisfying; when this pursuit of exactness in depicting everyday life and psychological and behavioral accuracy was carried over to simpler plays, they would turn out poorly. Mundanity and naturalness would take the forefront and would block out a play's essence, its internal workings. They would block it for both, the audience and the actors – the actors would get bogged down in small "tasks," performing mundane details; this would lead them away from internal psychological action.

This lack of success frightened the experimenters so much that they ran in the opposite direction – they started looking for truth where there's no "nature" and mundanity at all. They started working on symbolism, schematism, impressionism.

And so, in this time of worshipping decadence and symbolism, Stanislavsky left for Belgium to meet with Maeterlinck [1862–1949] – they were getting ready to put on his *Blue Bird*. This meeting is described very picturesquely, poetically, but with humor, in Stanislavsky's first

book, *My Life in Art*. Yet it excludes one conversation they had concerning the very essence of Maeterlinck's art.

In a friendly exchange, when the artists' souls opened up to one another, and they spoke about what was most precious and secret, Stanislavsky, wishing to do something nice, said: "You know, in Russia you are considered the greatest symbolist alive!"

Instead of melting in joy, Maeterlinck turned red and grumbled in frustration: "Fools!" "What do you mean, fools! Who are fools? Why?" "How am I a symbolist? I'm an *ultra-naturalist of heightened emotions*."

I'm not the only one who's heard this story – Stanislavsky loved telling it.

Maeterlinck's words contain the full, exhaustive solution to this issue of naturalism.

Naturalism on its own isn't something invented, artificial, and certainly not unnatural – it's not bad at all. But the question is: what kind of naturalism? Naturalism of what? Things? Everyday life? Blowing one's nose? Or one's internal life? Or, even more so – heightened emotions?

And who are Duse, Garrick, Yermolova, if not naturalists of great human passions, the deepest possible human emotions?

So what does this mean? Long live naturalism?

If the term's meaning has mutated from prolonged use and naturalism is now understood as over-naturalness, then this can hardly be changed. It'll stay like this. Proclaiming, "Long live over-naturalness!" would, of course, be absurd. But, "Long live nature!" That's sacrosanct.

Nature has everything. Look at the same pine – is it not symbolic? But is it not realistic at the same time? And impressionistic? And naturalistic? Etc., etc.

It has everything, you just have to know how to look.

Nature has everything. All of our "isms" are taken from it, from nature. And there are at least as many that we haven't taken yet, if not more.

Why is it, then, that painters paint the same pine differently? Some do it symbolically, others schematically, others realistically, etc. Because where are the people that could fit everything in themselves? Each artist sees in the pine only what is closest to him. One sees one thing, another sees another, and a third sees something different. Some 25th person who has nothing to do with art will come – he'll see suitable material for his new hut and cut it down . . . It'll turn out that the pine was simply lumber. Isn't that right? That's part of the pine as well. Only, in order to see that part of it, you don't have to be an artist – you just have to be a carpenter or a lumberjack . . .

Nature has everything . . . If somebody manages to see one thing in it and conveys that image in a painting – he's a painter. If somebody sees and conveys two qualities, then he's twice over a painter.

A real great work of art has all "isms" at the same time in harmonic convergence. Take Raphael, Michelangelo, Leonardo – are they not realistic? Or naturalistic? And symbolic too? Impressionistic? Etc., etc.

Naturally, they did not think about this, about all of these "isms" – these are discoveries of a later time. They knew only one thing: nature and truth. They saw it, felt it, and created it. And as we already said – it has everything!

Notes

1 Editors could not locate the source for the Tolstoy quote.
2 Renowned sculptors of Ancient Greece.

3

Truth, As It Is *Commonly* Understood (*Pseudoexperiencing*)

The Truth Isn't Limited only to Emotion: Directly Summoning Emotions

In the depths of their souls, the overwhelming majority of actors, regardless of which school they belong to, are supporters of the creative process onstage, i.e. *experiencing*. Even if they don't understand this themselves, even if they consider themselves to be cold and proficient "masters of form," when they are carried away onstage, when their blood starts boiling, when their heart starts pounding, and their voice sounds with resonating strength – they hardly fault themselves for it. This is understandable: the more skilled an actor is, the more he feels his connection with the audience, and the more they affect him, as he affects them. This is one of the laws of art onstage.[1] Those who *openly* consider themselves to be supporters of truth employ various means in trying to evoke truthfulness, sincerity, and experiencing in themselves while onstage.

But not all of them manage to succeed. For them, successful moments onstage are merely accidental. Their great misfortune is that they don't know: what *is* truth, really? They often mistake something else for truth and experiencing. Something very close and similar, but not it at all.

Instead of seriously and truly accepting all the circumstances of a character and then growing agitated, joyful or desperate from *that*, actors usually try to summon up whatever emotion they deem necessary at a given point *out of nowhere*, without paying any attention to "circumstances."

The issue here is that they obviously consider emotions to be most important. ***In their minds***, *emotion* equals *experiencing*. Emotion is truth. Since a person has emotions, he's obviously *living*. And since he's living, it's obviously the truth. You can't say that this deduction doesn't hold any water. However, things aren't so simple: *emotion is inevitably a part of truth, but it's only a* ***part***. Aside from just feeling, we also think, care about things, want something. And we orient ourselves nearly every minute – comprehending the circumstances or facts with which life surrounds us, or the words that people are saying to us. And lots more.

In life, that's how it works. Why should we think that it's simpler and more primitive in art? Isn't it the other way around? If I have to take care of things in life based on all of my known and very well-known circumstances, then in art, things should be much more complex. Because onstage, I'm not just me, but somebody else as well: Chatsky in Griboyedov's *Woe From Wit*, or Boris in Ostrovsky's *The Storm*, or Iago in *Othello*. Why is that simpler? Each one of them has his own circumstances, his own personality, and his own needs. And I know very, very little about them. I have to find all of those out, search for them. And it's not enough to find them – I then have to make them my own circumstances: as if Boris is me, and his life's circumstances are my own. Then I'll start having the necessary emotions and desires and actions in response to whatever happens to me in the play. Otherwise, I'll feel and do nothing.

Every great actor consciously or subconsciously understood this, consciously or subconsciously found a path to the truth in his role (and not just to "emotion"). But that's a small amount of people. The others searched and still search for *emotions*. That's all they care about.

How is it that they evoke them? For the most part, very simply. We learn this "art" as children: kids play about, liven up – a strict teacher enters the classroom, and they immediately pull themselves together and pretend that they weren't messing around . . . they put on an air of seriousness, concern . . . Or, you can't upset someone who's sick, so everybody tries to put on a happy, carefree mien – everybody smiles, jokes, keeps telling him that he looks well, he'll get better soon, but as soon as they leave, the mask drops away. Everyone looks at everybody else significantly: "Yeah, things aren't looking good . . ."

Pay attention to this, and you'll find, for better or for worse, that we spend a fair bit of our 24 hours occupied with this "acting." Only when we're completely alone, at home, in our room, when we don't have to deal with anything or be embarrassed before anyone, are we truly ourselves. Otherwise, we're always straining just a little bit, constantly ready to assume an air of strictness, seriousness, concern, amiability, simple-mindedness, and even foolishness, and whatever you want, as needed . . . It's become second nature to us . . . This is the precious experience that the actor uses. His "technique" is ready, and he doesn't see the need in any special school. The playwright writes, "angrily," and without further ado, the actor puts on an air of "anger," yells out whatever lines he's supposed to, in this state, and everything works out great. Same thing for "joyfully" – he smiles, skips, beams at everyone . . . there's your "joy."

Depicting Emotions ("Acting Emotions")

What is an emotion, essentially? Emotion is a reaction. Why did I become sad? Because my friend is very sick, God forbid he'll pass away – he would leave behind his widow and orphaned children, as well as his important, unfinished work . . . all things considered, who would I go to for advice and to bare my soul?

In reality, of course, none of this is true – I don't have a friend who's dying (maybe I don't even have any friends) – it's just a colleague, another actor is playing "my friend who's dying." Because of this, I have no feeling of grief, and it won't come on its own. You can use your memory to summon up something resembling grief for a brief second. You can even give it free reign, and it might carry you away, but not for long and not deeply: because it has no fuel . . . And it evaporates. You have to hold on to it! But how? And the actor grabs on to what he can: the appearance of emotion – a sad expression, a bowed head, sighs, a subdued voice, slower speech, seriousness and grimness in his gaze . . .

This doesn't come naturally to him and instead takes up most of his attention. He has no time to think about his friend, his family, everything that he actually would be thinking about if this were to happen in real life (about comforting his wife, about getting another, better doctor, etc., etc.) – his mind is occupied with keeping his mask from flying off . . . This is called "acting an emotion." Not feeling emotions, but "acting emotions."

Earthlight

There's no need to talk about "acting emotions," i.e. depicting emotions by external means – it's obvious that this doesn't involve real emotions, experiencing, or truth. But what about actual emotions that we call up at will? What about them?

Let's suppose that I want to feel sadness. In order to do this, my face and eyes adopt a sad expression, I assume the appropriate pose, I start speak slower, more elongatedly . . . and my spirits drop, everything around me seems to appear in a different, more somber light. How is this not emotion? How is this not truth?

In order to fully and properly understand that this isn't emotion, but only the reflection of emotion, we should look to the story of the so-called James-Lange Theory.

Some 40–50 years ago, the American psychologist William James gave a presentation about a very paradoxical theory on emotions. Before him, people thought that emotion (feeling) existed in the following manner: the first stage – a person has an impression (a person sees or hears something); stage two – this impression is decoded and comprehended (for example, upon seeing a scary wild animal that we come across while alone in the forest, we comprehend the horror of not having any way out); then stage three – as a result of this decoding, an emotion wells up (in this case, fear); and the final stage, stage four – we have a physiological reaction (we pale, can't move, our hair stands, etc.).

With the help of very clever experiments and deft deductions James [1893: 375–376] showed that everything happens in a completely different order – the exact opposite, actually: upon seeing the animal, we stop (all of our voluntary actions are slowed) completely involuntarily and reflexively, *without yet understanding the horror of our situation*, the blood leaves our face, our hair stands, and *these physiological changes* cause the feeling of fear.

And only then do we comprehend that we're in danger with no way out.

Because of this, if you manage to artificially create all of these physiological conditions, then *the feeling of fear will well up*.

So what do we have here? Is this not true? When we want to throw off some heavy feeling or boredom, do we not force ourselves to smile, jump up, straighten our backs, wave our arms around, or sing? And, for the most part, this gets the job done.

James' sensational discovery created a lot of noise. And in the psychologist's motherland, this discovery spread so well and garnered so much attention, that in some towns, city officials started hanging a poster in streetcars: "Smile!"

Its meaning and purpose were as follows: in order to evoke a joyful and perky state, you have to create a series of physiological conditions that exist when one is perky and joyful. What is the main and most constant manifestation of joy? Smiling. Concordantly, if we smile, we'll be taken by joy, and we'll feel happy.

And so, the city fathers, concerned about the cheerful disposition of their citizens, gave them a universal aid to achieve it. Those absent-minded citizens, who need constant reminders, received them through posters.

However, fascination with this discovery wasn't long; in practice, it turned out that evoking all of these physiological conditions was a far more complex procedure than it initially seemed.

It turned out that it was utterly impossible to create the majority of physiological conditions – go ahead and turn pale, right here on the spot! Or make your hair stand up on your head, or make this gland (which you've never even heard of!) wiggle around!

And without these conditions precisely so, the required emotion would not be summoned. Something would rise up that remotely resembled an emotion – a reflection of an emotion.

So, this theory didn't come through in practice. And, regardless, by that point, more exact and painstaking research made an appearance. And it turned out that all of these conditions that occur during a given emotion are caused not because of what the first theory or the second theory said – in reality, *everything happens simultaneously*, like a single, complex process.

As soon as a person sees a scary beast, he begins to feel fear, his hair stands up on his head, and he comprehends that he has no way out – all at the same time. And there's only one reason: he *saw* a beast! i.e. he *perceived* an impression.

And without genuine perception, there is not and cannot be fully-fledged emotion. Such is the real mechanism behind our emotions.

However, just as people in their daily lives are satisfied with a much simpler approach, so are actors on the stage. Regardless of whether they know about James' theory, when they want to summon one emotion or another, they use the same centuries-old methods, force themselves to dance and leap when they need to be happy, and grimace when they want to be in the throes of sorrow.

We should be fair: they do get some feeling. But what kind of feeling?

The sun illuminates the earth and the moon. The half of the surface, which is facing the sun, is illuminated, while the opposite half is not. However, when we see just a slender sickle in the sky and the greater part of the moon's surface (that's facing us) is in darkness, we still see that the darkness isn't absolute, that some light is still hitting it.

What is this light? It turns out that this is light reflected from the Earth – it is sunlight, but indirect sunlight, reflected from the Earth. It's called "earthlight."

Actors believe this sort of "earthlight" feeling to be the actual feeling itself.

Even though an actor might argue or protest, if he got his "feeling" without genuine perception, then it's just the "earthlight" of a feeling. It isn't a feeling. It will never be enough to inspire us to undertake any sort of move or action. Besides, we know that *we summoned up this "feeling" ourselves*. So we're trying to pull ourselves up by our bootstraps . . .

This isn't emotion, the actor is deceived. His deception is understandable – he *wants* to be deceived . . . It's advantageous to him. Otherwise, he'll have to come to terms with the fact that he acts poorly and that his school is good for nothing. And that's not pleasant for anybody.

Besides, you can call the audience as a witness: they like it, they say that it's the truth, that it's real experiencing, that it's high art – we should listen to them.

"Buzzzzzz . . ."

Another actor will say: "Of course, maybe some actors are simply "searching for emotions," "acting emotions," or "depict" them with gestures, physicality, tone of voice, as if they're agitated, as if they're truly feeling emotions onstage. I don't do this, I really am agitated, and I don't feel that I'm "acting" – rather, I become wholly affected by these emotions."

You'll take a look at this actor in action, and you'll see that he really is agitated. But what kind of agitation is it? It deserves some attention.

Let's take a doctor who has to daily inspect one hundred patients in only three hours in a row daily. What does he condition himself to do? He conditions himself to search for and find only the roughest signs of sickness. How could he give in to details and subtleties? He ignores them. They disappear for him. Because if they don't disappear, then how could he ever get through such an amount of patients?

An actor who is not given enough rehearsal time, finds himself in essentially the same situation. How can he search for the details, the tints and undertones of one character or another, of this emotion or that? Let's assume that he plays "leading men." Every month or two, a new "leading man." God grant that you're able to memorize the lines and figure out what's going on in the play. As for love – what is there to spend a long time pondering? You must "beautifully," "passionately," "with abandon" speak the "enticing words of love" and "monologues" – and that's pretty much it. The actor practices, gets experience, "perfects" everything. Years pass, and he's able to act out any love scene on the spot. If he has to, he doesn't even need rehearsals: just a prompter. Will this be an authentic slice of life? Of course not. Do you think there exists some sort of stencil for any given emotion, and especially love?

There's a simple device – the electric bell. Press the button: buzzzzzz – and that's it. It doesn't care who presses it, when, or where – it has only one response: buzzzzzz . . . It doesn't matter if the button is pressed by some beauty's delicate hand or the hardened hand of a digger, if the person is sick and dying or strong and full of life, if he's happy or miserable, if he's a fool or the smartest man alive – if the button is pressed: buzzzzzz . . . and nothing more. The actor who becomes used to summoning up what he calls "experiencing" turns into an analogous simple machine. Because it's not experiencing at all, it's just a standard actor's approach where he fires himself up – regardless of reason; it doesn't make a difference if it's because of love, hatred, joy, or grief – it can be whatever you want – the actor's always ready to fire himself up.

This seeming experiencing and presence of emotion is merely peripheral. Rather, it's nervousness, a state of being strung-up. Imagine a person who is too nervous – somebody neurotic. When he gets offended – he becomes nervous, starts twitching, fidgeting in his chair, and biting his nails . . . Somebody makes him happy, compliments him – he becomes nervous in a different way, but he gets nervous again, nonetheless: his laughter is too loud, ready to turn into tears at any moment, his running around the room is too frantic . . . you wish that he would sit down and keep calm.

The actor develops a similar professional nervousness. Regardless of the "experiencing" that's required of him, the button is pressed, something shudders in his chest – buzzzzzz – and everything is good to go. The nervousness is conveyed to the audience. The audience sees that the actor is "emotional," he is "experiencing." As they watch him act, the audience involuntarily presumes that the actor's emotions are caused by the content of the words that he is currently saying. They don't see any other possible reason. While, in reality, the words are delivered completely mechanically. He acts and speaks in a state of some insanity, of unhealthy excitement. We can't require any clarity of thought from him in this state. Even jurisprudence doesn't punish a crime that was committed in a state of psychological abnormality; it lessens the severity of the punishment if the suspect wasn't in his right mind. How, then, can we demand from an actor who has strained his psyche so much, to give us meaning, truth, authentic creativity, i.e. a harmonious and simultaneous union and coherence of all higher human qualities?

In these moments of artificial self-excitement, the actor is nearly "out of his mind." He doesn't possess himself as he should. He interprets this state as emotion, as temperament, as "experiencing." In reality, this is just a typical strained psyche, and in this state, the actor is shallow and primitive, just like that electric bell.

A Motor Storm[2]

This is something that is more powerful, and is the next level of the light strain described above. This is neurosis. It is very popular and it is held in high regard among actors. When an actor enters a state of neurosis, he is quite pleased and, for the most part, brags about how he acted so well today that he doesn't remember a thing, that his eyes grew dark, that his head spun, that he didn't see anything or anyone, that he broke something along the way, in the heat of the moment, and rammed into something himself, sacrificing everything for art . . . The actor considers this to be inspiration. He believes that some higher power possessed him, and he gave himself over to it.

Have you ever seen a bird accidentally fly through your window? Upon seeing you and growing scared, the poor bird, instead of sitting down for a few seconds, orienting itself, and calmly flying out the way it flew in, begins to fly around, bumping into cupboards, pictures, and curtain rods. It zooms around the room, freaks out at the sight of anything, launches itself at every window but the open one, rams into the panes, the mirrors. If it doesn't die from all of these hits, then maybe it'll finally fly out the right window. At that point, it's probably thinking that it was saved by this flurry of movement, that without it, she would have perished. And it was so difficult to get out! It almost died of fear!! If not for its resourcefulness, deftness, and courage, it would have surely died! What a silly bird! Psychologists call this state a *motor storm*.

Motor storms are very widespread; we can see them especially among insects. Flies, bumblebees, moths – when you try to capture them, they zoom around with dizzying speed, instantly and unexpectedly changing direction; it's almost impossible to catch them in this state. They are also in the throes of a motor storm. Even when you've stopped your chase long ago, they continue to zoom from place to place until the storm dies down on its own. For them, such a form of defense is practical. They cannot consciously orient themselves and choose the right path; so, nature has equipped them with motor storms. But when a person uses this same strategy, and in the middle of a fire, instead of leaving through the front door, throws himself out the third-story window, and instead of taking his most precious belongings, he saves a broom, a chair, and an empty bottle from the fire – then that's shameful, that's a sickness, it's too much of a return to the past, to our ancestors.

Actors who cultivate in themselves (and even worse, in their students) the ability to enter these motor storms, this most primitive of reactions that a living being can possess, also go as far as to return too deeply to the past. They feverishly clench their fists, grinding their teeth, raise their shoulders as high as they go to the point that it's painful, almost to the point of breaking . . . breathe sporadically . . . In this state of extreme strain, which denies them the ability to think and feel, they zoom around the stage, break everything in sight, howl in an inhuman voice . . .

This kind of acting leaves some audience members – unstable and neurotic ones – with a strong impression. And not just an impression, but also a physical reaction: they become infected with this form of seizure and are almost ready to join the madmen onstage.

This sort of jaw-dropping acting can be typically observed in powerful dramatic and, naturally, tragic parts.

"Verisimilitude"

You can call a "motor storm" "experiencing" in quotes. As a counterbalance, you have a different kind of "experiencing," no less deserving of quotes, but nobody's dared to raise a hand against it yet.

At the foundation of the MAT's school lie the principles of authenticity and live creativity. This is the school of experiencing. True, not the same experiencing that would carry away truly great actors – Mochalov, Yermolova, and the whole constellation of our miracle workers. Here, they don't rely on inspiration, talent, free creativity. Hundreds of rehearsals are spent analyzing plays, dissecting each scene, searching for the right rhythms, hunting for expressive forms, and, finally, "justifying" – turning everything into the truth, bringing every bit of a role "to life," every line, every word, every *mise-en-scene*. These distinctive and clever methods allow for those actors who are more gifted to immerse themselves in the circumstances of their characters' lives. Guided by the great directorial and pedagogical experience and talent, they begin to live onstage – live with their characters' interests, feelings, and passions. They transform into those characters.

The weaker representatives of the MAT, however, couldn't handle the main requirements of the school's founders. (This applies to MAT's weaker directors and pedagogues as much as to the actors.) In the pursuit of lifelikeness and verisimilitude, they failed to pick up on what's most important. Instead, they tried to do everything so "simply," "naturally," "like in life." Gradually, without noticing it themselves, they grew closer and closer to the most pitiful and pale of "verisimilitudes."

It goes from bad to worse. The fear of "overacting," of playing something falsely, is so great in these people, that *underacting* isn't even considered a mistake. Underacted today, underacted tomorrow – and it becomes ingrained.

Such a case unfolded before my own eyes – a student asked his teacher's permission to take on Franz's final scene in Schiller's *The Robbers*. She gave it to him. Another day, I asked him: why did you take such a difficult scene?"

"I doesn't seem so difficult to me," he replied. "I tried it, and it went fine." "Ok, and how does it go? How do you play it?" "Here's how I envision everything: nighttime . . . horrors . . . I hear whispers of some kind, ruffling, as if someone's looking at me, but the someone isn't human, but something strange . . . I'm scared. I call over a priest . . . he tells me about retribution beyond the grave . . . about hell . . . it turns out my crimes are the worst of all: I killed my father, my brother . . . I understand now that the whispers and ruffling – someone's come for me . . . from beyond the veil . . . Satan's servants . . . And all of a sudden, there really is a noise, screaming, the castle is surrounded, it's under siege . . . that means that they're here for me . . . there really are fires in the window . . . if they were human, I'd meet them with my sword, but this . . . there's no way out . . . and I . . . kill myself!"

The young man's passionate tale convinced me. He explained everything so well, felt the enemy forces that he was powerless against so clearly. He understood everything in this scene so truly, and it excited him so much, that I thought: hey, maybe he really will do it! . . . He may not manage to repeat it, but he could probably do it once . . .

A few days later, he showed this scene to his teacher.

He was quite agitated before the showing, and this agitation helped him: it served as a good springboard to Franz's agitation and fear. The whole scene with the holy father was, contrary to expectations, actually quite good. The teacher sat with a surprised expression on her face and was even somewhat confused: how can this young, inexperienced student, without any help, play . . . Schiller! He's doing it, there's almost nothing to correct! This is unbelievable! This is outrageous! . . . This doesn't happen . . .

After the father left, Franz is speaking to the old servant, Daniel, and, according to Schiller's directions, he is supposed to start losing his wits. In that part, the actor was so immersed in the role that it became slightly eerie. Despite his inexperience, he acted well. All who were present grew quiet, and watched him with bated breath. He looked in the direction Daniel left long

after Daniel was gone . . . Then he turned to us . . . He saw us and didn't see us . . . it looked like Daniel was still in front of him, and, turning to us and mysteriously and pointlessly smiling, he asked: "You want to say 'to hell?'"[3] he winked at us and whispered, as if entrusting us with a secret: "You're right, I'm already feeling something like it. . ." While hearing some sounds, and still smiling, he addressed the place where the sounds came from with quiet joy: "Could these songs, this hissing be yours, you serpents of the underworlds?.." And suddenly, hearing the real sound of robbers assaulting the castle—screams, noise, thuds against a distant door—he felt real danger. Reality became muddled in with hallucinations, and he started whispering or yelling things out in panic and horror: "They're coming here . . . breaking my doors. . ." He dashed from the windows to the door, from the door to the walls, looked at something above him . . . it seemed like he wanted to climb up the wall, then he would dash around the room again . . . he whipped out his sword, as if he wanted to kill himself . . . he grew afraid – threw it aside . . . He would run up to it again, then back away again: "Wherefore is this deadly blade frightening me?"

Then he grew still – he listened . . . "the door is creaking. . ." he fell down . . . "There's no salvation!" It's as if he sprouted roots . . . he couldn't move . . . he shut his eyes . . . and then, he lost it. Evidently, he looked at himself from the outside, and this interrupted the properly working process inside him. Up to this point, he heard all of the menacing sounds, screams, pounding on the door, the burst open door, but here, having looked at himself from the outside – he lost everything – he saw that he is an actor, that people are watching him . . . But what is there to look at? . . . There is all this agitation inside . . . but what is it about? What for? . . . And everybody's watching, waiting . . . inside, there's just emptiness and horror . . . What is there to do? . . . I have to do *something?!* . . . I can't just end the scene! I must do something quick . . . or they'll notice I am lost, and laugh at me. Come what may! – and the actor immediately whipped up a familiar motor storm: he clenched his fists, hunched his shoulders up to his ears, popped his eyes, and zoomed around the room . . . Then he tore a cord off of his hat (as per the stage directions) – "You take pity on me, at least!" – and with lightening speed – just to be done with everything as quickly as possible – he pretended that he hung himself . . . on some imaginary nail or window rod . . . and he fell . . . dead . . . .

"There, I thought so!" the teacher said triumphantly. "I allowed you to take on this scene so that you could understand how far beyond your reach it is. And that's just what happened."

"Why were you running around with clenched fists, not seeing everything around you? You should have been searching, looking for a way to save yourself 'from them' – so do that: look for salvation. In order to do that, you have to be able to see. You want to hang yourself? If you had really wanted to end your life with the help of that cord, what would you do?" He was silent, he was still agitated from the scene itself and from the unexpected failure in the last moment . . . She wouldn't relent: "Well? Tell me!" "I don't know," he mumbled incomprehensibly, not fully understanding what she wanted from him. But she already got on her hobby-horse, and, feeling that she was at the height of her power and wisdom, she began explaining: "Before hanging yourself on that cord, you would have first tested it to make sure that it could bear your weight – go ahead, try it. Well? Could it? It could. Now, look for a place to tie it to. Why did you immediately go to that window rod – you would have first searched for something better: a hook, a chandelier, a lamp . . ."

And so on and so forth. He was doused in cold water, even ridiculed . . . He thought that the most important part was his flight, his inspiration. But nobody even noticed that. Which must mean that it's unnecessary, and what *is* necessary is . . . the truth. His fire died out. He lost faith in himself. His teacher's words, regardless of how correct they seemed, couldn't concern everything that he did before us that day, but her triumphant tone confused him. For now, the actor understood only one thing: he didn't do anything right, and that's not how it's done!

And so he started methodically and pointedly, without any inspiration, organizing his suicide: he started checking the strength of the cord, looked for an appropriate hook, tied the cord to it, checked it again, and, in a word – did everything "realistically."

Except that nothing was left of Schiller, Franz, the insanity and the demons . . .

But since a figure of authority said that it was much better, more true now – the poisonous seed had taken root – that *this* was good, that it would do.

But this isn't good either! And step by step, case by case, an actor develops a habit of being cautious, stopping himself when he should and when he shouldn't, stepping on the brakes, and, aside from this: accepting not all of the circumstances that currently surround the character onstage, but only a part of them, and only insignificant ones at that. As a result – it's boring, uninteresting, pale. What's wrong?! What's wrong is that *it's not truth at all – it's all false*. That's all that's wrong.

Inspiration, excitement, self-abandonment . . . the actor shouldn't be punished for all this, but encouraged and taught to use it. Should we really persecute an actor who, because of his inexperience, couldn't handle the flood of emotions, got scared, looked at himself from the outside, lost equilibrium, began to rush, and lost it?

You should be overjoyed because of his strength as an actor, not his accidental breakdown. An actor who is denied the ardor of his imagination . . . what is he? An electric lamp with a burned out filament. What is it good for? The trash.

So it's thrown out.

Shallow, Verisimilar Idle Talk (Deceptive Simplicity)

Old and experienced actors often amaze everyone with their simplicity, the naturality of their behavior onstage. They move so freely, speak so easily. Without any actorly pushing and delivery. You look at him and think: he's so simple, so natural! Just like in life! However, one shouldn't overrate this simplicity. It is by no means evidence of an actor's complete organic immersion in a role. It's simply the unflappable calm of a craftsman-professional, simply the dulling of his receptiveness. What does his "mastery" constitute? Well, it manifests itself entirely in this acquired dulling of his soul. Judge for yourself – is this *truth*?

This "simplicity" can be observed not only among very old and experienced actors, old sea-dogs – young ones also sometimes deftly catch on to this *carelessness* onstage, this *aplomb of an empty soul*. The earlier they catch on to this and the more artfully they do it, the farther away they get from truth, experiencing, and naturality.

Notes

1 See Book Five, chapter 13, *The Actor and the Audience*.
2 The term and concept of "motor storm" [Bewegungssturm] are borrowed by Demidov from Kretschmer's *Hysteria, Reflex, and Instinct*. This terms has also been translated into English as "instinctive flurry."
3 Here and further, Demidov quotes Schiller 1802: 139–140.

4

The Intangibility of Truth

Why Is it so Difficult to Find Truth?

When falling into a "motor storm," an ignorant actor with an unstable nervous system believes that he is "experiencing." A craftsman who causes himself to feel generic nervous agitation by means of "Buzzzzzz" also thinks that what he's feeling is "emotion," i.e. he is experiencing. A more cultured actor in the hands of more or less knowledgeable pedagogues doesn't make this mistake. If he chances to enter a "motor storm" or if he happens to "step on it" out of insecurity – and experience by means of "Buzzzzzz" – then he'll mark it down as a failure. But few are capable of making the last step and jumping over from verisimilitude to truth. The step is so subtle that many actors who have spent their whole lives onstage (even on a good stage) don't even suspect that they never rose above mere verisimilitude. And when this kind of actor is dunked into truth and he breathes in the new, unfamiliar air, the result is always the same: bewilderment, surprise, joy, and fear. He looks around, as if to check if everything's the same as it was . . . looks inside himself . . . remembers the experience he just lived through and, for the most part, says: "Well, this is something else entirely! . . . And it's so wonderful! Yes! . . . This is truth – can't argue with that! . . . "

Why is this so? Why were he and others like him so deceived? Why did they take the shadow of truth as truth itself? The audience is deceived – that's obvious. But why is the *actor himself* also deceived?

There's nothing simpler. This is how it must be. Look at the counterintuitive situation that the stage puts the actor in: hundreds of eyes are looking at me. And they came in order to look at me. They paid money! So what am I supposed to show them? How can I surprise them? I have to turn into another person. As if I'm not me, but somebody else – some kind of "him." The actors surrounding me aren't actors either – they're either my brother, or my mother, or my father, or my wife . . . The audience (which I can see very clearly and know that they're all here, looking at me), I'm not supposed to see. Or, at least, I have to pretend that I don't see them. And along with my colleague actors, I'm supposed to play out a whole story in front of them. And I have to truly immerse myself in a role, feel emotions, live. But the words aren't my own – they're foreign . . . I know them all beforehand . . . And the actions, the turns of events are also all predetermined . . . (which never happens in life). And the stage isn't a stage – it's a

room, a forest, a field, a castle, a palace . . . And time isn't time either, it's just simple fiction – in some 10 minutes, more than 10 years come to pass – whole lifetimes . . .

There is so much that is counterintuitive here, and it doesn't all just string together into one long chain, but they increase exponentially! And you get a whole mountain of these completely incoherent demands and situations. Go ahead, try to swim your way out of it, try to look for the truth! Only a diabolical mind could have come up with such a machine, not a human one. It's full of lies and only lies, and yet they say: give us the truth! Don't be false!

Is it any wonder when, in the middle of this hellish mess, something that remotely resembles life or the truth flickers by – suddenly, for example, it'll seem like I became angry or very sad because of some chimerical reason – is it any wonder that this will seem like a miracle – a sunny day amidst impenetrable darkness. And so you think: there's that truth!

I once had to be present during one exceedingly torturous rehearsal, when both, director and actor, were wearing themselves out, trying to find authentic truth. The director was unsatisfied regardless of what the actor did. He wanted to achieve perfection. "I don't believe you!" "That's not truth!" "Look for truth!" he would demand. And so, the actor, tormented by his failures, had had more than enough of his own failures, the director, and theatre. "What!" he finally screamed, "What do you want from me!? You put me in a furnace, threw me in a fire and you want me to breathe normally in here . . . enjoy myself! . . . Who do I look like? Daniel and the three youths?!"

A lot of actors perceive the atmosphere of the stage to be so hostile and alien. And when something seems *obviously improbable*, then, out of nowhere, an invisible, but very real psychological wall instantly rises up between me and what I wanted to achieve, what seemed so close and easily attainable. This wall is a braking system. And it's so insurmountable that it seems futile to even attempt to try and live in this *inaccessible* environment normally, as we do every hour, every minute!

What exactly should you do? In essence, the conditions are counterintuitive, *unnatural* . . . Involuntarily adapting himself to them, the actor searches for counterintuitive methods and counterintuitive paths. He tries to make it seem "*as if he's living* . . ." He tries to pretend that he's feeling emotions, agitation, tries to pretend that he's interested in what is happening onstage, that he's listening to his partners . . . His face, his voice, his body try to portray the person he's playing ("the character").

What else can you do in these counterintuitive conditions if not squeeze out of yourself this counterintuitive "experiencing?" Everybody is familiar with it. People say: "theatrical gestures," "theatrical declamations." In pathology and psychiatry textbooks, you can find expressions like this: "The patient (who's suffering from some illness) is exhibiting exaggerated, theatrical behavior." It's quite sad for someone who loves and understands theatre to read something like this. But there's nothing to be done – a fact is a fact.

Actors who are practitioners of this "exaggerated, theatrical behavior" must value it and find it so interesting, significant, and beautiful, that they utilize it in life as well; especially when they're surrounded by strangers. You can immediately make one out in a crowd – he stands out – you can't go wrong: he's "an actor!"

More fastidious and serious actors understand the absurdity of such behavior, in life and on the stage. They keep away from it. They search for *authentic truth* onstage.

What is required for authentic truth? It turns out that you have to completely recondition yourself. You have to retune all of your reflexes! Yes, yes! No more, no less. In the exceedingly unnatural conditions of the stage, the actor involuntarily and reflexively develops unnatural behavior. This is a rule. But this behavior is good for nothing – it's fake, it's apery, it's untrue.

And so you have to search *how to live naturally in unnatural conditions*. Live naturally when every part of you and nature itself are protesting, revolting, refusing to accept any admonition . . .

There are only two ways out: either a certain, special giftedness, which, when an actor presents himself before an audience, feels itself as it's supposed to and does everything as the situation calls for. Or consciously developing these qualities. In the first case, you get the impression that the person has found his way into his natural habitat. Like a duck: he walked and walked along the shore, awkwardly hobbled from one foot onto the other, but once he entered the water – he came to life: he swims, he dives, he gambols about! Nothing can stop him!

If, however, you don't have any such obvious giftedness—it's a pity, of course, a great pity—but there's no need to panic – you have to gradually, step by step, develop it. Maybe not to the same level, but to a sufficient one. One way or another, but for the most part, you have to stubbornly, patiently, painstakingly *retune your natural reflexes*.

Or, so as to use ordinary vocabulary instead of the difficult language of psychology – you have to look at everything counterintuitive on the stage so that it not only didn't get in your way, paralyzed you, but on the contrary – inspired you and gave you strength; so that it didn't distract you, but on the contrary – helped you concentrate on the surrounding circumstances; so that it didn't constrict you, but on the contrary – freed you, liberated you, granted you bravery and freedom. Such bravery and freedom that you wouldn't feel in your ordinary life.

5

On Artistry and the Artist

The level of art's perfection is manifold. The greatest concepts, the most elevated intentions can manifest themselves so weakly and helplessly that they won't just fail to reach the art's intended goal, but on the contrary, they'll lessen and discredit the given elevated and noble idea, turning it into something crass.

Next to this: an artist who has taken a small, modest idea can sometimes become so involved with its execution, with the artistic process itself, that, in these creative moments, he broadens and outgrows himself. In broadening himself, he involuntarily broadens the idea, and it outgrows all its preliminary boundaries and becomes enormous.[1] And in this sense, the power of art lies not so much in its themes as much as in the perfection of execution.

Much has been written about the goals of art, the goals of various works of art. Everywhere, you'll find discussions about whether a character has been correctly understood and interpreted (a character or an event) from one and another and a third point of view. Significantly less attention is dedicated to the excellence of the work's execution, to the reason behind the actor's power or helplessness, his technique, the origins of his creative powers, the rules of the creative process, the methods of stimulating it or the reasons behind its stagnation and distortion. It's almost as if these topics aren't even worth discussing, they're all self-evident.

People who write this probably really think it's all self-evident, simple, and well-known, undeserving of discussion. That's why they write so easily and with such careless confidence . . .

I have to bitterly admit that our art form is defenseless. Somebody who isn't an expert will never allow himself to discuss whether a bridge is properly built, whether a train is properly constructed, if a surgery was done well – only in theatre is everything clear and obvious to everyone. I mean, really: people walk about the stage, sit, speak – what's so complicated about it? What is there to "get?" And who doesn't consider himself to be an expert in theatre? Anyone, whoever they may be, will go see a show and already considers it his right and even his duty to "dissect," "criticize," authoritatively expound his condemnations and exaltations, give his advice: this should be done like this, not like *this!*

However, this topic is so painful for a theatre worker that it's better to avoid it altogether for fear that it might lead us far, far away from our path.

And our chosen path is to discuss the process of an actor's creativity (and not just an actor's, but that of any performer: a singer, a storyteller, a reader, a musician, even a lector or an orator) – of its soundness or lack thereof.

Let's discuss this.

On Perfection

Experts say that as long as you hear the violin in the violinist's hands – no matter how much the music astounds you – his playing was far from perfect. It's when *the violin disappears* and you begin to hear hitherto unheard, magical sounds, the sighs of some grieving or endlessly joyful soul – that's when the *real thing* begins. Is this art? If we derive it from the word "artfulness," then probably not – this isn't artfulness anymore, this is a step father – beyond it, *beyond artfulness*. There is a good word for it, though it's not new: ***artistry***. This is a step into the realm of artistry.

I had the chance to see the *Sistine Madonna* in Dresden. It hangs on its own in a relatively small room. When I entered, it took my breath away: a woman is soaring right at me through the moving, undulating air . . . Her clothing is windblown and is vacillating slightly, her chest is breathing, her face changes between being flushed and not, her eyes sparkle and pierce you to your core . . .

No! No! It's just a painting! – I came to my senses. And yet, no matter how long I gazed at it, I didn't see a "painting." I saw a person. A person whose presence instilled such peace and calm in me that after two hours had imperceptibly slipped by, it seemed as if my soul had become clear and transparent, like a mountain lake.

That's true art. The art of a real *artist*. What's the essence, the secret of a work of art's extraordinary power and magnetism?

There are many secrets, and the primary one is truth. Truth is like the day, like an open field, like a river – you can't doubt it. You believe it and dissolve in its calmness and harmoniousness. But it can also amaze and thrill, like a stormy sea, like a thunderstorm, like human passions . . .

The Life-Giving Oneness

There was a time when I would often gaze upon the paintings of old Italian masters. At first, when your attention is still scattered, you only see shortcomings, convention, naiveté . . . But the more you look – you grow calm, you stop paying attention to external wrinkles and you're taken hold of by a singularly calm feeling of fulfillment and satisfaction. This especially happened with Raphael's paintings (it might be that I didn't yet learn how to look at other masters). You might be looking at *The Marriage of the Virgin*, and gradually, though you like one thing, something else, and a third thing, you're enraptured by ***one*** holistic, main quality that exists in the painting, that exists in the artist's soul.

This *one thing* makes the painting come to life. Moreover, it makes it a living creature with its own soul and its own laws of existence. And you unwittingly obey these laws. And just like that, every initial hindrance has disappeared . . . Many things seemed conventional, naïve, or even ignorant, but here, you see that it's the other way around – everything suddenly appears to have such strict, joyous consistency and, most importantly, an elevated, artistic calm! ***The "life-giving oneness," the "soul-granting oneness"*** . . . I don't know what to call it, but it contains the very magic of a work of art. Without it, it's dead, even if it's done with great artfulness.

The Liveliness of a Work of Art

Is a bird's corpse the form of a bird? It's just the form of a corpse. A bird is alive, and anything living breathes, pulsates, and a living creature's form is mobile and flickering. It's never in a single spot.

I saw the Mona Lisa in the Louvre. She didn't astound me in any way: she's ugly, eyebrowless, almost slant-eyed . . . I walked around the museum, and on my way out, stopped by again. What happened?! . . . Either the lighting changed, or something . . . But why isn't she smiling? She smiled then, but now, she's not . . . And her eyes aren't slanted . . . She's watching me with blame in her eyes, with pity . . .

I came another day directly to her. With snide curiosity, she looked right in my eyes . . . she's cunning . . . purses her lips so as not to laugh . . . As if to say, "look at how I puzzled you yesterday!" I looked at her for a long time, from every which way – learned her, memorized her – she won't fool me again!

I come back in some two hours – the smile is still there. But it's completely different – it's mournful . . . her eyes are serious and are looking past me; she's not interested in me at all . . .

What is the meaning of all this? It's like a hallucination!

Again, again, and again I would come . . . For a whole week. Every time, there was something different, something new. Now she's a friend, now an enemy, a sister, a mother, a stranger, or a secret lover . . . Of course there was different lighting, of course my own mood changed . . . But why don't the other paintings change? Why are they frozen, immobile, and don't react to anything? But this one, like a magical mirror, reflects my thoughts, my feelings, my life. I was afraid to speak of it – people might make fun of me: fantasizer, dreamer, "mystic" . . .

However, I was lucky – fate brought me together with one very prominent European painter. Carefully, gingerly, I swung the conversation in the direction of this painting that was making my head spin in circles . . . Seeing that my conversation partner also had a specific attitude towards it, one thing led to another, and I told him everything that had happened to me. He listened to me attentively and seriously. When I finished, he was quiet. Quiet and contemplative. It looked like he was crestfallen and let down. "Could it be," I thought, "that he's angry at me? Look at this ignoramus coming to me with his 'impressions.'"

Finally, I gathered my courage and said, "Of course, it might be that I don't get it . . . it's just my own . . . but still . . . what's going on here? There's some secret to this . . . You're a specialist – you have to know, right?"

Without uttering a word, he jumped up, ran around the room, made his entire mane of luscious hair stand on end, and, stopping before me, roared: "Hell only knows! Hell only knows how the devil did it! She's bloody alive! She moves, but how, what, and why – you try and figure it out – go ahead! They say that in his time, there were dark rumors that he sold his soul for his Lisa's eyes! It's a legend, obviously, but it means that those eyes haunted people back then too . . ."

That's when I realized that it wasn't just some silly fantasy on my part. If such a renowned artist was so distressed by this mysterious wonder, then you not only *can* talk about it, but *must*. Some might laugh, but not everybody, not by far. Of course, it's easier to laugh than to painstakingly rack your brains about something. I write for those who are capable of taking this seriously.

This is how you should interpret Hamlet! No, *that's* how you should interpret Hamlet! *No – that's* how you should interpret Hamlet!! And people fight about it and spend tons of paper writing about it . . . But Hamlet is alive, like Mona Lisa. And she'll smile invitingly to

one person, laugh at another, sorrowfully gaze at another, and will simply turn away from a fourth. And so they argue. They think that she has the same effect on everyone that she had on them. But the most curious part is that it'll be different for *them* every day too. And it's all because Hamlet and Mona Lisa are alive. It's impossible to shove Hamlet into one concrete, constant form – isn't it the same thing as forcefully stopping someone's heart or preventing them from breathing?

When you want to establish an unshakable form or when you want to nail down the exact meaning of a work of art, it's no different from murder. In the hands of these people, it's no longer form, but necrosis – form's corpse; instead of the secret of living content – it's just a dry specimen.

Even when you don't try to capture all of a work of art's content and only try to convey the most important parts (you would think that this, at least, would be possible), but it still turns out that the form is too slippery, and it melts away. You almost had it! But you look at it: it's already dead. You'll never catch it, just as you will never catch Lisa-Gioconda's smile. Today, it's about one thing, tomorrow, about something else, and the day after – it's not even there. And this is all because a true work of art has a strange and hitherto incomprehensible attribute: it has the ability to *change* before our very eyes. Like a living being, it changes along with us, retunes itself to our feelings, thinks, grows ill, overcomes its illness, grows old, grows young again . . . In a word: it lives! And only one thing is for sure: it never dies. You can break it, tear it, destroy it altogether, but it itself will not die. Wanting to change something, you can ruin it with an inexperienced hand or poor performance, but it will never deteriorate on its own.

There are few such true, "living" works of art . . . very few. Few and far between. There are a bit more "semi-living" ones – they begin to breathe and move when another artist (performer) imbues it with a part of his "I." But for the most part, the world is full of "semi-dead" ones and completely dead ones. We have a long way to go before they vanish – for now, they're still littering . . . And looking at them, new trash finds its way into the world, slipping through every crack . . .

A Living Work of Art in Theatre

If, in painting and sculpting, an artist strives for his dead material to "come to life" – and achieves this in his best works – then it would seem that in theatre this would be completely unnecessary, seeing as the material here isn't dead, neither paint nor stone, but a real, live human – the actor. And, in this way, the main part of the work is already done by nature itself. All that's left to do is utilize its gifts.

In practice, the opposite happens: directors, and the actors themselves, try to deprive their material of any freedom, spontaneity, fluidity, and mobility that are inherent to living beings. They establish once and for all the interpretation of each scene and each character. They create concrete blockings, they have fixed speech patterns: every phrase, every word is said with a certain, eternally set intonation; they firmly prescribe the rhythm and tempo of every scene. And, if the show goes like clockwork and follows the metronome, this is considered the height of achievement. Between all this, what good is there? Transforming living, creative material into dead, speaking marionettes doesn't deserve that much praise.

Only works that you can watch countless times without end, that enthrall you more and more, make you dig deeper and deeper, and seem newer and newer are true artistry.

To this end, it's necessary for a show to be somehow new each time, like a living being. And it can't not be new if the actors are correctly trained and cultivated and *live and create onstage*

every time, without chasing down the concrete, memorized "form" and director's vision; and they worry not about glorified verisimilitude, but about authentic truth, nothing but truth. And truth, like life, is *inimitable*. It's repeatable only in broad terms, but not in exact details. The ubiquitous hunt for *exact repetition* is what drives our theatres farther and farther away from true artistry. Away from the enthralling and irresistible authentic life, which we've seen in the best actors' best roles in the best minutes of their work.

These actors weren't always on top either. So what? Should we be flustered by the fact that not all of Leonardo's paintings were as magically alive as Lisa, that although Raphael has many wonderful paintings, not all can stand up to the Sistine Madonna?

The bar should be set by masterpieces, not by shoddy work.

Why is that directors and actors, instead of utilizing the ability to *live* that's been granted to them by nature, they mute it and tie it up, limiting themselves to *dressage* and rote memorization.

Simply because the ability to live isn't everything. It's just the *material* from which a work of art is made. Material, which needs to be set in the right direction. If we recall everything that was said about the artificiality of the stage environment, it will become quite clear that the ability to live (as we live in life) doesn't fulfill all the requirements for *life onstage before an audience*. Here, you need a unique and special psychological technique.

Some particularly gifted people are granted a significant part of this technique from childhood. But they are few in number. The majority of people require a special, complex course of training and cultivation. Without it, their ability to "live" in the unnatural conditions of the stage turns into verisimilitude and boredom, i.e. falsehood.

This leads to a simple and more "practical" conclusion: *destroy* this ability in the interest of avoiding any problems, switch it off and, by doing so, transform yourself into a machine, a wind-up doll, or a record player. This, at least, won't let you down.

Of course, when an actor is unable *to live onstage creatively*, nothing is left except to look for a truer and more expressive form of behavior onstage. Search, find, and fixate this form; memorize it, nail it down. If the form is expressive, tasteful, and is executed with additives that somewhat resemble the truth (there's a special expression for this: if the form is "justified"), then the show might even seem true and alive for two-three performances.

But it's necessary to understand that the effect of such art is rather limited. And the future of theatre doesn't lie with it.

The future of theatre lies with another acting technique (I assume a psychological-internal technique), as well as with another directing technique and aspirations.

The role has to be nurtured and grown in such a way that it could change any day, depending on the given actor's inner state and those of his partners. The show and its atmosphere should be entirely dependent on the actors: given one group of performers, it goes one way, given another (in the same theatre), it should be different. Most importantly, it's vital to create a show's form so that it could change every day! So the show doesn't stagnate, doesn't become a cliché (i.e. didn't mechanize), but develops, grows, becomes richer and more and more multilayered, keener and keener, more perfect in its truth and liveliness.

A Work of Art and Eternal Ideas

When he took to writing *Don Quixote*, above all, Cervantes wanted to ridicule the romances which he despised. He started writing a foolish and hapless person, a dimwitted fantasizer who completely lost his wits from reading this pompous literature. That's whom he started writing . . . And what happened next?

It just so happened that he wrote a great, eternal human figure. *Don Quixote*, as it turned out, was not so much a satirical piece as it was a psychological and philosophical one. Merging with the figure of the unfortunate Don Quixote and becoming immersed in him, Cervantes discovered one of the most touching and beautiful qualities of the human spirit in the pages of his satirical novel: the ability to believe in beautiful chimeras; the ability to completely give in to them, serve them with your whole life, heart, body, and soul 'til the grave. In every great scientist, researcher, inventor, poet – Don Quixote sits inside every one of these benefactors of humanity.

Is it not a chimera that prompts Columbus to embark on his thoughtless adventure? Any rational Sancho Panza could only be amazed and laugh at his foolishness, impracticality, and childlike naïveté: honey, why don't you sit at home and mind your own business! And is that not what ultimately happened to this seer and genius, much as it did to the Knight of the Rueful Countenance? Persecution, sickness, and death in poverty!

And what about scientists, inventors, who dedicate decades of hard work and invest all their capital, their whole lives and those of their families into their work? Are they not Don Quixotes? And it's rare when one of them reaps the fruits of their labor. For the most part, they are persecuted, ridiculed, and other, craftier, "practical," "realistic" people reap the fruits grown by their hands and minds. To the narrow-minded and "practical," do they not seem like half-witted Don Quixotes, and their efforts like battling windmills?

And don't we all have a part of Don Quixote who battles in us against our Sancho Panza?

In this way, a true artist who takes the smallest, most topical material and gets carried away, gives his imagination free reign, and . . . creates a masterpiece. In doing so, he not only crosses beyond the borders of his preliminary intentions, but also manages to capture ideas of the eternal.

In conclusion, I would like to remind actors, as well as directors, to guard themselves against the dangerous thought that artistry can only be found in the great, the powerful, the titanic – in tragedy. Is La Gioconda [Mona Lisa] something titanic? It's simply a portrait of a young woman. That's it. And just look at what it turned into!

Similarly, in theatre, there's no need to chase only "large canvas," "eternal universal figures," like Hamlet, Shylock, Macbeth, Lear, Joan of Arc, etc. A small, roadside flower can be as beautiful as a magnificent rose of Lebanon. At any rate, no artificial roses made of paper, wire, or rags go hand-in-hand with it, no matter how colorful or large they might be . . . It – it is a highly artistic, unsurpassed work of nature – a miracle of perfection. They – they are a pitiful attempt at deception by means of crude imitation.

You should only take on what's manageable. And ***bring it to perfection****. Such is the path of artistry.*

Note

1 See *A Work of Art and Eternal Ideas*. Pages 66-67.