The Routledge Companion to Michael Chekhov

Edited by Marie-Christine Autant-Mathieu and Yana Meerzon

THE ROUTLEDGE COMPANION TO MICHAEL CHEKHOV

The Routledge Companion to Michael Chekhov brings together Chekhov specialists from around the world – theatre practitioners, theorists, historians, and archivists – to provide an astonishingly comprehensive assessment of his life, work, and legacy.

This volume aims to connect East and West; theatre theory and practice. It reconsiders the history of Chekhov's acting method, directing, and pedagogy, using the archival documents found across the globe: in Russia, England, America, Germany, France, Lithuania, and Switzerland. It presents Chekhov's legacy and ideas in the framework of interdisciplinary theatre practices and theories, as well as at the crossroads of cultures, in the context of his forays into such areas as Western mime and Asian cosmology.

This remarkable Companion, thoughtfully edited by two leading Chekhov scholars, will prove invaluable to students and scholars of theatre, theatre practitioners and theoreticians, and specialists in Slavic and transcultural studies.

Marie-Christine Autant-Mathieu is Director of Research at the National Center For Scientific Research, and Assistant-Director of Sorbonne-CNRS Institute EUR'ORBEM. She is a historian of theatre and specialist in Russian and Soviet theatre.

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The Routledge Companion to Michael Chekhov is a new step in the ongoing collaboration between Marie-Christine Autant-Mathieu and Yana Meerzon, which started a number of years ago with the international conference on Michael Chekhov's life and art, organized by Autant-Mathieu in Paris in 2007. The current volume and the project itself have had some significant milestones. This book was conceived in the wake of the 2007 conference, which resulted in another collection of articles, the 2009 *Mikhaïl Tchekhov/Michael Chekhov. De Moscou à Hollywood. Du théâtre au cinéma*, edited by Autant-Mathieu for L'Entretemps éditions, France. The current volume continues what has been started in the 2009 publication by bringing together theatre scholars and practitioners from the countries where Michael Chekhov had lived and taught: Russia, Germany, France, Lithuania, the UK, and the USA. It also features the work of theatre specialists from Finland, Italy, and Canada, where Chekhov's ideas are well known and widely taught today.

Hence we would like to express our gratitude to all those scholars who contributed to this volume, for their generous ideas, stimulating collaboration, patience, and self-discipline. We were able to illustrate this volume, thanks to private collections or photographs by our authors or with help of theatre collections and archives (Moscow Art Theatre Museum, Bakhrushin Theatre Museum, Vakhtangov Theatre Museum, and the Dartington Hall Trust Archive). These photographs and images will make this book more vivid and educational.

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project further. Their constant attention, precise feedback, ongoing support, and encouragement have been invaluable throughout the course of the development of the book.

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NOTES TO THE READER

Russian names and words are transliterated according to the Wikipedia romanization of Russian, which is a modification of the BGN/PCGN romanization of Russian. Exception is made only for names by which the individuals in question became known in the English-speaking world and by which they signed their work, e.g., George Shdanoff (Zhdanov) and Maria Ouspenskaya (Uspenskaya).

Parenthetic references in the text to multi-volume works are given in the following format: 2.239, meaning volume 2, page 239.

The names of plays and works of literature written in other languages are given in English translation; readers will find the title in the original language in the Index.

Unless otherwise indicated, translations from the Russian or other languages are by the author of the chapter in question.

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Introduction

Michael Chekhov: actor, director, pedagogue

Marie-Christine Autant-Mathieu and Yana Meerzon

In her book *Schauspielkunst* (1988), Georgette Boner defines Michael Chekhov's acting technique of characterization as a complex process of simultaneous stretching and distancing of the actor's "I." Boner employs the image of a "two-faced Janus" (the Roman god with two faces, one turned to the past and the other to the future, one turned to the East and the other to the West) as a metaphor for Chekhov's personality, artistic practice, and spiritual quest when projected onto the historical and cultural context (170–248). The essence of the two-faced Janus – the god of entrances and exits, protector of roads and travelers, and guardian of fortunes in times of war – lies in his flexibility and vigilance. This metaphor aptly illustrates the dynamics of Chekhov's world perception and suggests how the artist was in a state of constant motion. Inner and outer mobility were characteristic of Chekhov's art, which was rooted in a complex unity of oppositions: for him an actor's body and imagination were inseparable. The present volume develops this metaphor further, examining Michael Chekhov's acting, directing, and pedagogical legacy in the multi-faceted context of theatre history and today's performance practices. It examines Chekhov's creative practices in the context of historical and contemporary inter-cultural and multidisciplinary theatre and analyzes his pedagogical and philosophical thought in broader geographical and temporal contexts, tracing its sources not only to European and Western schools of theatre but also to Asian and Eastern cosmologies.

This collection was conceived in the wake of an international conference on Michael Chekhov's life and art held in Paris in 2007, which resulted in a 2009 collection of articles, *Mikhaïl Tchekhov/Michael Chekhov. De Moscou à Hollywood. Du théâtre au cinéma*, edited by Marie-Christine Autant-Mathieu. The current volume continues the work begun by the 2009 publication, bringing together theatre scholars and practitioners from the countries where Chekhov lived and taught: Russia, Germany, France, Lithuania, the UK, and the USA. It also extends the geographical scope of the subject by including contributions by theatre specialists from Finland, Italy, and Canada, where Chekhov's ideas are well known and widely taught today. Parts I and II examine how Chekhov's personal theatre utopia reflected many similar theatre innovations of his time; Part III considers the role of his practice within concurrent interdisciplinary theatre experiments, while Part IV traces the influence of his theories and pedagogy in contemporary methods of actor training. Although some previous publications on Chekhov's method have already suggested mapping such

geographical and historical traces (Black 1987; Byckling 2000; Chamberlain 2003; Marowitz 2004; Meerzon 2005; Daboo 2007; Ashperger 2008), this collection seeks to present a comprehensive picture of the historical, theatrical, and cultural contexts in which Michael Chekhov's theatre method originated as well as its legacy today.

The path of Michael Chekhov

A nephew of Anton Chekhov and disciple of Konstantin Stanislavsky, the Russian actor Michael Chekhov (1891–1955) was a key figure of transition between theatrical realism and modernism. His life unfolded against the complex historical backdrop of such events as the Russian Revolution of 1905, WWI, the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, the Civil War, the formation of the Soviet state, and his forced exile. In his acting, as the influential Russian theatre critic Pavel Markov writes, Chekhov was a philosopher and a lyrical poet, "the poet of the humiliated and the downtrodden" (1974–77: 2.302). He saw theatre as a purifying art and activity that "represented the best of what the intelligentsia had to offer […] ethically" (ibid.). In the late 1910s, Chekhov embarked on a deep philosophical and religious journey, the result of which was his crucial encounter with the teachings of Rudolf Steiner and the aesthetics of Andrey Bely. During the early 1920s Chekhov was further attracted to the activities of various Russian mystical organizations, including the Masonic Lodge and the Knights Templar (Nikitin 2000: 175), and to their promotion of personal and cultural spirituality. At that time he became a member of the Russian Anthroposophic Society and began developing his acting technique in accordance with Steiner's spiritual and aesthetic ideas.

The basis of these ideas was Steiner's belief in the tripartite structure of the human self, consisting of spirit, soul, and body, and its connection with reality and the cosmos. Chekhov developed these ideas: for him the true artist functioned as a medium, envisioning the spiritual world and expressing its messages in the world of reality. This artist was called to embody three personalities: his everyday "I," his higher "I," and the character's "I." Chekhov's lifework centered on the mysteries of the actor/character; he envisaged a psycho-physical model of acting that would be both liberating and cathartic. His search for the ideal actor illustrated the Russian philosopher Nikolay Berdyayev's existential philosophy, because "for Berdyayev and Chekhov the personal was laid bare in order to ascend to the super-personal. The most crucial matters turn out to be guilt, love, and repentance" (Ivanov 1992: 155).

Chekhov was a visionary of his time. His practice and theatrical ideas contributed widely to theatre experiments in Russia and have today become influential in further intercultural and interdisciplinary theatre research that goes beyond a simple methodology of training actors. Chekhov's method was the result of his geographical peregrinations and artistic explorations; it stood at the crossroads of many artistic tendencies of his time, being influenced by film and his own experience in directing opera; but most importantly it was an amalgam and development of the numerous acting approaches with which he was familiar. His system was inspired by Russian theatre experiments (from Stanislavsky to Serge Wolkonsky), but also by the work of François Delsarte, Émile Jaques-Dalcroze, and Max Reinhardt. It also reflected the

experiments with word and sound of Russian symbolist poets. It echoed Kurt Joss's and Rudolf Laban's experiments in dance,[1] and it borrowed from older performative forms, such as Indian dance, which he discovered thanks to Uday Shankar.[2] Chekhov would habitually declare:

> It is ridiculous for the artist within us to say, for example, "I love only Stanislavsky. I reject Meyerhold," or vice versa, or deprecate the merits of any of the theatre's other creators. Why be narrow-minded, why cut ourselves off from any of these rich heritages, when […] we have the freedom to make the most of the best in all techniques? There are no prohibitions against it. All it takes is a little wisdom, imagination and courageous experimentation. (1963: 48)

Chekhov's life was never confined to a single sphere of activities. A highly admired actor, a talented student of Stanislavsky's System, and a close collaborator of Yevgeny Vakhtangov, Chekhov began his acting career at the age of 16, and his pedagogical endeavors in 1918 when he was 27. Chekhov graduated from Suvorin's Theatre School and spent his first professional season at Suvorin's Theatre in St Petersburg. In April 1912, Stanislavsky invited the young actor to join the Moscow Art Theatre (MAT) and its First Studio, led by Leo Tolstoy's follower Leopold Sulerzhitsky. As a student in the First Studio, Chekhov became familiar with Stanislavsky's views on acting and with Yevgeny Vakhtangov's system and directing methods. Chekhov's early repertoire included Friebe in Hauptmann's *The Festival of Peace* (1913), Cobus in Heijermans' *The Wreck of "The Good Hope"* (1913), Caleb in Dickens's *The Cricket on the Hearth* (1914), Frazer in Berger's *The Deluge* (1915), Malvolio in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* (1917), and Erik XIV in Strindberg's *Erik XIV* (1921). In 1921 he performed Khlestakov in Gogol's *The Government Inspector*, directed by Stanislavsky for the MAT. During August and September of 1922, when the First Studio went on its first European tour, traveling to Germany, Czechoslovakia, Latvia, and Estonia, Chekhov's Erik XIV astonished Karel Čapek, who wrote the following in *Lidové Noviny*:

> His acting is impossible to describe. […] Two words: "physical" and "spiritual" are the mystery behind this astonishing performance. The body may "represent" that mystery, may "symbolize" it and "express" it. But then comes Chekhov and proves to you […] that the body is the soul […]. For Chekhov, there is no "inside," everything is laid bare, nothing is hidden, everything is impulsively and sharply expressed in each movement, in the play of the entire body, of this most delicate and trembling tangle of nerves. (Qtd in Chekhov 1986: 2.453)

In 1922, after Vakhtangov's death, Chekhov became the leader of the First Studio and in 1924 Artistic Director of the Second Moscow Art Theatre (MAT 2), a position he occupied until 1928, when he emigrated. At that theatre Chekhov played the following roles: Hamlet in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1924), Ableukhov in Bely's *Petersburg* (1925), and Muromsky in Sukhovo-Kobylin's *The Case* (1927). Edited in 2014, a CD with audio extracts of Chekhov's most famous roles (Erik, Hamlet, Ableukhov,

Muromsky) demonstrates the extraordinary variety of his voice register (Zolotukhin 2014: 56–78 with enclosed CD). But the MAT 2 troupe did not welcome Chekhov's tutelage and a series of conflicts ensued. Some of the conflicts were provoked by Chekhov's new method of training actors and the apparent "mysticism" that marked his practice; others had to do with the leadership of the company and surrounding power-games. In 1928 Chekhov emigrated to Germany with the hope of continuing his acting career and pedagogical research. At the age of 36, at the peak of his acting career, Chekhov had to accept the role of a political exile who had escaped the powers of the communist regime and now had to find his way in the West. In Svetlana Boym's words, the exilic actor Michael Chekhov could be seen as a "freed man," who is "politically and physically liberated from his bondage, [and who] knows what he is escaping, but not where he is going. He flees from a place, not toward a new destination" (2001: 341).

Chekhov started his career in exile by working in German: he played Skid in Max Reinhardt's production of *Artisten* (1928; a German version of George Watters' and Arthur Hopkins' play *Burlesque*) and made a couple of appearances in films. Given the difficulty of learning new languages, Chekhov's remarkable skills in improvisation, for which he had been famous in Russia, became his individual tool of survival in exile. His improvisations paved the path to his theatre of "universal" sound and gesture. In 1930 in Berlin he directed *Twelfth Night* in Hebrew with the Habima Theatre. Working exclusively on the sound of the words, not their meaning, Chekhov focused on the rhythm and musicality of the actor's body; he accentuated singing in chorus and dance as the basis of the actor's training.

Chekhov intended to continue this research in Paris, where he opened his own theatre company with the help of his friend and close collaborator Georgette Boner, the daughter of a Swiss millionaire, who had received her Ph.D. in drama, taken courses with Max Reinhardt, and worked as an assistant director with Georges Pitoëff. The artistic program of Chekhov's international theatre was based on three fundamental principles: 1) to employ the sound narrative of a performance text and thus do away with the dominance of the dramatic text; 2) to use archetypal folktale structures; and 3) to utilize a "universally comprehensible" body language on stage. Chekhov's 1931 production of *The Castle Awakening: An Essay in Rhythmical Drama* in Paris was an attempt to realize this theatre utopia and to demonstrate a new educational tool for training the ideal actor.

The experiment was not successful, however, and Chekhov was forced to leave Paris to continue his work in Riga and Kaunas. Acting in Russian and teaching Latvian and Lithuanian actors, Chekhov prepared the most celebrated roles of his exilic repertoire. In Riga he played Ivan the Terrible in Aleksey Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan the Terrible* (1932) and Foma Opiskin in Dostoevsky's *Village of Stepanchikovo* (1932). In spite of this success as an actor, Chekhov gradually shifted his focus to directing and teaching. He directed new versions of Gogol's *The Government Inspector* (1933), Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1932), and *Twelfth Night* (1933) for the Kaunas National Theatre, but in early 1934 Chekhov was forced to leave the Baltic capitals after the rise of nationalist movements there.

In December 1934, he began to organize an American tour for his troupe of Russian actors. At the same time, Beatrice Straight and her friend Deirdre Hurst were in

the USA, looking for an acting teacher to lead a theatre studio at the estate of Beatrice's parents (Dorothy and Leonard Elmhirst) in England. They met Chekhov in New York, where he was performing his best Russian repertoire, including Khlestakov, with the Moscow Art Theatre Players. Although Chekhov was touring the USA for the first time in the winter and spring of 1935 and was about to accept an invitation to teach at Lee Strasberg's Group Theatre (Young 1982: 230), he liked the idea of having his own school and decided to move to England. The free time, safety, and serenity of Chekhov's life in the English countryside at Dartington Hall (1935–38) were priceless: these three years provided him with an opportunity to summarize and evaluate his own creative accomplishments, formalize and formulate his educational methods, and try them out in practice.

During the mid-1930s, the fourteenth-century Dartington Hall estate was one of the major rural centers for progressive education in the UK. Its original goal was to nourish the cultural life of Devon and bring back the glory and pride of countryside living lost on the continent and in England during the industrial revolution and WWI. Dorothy and Leonard Elmhirst, the owners of the estate, were widely known for their enthusiasm for economic reconstruction and educational practices, as well as sympathy with foreign artists and craftsmen. During the 1930s and WWII they would continuously find physical and artistic refuge on the grounds of the estate. In 1934 Christopher Martin, the director of the Dartington arts department, decided to end the estate's populist activities in art (mostly dance performances involving local talents), and suggested turning the grounds into a hosting place for professional theatre and dance companies (Young 1982: 223). The estate became a world-renowned international center for arts and art education – a laboratory for artistic endeavors, the results of which, however, were difficult to disseminate beyond the borders of the community.

During his years as the primary leader of the Chekhov Theatre Studio at Dartington, Chekhov continued his pedagogical experiments. After various experiences with foreign languages, he would emphasize the importance of music, sound, and rhythm in the training of actors and directing. In his utopian thinking he would state: "words [can be] so clever but movement is simpler. Therefore we begin our work with movement, with Psychological Gesture (PG). Your body must say the words" (DWE Arts, 18-B, cited by Meerzon 2005: 227). He was astonished by the Elmhirsts' eagerness to create an international theatre school for people of all nationalities. His hope was that his students "would be returning back to their countries of origin to disseminate those new ideas and new practice that they would learn here with us" (Chekhov 2001: 381). For this reason, he wished to raise a socially conscious artist, a "servant of the highest in the humanity" (Chekhov Theatre Studio 1936: 15), someone capable of resolving the psychological and sociological problems of contemporary society. Accordingly, Chekhov intended to educate a theatre-maker who would "develop in himself the power to carry a moral responsibility for what arises in the soul of the spectator" (ibid.).

Unfortunately, the turmoil in Europe put an end to Chekhov's fruitful years in the UK. Together with his studio Chekhov moved to the USA. Michael Chekhov's Studio in the USA functioned until 1942 and put on several productions, among which Dostoevsky's *The Possessed* (1939) was the most successful. In 1942 the studio was closed due to the general mobilization. Chekhov spent the last fifteen years of

his career and life in Hollywood. In 1945 he was nominated for an Academy Award in the category of Best Supporting Actor for his role as Brulov in Hitchcock's *Spellbound*, directed several productions, and taught celebrities including Marlon Brando, Marilyn Monroe, Ingrid Bergman, and Gregory Peck.

Chekhov's method of inspired acting

A devoted teacher of acting, Chekhov would never stop working to perfect his technique and methodologies. His experience in exile contributed largely to his theories, and his encounter with different languages and cultures forced him to search for utopian ideals. Chekhov envisioned a new theatre artist able to incarnate the spirituality of art in the tangible form of acting. He was hoping to make this new actor consider "what the ethical, religious or human problems are" in order to acquire a set of highly developed ethical principles and a vivid imagination (Chekhov 1985: 139). This new actor would rely on a sense of rhythm and a radiating/receiving technique to convey love and energy to the audience.

On Chekhov's pedagogy and writing

Michael Chekhov worked on his acting method for more than thirty years, shaping his terminology and ideas until his very last days, in every language accessible to him: Russian, German, and English. He tried out his ideas with both professional actors and young students, because he strongly believed that all categories of actors, from amateurs to celebrities, would be able to use his teaching and could benefit from it.

Beginning in the early 1930s, he was actively involved in composing his major book on acting, first in German (with Georgette Boner), later in Russian and English. The sixteen lectures on acting from his Kaunas period (published in Russia only in 1989) provide more evidence of how Chekhov's method evolved from its early stages to what we know about it today. Chekhov continued working on his method in the mid-1930s and drafted the English version of the book while teaching at Dartington Hall. In 1942, after he had moved to the USA, Chekhov decided to publish this work, presently known as *Michael Chekhov: To the Actor* (the 1942 version). He submitted the manuscript to several publishers, but did not succeed in getting it published. The reason for this, Chekhov was told, was because it was difficult to decipher the spiritual language and the approach – it contained a chapter on the Higher Self, featuring language borrowed from the theory of Rudolf Steiner – and therefore lacked market appeal; moreover, publishing houses were experiencing paper shortages and financial exigencies. As a result, Chekhov translated the text into Russian and published it privately in 1946 under the title *O tekhnike aktyora* (On the Technique of the Actor). In 1953, a somewhat edited version of the book appeared in English with the title *To the Actor* and an introduction by Yul Brynner. In this popularized form, it addressed a wider circle of both professional and amateur actors. After Chekhov's death, a number of his friends and students published two volumes, *To the Director and Playwright* (Leonard 1963) and *Lessons for the Professional Actor* (Hurst Du Prey 1985), based on Chekhov's notes, short articles, and lectures. In 1991, Mel Gordon returned to Chekhov's original 1942 text and

published it under the title *On the Technique of Acting*, with a preface and an afterword by Mala Powers, one of Chekhov's last students. The 1946 Russian and the 1991 English versions are almost identical, whereas the 1953 version *To the Actor* differs in the material and the layout of the chapters. The 2002 second edition of *To the Actor* (with a foreword by Simon Callow) contains Andrei Malaev-Babel's new English translation of the Russian chapter on Psychological Gesture from *O tekhnike aktyora* (1946), with examples from Gogol, Gorky, and Shakespeare.

Although Chekhov's method had been developing in English since the 1930s, it reached Russian-speaking readers for the first time only in 1986 as the two-volume *Literaturnoye naslediye* (Literary Heritage). In this first publication many of Chekhov's original ideas were cut. They were restored in a second edition by Mariya Knebel and Natalia Krymova, which appeared in 1995. On the other hand, Chekhov's autobiography *Put aktyora* (The Path of the Actor) was published in Russia in 1928, just before Chekhov's emigration. It was translated into English only in 2005 (edited by Bella Merlin and Andrei Kirillov) together with extracts from Chekhov's second version of his autobiography *Zhizn i vstrechi* (Life and Encounters), which had appeared in New York in the Russian-American émigré journal *Novyi zhurnal* (vols. vii–ix, 1944, and vols. x–xi, 1945). Thus, the history of Chekhov's acting method and its publication is very complex: it reflects the actor's own life journey through countries, languages, theatre systems, and political regimes. His ideas on actor training also bear the influence of his life journey and encounters.

Evolution of Chekhov's ideas, thoughts, and terminology

Chekhov began to develop his method as early as 1918 in the studio that he opened in his private apartment. Ten years later, when he left Russia, he had acquired his own original technique, based on Stanislavsky's System, but enriched with Anthroposophy, which had provided him not simply with practical tools, but above all with an existential philosophy. Stanislavsky's System was based on practical observation and sought to help the student actor to rise above the constraints of a craft (*remeslo*) in order to become an artist (*khudozhnik*). Chekhov's method, on the other hand, gradually took the form of an initiation into spirituality through the metamorphosis that acting makes possible. Mariya Knebel, who studied under both Stanislavsky and Chekhov, rightly points out that Chekhov started with philosophy and ended up with art, not the reverse (Chekhov 1995: 1.19).

Several myths concerning Chekhov have emerged as a result of Chekhov's emigrating: in the USSR he became an "unperson," while in the West his pre-1928 research and publications long remained unknown because of the linguistic barrier. In Russia, until perestroika, scholars remained ignorant of the spiritual dimension underlying his approach. In the West the importance of the time spent in Germany and the Baltic countries working on his method has been insufficiently understood, and the Dartington Hall archives have been far from exhaustively explored. Yet the period from 1928 to 1938 was one of intense research during which Chekhov clarified his discoveries. As he stated: "The East knows the secret, but the West does not and must learn" (2000: 15).

Other reasons have distorted the overall picture of his work. Apart from the chaotic and incomplete publication of his writings, the heritage of Stanislavsky weighs heavily. In the USSR Chekhov was interpreted through Stanislavsky, because this was the only way to rehabilitate him after his emigration. In the USA also, because of the participation of members of the Group Theatre in the Chekhov Studio in New York, and the strong influence of the Stanislavsky System, thanks to the publication of *An Actor Prepares* (1936) and *Building a Character* (1949), Chekhov's method was constantly interpreted in terms of the System and eventually contaminated by it.

This break-down in the evolution of the method and terminology led to statements that excluded either the period of emigration (Morov 1971; Knebel 1986) or the Russian period: "Although adjustments and changes were made later at Ridgefield, Connecticut and in New York and Hollywood, Chekhov's essential format had been articulated by 1937–38, Dartington's second term" (Gordon 1985: 16). Thus, one can argue that Chekhov formulated the major principles of his work with actors as early as the 1923–24 MAT 2 rehearsals of *Hamlet*.[3] He also worked on these principles between 1925 and 1928 during the preparation period of *Don Quixote*.

Imitating the image

The October revolution of 1917 imposed a materialist, rational world view that disgusted Chekhov. The Bolsheviks favored the collective over the individual, who became simply a cog in the ideological machine. Chekhov, however, viewed each person as a divine work, not as a means to an end (Chekhov 1995: 1.315). Mankind is a work in progress that needs help in fighting the forces of evil that work through it and prevent it from reaching the ideal. In a letter to the Commissar of Enlightenment Anatoly Lunacharsky, in which he explained his reasons for leaving the USSR, Chekhov described his conception of the role of the artist (to embody the universal figures of humanity) and the vocation of the theatre, which should encompass much more than current events, political propaganda, or the reproduction of emotions: "On the stage 2 x 2 is not 4, but 8." Creation must begin with the classics, which raise eternal moral questions and are accessible to every human soul (1.369).

It was while he was working on *Hamlet* under Bely's tutelage that Chekhov began to research a "new acting technique" (Chekhov 1995: 2.378). According to his analysis, Shakespeare's work is a mystery play in which Hamlet is the Chosen One whose soul seeks the Light. This interpretation cast aside any psychological reading (2.412). Chekhov rejected the idea of nature (*priroda*) linking man and the animal state in favor of mysterious, impetuous forces (*stikhii*) emerging from beyond this world. The actor does not "act," but rather allows these forces to act through him or her; once the actor has voided him- or herself of the daily "I," he or she reaches a state of purification: "As soon as the actor has purified himself, he sees" (2.416).

In the *Hamlet* production a major concept of the Chekhov approach was brought into action, namely the "imitation of the image," which marked a complete break with Stanislavsky's System. This is not a question of copying or reproducing a form, but of tuning into suprasensory forces and incarnating them in one's physical body, using one's arms and legs as conduits for the cosmic forces that take possession of

the "I" and enlarge it. The actor passes from the Inner Self to the Higher Self, imitates the universal soul, and radiates it to his or her surroundings, whether on stage or in the audience.

In the years 1925–28 Chekhov, while preparing the role of Don Quixote for MAT 2, experienced for the first time having a dialogue with an image from beyond this world and being tormented by it. He describes the birth of the character, which began as a rhythm, a movement, and then as a complex of sonorities, before finally assuming a bodily shape. As he wrote in his diary: "Quixote should not be considered a role. It's the beginning of something new" (1995: 2.105). It was no longer a question of applying a new technique such as eurythmy or rereading the classics to find archetypal figures in them, but rather of ascribing a new function to the art of the theatre. The text is the starting point on the path to knowledge, not through plot analysis, but by the stimulus it offers the imagination. The image appears in one's sleep and the visionary must master his or her dreams in order to contemplate the invisible. Chekhov recommends one "practice dreaming so as not to coarsen the process of viewing images by approaching them too consciously, purposefully and professionally" (2.107). Meditation, that state between consciousness and sleep, enables one to induce the image to appear.

Simplification of the terminology (1936–42)

When he found himself far from Russia and anthroposophic circles, Chekhov had to adapt his conception of theatre and acting to student actors who had not been initiated into this world view. He therefore began to create his own terminology based on the four elements – earth, water, air, and fire – that Steiner defined as necessary to become an initiate (Steiner 1989: 97–114). These became the notions of molding, flowing, flying, and radiating. Using such key notions as atmosphere, vision of the image, sense of rhythm, and aura, he shifted around certain concepts and techniques. The following are some examples.

Steiner's notion of eurhythmic gesture is objective and definitive. By contrast, Chekhov's term Psychological Gesture (PG), which he used in Moscow but gave a precise definition to only at Dartington Hall, arises out of the observation of life and is the actor's own: "You are the one who creates it. Its value is purely subjective" (Chekhov 1995: 2.204). Both the eurhythmic and psychological gestures arouse the emotions and the will, raise the actor up above the everyday, give expressive force, and transmit through the physical body the radiation of the spiritual impulse. But the PG is a subordinate component of the eurhythmic gesture (2.27, 216).

Steiner lists the zones of the "lotus flowers" that are the sensory organs of the soul, their rotation corresponding to the suprasensory perceptions (Steiner 1989: 152). As a result of exercises of concentration and meditation the occultist sees luminous images and hears the inaudible. Chekhov concretizes this quest for the suprasensory by defining "imaginary centers." These are starting points or points of reception of energy that allow the actor to vary his or her gestural vocabulary according to the character viewed as a dynamic figure; the vocabulary is activated at precise points of his or her anatomy: the middle of the body, the shoulders, the top of the chest, the knees, the head, etc.

Until the beginning of the 1930s Chekhov engaged in exercises in meditation in order to attain the void; at Dartington, however, he proposed concentration exercises that were more accessible and less contemplative. He developed the notion of the "sense of the form" that allows one to listen to nature and locate in it the gestures and the "qualities" that one needs to practice feeling through a holistic effort that is in no way reducible to interior emotions. The intention is no longer to imitate the image (through a contemplative vision), but to imagine it. The image no longer "appears" like Don Quixote in an inadvertent and tormenting way, but emerges because the actor is exercising his or her imagination. Here is what Chekhov told his students at Dartington Hall on 30 October 1939:

> If you are making efforts to see a character you have to perform you must see it in your mind's eye by making the effort. By making such efforts every day you will come to the point when your images will appear before you with such power and strength that you will be forced to stop your inner life and follow your image not because you force it but because it forces you to follow it. Then is the moment when you can say that you have developed your imagination to the necessary point.
>
> (Qtd in Daboo 2007: 267)

The exercises are no longer of a spiritual nature, but rather psycho-physical (Chekhov 1991: 43–57). Formerly the actor was supposed to let the ethereal body (the Higher Ego) take possession of the physical one, thereby allowing the transcendent radiation necessary to achieve inspiration. In Moscow Chekhov condemned psychology. In emigration he reinstated it in order never to single out and give pride of place to the physical work of the actor: "There are not purely physical exercises in our method. These would be useless, since our primary aim is to penetrate all of the parts of the body with fine psychological vibrations" (43).

Psychology, however, will remain a "prison" (Chekhov 1985: 80) if the actor does not succeed in developing an emotional life beyond the character: "While we are exercising we are trying to fuse the psychology of a creative person with the exercise so that the exercise will not be somewhere else and we, as creative persons, be here" (68). Chekhov reintroduces psychology on condition that the actor has acquired a double consciousness: "To be an actor means to have two psychologies – one for one's private life and one for the stage. The stage psychology (the other self) means being filled instantly and instinctively with everything" (1983: 82). He advocates self-knowledge not in order to act (through the character) but to *be*, or, in other words, to leave room for the Higher Self, to exist in another dimension: "First we must *know*, and then we must forget. We must *know*, and then *be* […] To know and then to forget. When we reach this point then we will be the new type of actor" (qtd in Daboo 2007: 272).

As a result of the publication of *An Actor Prepares*, Chekhov was faced with a vogue for Stanislavsky's System as reinterpreted by Stella Adler, Lee Strasberg, and the members of the Group Theatre, some of whom were to become active in his New York studio, and was obliged to adapt his terminology. After the appearance of *As If*, which refers to the Stanislavskian "Magic If" or "What if," at Dartington Hall

he began to stress the "psycho-physical" (Chekhov 2000: 62) without neglecting the third dimension – that of the soul. His use of the terms "objective" and "spine" are reminiscent of Stanislavsky's "super-objective" (*sverkhzadacha*) and "through action" (*skvoznoye deystviye*). Chekhov found points of convergence with his teacher: the idea of second nature echoes the creative state (*samochuvstviye*); the quest for truth, the idea of the threshold, the sense of the whole, and harmony henceforth became leitmotifs of his teaching (Hurst Du Prey 1983: 84–90).

Even purged of its anthroposophic terminology as it was in the first English-language publications and limited to objectives and concrete exercises, the Chekhov method remains a means of accessing suprasensory knowledge. In 1926 in Moscow he could glimpse the future actor as a revealer of truth who would help people build their lives (Chekhov 1995: 2.498). Over twenty years later he was to describe it, radiating to the public and his partners an atmosphere that transcended everyday reality and receiving in return a positive, creative energy (1985: 28–29). In November 1941 he confessed to his New York students: "I believe that there is something more – *a certain influence* from somewhere else which we do not know about. I believe this" (1983: 61). This would bond the new actors as they strived for the Theatre of the Future.

Main concepts

Chekhov's *To the Actor* analyzes and theorizes the actor's activity. It presents a number of tools and devices to help an actor to attain his or her particular individual verisimilitude on stage. It challenges the actor's imagination in order to free the mind and body, opening them up to experiment and the joy of creativity. His method discusses four principles of preparing a role or methods of rehearsing: imitation, atmosphere, individual feelings or directed actions, and psychological gesture. Chekhov's model of inspired acting can be seen as a double-layered circular structure (Powers 1991: xxxvi), representing two closed systems, one within the other. It is a flexible scheme of devices, any of which could be chosen by an actor as his or her starting point when working on characterization. Since Chekhov's technique is a circle, a self-closed, inclusive structure, it is almost impossible to separate one element from another. In order to achieve a state of inspired acting, a student using Chekhov's circle needs to incorporate in his or her characterization all the components of the technique in a free arrangement. Chekhov considers the actor an anthropological entity, characterized by the complexity of his or her psycho-physical apparatus. In Chekhov's technique, the actor's body acquires the functions of a universal vessel consisting of rhythms, movements, and gestures based on collective archetypes and the ideal images born in the actor's imagination. The body is rhythmically defined within the stage space and time of a production, and is a fundamental component of his theatre language. Thus, Chekhov's actor on stage appears as a unity of physical and psychological characteristics.

One of Chekhov's devices involving an actor's thinking and fantasizing about the character is the actor's visualization of the character's body or physicality. Chekhov's

actor uses the character's imaginary body, which "initiates all gestures." The imaginary center "leads the [actor's] body forward or backward, and to sit, walk, and stand" (Powers 1991: xxxviii). Improvisation is, according to Chekhov, the necessary process for both the preparatory and finalizing steps in the actor's characterization technique. There are also four feelings, the Four Brothers, controlling the actor's characterization process: 1) the feeling of ease – the alternative to Stanislavsky's relaxation exercises; 2) the feeling of form – the actor's awareness of his or her body moving in space; 3) the feeling of beauty – the actor's inner sensibility to the harmony in a work of art; and 4) the feeling of the whole – the actor's knowledge of the artifact's dynamic form, as it is perceived by a spectator. Moreover, each feeling is to be coaxed out by sensations and qualities, which are accessible through the actor's movements and gestures. Thus, for example, the feeling of tenderness is to be achieved by moving with the quality or sensation of tenderness (xli).

Chekhov's new actor is to be controlled by his or her inner feeling of truth and style, which are tightly interconnected. Chekhov's feeling of truth is opposite to that of Stanislavsky. It is highly theatrical and embraces the concept of style and genre, be it tragedy, drama, melodrama, farce, or clowning. Chekhov's technique requires that an actor not be "true to life," but true to his or her psycho-physiology, to the given circumstances of a play, to the historical style of a period piece, to the genre of the play, to the directorial style of a production, and to the character's psychology as well as that of the other surrounding characters. Chekhov's technique, borrowing from Steiner's eurythmy, Dalcroze's eurhythmics, and Serge Wolkonsky's aesthetics, is connected to Goethe's idea of the body as a visible device conveying the invisible material of the actor's feelings and emotions. Chekhov's image is independent of both the author's or director's will and the actor's "I." It is a product of the actor's imagination and body, and is used as creative material and as a tool (Chekhov 1995: 2.230).

The Psychological Gesture (PG) emerges as a major element of Chekhov's technique of characterization in acting. It is rhythmical, visually granted, and anti-emotional. As Powers explains, PG is "a movement that embodies the psychology and objective of a character. Using the actor's entire body, and executed with the utmost intensity, it gives the actor the basic structure of the character and at the same time can put the actor into the various moods required by the script" (1991: xxxviii). Chekhov believed in the universally comprehensible and archetypal nature of theatrical communication based on the energy exchange between the stage and the audience. He saw in the literary archetype of the fairy tale the foundation of a new theatrical language lucid for any spectator of any national or linguistic background.

In his distinction between actor and character as the central feature of his characterization technique, Chekhov comes close to the Russian opera singer Fyodor Shalyapin, who described the experience of co-suffering (*sochuvstviye*). Co-suffering, in Shalyapin's understanding, is the action together with the character, not instead of it. "I am not feeling as a character, I am feeling for a character" (qtd in Meerzon 2005: 278). Shalyapin meant that when he is crying while playing Don Quixote, he is not crying as the suffering Don Quixote: he is crying as himself observing Don Quixote's suffering. Chekhov used this experience as an example of his vision of actor/character relationships. This practice distances Chekhov's technique from

Stanislavsky's System, which sees as the final result of the actor's work the merging of the actor's self with that of the character. Another difference with Stanislavsky's System is the importance given to the spectators. Although Stanislavsky recognizes theatre performance as a communicative or radiating substance, as Chekhov admits in his books, the idea of acting toward the spectator, having the spectator constantly in mind, came to him from Vakhtangov.

In his ideas Chekhov foresaw the interest of the contemporary theatrical avant-garde in investigating the possibilities of the actor's body and voice, in shaking and blurring the definite borders between theatrical genres (those between drama and dance, for instance), and looking for a theatre of improvisation based on the actors' collective creativity, not the dramatic text. In Eugenio Barba's words, "great modern performers like Georges Pitoeff and Michael Chekhov challenged both the spectator's taste and the critics' lack of comprehension and composed their interpretations according to a clear, artificial and premeditated design, as incisive as if it had been carved" (1995: 103).

In his autobiographies *The Path of the Actor* and *Life and Encounters*, Chekhov the author simultaneously merges with and distances himself from Chekhov the character, which is the cornerstone of his acting theory, and creates a *literary persona*. Chekhov the fictional figure functions at the will of Chekhov the author, depicting the most important images and impressions, thoughts, and ideas, which influenced him. However, as Knebel recollects, "Chekhov strove for harmony. As an actor, he sought and achieved it on stage, in his roles. As a person, he constantly suffered from the disharmony of the world" (qtd in Chekhov 1995: 1.27). This quality of entirety would characterize not only his art but also his life journey, making him a citizen of the world, one between cultures, always looking both East and West.

On the layout of the present collection and concluding remarks

The current volume attempts to respond to and convey the complexity of Chekhov's life and thought. In Part I, titled "Michael Chekhov in context: theory, practice, pedagogy," a group of international specialists and biographers of Chekhov – Liisa Byckling, Andrei Kirillov, Crista Mittelsteiner, Monica Cristini, Marie-Christine Autant-Mathieu, John Lutterbie, Andrew R. White, and Yana Meerzon – look at the fundamental elements of Michael Chekhov's practice and theory – from Psychological Gesture (PG) to radiating and his view of the function of the audience – and re-contextualize his oeuvre historically and contextually. Part II, titled "Michael Chekhov on stage: collaborations and encounters," is dedicated to an analysis of the place Chekhov occupies in the history of twentieth-century theatre and the uniqueness of his artistic quest. It re-formulates and re-envisions Chekhov's role within the Russian avant-garde of the 1920s and European theatrical modernism. In their articles, the eminent theatre historians and theoreticians Laurence Senelick, Maria Ignatieva, Andrei Malaev-Babel, Sharon Marie Carnicke, Franc Chamberlain, Jonathan Pitches, and Ian Watson discuss Chekhov's creative, collaborative, pedagogical, and even imaginary meetings with such important and diverse theatre artists of the period as Yevgeny Vakhtangov, Mariya Knebel, Vsevolod Meyerhold, and Eugenio

Barba. The distinctiveness of Chekhov's concept of the actor's duality of consciousness, his contribution to making a new Russian canon in interpreting Shakespeare and classical comedy, and his roles as the precursor of theatre anthropology and cognitive approaches in today's theatre practice make up the diversity of this section. Part III raises another important issue of Chekhov's heritage, namely, the interdisciplinarity of his method, its implications for mime, dance, and cinema (both silent and talkies), and its transnationalism. In order to offer the most comprehensive picture of Chekhov's artistic heritage and philosophical influence, we have expanded the geographical scope of invited contributions: Julia Listengarten, Rose Whyman, Jerri Daboo, Daniel Mroz, Oksana Bulgakowa, and Jacqueline Nacache contextualize Chekhov's practice within visual arts, dance, movement, and film practices as well as framing it through the lenses of Asian thought and cosmology. Finally, Part IV focuses on the evolution of Chekhov's theatre techniques today. Gytis Padegimas, Cynthia Ashperger, and Lionel Walsh present a diverse picture of contemporary applications of Michael Chekhov's acting ideas and pedagogy. The volume closes with the contribution by Joanna Merlin, one of the few remaining pupils of Chekhov's and president of the Michael Chekhov Association (USA). Her testimony is of special significance to all students and specialists of Chekhov's acting, as are her reflections on specific aspects of his method, such as the imaginary body, imagination, mimic expressivity, and spirituality. The volume is completed by a new, comprehensive chronology of Chekhov's life and work, the timetable necessary for students of his method to recognize it both as a historical endeavor and as a contemporary phenomenon. The book focuses on the major aspects of Chekhov's theory – the actor's characterization technique, the construction of physical or visual and vocal or auditory signs in acting, and the inseparability between psychological and physical practices in the theatrical presentation or concretization of a dramatic work. It theorizes the performative aspects of acting and considers the literary text as not a dogma but an impulse for the actor's individual creativity, going beyond the scope of ideas, techniques, and images offered on the page. Chekhov's acting theory recognizes the actor's activity on stage as both a dichotomic entity and a combination of technical devices.

Today there are numerous acting schools based on Chekhov's method. As Mala Powers writes, there is significant interest in Chekhov's technique in film practices too:

> Now, in this twenty-first century there is a burgeoning interest in applying the Theater Techniques originally given to us by Michael Chekhov. Recently, Academy Award-winning actors Sir Anthony Hopkins, Clint Eastwood, Jack Nicholson, Helen Hunt, Anthony Quinn and Marisa Tomei spoke of choosing and using Centers or *psychological gestures*, two of Michael Chekhov's innovative techniques for embodying the essence of a character.
>
> (1991: xxv)

This collection acknowledges these important tendencies and lays out a new theoretical basis to examine Chekhov's work not only for theatre, but also for anthropology, film, and performance studies as well as cultural and cognitive studies. Chekhov's theatre vision is based on seeing the actor's body and personality as part of a cultural

network, which as a theatrical language and system should be open to intercultural influences. Therefore, his ideas on the development of acting as an intercultural theatre language not only anticipate contemporary movements in theatre defined by the tendencies of globalization, but also serve as the basis for new cognitive theories of acting (Lutterbie 2011; Blair 2008). Chekhov's dream of a Theatre of the Future based on acting as an international theatre language has not lost its importance today. Numerous schools from North America to Russia, Germany, Brazil, and Israel, from Hollywood to France, Italy, Poland, and the UK practice Psychological Gesture (PG) and imitation theory, and emphasize the importance of imagination, improvisation, and embodiment on stage. This volume opens the possibility of tracing similarities between contemporary theatre practices and Chekhov's technique. It also firmly establishes Chekhov's thinking within performance studies.

The reader might notice some contradictions between points of views and repetitions of factual information and references that occur in the chapters from time to time. This is unavoidable, because Michael Chekhov's work is deeply rooted in his own biography, his travels and experiments, as well as in mid-twentieth-century history. Thus, every contributor to this volume finds it necessary to contextualize his or her argument in a certain historical and theatrical context of Chekhov's life. The editors strongly believe that such intertextual and inter-historical echoing should not be an obstacle but on the contrary a helpful tool to better understand the complexity of Chekhov's artistic, philosophical, spiritual, and geographical journey. Each chapter is also accompanied by a comprehensive list of works cited to help the reader better orient him- or herself in the sea of scholarly and biographical literature available in the Michael Chekhov field of study today.

At the same time, although this volume illuminates many important collaborations of Chekhov's, its scope does not allow the development and investigation of all possible links and parallels between his technique and other European and world theatre movements.[4] The book remains introductory and exploratory; the editors welcome a further opportunity to publish the next volume focusing in more detail on contemporary interpretive and interceptive applications of Chekhov's technique. Today the Chekhov method is practiced worldwide with numerous workshops and publications dedicated to Chekhov by such professionals as Bella Merlin, Jobst Langhans, Sarah Kane, Jessica Cerrulo, Lenard Petit, David Zinder, John McManus, Ted Pugh, Zelda Fichandler, Ragnar Freidank, Michael Mayer, Mary Jo Romeo, Fern Sloan, Sims Wyeth, Dawn Arnold, Scott Fielding, Anne Gottlieb, Ragnar Freidank, Phelim McDermott, Hugh O'Gorman, Joerg Andrees, Slava Kokorin, Carlos Aladro, Marjolein Baars, Hanna Linde, Ulrich Meyer-Horsch, Natalia Zvereva, Oleg Kudryashov, Jesper Michelsen, Suzana Nicolic, Tarja Nyberg, Asa Salvesen, Griet Spanhove, You-Ri Yamanaka, and Kim Chen, among others. Still we strongly believe that this collection will serve to encourage not only these established scholars/practitioners, but also a younger generation of theatre artists to develop and think further through Michael Chekhov's work.

Notes

1 In 1938, Rudolf Laban (1879–1958), dancer, choreographer, pedagogue, and theoretician, came to Dartington Hall from Germany seeking refuge from Nazism. Inspired by the spiritual practices and theories of his time, Laban refused the idea of the body as a mechanical entity governed by reflexes. His concept of energy of movement resonated with Chekhov's own ideas on radiation. Lisa Ullmann and Sigurt Leeder, two dancers of Kurt Loss, participated in Chekhov's acting classes.

2 Uday Shankar (1900–77) was the pioneer of modern dance in India. He was interested in intercultural experiments and adapted Western dance techniques to Indian classical forms. In 1936, together with his company and the leading dancer Simikie, he joined the Dartington Hall artistic community. Chekhov was inspired by Shankar's artistic experiments and specifically his use of time in performance.

3 Elaborately depicted in Aleksandr Cheban's directorial notes (MAT archive); 32 rehearsal records transcribed by Gromov (Chekhov 1995: 2); a later reconstruction of this production by Tatyana Shanko, who had seen Chekhov's *Hamlet* more than 50 times (MAT archive); and reviews and descriptions of Chekhov's acting. The English translation of the rehearsals protocols is available in Chamberlain and Kirillov (2013).

4 For example, Chekhov's experiments with movement and those of Antonin Artaud (Byckling 2000: 109–11) remain beyond the scope of this study.

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Part I

MICHAEL CHEKHOV IN CONTEXT

Theory, practice, pedagogy

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1
Michael Chekhov's work as director

Liisa Byckling

Michael Chekhov was a modern director of the type established in the second half of the nineteenth century. For thirty years he combined directing with actor training in many theatres and studios, and with literary work: writing scenarios in close collaboration with playwrights, who became members of his team; producing articles; and authoring one of the best autobiographies of a Russian actor.[1] "One of the most remarkable actors of our time, Michael Chekhov, ardently and passionately seeks new means of theatrical expression," wrote Pavel Markov, a distinguished Moscow critic (Chekhov 1986: 2.492). As director of the Second Moscow Art Theatre (MAT 2) from 1924 to 1928, Chekhov sought to implement a new means of acting in his productions. He was guided by several creative principles: acting as collective work; a preference for classical repertoire as his dramatic choices; the use of adaptation techniques in creating scores of performances; and creating an ensemble of actors. His focus on actor pedagogy as the basis of directorial work went back to his teacher Stanislavsky's tradition in directing. Chekhov's great artistic pilgrimage stretched from Moscow to Los Angeles.[2] After leaving Russia he underwent three separate stages in his development: the period of directing, acting, and teaching in Berlin, Paris, Riga, and Kaunas (1928–34); the period of the Anglo-American Theatre Studio and professional theatre (1936–42); and, finally, acting in cinema, writing books, and teaching film actors in Los Angeles (1943–55). Being an émigré, he was often obliged to work with heterogeneous groups and in uncongenial cultural contexts; nevertheless, he always found sponsors and admirers of his talent.

Director in Moscow

Edward Braun defines the fundamental requirement of theatre production as "the coordination of expressive means based on an interpretation of the play-text" (1982: 7). In Russia the role of the director was consolidated in the Moscow Art Theatre (MAT), founded in 1898 by Konstantin Stanislavsky and Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko. Following the practice of his teachers, the directors of the MAT,

Chekhov had a twofold professional function: first, he had overall responsibility for the rehearsal of any play that reached the stage in his theatre; and, second, as head of the MAT 2 he was responsible for the artistic and ideological work of one of the leading Soviet Russian theatres of the 1920s. Like Stanislavsky, Chekhov studied theatre art and gained his knowledge of it from the standpoint of the actor and not that of the director. The actor, his or her technique and personality, was always paramount for Chekhov.

Chekhov's individuality as an actor was determined by the social situation and aesthetic values prevalent at that historical point. He belonged to the generation of the 1910s, so that his formative years coincided with a period of swift social change, marked by the 1905 and 1917 revolutions in Russia. It was a period of symbolism in art and modernism in literature. In the theatre there was the generation of "post-Stanislavskian" actors and directors, who were searching for alternatives to psychological realism. Chekhov's favorite writer was Dostoyevsky; one of his spiritual fathers was the symbolist writer Andrey Bely; and his sources of inspiration came from religious philosophy. Like Edward Gordon Craig, one of the first great theorists of the director's theatre, in Russia Chekhov developed his theory of the Theatre of the Future, fulfilling a twofold function as actor-director and actor-philosopher.

Chekhov acknowledged his indebtedness to Stanislavsky's pioneering achievements in theatre. In his Hollywood lectures (1955) he declared: "Others are said to have surpassed and even bypassed him, but he, together with Nemirovich-Danchenko, was the first to break the land that opened up the new fields which all of us later tilled in our own distinctive ways" (1963: 39). Comparing the two MAT directors, he wrote about their collaborative productions of his uncle Anton Chekhov's plays: "From the brilliant mathematician [Nemirovich-Danchenko] came the skeleton of the play, from the great humanist [Stanislavsky] came the real-life moods and atmospheres[3] to flesh it out" (ibid.). Chekhov developed creatively the special qualities of the MAT productions that he saw and was influenced by. At the rehearsals of Nikolay Gogol's *The Government Inspector* (1921), Stanislavsky the director and Chekhov as Khlestakov inspired each other. Challenged by his teacher to perform Khlestakov in a grotesque manner, as "a symbol of emptiness and evil, an embodiment of that very 'void' Gogol identified with Devil" (Slonim 1963: 273), Chekhov had tremendous success in the role. His acting stunned the audience with its unbelievable ease of improvisation and unrestrained imagination (Stroyeva 1977: 60; Rudnitsky 1988: 52). Many years later, Chekhov would refer to Stanislavsky's book *An Actor Prepares* (1936), calling the suggestion for tackling the part – the analysis of "units and objectives" – one of Stanislavsky's most brilliant inventions:

> […] when properly understood and correctly used they can lead the actor immediately to the very core of the play and the part, revealing to him the construction and giving him a firm ground upon which to perform his character with confidence.
>
> (1953: 154)

In his creative work with actors, Chekhov would go on to employ Stanislavsky's method: finding the subtext, the through-line of action, and the superobjective (Byckling 2013: 70–71).

Chekhov's directorial work was strongly influenced by the Russian avant-garde theatre of the 1920s. In the First Studio, founded in 1912 and led by Stanislavsky and Sulerzhitsky, the productions of the brilliant director Yevgeny Vakhtangov (1883–1922) shaped his concept of the theatre. Vakhtangov believed that the theatre must create imaginary forms; he called this "fantastic realism." Chekhov wrote that he "leaned in Vakhtangov's direction," in the way he moved from naturalism to stylization and then was infected with theatricality (1986: 1.183). In 1921 Chekhov created the memorable role of the tortured monarch in August Strindberg's historical drama *Erik XIV* directed by Vakhtangov. He and Chekhov brought nervousness, morbidity, and acuity to the art of the Studio (Rudnitsky 1988: 21).

Chekhov learned expressive means and rehearsal methods from Vakhtangov, both based on a mutual trust between director and actor. Vakhtangov had "a special *feeling for the actor*" (Chekhov 2005: 68) and used a special working language: "[Actors] must learn to embody their thoughts and feelings in images and exchange them with one another, thus replacing long, boring and pointlessly clever *conversations* about the play […]" (70). They shared an interest in the commedia dell'arte, myth, and folklore. Chekhov learned from Vakhtangov the need to educate actors in the rhythmic expressiveness and plasticity of the body. Vakhtangov's work as a director was probably the source of the almost nonverbal international theatre that Chekhov attempted to create in Paris. Moreover, Chekhov also acquired from Vakhtangov his understanding of the role of the spectator as a third component in theatre (Chekhov 1953: 162).

The leading Russian and Soviet director Vsevolod Meyerhold (1874–1940) and Chekhov were drawn to each other by mutual admiration. Meyerhold spoke with enthusiasm about Chekhov's Khlestakov as the grotesque essence of Gogol's comedy (Chekhov 1986: 2.446). When Meyerhold's 1926 staging of *The Government Inspector* aroused heated discussion, Chekhov was one of his eager defendants in the press and public discussions. He considered Meyerhold's bold and talented break from tradition as the ideal approach to classics (2.99). Meyerhold's way of reconstructing dramatic texts and his powerful expressive techniques influenced Chekhov. In his publications he saw both Stanislavsky and Meyerhold as leading figures in the future of Russian theatre.[4]

Chekhov's "spiritual theatre"

After the Russian revolution of 1917 a new orientation took place in Chekhov's philosophy of life and theatre. He combined elements of Stanislavsky's system of acting, Vakhtangov's Fantastic Realism, and German philosopher Rudolf Steiner's spiritualism to create his own method. Chekhov's experimental studio (1918–21) laid the basis for his subsequent studios. The only public performances he directed at the studio, Leo Tolstoy's *The First Distiller* and Nikolay Popov's *Shemyakin's Justice*, were in the folklore tradition. After Vakhtangov's death in 1922, Chekhov became director of the First Studio of the Moscow Art Theatre, which was renamed the Second Moscow Art Theatre (MAT 2) in 1924. As artistic director, he aimed at creating a theatre as an artistic unit with its own style and "ideology" of spirituality