Jonathan Pitches

'Is It All Going Soft?' The Turning Point in Russian Actor Training

Whilst Stanislavsky spent much of his energy trying to simplify the processes of acting and avoiding a (pseudo-) scientific terminology for his acting system, he was nevertheless caught up in Stalin's appropriation of hard science after the Russian Revolution, to be paired with other 'founding fathers' of Soviet materialism, including Ivan Pavlov, in the creation of a powerful political orthodoxy. Here, Jonathan Pitches focuses on two of Stanislavsky's key contemporaries, Meyerhold and Michael Chekhov, both of whom had worked with the founder of the System at different periods in their career, to pinpoint a significant shift, or turning point, in the development of twentieth-century Russian actor training. Drawing on Fritjof Capra's history of systemic thinking, the article argues that a radical shift of thinking took place in actor training in the 1920s and 1930s, which prefigures the global paradigm crisis Capra has identified at the turn of the last century. Jonathan Pitches is a Principal Lecturer in the Department of Contemporary Arts at Manchester Metropolitan University and author of *Vsevolod Meyerhold* (Routledge, 2003). This article is a revised version of a paper delivered at the IFTR 2004 Conference in St Petersburg. Its argument derives from his forthcoming book *Science and the Stanislavsky Tradition* (Routledge, 2005).

SPEAKING at a conference in Amsterdam in 1990, the particle physicist and philosopher of science, Fritjof Capra, made the following assessment:

> We are at a turning point in all aspects of our culture. The paradigm shift towards a systemic world view is crucial because without it there will be no future.[1]

Capra's argument has been consistent since his second book, *The Turning Point,* was published in 1982 and he develops the theme further in his most recent publication, *The Web of Life* (1996). For Capra, the intellectual crisis experienced by the early quantum physicists is 'mirrored today by a similar but much broader cultural crisis' (1996, p. 5), one which is set to destabilize the hegemony of the hard sciences, as well as the 'hard thinking' associated with the scientific method.

At the cusp of two millennia, Capra believes, the crisis has reached global proportions, caused on the one hand by the growing unsuitability of the Cartesian 'building blocks' view of the world and on the other by the rapid growth of non-linear, intuitive, holistic ways of thinking – what he calls the 'systems' view of life. The roots of this crisis are traced back to the 1920s and to the radical shift in attitude occasioned by the revolutionary quantum model of the atom emerging at the time. Instead of a billiard-ball model of atomic physics, based on geometrical, causal logic, quantum physics revealed the atom to be a complex set of *connections* – not a thing of substance at all. What's more, an atom's behaviour could be radically transformed depending on the way its properties were measured. Quantum theory thus stimulated a significant shift in the physical sciences, from an atomistic view of the world (where parts lead to wholes in a clear and ultimately predictable model of 'building' or progression) to an holistic world view where *context* is all important and the whole is often greater than the sum of the parts.

In addition to quantum physics, Capra cites Gestalt psychology and the Russian systems theorist Alexander Bogdanov – also a novelist, cultural theorist, and key political thinker – as drivers in this paradigm shift. But Capra's vision, inclusive though it is, does not extend as far as *theatrical* culture

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or to Bogdanov's compatriots in the 1920s – most notably Stanislavsky, Meyerhold, and Michael Chekhov. Indeed, Capra's claim at the Amsterdam conference that '*all* aspects of our culture' are in crisis is not fully substantiated anywhere in his writing. What currency is there, then, in the notion of a 'turning point' from a theatrical perspective? And how might it shed light on the early twentieth-century Russian actor training, developing apace alongside Bogdanov's own system, known as Tektology?

One possible response to these questions is outlined here, by drawing on practical sources and key archival materials from two of Stanislavsky's most significant contemporaries, Vsevolod Meyerhold and Michael Chekhov. Taken together, these practitioners embody the split in post-Stanislavskian practical thinking after the Revolution, the one explicitly committed to an industry-inspired system of training or Biomechanics, the other motivated by Goethe, Rudolph Steiner, and the Utopian dream of the Dartington Estate in England.

Indeed, Meyerhold and Chekhov may be viewed as key markers of a turning point in the Russian tradition of actor training, from a Cartesian or Newtonian framework to a holistic system of training based on interconnectedness. Such a development may not in fact have taken until the millennium to develop its momentum, as Capra argues, but might be better located in the 1920s and 1930s, concurrent with Alexander Bogdanov and with the diasporic explosion of the System.

Actor Training as Hard Science

Science and theatre have enjoyed a long and complex relationship for many hundreds of years, but the marriage of the two cultures reached a particularly intensive stage at the turn of the last century and specifically with Strindberg and Zola's idiosyncratic brand of Naturalism. Both men declared an explicit debt to the natural sciences, to Darwin and Claude Bernard, and both propagated a model of creative investigation that had conscious parallels with vivisection.[2] In any case, respect for the discipline of science, by the time Stanislavsky was organizing his findings into a system in the first decades of the twentieth century, was such that the methodologies of the hard sciences, in particular, were regularly associated with the methodologies of actor training. For Alison Hodge, in her introduction to *Twentieth-Century Actor Training*, this was due to:

> The widening influence at the turn of the century of objective, scientific research. Western European practitioners began to search for absolute, objective languages of acting that could offer models, systems and tested techniques to further their craft.
> (Hodge, 2000, p. 2)

The common hallmarks of 'hard' scientific investigation – a well-defined and objective methodology, laboratory conditions, measurable outcomes – were thus emerging as an implicit framework to which actor trainers could aspire. The characteristics of the 'softer' sciences – where strictly reliable data is more difficult to establish and which often involve the *interpretation* of human behaviour – interestingly were not (at first) part of this emerging language.

The System as Life-Study

We can get a flavour of this in Stanislavsky's own recollection of his System as he developed it with Leopold Sulerzhitsky. In *My Life in Art* he asks:

> Can there exist a system for the creative process? Has it really got laws that have been established for all time?

He provides this answer:

> In certain parts of the system, like the physiological and psychological, laws exist for all, forever, and in all creative processes. They are indubitable, completely conscious, tried by science and found true.
> (Stanislavsky, 1980, p. 483)

Here, Stanislavsky is clearly appealing to science to validate his ideas. Both sides of his 'psycho-physical' acting theory (the internal, psychological side, or *perezhivanie*, and the external, physiological side, *voploscenie*) are

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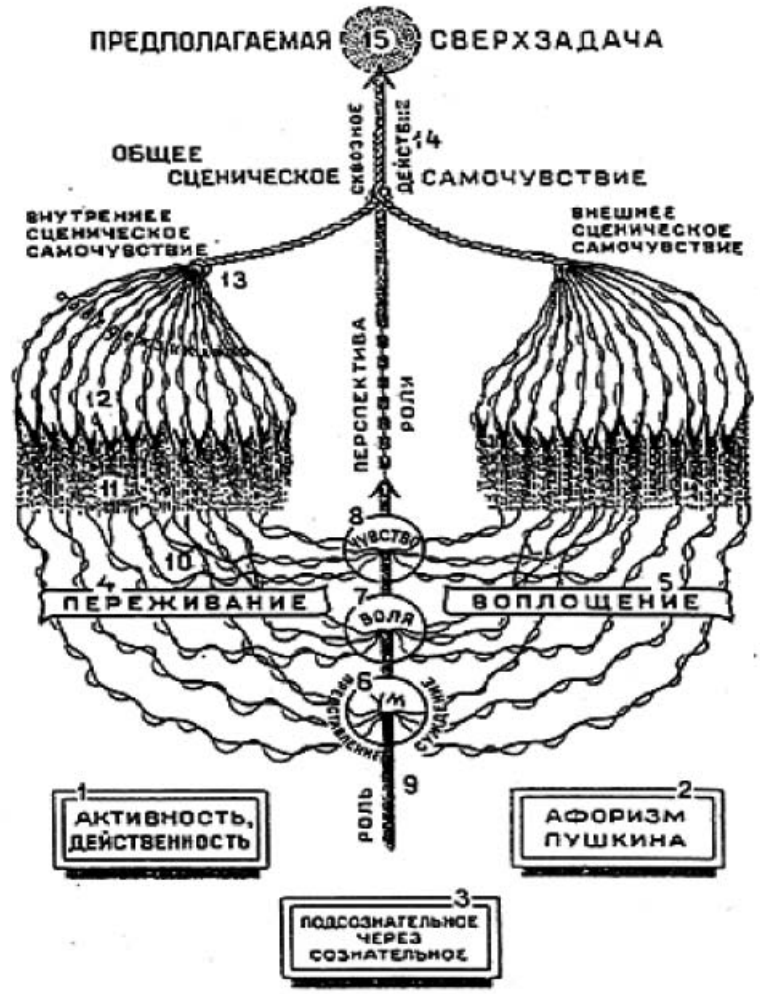

best expressed in universal 'laws'. Nature (and specifically what Stanislavsky sees as the *natural* process of acting) is, in effect, legitimized by its associations with science. Even if the so-called soft science of psychology is central to much of his thinking – through his reading of Ribot, for example – the unmistakable tone of this statement is 'hard'.

An extension of this idea may be seen in the fascinating diagrammatic representation, reproduced above, of the system drawn by Stanislavsky to illustrate the two sides of an *An Actor's Work on Himself* and reprinted in *Stanislavsky in Focus* (Carnicke, 1998, p. 99). Conceived as a biological life study, the System's two sides – on the left, *perezhivanie* (experiencing) and on the right, *voploscenie* (embodying), take the form of lungs that connect to a central spine by means of a braided artery; streams of nerves appear to be emanating from the triumvirate of motive forces. On closer inspection, the central spine has rectangular blocks of material, not vertebrae, and these seem to signify the constituent actions of the role. These actions are directed by the forces of reason, will, and feeling and all the impetus of the diagram is towards the pinnacle of the life study – the supertask or *sverkhzadacha*.

Whilst a first look at Stanislavsky's diagram yields a sense of the organic, of breathing, and of multiple nerve-endings, it is easy to review its network of lines not as nerves but as charged electrical wiring feeding into the System's main cabling. Indeed, within it there is an equally powerful sense of the electric circuit being diverted through two

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resistors or transformers (the 'lungs') before being channelled back to the ultimate goal of the System actor, the supertask. Be it biological life study or mechanical circuit model, Stanislavsky's associative message is clear – the System is to be viewed as part of a wider project of scrutiny, rigorous dissection and experimentation.

Viewed in isolation from the Stalinist political environment in 1938, Stanislavsky's diagram is an elegant illustration of the general tendency to objectify the intuitive processes of acting. But it is worth taking into account the specific state of Soviet science in the late 1930s, which, under the aegis of Stalin, had become increasingly centralized, isolated, politically driven, and tied into the practical advancement of the Bolshevik cause.

By the time *An Actor's Work on Himself* was published in 1938, any 'new' developments in science had to be traced back to what Nikolai Krementsov calls 'the founding fathers' – amongst whom were Ivan Pavlov (the founder of Reflexology and a key figure in research into the nervous system) and Dmitri Mendeleev (the chemist who formulated the periodic table). These founding fathers were lauded as 'materialists, great patriots, and practitioners' (Krementsov, 1997, p. 50) and consistently cited as the root of scientific research by any laboratory which wanted its ideas to be published (and, of course, funded). Thus emerged a powerful orthodoxy built on the past.

Not notably adept at political chicanery, Stanislavsky nevertheless recognized this orthodoxy, indeed he was part of it as Stalin's named 'founding father' of the theatre, his own acting system the only one to be taught in the Soviet Union after 1934. It is easy to see how, in this climate, a diagram consciously designed to evoke the idea of an actor's creative 'nervous system' would have the right kind of impact and backing. It was, in fact, a kind of periodic table of the theatre, Stanislavsky's final attempt to systematize his System in a vernacular he knew would be acceptable.

In many ways, Vsevolod Meyerhold consciously intensified this scientism in relation to his own actor training, Biomechanics. From the Russian Revolution onwards, he was fully aware of the growing practical bias in Soviet culture and was at the centre of many developments to introduce such a bias in the theatre. In 1922, five years after the October uprising, he was characteristically outspoken on the relationship between his emergent acting system and the prevailing pragmatism: 'Art should be based on scientific principles', he argued, 'the entire act should be a conscious process' (Meyerhold, 1991, p. 198).

The Meyerhold Formula

Meyerhold provocatively reduced the task of acting to a formula ($N = A_1 + A_2$),[3] and appealed directly, in his *Programme of Acting* (1922), to the Objective Psychology of the 'founding fathers' of Russian Reflexology, Pavlov and Vladimir Bekhterev (Hoover, 1974, p. 312). Reflexology, defined by Pavlov as the detailed study of 'the physiology of the higher parts of the central nervous system' (Pavlov, 1955, p. 245), was an attempt to base an understanding of behaviour on physiological *reflexes*. As such, it was an 'anti-psychological' movement, in that it viewed psychological phenomena strictly in physical terms. Meyerhold's acting system also did that, by formulating an 'outside-in' approach to the generation of emotion: 'only a few exceptionally great actors have succeeded in utilizing the correct method', Meyerhold claimed in 'The Actor of the Future' – 'that is, the method of building the role not from inside outwards, but vice versa' (Meyerhold, 1991, p. 199).

In the same polemical essay, Meyerhold stressed the significance of Taylorism and highlighted his debt to Frederick Winslow Taylor's *Principles of Scientific Management*, first published in 1911 and zealously promoted in Russia by the futurist poet Alexei Gastev. In pursuit of a rationalized efficiency in the workplace, Taylor undertook time and motion studies for factory managers, timing each individual task of a worker in order to ascertain its fastest completion time. In doing so, he developed huge and complex chains of micro-actions or 'work cycles', which,

looked at across an entire workforce, constituted the macro-problem for the manager.

In *Shop Management*, for example, Taylor reproduces a worksheet for 'hand work on machine tools' (1947, p. 166–7), dividing the work up into forty-nine separate tasks. For each of these tasks he stipulates a preferred completion time (the fastest possible) and an actual completion time. Such detailed analysis, according to Taylor, ultimately allows for predictions to be made:

> No system of time study can be looked upon as a success unless it enables the time observer, after a reasonable amount of study, to predict with accuracy how long it should take a good man to do almost any job in [any] particular trade.
>
> (Taylor, 1947, p. 167)

Not only, then, was Taylor's system designed to rationalize the behaviour of the worker, it was also a predictive science which could anticipate the performance of any 'good man . . . [in] almost any job'. Taylor's analytical technique has its roots firmly in the Cartesian school, viewing the complex problem of lathe work (or equally of car production) as a systematic series of steps – a 'long chain' of sub-problems solved separately in order to reach a larger solution.

The Work Cycle and Biomechanics

Meyerhold's biomechanical *études*, the keystone of his actor training, were an inspired fusion of both Taylor and Pavlov's respective systems. From Taylor's 'work cycle' Meyerhold took the idea of a smoothly executed, rhythmically efficient action, punctuated with rest periods or pauses. From Pavlov, he borrowed the concept of a chain of reflex responses, described in *Conditioned Reflexes* as 'the foundation of the nervous activities of both men and of animals' (Pavlov, 1927, p. 11). Together, they formed Meyerhold's notion of the 'acting cycle'.

At a formal level, Meyerhold's études are models of Capra's Cartesian paradigm: they break down large complexes of actions (shooting bows, stabbing chests) into separate sub-actions, and then break these sub-actions down to the 'building blocks' of all biomechanical action on stage, to the *otkaz, posil*, and *tochka*[4] – the tripartite rhythm of biomechanics. Having *de*composed, these constituent parts allow the performer to *re*compose, or to build up from these essential elements (the atoms of theatrical action, so to speak) to levels of great complexity – the structure of a whole play text, for example. Working with actors in 1996 on rhythm, the contemporary biomechanical practitioner Gennady Bogdanov made this idea explicit:

> What is this [*otkaz, posil, tochka*] structure for? It's there so it's easier for you to *build* your movements. Like in music, we count the notes. And it's the same for an actor's movements.
>
> (Bogdanov, 1999)

Pavlov had argued for the same analytical approach in 1932 in an article for *The Psychological Review*. Reflex activity, he maintained, was underpinned by the principle of 'analysis and synthesis', or 'the initial decomposition of the whole into its parts or units, and then the gradual reconstruction of the whole from these units or elements' (Pavlov, 1932, p. 102).

Meyerhold's own reflexive system, biomechanics, did precisely this, taking simple narratives of conflict and breaking them down into their constituent parts – not, as Taylor would have it, to rationalize them, but greatly to extend them, transporting the actions themselves into the realm of the grotesque. Consider the structure of the solo *étude*, *Throwing the Stone*, taken from a commentary by Alexei Levinsky, Bogdanov's compatriot and contemporary in biomechanics training (Levinsky, 1997):

1. Dactyl
2. Leap to the Stance
3. Preparation to Run
4. Seeing the Stone
5. Falling on to the Stone
6. Lifting of the Stone to the Foot
7. Transition of the Stone to the Knee
8. Refusal
9. Spinning/Winding up the Stone
10. Taking Aim
11. Refusal
12. Throwing the Stone

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13. Abstract Gesture (Ducking)
14. Strike!
15. Turn
16. Dactyl

As the biomechanical actor steeps himself in this *étude* work, a powerful compositional understanding emerges alongside the more obvious extension of physical expressivity. The actor in Meyerhold's school, echoing Pavlov's call, must first 'analyze' and then 'synthesize', breaking actions down into their multiple elements only to reconstruct them with a renewed theatrical consciousness.

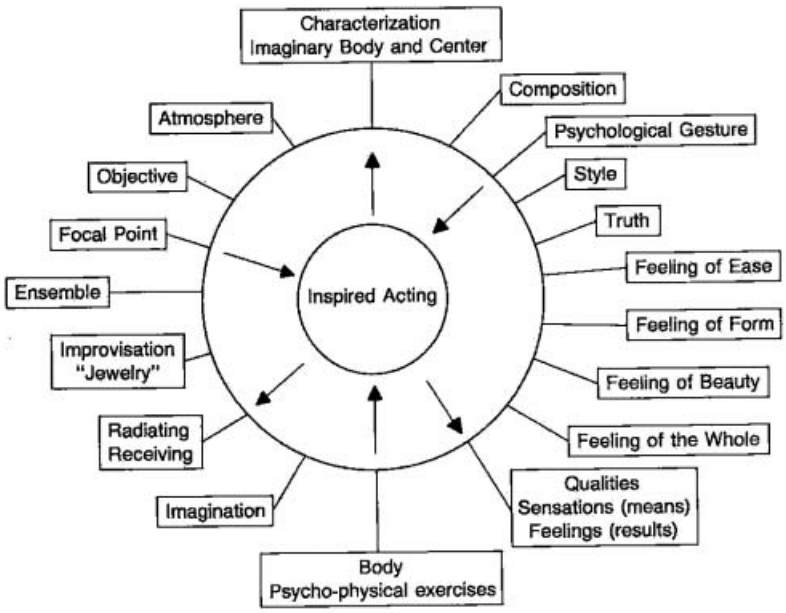
Michael Chekhov's Search for the Spiritual

Michael Chekhov rejected this model of constructional thinking and the mechanistic theories underpinning it. He fled from the Soviet Union in 1927 and, after touring Europe, arrived in Dartington in Devonshire, England, just before the Second World War. In making this move away from Russia, Chekhov was signing his ideological opposition both to the Soviet regime and to the hard scientific climate associated with it. His theatre school policy, drawn up in 1936 to launch his new Acting Programme at Dartington, made this explicitly clear:

> [My] aim is to give back to the theatre its spiritual content: at the same time using all the advantages and achievements of technique, in so far as this can be done without allowing mechanics to become the ideal.[5]

Although he emerged from the same school, Chekhov's philosophical territory was significantly different from that of Stanislavsky. One way to measure this is to compare the diagrammatic representation of the System with Chekhov's 'inspirational' model of acting (Chekhov, 1991, p. xxxvi), reproduced below, and designed to capture his technique in its entirety.

Where much of Stanislavsky's thinking is linear – witness the *through-line* of action (*skvosnoe deistvie*) following the spine of his system upwards to the supertask (*sverkhzadacha*) – Chekhov's is circular. Indeed, the Chekhov technique exhibits a distinctive interconnectedness; it is a kind of web of practical skills for the actor. The hallmarks of the technique – Qualities of Action, the Psychological Gesture, Atmosphere, Imagination – all co-exist interdependently. If the actor is paying attention to Atmosphere and Radiation, for instance, many of the other 'lights of inspiration', as Chekhov puts it, will be illuminated automatically (Chekhov, 1991, p. xxxvii).



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As such, it is a non-hierarchical system which models acting rather as modern science models the brain: as an organic web of connections. These connections are not causally related but organized holistically with each element of the system contributing as a whole to a harmonious outcome for the actor – 'inspired acting'. The motif of breathing is continued from Stanislavsky's diagram – 'inspired' acting is of course connected to the idea of 'breathing in' and of infusing the body with energy. But the emphasis here is more contextual than dissectional.

Chekhov's vision of an actor as part of one great harmonious whole was first created in the unique environment of Dartington in the late 1930s, and this context is all-important when looking at the formation of his technique. His own assessment of the estate, run by Dorothy and Leonard Elmhirst as a radically inclusive integration of the arts, agriculture, and education, was characteristically upbeat:

> Nowhere in this world will you find such a possibility to work – such space, such air, such buildings, such harmony, such light.[6]

Clearly, Chekhov was grateful to his benefactress Dorothy Elmhirst for giving him the opportunity to develop his technique at a particularly dangerous time in European history. But Dartington offered more than a safe haven. It provided him with a model of holistic thinking and practice – the confluence of professional arts with rural industries and a progressive educational agenda. Michael Young captures the idea:

> New men would not be evolved except through the reform of education; they would not be able to fulfil themselves. . . . Without the arts, they would not be whole without the beauty of nature . . . and all would fail unless based securely in the foundations of a sound economy which did not sacrifice the individual to the machine.
>
> (Young, 1982, p. 101)

In fact, the Dartington project and, by extension, the Chekhov technique, which was first formalized within the estate's boundaries, are best located in a very different paradigm from Meyerhold's Biomechanics. The prominence of nature and its relationship to the imagination, the deep suspicion of all things mechanical, and the belief in an integrated holism all combine to form a fundamentally Romantic rather than mechanistic view of the world.

Finding a Context for Chekhov

But locating Chekhov in a Romantic context demands justification beyond pointing out his broad affinity with the philosophical leanings of the Dartington project, and this can be found by scrutinizing the many treasures in the Trust's archive from the period, which houses the unpublished 1942 version of *To the Actor,* Chekhov's key correspondence during the period, notated practical sessions, an emergent acting programme, and many lectures of Chekhov's, one of which offers persuasive evidence for his scientific bias.

This lecture, entitled *Colour and Light* (*c.* 1939),[7] draws on the theories of Rudolph Steiner (a known influence on Chekhov), but more significantly in the current context also refers explicitly to the scientific ideas of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Indeed, it confirms what remains implicit in much of Chekhov's other writings – that he had detailed knowledge of Goethe's Romantic science and, specifically, had read Goethe's anti-Newtonian *Theory of Colours*. Reflecting on the emotional qualities of colour, the following parallel quotations from Chekhov's lecture at Dartington and Goethe's *Theory of Colours* (1810) will exemplify. Thus Chekhov:

> If we look at nature on a very gloomy day through a YELLOW glass it is able to change the day to a happy one.
>
> (Chekhov, 1939, p. 3)

And thus Goethe:

> The eye is gladdened . . . particularly if we look at a landscape through a yellow glass on a grey winter's day. (Goethe, 1996, p. 307)

And Chekhov again:

> Blue gives us the feeling of concentration. . . . It recedes from us. (Chekhov, 1939, p. 4)

And Goethe:

> Blue seems to retire from us. But as we readily follow an agreeable object that flies from us, so we love to contemplate blue.
>
> (Goethe, 1996, p. 311)

In common with the literary movement, Romantic science promoted an organic rather than a mechanical relationship with nature, it looked to feeling as much as to rational thought for inspiration, and valued intuition above intellect.

As a Romantic scientist, Goethe's central thesis was based on a theory of archetypes. From plants to granite he believed *ur-forms* constituted the formative beginnings of all phenomena – forms which, he argued, were only recognizable to those with a 'super-sensory' perception, who could see beyond the external image of something to the formative laws that lie within.

Goethe attempted to tap this higher level of consciousness by doing his experiments twice – once conventionally, and then for the second time re-running the experiment solely in his mind. Working thus, he believed he could colour the coldly intellectual processes of science with the intuitive forces of his imagination – a process he called 'delicate empiricism' (Goethe, 1996, p. 72). Chekhov believed the same, echoing Goethe's experimental technique with his idea of Qualities:

> Perform the Gestures with their Qualities again. . . . Then go on doing them, but only in your imagination, remaining outwardly immobile. See that your Will and Feelings react upon the imaginary gesture as they reacted upon the real one.
>
> (Chekhov, 1991, p. 42)

In demanding as much, both men were striving to establish a feedback loop between the internal and the external world; they were actively facilitating an improvisatory communion of the rational and the intuitive.

Chekhov took the principle of delicate empiricism and formulated his most important contribution to acting theory – the psychological gesture, or PG. The PG is effectively Stanislavsky's supertask in mime: a physical model of the character's essential core, developed in rehearsals but never shown on stage. Whilst much has been written about the importance of the PG within the Chekhov Technique, the scientific context for these ideas has never been discussed. But seeing Chekhov's work through Goethe gives his statements on the PG a new resonance:

> [The PG is] not only a movement of the body – [but] movement *and* feeling *and* will and other elements . . . gesture in everything, in a plant, a tree, a chair.
>
> (du Prey, 1979, p. 4)

And, when Chekhov is talking about centres:

> The imaginary centre in your chest will also give the sensation that your whole body is approaching . . . an 'ideal' type of human body. . . . You will have the feeling that your ideal body enables you . . . to give it all kinds of characteristic features demanded by your part.
>
> (Chekhov, 1953, p. 8)

In the same way as Goethe argued that ideal or archetypal forms were at the formative core of all natural phenomena, Chekhov conceived of a similar *ur-form* residing in the body memory of the performer and constituting the basis of 'all kinds' of potential character creations.

On one level, this hidden character-form aligns the Chekhov technique with Meyerhold, whose biomechanical training in *études* was similarly banned from direct citation on the stage and which also resides in the physical memory of the performer, informing both gestural and rhythmical choices. But on another level the *études* are fundamentally different, not least because they originate from a different paradigmatic place. Where composition skills in Biomechanics can be traced back to the building blocks of Meyerhold's system (the generic *otkaz*, *posil*, and *tochka*), the act of creation in Chekhov's PG is individualized and networked into the range of other activities which constitute the Chekhov Technique.

The Chekhovian actor doesn't so much *build* a character from the PG as stimulate a range of connected performance elements – tempo, imagination, qualities of action – through its embodiment. The PG is not so much a 'foundation' for developing per-

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formance (although Chekhov himself uses the metaphor at times), but more a fluid reference point.

Conclusion

Chekhov clearly espoused Goethe's ideas on colour theory and undertook an analogous search for *ur-forms* in his acting technique. His association with Romantic theories of interconnectedness ultimately took him away from Stanislavsky's philosophical foundations and marked a turning point in the development of the System.

From Chekhov on, there are two dominant strains identifiable within the Stanislavsky tradition. The Cartesian or Newtonian paradigm continued in Boleslavsky's work and developed into the Method in the US; the Goethean or Romantic strain is traceable in the work of Anatoly Vasiliev, having evolved via Maria Knebel. Stanislavsky effectively bridges these two strains of development.[8]

In the late 1930s, when Chekhov was developing his technique at Dartington, the move away from an essentially causal model of the actor's task to an holistic formation of the craft of acting was both ancient and modern. On the one hand, in his focusing of attention on archetypal forms, Chekhov was looking back to before Goethe – before Aristotle, even, to Plato and his Theory of Forms. On the other, his insistence that 'everything connects' and his holistic, systemic vision foreshadows the global turning point Capra is identifying in *The Web of Life*.

Indeed, rather than condemning him as anachronistic, Chekhov's affinity with Romantic science may be viewed as evidence of his paradigmatic vision; Romantic science was pivotal in the development of systems thinking, and Goethe, according to Capra, was the 'first strong opposition to the mechanistic Cartesian paradigm' (1996, p. 20).

But if Chekhov's Technique is to be seen as a turning point in the Russian tradition of acting, to what extent *has* the ground shifted from the hard quasi-scientific models of the early twentieth century to a softer, more fluid model in the early twenty-first? Lev Dodin's work at the Maly Drama Theatre offers one possible response to this question. In the last two decades, the Maly Theatre has become an internationally recognized company, working from its base in a four hundred-seater theatre in St Petersburg. Its Artistic Director, Lev Dodin, trained with Boris Zon at the St Petersburg Theatre Institute, Zon in turn having spent many years with Stanislavsky; and Dodin's work thus represents another significant evolutionary development in the Russian tradition of actor training. In Maria Shevtsova's recent book, *Dodin and the Maly Drama Theatre* (2004), she quotes the director making the following observation:

> [Stanislavsky's] investigations and experiences transmitted by those who left him early, say Boleslavsky, . . . emphasized rational analysis [and] confirmed the rather naive notion that the system was a collection of determined, fixed exercises and principles.
>
> (Shevtsova, 2004, p. 39)

Instead of the dry – you might say 'hard' – pedagogical doctrine of the Stanislavsky textbooks, Dodin's preference is for Stanislavsky's *notebooks*, capturing, as they do, the mutable and ever-evolving practical record of a director in process. Accordingly, Dodin trumpets in his own work, 'a training of the heart and the nervous system' (p. 40), a training, which is responsive to the complex moment-by-moment psychophysical relationship an actor has with his environment – a training which in his own words is 'an uninterrupted process without end' (p. 44).

His productions, which include *The Devils* (1991), *Claustrophobia* (1994), and *A Play with No Name* (1997), are notable for an often stunning quality of ensemble and for the holistic model of acting propounded by him – each individual in his troupe is encouraged to be a dancer, actor, researcher, deviser, and musician all in one.

For Shevtsova, Dodin's organic training has its roots mainly in Stanislavsky's idea of the 'transient now' (2004, p. 39), whilst he also consciously pays tribute to Meyerhold's sense of theatricality and play. Both of these directors are clearly important to an understanding of the Maly. But Dodin's particular approach to the 'living organism' of the pro-

duction, as he calls it, may also be testimony that Capra's holistic, systemic world view *has* impacted on the tradition of actor training begun by Stanislavsky, not through the celebrated System but through the agency of the Michael Chekhov Technique: an acting paradigm for the future?

Notes

1. From *Art Meets Science and Spirituality in a Changing Economy* (Mystic Video, 1993).
2. Cf. Zola's *Experimental Novel* and Strindberg's treatise entitled *Vivisections.*
3. N = the Actor, A_1 = the artist's conception or idea, A_2 = the artist's execution. See Meyerhold, 1991, p. 198.
4. *Otkaz* is the Russian for 'refusal' and describes the preparation an actor makes before any actual action – crouching down before jumping or reaching back before throwing. *Posil* (the verb 'to send' in Russian) is the action itself. Sometimes known as the 'realization', the *posil* is the actual expression of what was suggested in the prologue, the jump or throw itself. *Tochka* marks the end-point of a cycle of action: the rest at the end of any movement – but one which always suggests a new start.
5. Cf. Box I, Dartington Archive.
6. Dartington Archive, 24 March 1937.
7. The lecture is only marked with a date (15 March) but it is boxed in Vol. VI in the Dartington Archive, which, according to du Prey's notes, contains writings from January to July 1939.
8. Details of this development and of Vasiliev's work are in my forthcoming *Science and the Stanislavsky Tradition of Acting* (Routledge, 2005).

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