

Viktoria Volkova

# Stanislavsky's Legacy: From Vasily Toporkov to Oleg Yefremov and Oleg Tabakov

This article discusses the continuity of Konstantin Stanislavsky's pedagogy directly to his disciple Vasily Toporkov, and from him to his students Oleg Yefremov and Oleg Tabakov. Toporkov joined the Moscow Art Theatre (MAT) as an actor eleven years before Stanislavsky's death, which allowed him to participate in the final phase of Stanislavsky's life's work and his development of the method of psychophysical actions. Struck by Stanislavsky's authority, scrutiny, and caring attitude towards all actors, as well as other co-workers of the theatre, Toporkov transmitted this legacy, together with the practical knowledge that he had gained, to Yefremov and Tabakov, recounting vivid stories and anecdotes about Stanislavsky. The article traces the professional development of both men: each founded his own theatre, Yefremov the *Sovremennik*, and Tabakov the *Tabakerka*. Thus, whether or not they set out to do so, both Yefremov and Tabakov followed Stanislavsky's life example, when he founded the MAT. Their decision to follow Stanislavsky's example was a logical consequence of this great teacher's life-affirmative, spiritual, material, and intellectual legacy, which is on a par with the most significant humanistic writings. The key spiritual-physical aspects of Stanislavsky's legacy have been passed down in a straight line from Stanislavsky to his students, from them to their students, and so on, from one generation of the Moscow Art Theatre to the next, until the present day.

Viktoria Volkova is an independent theatre researcher, scholar, and practitioner living in Germany. She was educated as a translator and teacher of German and English as Foreign Languages at the Moscow State Linguistic University. Her doctorate dissertation at the Free University of Berlin was developed into the book *On the Constitution of the Character-Role via Social Emotions: Rehearsal Work by Dimiter Gocheff, Thomas Langhoff, and Thomas Ostermeier* (published in German by Theater der Zeit in 2019). She is a co-editor of the forthcoming German edition of *The History of The Chinese Theatre* by Fu Jin.

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THE CONTINUITY of Stanislavsky's practical pedagogy from the later 1920s until his death in 1938 is crucial for the tradition of the Moscow Art Theatre (MAT), since its fruits can be witnessed in the work and legacy of Russian theatre directors today. It is remarkable, however, that the prolific legacy of Stanislavsky's pedagogy has spread so far beyond the boundaries of Russia that it echoes in the working and pedagogical principles of dozens of contemporary distinguished theatre directors all over the world. Maria Shevtsova has consistently drawn attention to Stanislavsky's presence in the work of such internationally renowned directors of the second half of the twentieth century and the first quarter of the twenty-

first as Giorgio Strehler, Peter Brook, Krzysztof Warlikowski, Katie Mitchell, Peter Stein, and Thomas Ostermeier.<sup>1</sup>

All of these have shown themselves to be acknowledged continuers of Stanislavsky's ideas regarding ensemble playing, as well as of his educative principles in their rehearsals with actors. The names of these directors – and more – who have influenced current world theatre trends and landscapes, reflect the leading role Stanislavsky's legacy has played in what is known in German as *Regietheater* ('director's theatre') and in the director's work with actors in this theatre. A constellation of such eminent European directors of the twenty-first century, whose work, in fact,

has promoted Stanislavsky's ideas, raises questions as to how the teachings of the greatest of theatre reformers have been developed since the second half of the twentieth century in Russia itself.

In order to focus attention on specific manifestations of late Stanislavsky pedagogy, this article traces the transfer of knowledge from the great master to his then-new actor Vasily Toporkov during the rehearsals of performances staged in the last decade of Stanislavsky's life. The uniqueness of such a direct transfer of knowledge is reinforced by the very continuity of the educational process undergone.

Toporkov taught acting at the MAT Studio in the late 1940s and then the mid- 1950s to two of his own group of students, Oleg Yefremov and Oleg Tabakov, who would be major drivers in the course taken by the Moscow Art Theatre right up until the present day. Toporkov successfully transferred and bequeathed to them, *his* direct students, the human qualities and professional aspirations that were key to Stanislavsky's person, artistic endeavours, and the management of such a theatre as the MAT: genuine interest in the fate of each employee of the theatre; concern for the inner state of being of the actors; the ongoing nature and coherence of the work of a theatre ensemble; internal and external discipline; and mutual respect. Yefremov and Tabakov absorbed these qualities, instilling them in subsequent cohorts of students as examples to be followed both in classes at the MAT School and in real life. These precepts have ensured the successful work of the Moscow Art Theatre for 125 years, which, hand in glove with the continuity of transmission involved in the process, still distinguish the MAT from other theatres. This article aims to shed light on the mechanisms of working, cooperation, and coexisting within the MAT atmosphere, which are the mechanisms – often underestimated by theatre researchers – that ensure the continuity of Stanislavsky's pedagogy over successive generations.

### **Toporkov's Way to the MAT: It Is Never Too Late to Relearn**

Stanislavsky rarely invited actors from theatres other than the Moscow Art Theatre

to join the ensemble: one of his key rules was to educate actors within the walls of the MAT Studio so that only those actors were allowed to work at the MAT. Seen against this background, Stanislavsky's invitation to Toporkov in 1927, eleven years before Stanislavsky's death, to join the MAT ensemble is even more valuable. This happened on the recommendation of several MAT actors.

Toporkov was trained at the drama studio of the St Petersburg Royal Theatre School in Vladimir Davydov's class and had twenty years of experience at the Suvorin Theatre in St Petersburg, along with various theatres in the Russian provinces. He was a member of the Korsh Theatre in Moscow before transferring to the MAT – an unlikely step, given that the Korsh Theatre, founded in 1882, was the antithesis of the MAT in its denial of any discussion concerning the aims of theatre art. The theatre was closed down in 1933 due to its lack of a clear artistic position or unified creative method. Stanislavsky, after conducting a four-hour interview with Toporkov at his home, enrolled a new actor at the MAT whom he did not know and had never seen on stage. It was an incredible precedent.

But this precedent has an explanation in relation to Stanislavsky's views: the director was convinced that every actor had to 'go back to learning at least every four or five years', to 'relearn from the basics'.<sup>2</sup> Stanislavsky had once appealed to Olga Knipper-Chekhova, leading MAT actress and Anton Chekhov's widow, to hear a similar injunction during the rehearsals of *A Month in the Country* in 1909.<sup>3</sup> The main condition for Toporkov's acceptance was to learn to act from the very beginning, and that meant learning according to the MAT method.

The learning process had to take place in a practical form. In other words, Toporkov had to learn during rehearsals – in a laboratory, which was a holy of holies for Stanislavsky, for here, in concrete rehearsal situations, the most important laws and terms for acting came into being. Toporkov had the great fortune of being educated directly by Stanislavsky during rehearsals on the stage. This meant that he was instantly drawn into the depths of practical training and discipline and

the finest nuances and rules of rehearsal work of the Moscow Art Theatre, which were known only to its actors. Stanislavsky had begun to formulate the principles concerned during the pre-Revolutionary period in what became his unfinished essay *Ethics*.<sup>4</sup> He added improvements to this essay until his death in 1938.<sup>5</sup>

The very fact of becoming Stanislavsky's acting student in rehearsals played into Toporkov's hands, because during the last three plays directed by Stanislavsky before his death, Toporkov not only mastered the most important laws of Stanislavsky's acting method of psychophysical actions, but he could also write those laws down, describe three rehearsal processes, and thus meticulously transmit Stanislavsky's words to future generations: Stanislavsky died before finishing the third part of his student book for actors, *An Actor's Work on the Role*. In the early 1950s, Toporkov published the books *Stanislavsky in Rehearsal* (1950) and *On the Technique of Acting* (1954), which 'completed' Stanislavsky's unfinished publication.

In *Stanislavsky in Rehearsal*, Toporkov described their collective work in rehearsals of Stanislavsky's last three pieces of directing: *The Embezzlers* by Valentin Katayev (1928), where he played the cashier Vanechka Klyukvin; *Dead Souls* by Nikolay Gogol (1932), in which he played the leading role of Chichikov; and *Tartuffe* by Molière (1938), where Toporkov was chosen for the role of Orgon. For the latter, he was also co-director, together with Mikhail Kedrov. So it is *Stanislavsky in Rehearsal* that transmits Stanislavsky's words to later generations of actors, referring to the acting technique that was universal for playing any role – the *psychotechnique of physical actions*. To a large extent, it was in his work on *Tartuffe*, organized by Stanislavsky for the MAT directors and actors only for educative purposes, where he gave a final and fixed terminology for how the actor should work on roles.<sup>6</sup> Toporkov cites Stanislavsky:

I am not going to put on a play. It is important for me to convey to you everything that has been accumulated throughout my life. I want to teach you to play not a role, but roles. An actor must

always work on himself, on improving his skills. An actor should strive to become a master as soon as possible in all roles, and not just in the role he is working on. The art of the MAT requires constant renewal, constant hard work on oneself. This art is built on the reproduction and transmission of living, organic life; it does not allow frozen forms and traditions, even if they can be beautiful. This art is alive and, like everything that exists, it is in continuous development and movement. What was good yesterday is no longer good today. The same performance tomorrow is not the same as it was today. Such art requires a very special technique – not a technique for studying certain theatrical mechanisms, but a technique for mastering the laws of creative human nature, the ability to influence this nature, to control it. This is an artistic technique, or, as we call it, a psychotechnique. The qualities generated by this technique must form the basis of the art of our theatre, must distinguish it from other theatres. This is a beautiful art. The mastery of this technique must embrace the entire ensemble of our theatre, all the actors and directors. As I will soon pass away, I want to pass on the basics of this technique to you. These fundamentals cannot be conveyed either in words or in writing. They must be studied in practical work. If we achieve good results, and you understand this technique, then you will spread and certainly develop it further.<sup>7</sup>

Stanislavsky recommends that, when working on a role, the actor should first fix the line of physical actions (by writing them down); then check their nature; and, third, begin to act (*deystvovat*). As soon as one begins to act creatively, one feels the need to justify these creative actions. If the actor follows this style of acting, he can gradually approach the performative technique of creating the role, which Stanislavsky called 'the art of experiencing' (*iskusstvo perezhivaniya*).

Practical work, as Toporkov described it during the rehearsals of *The Embezzlers* (1928), showed that the art of experiencing is inextricably linked to the practice Stanislavsky derived from musical theatre.<sup>8</sup> He called this technique the 'orchestration of the role' (*orkestrrovka roli*), according to which each participant involved in the process had to 'conduct' (*dirizhirovat*), and thus show with their hand the inner rhythm of their character to their stage partners and the director. Being a newcomer to Stanislavsky's rehearsals in 1928, Toporkov, a former musician, was

surprised to discover for himself the very effective way of rehearsing by means of the inner rhythm of the role.

Nikolay Gorchakov, the director of the young MAT generation who also published several outstanding books on Stanislavsky's work in different rehearsals, was already familiar with this technique from his directing experience of *The Gerard Sisters*, *Woe from Wit*, and *The Marriage of Figaro*.<sup>9</sup> Gorchakov's *Stanislavsky Directs* (1951) indicates clearly that, from the early 1920s, the MAT actors were aware that the 'stage rhythm [was] not an acceleration or deceleration of the tempo, counting, but an increase or decrease in the desire to complete a task, to perform an internal or external physical action'.<sup>10</sup> Toporkov remembered Stanislavsky's demonstration of the technique of inner rhythm while rehearsing *The Embezzlers* as the most exciting episode of all the rehearsals that he had witnessed.

The MAT newcomer, Toporkov, in a scene in *The Embezzlers* that required buying a newspaper one minute before the departure of a train, was glued to the text of the role, not realizing that he was supposed to be creating a whole scene of a production in which he should have shown the gamut of his actor's talent. Stanislavsky insisted on the rapid but exact development of events during cashier Vanechka's act of buying a newspaper. The cashier's task in that *mise en scène* was to prevent his colleague and fellow passenger, the accountant, from catching the train. But the confused Toporkov was fixated on his single phrase, and even stood 'in the wrong rhythm'.<sup>11</sup>

In order to explain to the novice Toporkov what standing in different rhythms meant, Stanislavsky went on to the stage and demonstrated what he would *do* when buying a newspaper an hour before the train's departure, then when the first and the second bells rang, and, finally, when the train started to move. In each of Stanislavsky's demonstrations, Toporkov saw practically the same *actions/doings*, but they were shown in a different order and rhythm each time: in a slow, 'lazy' rhythm, when one had a whole hour before departure; in a nervous and rising

one, when the passenger heard the second bell; in a chasing rhythm, when the train was already leaving. The actor realized that Stanislavsky, who was performing the described *mises en scène* with such ease, had achieved this skill due to his enduring artistic work on himself.

In those demonstrations, Toporkov saw 'the authentic, tangible technique of our art [of acting]'.<sup>12</sup> And the key to understanding the technique of inner rhythm was his experience as a musician when he did musical technical exercises (for example, violin exercises) in different rhythms. As a practitioner, Toporkov knew that the regular repetition of a technical exercise, and stretching the fingers while doing so, would develop a musician's technique. Like a musician, an actor should be able to work out an inner rhythm for any stage situation at whatever speed was required by the plot of a play. Stanislavsky wished Toporkov to confirm his understanding of this by 'conducting the *mise en scène*', which followed.<sup>13</sup>

Formerly a co-director of the conservatory, Stanislavsky often used musical terms in conversation with his colleagues on the stage and when giving explanations to them.<sup>14</sup> Toporkov's first rehearsal saw him confronted with Stanislavsky's analogy between drama and music; and, in his first attempt, directed to 'conduct' with his hand the required rhythm as 'presto', the director noted that what Toporkov was 'conducting' looked more like 'andante'.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, Toporkov understood *how* the required physical actions should logically occur in the rehearsed scene; and he understood that inner rhythm was just one of the key elements of which an actor should have command when mastering the method of psychophysical actions. As Gorchakov defined it precisely in his *Stanislavsky Directs*, 'the method of physical actions [is] an ideological and artistic set of elements [*ideyno-tvorcheskiy kompleks*] in a director's work with an actor on the role'.<sup>16</sup>

Toporkov, throughout his ten years of work with Stanislavsky, came to the same conclusion as Gorchakov, and in 1954 published a corresponding account of Stanislavsky's method of psychophysical actions in his

second book, *On the Technique of Acting*. He defined an organic action on stage as a set of such elements as relations (*vzaimodeystviye*) and interaction (*obshcheniye*), perception (*vospriyatiye*), the art of ensemble work, and verbal or word action (*slovesnoye deystviye*). In doing so, Toporkov both designated and fixed the method of psychophysical actions as the main method of acting practised and established by Stanislavsky in the last period of his life and work.

Toporkov noted that Stanislavsky had urged his colleagues not to disturb the order of the work on organic action, since he was convinced that, first of all, an actor needed to create the 'prerequisites for material, physical existence', such as the perception of a stage partner, 'an object, a fact, a deed, and a "judgement" about what was perceived'.<sup>17</sup> Actors often ignore perception when working on a role, and all their attention is focused, from the outset, on the impact (*vozdeystviye*) of action – its result. Consequently, this artistic error leads to 'gaps and voids in the effective line of the role'.<sup>18</sup> To avoid such gaps and holes in the line of a given role, an actor should also pay close attention to relations and interactions with stage partner(s).

According to Toporkov, Stanislavsky used to repeat to his actors in rehearsals that 'if, after finishing the *mise en scène* and coming backstage, you describe with delight the acting of your stage partner, conveying in detail all the subtle nuances with which he responded to your actions and remarks, then this is a sure indicator that you yourself played very well'.<sup>19</sup> This observation stresses how the actor's full attention to the actions of his/her stage partner, and so also to their organic relations (*vzaimodeystviye*), is an inseparable part of organic behaviour on the stage. Furthermore, an actor should not start working on 'the stage word (verbal/word action)' before 'the roots [i.e. perception, interaction, relations, ensemble work] that feed and generate words and thoughts are strengthened'.<sup>20</sup>

Stanislavsky positioned 'word action' as the final and more complex stage of the actor's work on the organic line of psychophysical actions. He did so because the goal of the word action is to change the mind of the interlocutor

and point them in a certain direction, making this interlocutor think and act in the way the sender of the intention desires.<sup>21</sup> Behind every spoken word and every phrase is a reality that the actor should be able to see. An actor's verbal actions, then, constitute on stage the author's ideas as conveyed in their play. Stanislavsky's frequent statement that the actor should 'speak not to the ear, but to the eye of the partner' (and, through this, awaken visions in the partner's mind) pertains to the impact of the word on the stage.<sup>22</sup>

Mastering the technique of word action means 'to be able to see well and contagiously the reality behind the words, to have clear diction, a good, flexible voice, [and] to know the laws of the logic of speech and of the voice that is the leading voice [*golosovedeniye*]'.<sup>23</sup> This description of the sequence of techniques (in which word action comes last) when mastering the method of psychophysical actions explains why Stanislavsky, beginning from the early 1920s, prevented the actors from learning the text of their roles by heart while they were fixing the line of physical actions. During the rehearsals of *Tartuffe*, he finally enshrined the law prohibiting the memorization of a text of the role when fixing the line of physical actions was being set in place:

Without text, without *mises en scènes*, knowing only the content of each of your scenes, play everything according to the scheme of physical actions, and your role will be completed to at least 35 per cent. First of all, you have to establish a logical sequence of your physical actions. This is the how you should prepare the role.<sup>24</sup>

At several points in *Stanislavsky in Rehearsal*, Toporkov recalled the scenes in which he and his stage partners had to fix the line of physical actions. When taking the prologue of *Dead Souls*, he described the way the landowner Chichikov tried to waylay an important official at the door in order discreetly to slip him a bribe:

[My] work was long and painstaking and at first concerned only physical behaviour: how to hide near the table so that your stage partner does not see you while you can watch him, sitting almost with your back to him; how to stun a stage partner



so that he stops at full speed; how skilfully to block the partner's way to the exit all the time; how to hand him a bribe, so that no one sees it, etc. We haven't applied the text of the role yet.<sup>25</sup>

The description of the individual artistic task for Toporkov to find the proper physical behaviour for the character in *Dead Souls* fully corresponds with the same collective task in the laboratory work on *Tartuffe* in the scene where the inhabitants of Orgon's house try to prevent Orgon's outraged mother, Madame Pernelle, from leaving the house. Stanislavsky compared the imagined actions of the performed characters with the actions that a tamer would carry out with five or six angry, roaring tigers in a cage. The actors had the task to do everything possible to keep and appease the angry old woman, while her task was not to succumb to their arguments, and not even to allow anyone to open their mouth. Stanislavsky reasoned as follows:

This is Molière, and not Chekhov. If it is an uproar, then it really is an uproar, if it is a fight, then it is a fight – not a chess game, but boxing. Imagine that there are angry tigers in a cage. The tamer, whom the tigers are ready to tear to pieces at any moment, restrains them only by the fact that he does not take his eyes off any of them. In the eyes, he reads the intentions of each tiger, and fundamentally suppresses these intentions, preventing them from turning into action. If one of the tigers tries to attack the tamer, then he needs to whip it so that it runs to escape, with his tail between his legs. So how are you going to act? Even when sitting you have the wrong rhythm! (*To an actor.*) You, for example. You seem to sit not for a fight, but to relax, to read a newspaper. (*The actor stands up.*) No, do not stand up, it is possible to sit and be ready to jump. I ask everyone, sitting still, to find an inner rhythm, a frantic rhythm.<sup>26</sup>

This is another example of the crucial role of the scenic (inner) rhythm for elaborating a *mise en scène* that Stanislavsky systematically taught his actors in rehearsals by drawing parallels with building the rhythm in music, and, through this, operating as a competent musician.

The descriptions of both scenes here cited from *Dead Souls* and *Tartuffe* reveal a sequence of concrete physical actions that the participants had to perform at the beginning of

rehearsals before they added their texts to it by the end of the rehearsal processes.<sup>27</sup> It was crucial for Stanislavsky's actors *not* to start to memorize the author's text before constructing visions and images located *within* the text. 'Cramming' the text prior to constructing visions would cause the *inactivity* of speech (*bezdeystvennost' rechi*).<sup>28</sup> This was a term by which Stanislavsky distinguished actors who understood how they should act after they discovered the visions and images in the texts of their roles from those who tried to hide behind the mere articulation of their text memorized prior to rehearsals. The speech of a MAT actor should be active (the spoken word should act). The actor has to focus their full attention on what gives rise to their thoughts and visions for only this active speech enables the actor to transmit their visions to their stage partner – that is, to allow the one to influence the other.<sup>29</sup>

The laborious process of mastering an organic word action, as Toporkov realized in Stanislavsky's rehearsals, is subject to enduring self-control during the work on the role and has to be developed into a habit. But it is solely the drama text that enables the ensemble to demonstrate the super-idea of the play via organic actions on the stage. That is why, when working with contemporary (living) authors, Stanislavsky always paid special attention to amending the text of the play, when adjustment was necessary, making positive changes to the plot and so also to the overriding idea of the play.

### Work with the Author during Rehearsals

The most characteristic feature of Stanislavsky's work with contemporary authors, playwrights, and novelists was the active involvement of the latter in the life of the theatre. Such work with authors was typical and consistent at the MAT, since Stanislavsky worked closely with living writers throughout his life when it came to creating productions based on contemporary events for the MAT stage. He cooperated directly with Anton Chekhov and Maxim Gorky in the early 1900s;<sup>30</sup> with Valentin Katayev, Leonid Leonov, Aleksandr Afinogenov, and

Vsevolod Ivanov, among others, in the 1920s and early 1930s; and, closely, with Mikhail Bulgakov between the mid-1920s and 1936.<sup>31</sup> Stanislavsky's interaction with contemporary authors was always the main link in the work prior to rehearsals because it was at this stage that 'the director had to strive to subordinate both the characters and events to a single idea, a single through-action of the play'.<sup>32</sup> Stanislavsky never started to rehearse a contemporary play without determining its main 'organic line' and through-action – except for one case, as will be discussed shortly.

Nikolay Gorchakov asked Stanislavsky in the late 1920s how a director should work with a playwright. The director replied that, in general, he did not know how to work with authors, but he nonetheless described his personal way of working with them, referring to a special kind of reading of a play called a 'director's reading', during which time he read a play aloud to its author, interrupting the reading at those passages he found unconvincing for the logical development of the play.<sup>33</sup> With such passages, the director tried to persuade the playwright to alter the designated passage in order to assign it to the main idea of the play. When reading the text aloud to the author, Stanislavsky emphasized with intonation those passages which, in his eyes, highlighted the main idea of the play, and, by contrast, deleted all those literary flourishes that would distract the reader's (and later the spectator's) attention from the main idea of the play.

Given this context, Stanislavsky's work on the play devoted to the tenth anniversary of the Great October Social Revolution clearly illustrates his approach to involving playwrights in rehearsals. In 1927, the MAT, as one of the leading state drama theatres in the country, was supposed to produce a play devoted to the first decade of the great historical event that had not only changed the political system and the course of life in Russia, but had also influenced the entire world to one degree or another. Pavel Markov, head of the MAT literary department, was in charge of finding suitable literary works by contemporary authors for this very purpose (novels, essays, stories, short stories) for reworking

into plays. From the list of works proposed to him, Stanislavsky chose the story 'Armoured Train 14-69' ('*Bronepoezd 14-69*') from the *Partisan Stories* of Vsevolod Ivanov. Markov believed it to be 'a true historical case from our revolutionary epoch', and that the text had a clear idea of the 'Russian people who understood the precious essence of freedom and fought for their new state'.<sup>34</sup> Besides Ivanov, there were several other authors on the list, notably Leonid Leonov and Valentin Katayev, whose works had also attracted Stanislavsky's attention, and whom he decided to involve in the life of the MAT.

At one of the first meetings dedicated to the staging of a future 'revolutionary' play, by order of Stanislavsky, each of the actors (Ivan Moskvina, Vasily Luzhsky) and directors (Nikolay Gorchakov, Vasily Sakhnovsky, Ilya Sudakov) present had to take one author under his 'artistic' control. As Pavel Markov precisely expressed it, it was 'the most necessary thing – to involve the authors in the life of the theatre'.<sup>35</sup> That involvement included, according to Stanislavsky's command, invitations to the authors 'to do everything that is possible' in the theatre: 'New understudies are introduced into the performance – call them to have a look; the youth group is organizing a party – all our authors have to join it. Find concrete work for them in the theatre. Send them drama pieces for consultation.'<sup>36</sup> Thus, the artists' task was to 'stick' (Stanislavsky's expression is *prilipitsya*) to the authors in order to share with them every free moment at the theatre, to set them up to work for the repertoire of their theatre, and to motivate them to create completed plays suitable for the artistic conditions and ideas of the Moscow Art Theatre.

Stanislavsky decided to stage several scenes from 'Armoured Train 14-69' that would transmit the mood of the people – 'people in revolt, fighting against the remnants of the White Guard and against foreigners'.<sup>37</sup> Further, he described to colleagues in charge of working with Ivanov the main idea of every scene he would like to have in the play. For example, in the character of Peklevanov, Chairman of the Underground Committee (Nikolay Khmelyov in the final version

of the play), Stanislavsky saw traits of Vladimir Lenin: 'his calmness, patience in dealing with people, his wish to express to people in simple words the most important things about the revolution'.<sup>38</sup> Ivanov had to work first of all on the scene 'On the Embankment', and thoroughly work out the dramatic characters of the Chinese Sin Bin-U (played by Mikhail Kedrov) and the Russian Vasily Okorok (Nikolay Batalov). In the key scene 'On the Bell Tower', 'the ideal stage conditions for showing the people in revolt' had to be created, for which Stanislavsky made all the young MAT directors write their own variants of the stage layout of the scene.<sup>39</sup>

The other key scene that Stanislavsky had Ivanov write was the one set inside the armoured train in which the death of Nezelasov (Mark Prudkin) had to be shown unequivocally (not symbolically) after his long fight with the Soviets. As a contrast to what Ivanov's play should *not* have contained, Stanislavsky gave the example of a puppy as a symbol of loneliness in the scene with Aleksey Turbin from Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Days of the Turbins*, which the MAT had staged in 1926. Ivanov's task was to describe Nezelasov as a 'clever, cruel enemy who cost Russia hundreds of thousands of lives'.<sup>40</sup> The main antagonist in Ivanov's play, premiered on the tenth anniversary of the Revolution, was to have very concrete, down-to-earth traits, by contrast with Bulgakov's 'cheap sentiment' in the scene with Aleksey Turbin and the puppy.<sup>41</sup>

After several months of close work with director Ilya Sudakov and Pavel Markov, Ivanov delivered a draft copy of the play with which the MAT immediately began its usual working routine – a collective reading of the play, the distribution of roles, scenographic preparations. Ultimately, the collaborative work with Ivanov was an ideal example of the sequence of steps required for a quick collective artistic undertaking.

Nevertheless, there was one single case in Stanislavsky's late practice of working with playwrights for which he could not forgive himself, because he had 'succumbed to the charm of the author'. The latter was Bulgakov and the play was *Molière* (better known

nowadays as *The Cabal of the Hypocrites*), the second play (the first was *The Days of the Turbins*) that Bulgakov wrote specifically for the MAT in 1931. Stanislavsky had accommodated Bulgakov's wishes in the very first stage of working with him, and, fearing the author's refusal to cooperate further if he pressed too hard, he did not insist on reworking the main idea of the play, which had initially bothered him.<sup>42</sup>

Judging by Gorchakov, who was in charge of rehearsing the piece, it must have been a very tense, long, and morally exhausting rehearsal process, as Stanislavsky, who had approved staging the play in 1934, was still not pleased with its main idea and expected Bulgakov to rework it immediately. Bulgakov, however, was very determined and, in every discussion, insisted that what he had written was final. Stanislavsky, who coordinated the rehearsal process from his home, felt that Bulgakov had already fallen into despair from constant postponement and delay, between 1931 and 1934, and that, accordingly, it would be impossible to make him change his mind before rehearsals began. In a private talk with Gorchakov, Stanislavsky suggested that Gorchakov start rehearsals, during which time they would attempt to convince the playwright to make some changes. Stanislavsky could not accept the fact that Molière was portrayed as a simple, easily excitable common man obsessed only with his domestic problems and family affairs. 'Molière as a genius, Molière as a great writer of his time, as a forerunner of the great French encyclopedists, philosophers, and thinkers' failed to appear in any phrase of Bulgakov's drama.<sup>43</sup>

Rehearsals were in full swing, however. Stanislavsky gathered the main participants and the playwright at his home several times, trying to draw the author's attention to the obvious lack of Molière's genius in the demonstrated scenes. But, during almost a year of rehearsals, Bulgakov consistently refused to rewrite any line. Even an impromptu staged *mise en scène* did not help: Molière sat at his desk and, in a fit of jealousy, began to write lines for *The School for Wives*, dictating them aloud to himself. Bulgakov's intransigence



was evident. Stanislavsky refused to release the production under his own name, admitting to Gorchakov his grave mistake in being afraid of insisting that the play be reworked prior to rehearsals, but left Gorchakov the right to release the production and take responsibility. After the premiere, the audience having reacted negatively to Molière's plainness, the production's life was cut short. This case of unsuccessful collaboration shows just how important unanimity between the director and the playwright really is. It also pointed out how crucial was the first stage of collaborative work on a dramatic text before the start of rehearsals.

### **MAT Aesthetics under Oleg Yefremov**

Work on authors and with contemporary playwrights as an ongoing principle was the basis of the MAT director's approach to theatre material in general. This working principle was recorded in numerous minutes of meetings as well as transcripts of rehearsals since the MAT was founded, and it was thus preserved for adoption by future MAT generations. Continuity through transmission of such information in this way was no less important than the direct communication of knowledge between Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko and their students, and between the latter and their own. These methods of continuity by transmission were constantly used by Oleg Yefremov, the second key figure (after the founding fathers) in the MAT history of the second half of the twentieth century.

It is crucial that Stanislavsky's teaching was directly transmitted from his disciples to the disciples of disciples. So, when Toporkov became Professor of Acting and Head of the Acting Department at the MAT Studio, he taught acting to Oleg Yefremov and, later, to Oleg Tabakov, both future artistic directors of the MAT – Yefremov between 1970 and 2000, and Tabakov between 2000 and 2018. Both were inspired by Toporkov's lessons and even more by his acting on the stage, as Tabakov confirms in his memoirs; similarly, by Toporkov's ability (inherited from Stanislavsky) to take care of his students' simple but very

important everyday needs. Both inherited this Stanislavskian pattern of responsibility for the lives of many generations of students whom they educated.<sup>44</sup>

Such responsibility for everyday life, together with Stanislavsky's pedagogical methods and collective research for staging socially important questions and difficulties, were pivotal for what Yefremov, in an interview on the MAT's eightieth anniversary in 1978, called the 'MAT aesthetics'.<sup>45</sup> This aesthetics is democratic in its collaborative spirit and is 'made up of what Chekhov and Gorky are', in that it involves a deep exploration into what constitutes the human, and how the public – the social – is in the personal.<sup>46</sup>

As the MAT's Artistic Director for thirty years, Yefremov maintained that staging a play was one of several ways of tackling socially acute problems. In an interview with *Literaturnaya Gazeta* in August 1978, he stated that broaching them was an element of artistry in itself. A MAT director, he observed, should be capable of appreciating theatre authors whose writings were close to the aesthetics of the Art Theatre. It was no coincidence, then, that, in building up what he called the 'MAT aesthetics', Yefremov should discover and work with such contemporary authors as Viktor Rozov, Aleksandr Vampilov, Aleksandr Volodin, Mikhail Shatrov, Ludmila Petrushevskaya, Mikhail Roshchin, Aleksandr Gelman, and Leonid Zorin, among others. All, like Chekhov and Gorky before them, formulated and exposed current problems – now involving the 'sixtiers' generation.<sup>47</sup> Yet he never lost sight of the central importance of the actor since, as Yefremov continually affirmed, only an actor could create the life of a character on the stage, and thereby unravel a given play's mystery. With this, he upheld the MAT legacy of spotlighting the actor and not the director.

Yefremov well understood this legacy and how it was formed out of the theatre's everyday life by carefully studying the transcripts, manuscripts, and minutes archived at the MAT since the 1900s; and he undertook this task before he assumed the post of its Artistic Director, perceiving, as he read, the great difficulties of educating the actor as the actor also

exercised responsibility for their own education. Quite deliberately, Yefremov established his role as Stanislavsky's direct successor, absorbing too Stanislavsky's conviction that upcoming generations needed new dramatic texts that reflected their (necessarily contemporary) views. He recalled how Chekhov's *The Seagull* had failed catastrophically at the Aleksandrinsky Theatre in St Petersburg in October 1896: the director (Yevtikhy Karpov) had made no effort to gauge the playwright's sense of his own work, turning it into a comedy-satire on a par with Chekhov's well-known humorous stories; the audience, largely made up of the nobility, expected comedy and could not imagine that such a 'profound upheaval had taken place inside the author' whose *The Seagull* was completely different from all his previous writings.<sup>48</sup>

Thinking on this historic failure, Yefremov understood the value of Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko's efforts to collaborate, to whatever degree, with playwrights during rehearsals, and otherwise involve them in the creative life of the MAT, so as to find common ground between them and the company. These considerations largely prompted him to found a new theatre studio, the *Sovremennik* ('Contemporary'), in Moscow in April 1956, whose charter stated that it was a 'theatre of like-minded people who apply Stanislavsky's and Nemirovich-Danchenko's method in terms of modern life'.<sup>49</sup> It was the theatre of a new, post-war age, created by representatives of the young post-war generation to which Yefremov belonged, as did its leading actor Oleg Tabakov, who was both Toporkov's and Yefremov's disciple. Throughout his period as head of the MAT, Yefremov sustained the theatre's principle: 'the Moscow Art Theatre has always worked with playwrights' and 'the [present] MAT [did] not interrupt that tradition, which, even in new conditions, [was] important and essential for it'.<sup>50</sup>

Given his belief that the playwright was 'the builder of a theatre, an equal participant in the process of creating a performance',<sup>51</sup> Yefremov began to renew the Russian (Soviet) theatre by completely embedding new playwrights in its repertoire with whom

he co-created his performances.<sup>52</sup> His launching pad for the new plays opened with Viktor Rozov's *Vechno zhivoye* (*Eternally Alive*, also known as *Alive Forever*), written in the 1940s and played now to herald the new era that had begun in the 1950s after the official repudiation of Stalin's regime. Rozov, who had fought and been wounded on the front during the Great Patriotic War as a volunteer, wrote in his play that there was 'true intelligence, decency at all times in Russia', and that 'an honest person retains honour in the most difficult circumstances'.<sup>53</sup> It was precisely this message that became the unifying idea of Yefremov's entire ensemble, and the company perceived this play as its 'artistic manifesto'.<sup>54</sup>

In 1957, one year later, Rozov's play was filmed by Mikhail Kalatozov in the Mosfilm Studio as *Letyat Zhuravli* (*The Cranes Are Flying*) – the only Soviet film to win the Palme d'Or at the 1958 Cannes Film Festival. Yefremov noted that Rozov had always been 'a deeply theatrical writer' because he could easily understand any director's or actor's proposition.<sup>55</sup> Rozov's genuine talent, Yefremov explained, was his capacity to see the human dimension of something first of all and only after that to see a problem. His skill was to 'solve any problem through a [given] person's character'.<sup>56</sup>

So it was also with *Traditsionny Sbor* (*The Traditional Collection*, 1967), for which Rozov allowed Yefremov to go deeper into the effectiveness of the plot, with greater focus on what had happened to the protagonists of the play.<sup>57</sup> Like *Eternally Alive*, *The Traditional Collection* 'acquired features which became programmatic for the *Sovremennik*', because its members 'checked [their] lives, [their] knowledge of art', through it.<sup>58</sup> It was, in general, characteristic of Yefremov as a direct successor of Stanislavsky not to separate a conversation about a play from a conversation about life: these two concepts were identical for him.

Lev Dodin, the Artistic Director of the Maly Drama Theatre in St Petersburg who had been a close friend of Yefremov recalls that:

conversation about life during a rehearsal always went on like a conversation about a play, a conversation about a play always meant a conversation

about life. When I visited some of his [Yefremov's] rehearsals and listened to the stories of its founding and early Sovremennik actors about their work, I realized that analyzing the play meant analyzing their own lives. This lesson has become one of the most important lessons of my life.<sup>59</sup>

It is worth observing that Dodin, an ally and in many ways a follower of Yefremov, also notes that the latter's work with the playwright was integral to his very own biography. Dodin emphasizes that the main theme of Yefremov's body of work was 'the theme of the individual personality [and] its role in the history of the state, which was organized unfairly and did not allow the development of this personality'; and this was why Aleksandr Volodin's dramaturgy was so close to Yefremov's understanding of life.<sup>60</sup> Dodin singles out *Starshaya Sestra* (*My Elder Sister*, 1962) and *Naznacheniyе* (*The Appointment*, 1963) as the most important Volodin plays in Yefremov's legacy.

In *The Appointment*, 'recognizable truth [characteristic of Yefremov's directing and his actors' acting style] combined with Volodin's piercing lyricism and passion'.<sup>61</sup> The production, for which Yefremov was simultaneously the director and the main actor, accompanied by his like-minded stage partners – Nina Doroshina (Yefremov's muse), Yevgeny Yevstigneyev, Igor Kvasha, and Galina Volchek – was genuine ensemble work, and impressed Dodin so much by its life truth and harmony that he staged this, Volodin's 'most brilliant creation', in Leningrad in 1978.<sup>62</sup>

Yefremov's revival of ensemble work in the theatre was the continuation of another life law that had guided Stanislavsky throughout his life. In Dodin's words: 'Every person was dear to Yefremov, he protected everyone – in this he was a true supporter of K. S. Stanislavsky.'<sup>63</sup>

Yefremov said that he considered the Sovremennik, which he ran until 1970 before moving to the MAT, to be the sixth MAT Studio.<sup>64</sup> For him, 'an actor-artist – just like the actor of the Sovremennik – was a person eager for everything, for the pain and thirst of life – in a word, someone whose origin was not

philistine but civic'.<sup>65</sup> Civility to all the people around him, from students to heads of state, was the hallmark of the second great Oleg who was to lead the MAT artistically and who, like his predecessor, had founded his own theatre based on the traditions of the MAT.

### Oleg Tabakov: the Bridge between the Past and the Present

Tabakov was the first Russian artist to be awarded, in 2008, an Honorary Doctorate at the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague for his 'exceptional contribution to the development of theatrical art, as well as for an exceptional attitude to Czech theatre culture'.<sup>66</sup> As the Sovremennik's leading actor, who had toured the whole of the Soviet Union with his company and made numerous feature films, Tabakov was invited to Prague in the winter of 1968 to play the leading role in Gogol's *The Government Inspector* in the new theatre Činoherní Klub. According to Tabakov, his performance as Khlestakov was 'the greatest theatre success of my life'.<sup>67</sup> In the words of Jan Kačer, the director of the play, it was a 'revolutionary role for the Czech theatre'.<sup>68</sup>

The play was performed in Czech, except for Tabakov who performed in Russian. His performance was a resounding success, especially because it was shown, quite inadvertently, on the eve of the Prague Spring, when Soviet tanks entered Prague to suppress anti-socialist protests; and this had the effect of an exploding bomb. Almost forty years after the production's premiere in 2004, the director Jan Kačer observed in an interview to *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* in Moscow that there were still thousands of people in the Czech Republic who claimed to have seen that performance in person, as it was a crucial event in the modern history of their country. (It should be noted that the Činoherní Klub only had 220 seats!):

Tabakov came as a Russian auditor to conduct an audit of the Czech Republic, and in a situation where anti-Russian sentiments were rife, he played eleven performances [Tabakov claims that he

played practically every day for a month].<sup>69</sup> Each time the audience applauded for twenty-five minutes to express its gratitude for that 'audition', which concerned both the Czechs and the Russians.<sup>70</sup>

Thus, Tabakov received the well-deserved honorary award for playing Khlestakov for modern Czech history, as well as for his acting classes at the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague. He managed to achieve success even in such cases as the Prague situation, which could have been a failure, avoiding, at the same time, political violence towards himself. Thus, after many years of judicial and administrative disputes with officials, his own studio and then theatre called The Cellar (but popularly known as the Tabakerka) was opened in the former coal cellar in Chaplygin Street in the centre of Moscow in 1987. (Tabakov himself was persistently unhappy with the name 'Tabakerka', realizing that it was derived from his surname and meant 'tobacco box'. He preferred the title The Cellar to emphasize the origins of the workroom that once had stored coal and which he and his students had converted manually and substantially into a theatre building.)

Here Tabakov ran a theatre school where he personally trained his students according to the MAT method. It soon received the status of a state institution in which he staged plays performed by his students. Tabakov followed Toporkov's life rules and examples, convinced that 'the class of a theatre faculty was a family association, a kind of cell where there should be a father who helps, supports, approves, and administers a fair trial whenever possible'.<sup>71</sup> He would never forget the day when his teacher Toporkov went to the savings bank, withdrew money from his own account, and hosted a banquet for the graduates of his class. For the late 1960s, this was an incredible, almost 'surrealistic' gesture, and a unique occurrence.<sup>72</sup> Tabakov, too, in the course of his life, became a main support for his students, actors, and colleagues in various everyday problems like searching for a flat to rent or to buy, applying for a bursary, registering a child in kindergarten, and so on.

In many respects, Tabakov was a revolutionary person for Russia too, because, in a very organic way, he could combine all the good qualities and skills that he had inherited from his two teachers and the MAT method. In Russian terms, to be able to found a theatre in the centre of Moscow and not to be ruined for this vanity endeavour by local authorities is *per se* a revolutionary act. To be able to interest overnight half the country in his semi-underground productions, so that there were queues for tickets three days before the premiere, to be able to recruit two classes of students into his studio – all these facts indicate that Oleg Tabakov had absorbed Stanislavsky's idea and learned his method to the depths of his soul. Otherwise, he would not have been able to attract anyone to his studio or to create a professional theatre in the centre of Moscow. A creation (whether a production, a studio, or class) that carries the spark of Stanislavsky in it, and is based on Stanislavsky's methods, would attract people's attention at all times. But what exactly was that Stanislavsky spark that Tabakov had inherited from his teacher Toporkov so that he could bring it to life with such success? How was that spark expressed artistically?

His co-director and theatre pedagogue Andrey Droznin argues that Tabakov's pedagogics can easily be called a *nature education*. At the festival of Tabakov's former students titled '*Atom solntsa*' ('The Sun Atom') devoted to their teacher's method in 2019, Droznin stressed during the round table meeting that, in his method of theatrical teaching, Tabakov followed from nature.<sup>73</sup> It was Stanislavsky's postulate that theatre artists should return to nature, Droznin argued. In this respect, Droznin observed, Tabakov did not even have to return to nature because he [as a theatre pedagogue] was part of nature, and his teachings were based on simple, basic, understandable things. It was expressed in everything – from repertoire to teaching the students about the life of the human body. For example, for the opening of his theatre in March 1987, Tabakov staged Aleksandr Volodin's play *Dve strely* (*Two Arrows*), in which such basic themes as the first manifestations of love, hatred, loyalty, and responsibility were touched upon



and for which perfect mastery of body plasticity and comprehension of the human spirit were demanded.

To open his studio in October 1978, Tabakov staged Aleksey Kazantsev's play *Is vesnoya ya vernus' k tebe* (*And I Will Return with the Spring*), in which, as the theatre historian (and Tabakov's fellow native of the city of Saratov) Lidiya Bogova emphasizes, the production was a real 'drama of events, the tragedy of historical cataclysms in relation to the human', which became for young performers 'understanding of the difficult lessons of life about faith, honesty, friendship, integrity'.<sup>74</sup>

Following this production, in 1979, the actor-director Konstantin Raikin and the theatre pedagogue Andrey Droznin were in charge of staging *Proshchay, Maugli!* (*Goodbye, Mowgli!*), based on Rudyard Kipling's *Jungle Book*.<sup>75</sup> According to Bogova, the production left impressions that nowadays have simply nothing comparable. It seemed that there were no movements that the young studio students could not do on the stage. Their techniques of body control were ideal: their body movements were comparable only to those of circus acts. With this production, their final qualifying work (or diploma), the students demonstrated what, exactly, they had been taught in Tabakov's studio: 'almost self-acting expressiveness of rhythm and plasticity', in the words of Tabakov himself.<sup>76</sup> According to Bogova, Tabakov's biographer, it was the study of the life of the human body (thus expressed so as not to call this pure biomechanics) that was added to 'the study of the life of the human spirit' within the process of mastering the acting profession.<sup>77</sup>

Tabakov's studio was nothing other than an independent understanding of Stanislavsky's teaching, a creation of its own version of the System on an experimental basis. (This had also happened previously when Michael Chekhov and Yevgeny Vakhtangov, two of Stanislavsky's best students and followers, created their own 'systems' inspired by their teacher's methods.) In addition, while mastering the acting profession, the students also mastered many other theatre crafts, such as prop making, lighting design, prompting, and

make-up artistry. These were the physical and technical elements of Tabakov's pedagogical method.

Yet the main feature of Tabakov's pedagogy was his teaching his actors the relationship between the physical and mental-intellectual components of their art. The main task for any actor is to find the inner life of the character and to find ways to reveal and show this inner life on the stage. This was the ability that Droznin did not see in any theatre pedagogue or director other than Tabakov working on his lessons and rehearsals. Droznin recalled how Tabakov would start with descriptions, often of his childhood – an ice-cream stall in his home town Saratov on the Volga, the taste of that ice cream – and the way that the students immediately saw that ice-cream stall in front of them. Droznin identified this pedagogical ability in Stanislavsky's terminology as a *ray emission* (*lucheispuskanie*), when one conveys to an interlocutor something that cannot be conveyed in ways other than from soul to soul. The 'Sun Atom' festival acquired its title from Tabakov's unique ability to emit (solar) rays when communicating with his students during the teaching process. It was a significant part of his practical work with students and actors.

Tabakov's career was full: first as the co-founder and leading actor of the Sovremennik from 1957 to 1983; then as the leader of his own theatre studio, the Moscow Oleg Tabakov Theatre (the Tabakerka), from 1987 to 2018; and, finally, as the Artistic Director of the Moscow Art Theatre from 2000 to 2018. But he also managed to achieve great success as a voice and dubbing actor in about 150 radio broadcasts and radio plays, and, first and foremost, as a film actor in over a hundred feature films loved by millions of people. A consummate film actor, he brought to life Stanislavsky's belief that his System was appropriate for the cinema. A close-up of Tabakov in each film allows the viewer to see what his character really thinks and feels, from his poses and facial expressions, and even in silent scenes. This was Stanislavsky's goal.

Tabakov ran the MAT until the last day of his life in March 2018, having brought up many hundreds of students of acting and



directing. In this way, he was the very bridge that connected the Stanislavsky era with the twenty-first century. He not only passed on to his students all of Stanislavsky's laws of acting as Toporkov and then Yefremov had learned them, but he also bequeathed to them his very own example as the head of the MAT, the head of an ensemble which was a united family. The members of such a structure took care of each other, as Stanislavsky had taught during his time at the Art Theatre, and the numerous generations of students of the theatre who have followed have continued this practice.

## Conclusion

Using the example of the continuity between generations, from Konstantin Stanislavsky to Vasily Toporkov, Oleg Yefremov, and Oleg Tabakov, this article has sought to demonstrate the inextricable co-existence of all generations of MAT artists within Stanislavsky's System and his legacy.

The art of the Russian school of theatre has been transmitted daily through both routine and exciting processes of interaction between generations of actors. This continuous process of interaction, which goes beyond training in a theatre studio and, in fact, covers the entire daily life of a Russian actor, was shown by the last generation of Stanislavsky's direct students, Vasily Toporkov and Nikolay Gorchaikov, and between the latter and their students, our contemporaries Oleg Yefremov and Oleg Tabakov. Such familial relations between different generations reveal the MAT's principle of continuity based on conscious, unconditional, and meticulous devotion to the art of the theatre, which glorifies the sublime human spirit.

## Notes and References

I wish to thank Maria Shevtsova, to whom I am hugely indebted for her time and care in correcting linguistic errors and guiding this article, and generously helping with its translation.

1. Maria Shevtsova, *Rediscovering Stanislavsky* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), p. 235–69; Christopher Innes and Maria Shevtsova, *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Directing* (Cambridge: Cambridge

University Press, 2013), p. 154–61, 185–9, 186–98, 209–13; Maria Shevtsova and Christopher Innes, *Directors/Directing: Conversations on Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 177–206. See also Katie Mitchell, *The Director's Craft: A Handbook for the Theatre* (London/New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 225–30; Grzegorz Niziolek, *Warlikowski: Extra Ecclesiam*, trans. Soren Gauger, (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2015); Peter M. Boenisch and Thomas Ostermeier, *The Theatre of Thomas Ostermeier* (London/New York: Routledge, 2016), esp. p. 132–85; Roswitha Schieb, *Peter Stein: Ein Porträt* (Berlin: Berlin Verlag GmbH, 2005); Peter M. Boenisch, Jitka Goriaux Pelechová, and Viktoria Volkova, *The Directing Work of Thomas Ostermeier: Special Edition of the Proceedings of the 2018 Symposium, Tendencies in Contemporary Theatre Directing and Theatre-Directing Education at the Janáček Academy of Music and Performing Arts*, (JAMU: Brno, 2022), <<https://www.theatreconferencejamu.cz/en/book-proceeding/tendencies-in-contemporary-theatre-directing-and-theatre-directing-education-fragments-from-a-symposium/lecture/the-directing-work-of-thomas-ostermeier>> (accessed 2 November 2023).

2. Vasily Toporkov, *Stanislavsky na repetitsii* [*Stanislavsky in Rehearsal*] (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1950), p. 132. (All translations here and below are mine.)

3. When Stanislavsky had just begun to use the System in practice, during one long rehearsal of *A Month in the Country* in 1909, Olga Knipper-Chekhova could not master her role, for an hour or more, according to Stanislavsky's new findings regarding this acting technique. She burst into tears and hastily left the theatre. Stanislavsky was very worried about the incident and, recognizing his vehemence and intolerance in applying his acting method, sent Knipper-Chekhova a bunch of flowers and a touching letter of apology. The director assured the actress that everything that seemed so difficult to her was actually nothing and that she just needed to have the patience to delve into, think, and understand these trifles. Then, with such a talent as hers, she would know the best joys that existed (Konstantin Stanislavsky, *Collected Works in Eight Volumes. Vol. 7: Letters 1886–1917* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1960), p. 453). Stanislavsky adds that one must be 'firm and courageous in the artistic struggle' for the principles that the Moscow Art Theatre promotes in life. Even at that early stage of his System, Stanislavsky called on the actress to take concrete psychophysical actions in order to determine once and for all 'into what pieces her role fell': 'Here – I want to conceal my excitement; here – I want to share my feeling with a friend; here – I am surprised and frightened; here – I am trying to assure him that nothing bad happened, and, for that, I either become gentle, or capricious, or try to be convincing' (*ibid.*, p. 454). These lines of heartfelt apology and sincere explanation of the artistic task seem to be the first written reference to Stanislavsky's application of what would later become his method of psychophysical actions.

4. The first mention of *Ethics* is dated 26 August 1908 in a letter Stanislavsky addressed to his wife Maria Lilina, in which he complains to her about the lack of order and discipline at the renewed rehearsals of *The Blue Bird* by Maurice Maeterlinck. After that rehearsal, Stanislavsky felt that they would 'perish in debauchery' and that they 'needed discipline', so that, in the evening, he 'stayed at home and wrote, seemingly, a quite good, chapter about ethics. . . . during the morning rehearsal I read it to the actors. It seems to me that they started thinking about it

and the rehearsal was good' (Stanislavsky, *Collected Works: Vol. 7*, p. 411).

5. In order to work out true artistic ethics and discipline, the actor has to prepare at home for every rehearsal by reading the director's notes of the previous rehearsal. A negligent attitude to rehearsal would slow down the collective work and make the director repeat the same issue to every single actor. According to Stanislavsky, 'this is a fault as regards all the theatre co-workers', and that is why the actor 'should learn to work on a role on his own, at home' (Konstantin Stanislavsky, 'Zametki po voprosam etiki [Notes on Issues of Ethics]', in *Stat'i. Rechi. Besedy. Pis'ma* [Articles. Speeches. Conversations. Letters], ed. Grigori Kristi and Nikolai Chushkin (Moscow: Iskustvo, 1953), p. 332–55, 348). The actor should make notes not only on his part, but also on all the parts of the play in order to understand the objective and the super-task of the whole play (ibid., p. 349). The basics that Toporkov had to master from Stanislavsky's rehearsals were huge. See Shevtsova's synthesis, 'Ethics and Discipline', in *Rediscovering Stanislavsky*, p. 124–8.

6. This is the only existing video of a rehearsal led by Stanislavsky. V. Toporkov, A. Geyrot, and V. Bendina are in a scene from *Tartuffe* with Stanislavsky in Leontyev Alley (1938). See <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nj6pdhqMX3Y>> (accessed 2 November 2023).

7. Toporkov, *Stanislavsky na repetitsii*, p. 131f.

8. Nikolay Gorchakov, *Rezhisserskiye uroki K. S. Stanislavskogo* [*Stanislavsky Directs*] (Moscow: Iskustvo, 1951), p. 395–456.

9. Ibid., p. 159–228, 353–94, 395–456; Nikolay Gorchakov, *K. S. Stanislavsky o rabote rezhissyora s aktyorom* [*Stanislavsky on a Director's Work with an Actor*] (Moscow: Vserossiyskoye Teatralnoe Obshchestvo, 1958), p. 105–68.

10. Gorchakov, *Rezhisserskiye uroki*, p. 432. An episode in rehearsals of *The Gerard Sisters* (1926–27) shows how established MAT actors Olga Knipper-Chekhova, Vladimir Yershov, and Pavel Massalsky understood what 'conducting the inner rhythm of the role' meant. They 'conducted' with their hands the inner rhythm of their roles to Stanislavsky while 'speaking' to each other with their eyes and stressing only the key words of their phrases – like 'accents in a real orchestra' (p. 433).

11. Toporkov, *Stanislavsky na repetitsii*, p. 46.

12. Ibid., p. 47.

13. Ibid., p. 48.

14. Calling himself a former 'Head of the Conservatory' (Gorchakov, *K. S. Stanislavsky o rabote rezhissyora*, p. 115), Stanislavsky refers to his post as Director of the Russian Musical Society and of the Conservatory from 1886 to 1888 (Stanislavsky, *Collected Works: Vol. 7*, p. 647). He was one of five heads (directors) of the Russian Musical Society and Conservatory, to which also belonged Piotr Tchaikovsky, Sergey Taneyev, Sergey Tretyakov, and Peter Yurgenson (ibid., p. 651), and Stanislavsky enjoyed telling his opera students about that period: see Boris Haikin, in *Stanislavsky: reformator opernogo iskusstva* [*Stanislavsky: Reformer of Opera Art*], ed. Yuri Kalashnikov (Moscow: Muzyka, 1985), p. 70.

15. Toporkov, *Stanislavsky na repetitsii*, p. 48.

16. Gorchakov, *Rezhisserskiye uroki*, p. 393.

17. Vasily Toporkov, *O tekhnike aktyora* [*On the Technique of Acting*] (Moscow: Iskustvo, 1954), p. 58, 66.

18. Ibid., p. 66.

19. Ibid., p. 52–3.

20. Ibid., p. 58.

21. Ibid., p. 84.

22. Ibid., p. 101.

23. Ibid., p. 117.

24. Toporkov, *Stanislavsky na repetitsii*, p. 138.

25. Ibid., p. 70.

26. Ibid., p. 145.

27. German director Thomas Ostermeier (whose rehearsals on *Death in Venice* I attended as a participant observer for my PhD) considers himself to be a follower of Stanislavsky in many ways, and uses very similar psychotechniques in rehearsal. Ostermeier calls his method 'storytelling', which resembles the described processes with psychophysical actions that Stanislavsky implemented in his rehearsals in the last decade of his life. In 'storytelling', the actors ignore the text at the beginning of rehearsals and approach a scene by reproducing a similar situation, as if it were taking place in real life. After having 'collected' the required physical actions, positions, poses, facial expressions, and gestures, the participants start to introduce the texts of their roles. See, for more details, Boenisch and Ostermeier, *The Theatre of Thomas Ostermeier*, p. 154–9; Boenisch, Pelechová, and Volkova, *The Directing Work of Thomas Ostermeier*; and Shevtsova, *Rediscovering Stanislavsky*, p. 183, 253–5.

28. Vasily Toporkov, *Doklad po rabotam na temu 'Metod tvorcheskoy praktiki K. S. Stanislavskogo' na soiskaniye uchenoy stepeni doktora iskustvovedeniya* [*Report on the works on the theme 'The Method of Creative Practice by K. S. Stanislavsky' for a doctorate*] (Moscow: Ministerstvo kultury RSFSR, Gosudarstvennyy Institut Teatralnogo Iskustva imeni A. V. Lunacharskogo, Shkola-Studiya (VUZ) imeni Vl. I. Nemirovicha-Danchenko pri MKhAT SSSR, 1964), p. 25.

29. Ibid.

30. Gorchakov, *Rezhisserskiye uroki*, p. 522. (Stanislavsky refers to his and Nemirovich-Danchenko's director's copies of such plays as Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* and Gorky's *The Lower Depths*, which are kept in the MAT Museum.) See also Oleg Yefremov, *Vsyo neprosto: Stat'i, vystupleniya, besedy, dokumenti* [*Nothing Is Easy: Articles, Lectures, Conversations, Documents*] (Moscow: Rezhisser Teatr, 1992), p. 216.

31. Gorchakov, *Rezhisserskiye uroki*, p. 459–67, 521–30, 460, 532.

32. Ibid. p. 521.

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid., p. 463.

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid.

37. Ibid.

38. Ibid., p. 464.

39. Ibid., p. 465.

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid., p. 553.

43. Ibid.

44. Oleg Tabakov, *Mechta o teatre: moya nastoyashchaya zhizn'* [*A Dream of Theatre: My Real Life*], Vol. 1 (Moscow: AST, 2020), p. 135–41.

45. Stanislavsky's responsibility for the everyday problems of the actors and the stage work refers to the phenomenon of the ensemble, which was the restraining and unifying power that consolidated the MAT in the toughest times of its existence and, later, under the changing circumstances and different directors through the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Internationally renowned Stanislavsky scholar Maria Shevtsova highlights in her recent deeply and finely researched

*Rediscovering Stanislavsky* that it was the very power of the ensemble that helped Stanislavsky to overcome 'his gnawing disillusionment with the company' during the famous MAT tours of the USA and Europe in the early 1920s. It was his 'principles for harmoniously integrated stage work [that were] so deeply implanted that they had withstood the negative influences weakening the troupe on other fronts, mainly of their daily life' (p. 15). The same deeply implanted principles for both harmoniously integrated stage work and daily unconditional mutual assistance were inherited by the next generations of the MAT actors and directors, including – first of all – Oleg Yefremov and Oleg Tabakov.

46. Yefremov, *Vsyo neprosto*, p. 212.
47. Those people of the 1960s called the 'sixtiers' (*shestidesyatniki*) were representatives of a young generation of the Soviet intelligentsia whose art (of all genres, including music, literature, visual arts, and theatre) reflected their liberal views after the end of the Stalin era and from the beginning of the so called 'Khrushchev Thaw' in 1956 (after Khrushchev's speech at the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the USSR and his notorious 'exposure of Stalin's personality cult'). The main theme promoted by the 'sixtiers' was the theme of the personality in the world historical process and in the Soviet state, which, as a complex apparatus, suppressed and limited the personality in its development.
48. Yefremov, *Vsyo neprosto*, p. 168.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 268.
50. Oleg Yefremov, *O Teatre i o sebe [On the Theatre and Myself]* (Moscow: MChT, 1997), p. 201.
51. *Ibid.*
52. See <<https://screenstage.ru/?p=17782&ysclid=lasmtquejg899686834>> (accessed 2 November 2023).
53. Yefremov, *Vsyo neprosto*, p. 171.
54. *Ibid.*
55. *Ibid.*, p. 172.
56. *Ibid.*
57. *Ibid.*
58. *Ibid.*

59. Lidiya Bogova, Oleg Yefremov. *Albom vospominaniy [Oleg Yefremov. Book of Reminiscences]* (Moscow: Teatralis, MAT edition, 2007), p. 173.
60. *Ibid.*, p. 165.
61. *Ibid.*
62. *Ibid.*
63. *Ibid.*, p. 162.
64. Yefremov, *Vsyo neprosto*, p. 219. Yefremov is here mistaken in his counting of the number of studios that Stanislavsky had created.
65. *Ibid.*, p. 218.
66. See <<https://www.amu.cz/en/all-about-amu/history-successes-awards/honorary-doctorates-awarded-amu/>> (accessed 2 November 2023). Tabakov was a prominent figure for Czech theatre culture, and an early version of this article was presented at the international symposium 'The S Word: Stanislavsky's Last Words' at the same venue in November 2022, <<https://stanislavskyslastwords.amu.cz/about-conference.html>> (accessed 2 November 2023).
67. Tabakov, *Mechta o teatre*, p. 280.
68. Jan Kačer, interviewed in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 18 November 2004, <[https://www.ng.ru/culture/2004-11-18/7\\_kacher.html?ysclid=l9x2ypffr941764305](https://www.ng.ru/culture/2004-11-18/7_kacher.html?ysclid=l9x2ypffr941764305)> (accessed 2 November 2023).
69. Tabakov, *Mechta o teatre*, p. 280.
70. Kačer, interviewed in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*.
71. Tabakov, *Mechta o teatre*, p. 141.
72. *Ibid.*, p. 140.
73. See <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vVa7uXyRKdI>> (accessed 2 November 2023).
74. Lidiya Bogova, Oleg Tabakov. *Moyo delo – igrat' [Oleg Tabakov: My Job is to Play]* (Moscow: Molodaya Gvardiya, 2023), p. 155.
75. See <<https://tabakov.ru/performances/maugli/?ysclid=lod87noysq982984810>> (accessed 2 November 2023).
76. Lidiya Bogova, Oleg Tabakov. *K semidesyatletiyu artista [Oleg Tabakov. On the Artist's Seventieth Anniversary]*, Vol. 2 (Moscow: MAT, 2005), p. 67.
77. Bogova, Oleg Tabakov. *Moyo delo – igrat'*, p. 156.