

Katarzyna Osińska

Twentieth-Century Russian  
Theatre and Tradition  
Continuities,  
Ruptures,  
Transformations



MONOGRAPHS



Institute of Slavic Studies,  
Polish Academy of Sciences





Twentieth-Century Russian  
Theatre and Tradition  
Continuities,  
Ruptures,  
Transformations



Katarzyna Osińska

---

Twentieth-Century Russian  
Theatre and Tradition  
Continuities,  
Ruptures,  
Transformations

Translated by  
Paul Vickers



MONOGRAPHS



WARSAW 2017



Institute of Slavic Studies,  
Polish Academy of Sciences

Editorial review

*Dr hab. Joanna Walaszek, Assistance Professor, Jagiellonian University, Cracow  
& Dr hab. Juliusz Tyszk, Assistance Professor, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań*

Originally published in 2009 as *Teatr rosyjski XX wieku wobec tradycji (kontynuacje, zerwania, transformacje)*, Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria.

Praca naukowa finansowana w ramach programu Ministra Nauki i Szkolnictwa Wyższego pod nazwą „Narodowy Program Rozwoju Humanistyki” w latach 2014–2017.

This academic publication was financed within the “National Programme for the Development of Humanities” of the Minister of Science and Higher Education in 2014–2017.



**NATIONAL PROGRAMME  
FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF HUMANITIES**

ISS PAS MONOGRAPHS SERIES

Editorial supervision

*Jakub Ozimek*

Cover and title page design

*Barbara Grunwald-Hajdasz*

Editing

*Anna Meysztowicz*

Typesetting and page makeup

*Jerzy Michał Pieńkowski*

This is an Open Access book distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 PL License ([creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/pl/](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/pl/)), which permits redistribution, commercial and non commercial, provided that the book is properly cited.

© Copyright by Katarzyna Osińska

© Copyright for the English translation by Paul Vickers, 2017

**ISBN: 978-83-64031-66-3**

Instytut Sławistyki Polskiej Akademii Nauk  
ul. Bartoszewicza 1b lok. 17  
00-337 Warszawa  
tel./fax 22/ 826 76 88  
[sow@ispan.waw.pl](mailto:sow@ispan.waw.pl), [www.ispan.waw.pl](http://www.ispan.waw.pl)

# CONTENTS

|                                                                                                          |     |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| FOREWORD .....                                                                                           | 7   |
| 1. THE EVOLUTION OF STUDIO AND LABORATORY THEATRES<br>IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY .....                     | 13  |
| 1. Meyerhold – from Masterclasses to a Director’s Theatre ....                                           | 13  |
| 2. Proletkult Studios .....                                                                              | 25  |
| 3. The Twilight of the Studio Utopia .....                                                               | 34  |
| 4. Sovremennik, or a Return to the Sources .....                                                         | 40  |
| 5. The Rebirth of the Studios – 1970s .....                                                              | 44  |
| 6. Traces of Grotowski .....                                                                             | 47  |
| 7. Against Enthusiasm .....                                                                              | 51  |
| 8. “The Theatrical Brotherhood,” or the Petr Fomenko Workshop<br>Theatre .....                           | 54  |
| 9. From the Underground to the Tusovka .....                                                             | 64  |
| 2. THE AVANT-GARDE IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY SOVIET AND<br>RUSSIAN THEATRE .....                              | 73  |
| 1. The Aesthetic Avant-Garde and Theatrical Practice – Vsevolod<br>Meyerhold and Aleksandr Tairov .....  | 73  |
| 2. New Realism and the Socialist Avant-Garde .....                                                       | 95  |
| 3. Nikolay Okhlopkov – Socialist Realism or Academic Avant-<br>-Garde? .....                             | 108 |
| 4. The Taganka Theatre. David Borovsky: between Construc-<br>tivism and Reality .....                    | 116 |
| 5. The Myth of the Avant-Garde Artist – from Hooligan and Red<br>Army Soldier to Victim and Martyr ..... | 137 |
| 6. Meyerhold-Inspired Theatre Architecture .....                                                         | 145 |

|                                                                                                      |     |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 3. ECCENTRISM, BIOMECHANICS AND MIME (FROM THE CIRCUS TO DANCE) .....                                | 155 |
| 1. FEX and Eisenstein .....                                                                          | 155 |
| 2. Critiques of Eccentrism – the 1930s .....                                                         | 163 |
| 3. Eccentrism and Biomechanics in Acting – Yudif Glizer, Erast Garin, Igor Ilyinsky and Others ..... | 168 |
| 4. Biomechanics – Reconstruction or Transformation? .....                                            | 181 |
| 5. Tairov’s Hidden Line .....                                                                        | 189 |
| 6. Derevo, or Metaphysical Eccentrism .....                                                          | 197 |
| 4. THE BURDEN OF TRADITION, OR HOW TO STAGE CHEKHOV IN RUSSIA? .....                                 | 205 |
| 5. LEV DODIN – BETWEEN THE STUDIO AND A DIRECTOR’S THEATRE .....                                     | 235 |
| 1. Teachers. Legends .....                                                                           | 235 |
| 2. <i>Zachin</i> – Chronicle – Ikebana .....                                                         | 241 |
| 3. Home. Brothers and Sisters .....                                                                  | 245 |
| 4. The Soviet Epic .....                                                                             | 247 |
| 5. Eduard Kochergin – “a Wooden Metaphor of Russia” and the Truth of Mementos from the Past .....    | 250 |
| 6. Corporeal and Vocal Realism .....                                                                 | 253 |
| 7. Collective or Community? .....                                                                    | 258 |
| 8. <i>Life and Fate</i> – the Director and History .....                                             | 263 |
| 6. ANATOLY VASILEV – AN INNOVATOR IN DIALOGUE WITH TRADITION .....                                   | 269 |
| 1. Roots .....                                                                                       | 269 |
| 2. The Method – Origins. Collaboration with Anatoly Efros ....                                       | 278 |
| 3. School .....                                                                                      | 281 |
| 4. The Performance Space – Collaboration with Igor Popov ....                                        | 287 |
| 5. Rigours. Theatre as an Icon .....                                                                 | 290 |
| 6. The Art of Contradictions .....                                                                   | 295 |
| 7. Pushkin and the Tradition of Baroque Theatre .....                                                | 299 |
| 8. Self-Referentiality in the Architecture of the Theatre on Sretenka Street .....                   | 307 |
| 9. The Old as a Source of the New .....                                                              | 311 |
| CONCLUSION .....                                                                                     | 315 |
| LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS ALONG WITH THEIR SOURCES .....                                                 | 319 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY .....                                                                                   | 329 |

## FOREWORD

This book, originally published in Polish in 2009, was written during the first years of the twenty-first century. It also draws upon findings from research conducted in the 1990s. The thematically-focused chapters cover the period from the first years following the Revolution of 1917 (with a few forays into the pre-revolutionary past) to the early 2000s. There was never any intention of covering the very latest phenomena in theatre in this book, whose form demanded a retrospective approach. In over twenty years of direct encounters with Russian theatre culture, I have noted what I consider to be a typical trait, namely its tendency to make reference to tradition – either in search of continuity or in order to overcome it.

Russian theatre of the second half of the twentieth century confronted its own past as embodied in the achievements of Stanislavsky, Meyerhold, Vakhtangov and others. Theatre artists' declarations of an attachment to the legacy of the past effectively became the norm. In this book I investigate both the content of the legacy that had been appropriated – the ideas of theatre, specific techniques and methods, and also intangible aspects such as ethos or atmosphere, that formed an element of the experiments of the pioneers of twentieth-century theatre, particularly in its studio form – and also the way in which the transmission of tradition occurred. This could take the form of direct transmission from a master (or his or her students), it could also occur through readings, or through vicarious testimonies.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Jerzy Szacki's classic and still relevant 1971 work differentiates three concepts of tradition: 1) "practical" – when the focus is the practice of transmitting certain values of a collective from one generation to the next; 2) "objective" – when the focus is on establishing what those values are; 3) "subjective" – when the attitudes of a particular generation to the past and the extent of its acceptance or rejection of a particular heritage are explored. Following Szacki's terminology, thus, the first case is a matter of social transmission, the second of social legacy and the third, simply put, a matter of tradition. See Szacki 1971: 97–98.

Thus the questions guiding this book are: to what extent was Russian theatre culture of the second half of the twentieth century, on the one hand, influenced by the legacies of the past and, on the other, to what extent was innovation significant? Does broadly-conceived tradition have only an invigorating influence, or can it also function restrictively, particularly when a very strong tradition is in place? And finally, which elements of the legacies of the past were employed in the second half of the twentieth century, what was appropriated, what was rejected, and what was reborn in new forms? It is impossible to draw definite conclusions when dealing with such complex material and the crucial significance of this final question means that this book cannot consider in great depth artistic phenomena that were not continued into the post-war period (the work of Nikolay Evreinov, for example) or those in which renewed interest came later on and was of limited scope (such as the work of Mikhail Chekhov, on the one hand, and certain aspects of the early twentieth-century avant-garde, on the other).

In the post-Stalinist Soviet Union, when distrust of the officially-approved cultural heritage was rife, artists were unwilling to be passive recipients of that which was made available, and instead sought out those fragments of the past they were ready to identify with. This resulted in the return to Stanislavsky and the early Moscow Art Theatre, for example, and this typified the post-1956 period. The Stalinist period was overlooked. This was also the case with Anatoly Efros and Oleg Efremov, as well as the Sovremennik Theatre. Typical of the social life of this period, this mechanism of rejecting the recent past in favour of more distant periods, which were seen as a source of a pure, untainted ideal that could inspire the creation of new relations, was transferred to the field of theatrical experiments by the generation active in the 1960s (the so-called *shes-tidesyatniki*). The loss of trust in the recent past, which coincided with the period this generation spent in education in theatre schools, went hand-in-hand with the search for vital, pure sources located in the early twentieth-century tradition that was being rediscovered. We should be aware that artists always modify the traditions they appropriate. This happens with creative individuals, although the relations between what is original and what has been inherited must be explored separately in the case of each artist.

Another important question emerged as I wrote the book. It concerns the presence of the art of the past (and not only native traditions) in various trends in modernist art. Indeed, issues regarding cultural heritage concern not only traditionalist and conservative spheres based on authority, hierarchy and strict structures; the avant-garde, synonymous



with modernisation and transformation, also made reference to the past, albeit with the intention of overcoming it.<sup>2</sup>

Twentieth-century Russian theatre is a broad field, difficult to cover in a single monograph. Among the mass of phenomena this concept covers, I have selected not only those considered most important, but also lesser-known and less spectacular events that are nevertheless essential for understanding the changes affecting Russian culture in general and not only theatre. I was interested in exploring the extent of the evolution of certain ideas important to Russian theatre. The first chapter continues my research on studio and laboratory theatres, something I first explored in the book titled *Klasztory i laboratoria* (*Convents and Laboratories* [Osińska 2003]). I was interested in the evolution of studio theatres post 1917, and changes to the very idea of studio theatres. The second chapter here focuses on changes in the ideals of the avant-garde that occurred at the intersection of theatre and the visual arts. Theatre itself cannot be explored without considering broader artistic and cultural contexts. The issue of theatre architecture and design, together with its self-referentiality, comes into play here as I explore designs for theatre buildings that emerged from utopian avant-garde projects, since these are highly insightful sources with respect to directors' artistic programs. The following chapter explores less well-known phenomena nevertheless essential to some spheres of contemporary theatre, namely phenomena centred upon the physicality of non-psychological acting and also those trends in art remaining outside realist theatre traditions. Based on analyses of the Russian reception of twentieth-century productions of Chekhov, in Chapter Four I explore the issue of the legacy of the Moscow Art Theatre and Konstantin Stanislavsky. The book ends with two monographic case studies of contemporary directors belonging to the older generation of artists: Lev Dodin and Anatoly Vasilev. Almost the same age and known throughout the world, they nevertheless occupy distinct positions in the Russian theatre landscape and represent different approaches to tradition.

---

<sup>2</sup> This idea is constantly revived in works representing various fields of the humanities and diverse methodological orientations. In his analysis of the rules of art, where he makes reference to literature and the concept of the literary field, Pierre Bourdieu wrote:

"Paradoxically, the presence of the specific past is most visible of all among the avant-garde producers who are controlled by the past when it comes to their intention to surpass it, an intention itself linked to a state of the history of the field. The reason the field has a directed and cumulative history is because the very intention of *surpassing* which properly defines the avant-garde is itself the result of a whole history, and because it is inevitably situated in relation to what it aims to surpass [...]" [Bourdieu 1995: 242–243].

When I completed work on the book, it seemed that Russian theatre was entering a new era and that the generation of artists who had made their debuts or came to prominence after 2000 no longer sought to position itself so openly in relation to the past, meaning that the emergence of this generation is characterised by a liberation from “the burdens of the past.” Artists such as Evgeny Grishkovets, Kirill Serebrennikov, Ivan Vyrypaev, Konstantin Bogomolov, and also the group of dramatists representing the so-called “new drama” trend, such as the artists associated with *Teatr.doc* established by Elena Gremina and Mikhail Ugarov, as well as other youthful and ambitious theatres emerging not only in the traditional cultural metropolises of Moscow and St Petersburg, but also in cities once considered provincial – in Voronezh, Ekaterinburg, Perm and Novosibirsk among others – have brought many new ideas, phenomena previously unheard of in Russia, and a new aesthetic to Russian culture.

In the last few years, however – and not for the first time – theatre has become a site of pointed conflicts. Productions by artists such as Konstantin Bogomolov, Timofey Kulyabin and Kirill Serebrennikov, particularly since the latter took over the failing Moscow Gogol Theatre and converted it into the contemporary Gogol Centre, which is open to a wide and youthful audience – have met with angry responses from traditionalist spectators and critics alike (i.e. those looking to the past in search of true values). The arguments presented by the opponents of these and other directors belonging to the youngest and middle generations concern the repertory of plays selected for production, aesthetic issues (works subject to criticism are often accused of unprofessionalism), as well as the attitude of the theatre to the classics in general.

In disputes over contemporary productions of the classics, there are clear echoes of older discussions that had taken place in the Khrushchev era. Perhaps the term “discussions” is misplaced; what we saw over half a century ago were accusations of “deforming the classics,” with these resulting in mid-1960s productions by Anatoly Efros, Petr Fomenko and Mark Zakharov being withdrawn from Soviet stages. This marked the end of the Khrushchev “Thaw,” although the beginnings of the end were evident much earlier. It is thus easy to make analogies to the situation in Russia today, although such analogies are not necessarily accurate. In the Soviet era, productions were withdrawn on the direct orders of Party authorities, while it seems that such actions today come from below. The dividing lines are much more complex and difficult to define unequivocally. Participants in the debate are divided by their attitudes towards such fundamental aspects of culture as tradition, authority and the canon.

These issues were explored by the late cultural sociologist Boris Dubin, who died in 2014. In his books he stressed that in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Russia, the classics became synonymous with literature as such, with Dubin attributing the elevated status of national classics to Russia's late formation as a nation state, which meant that elites were a relatively new institution, while tradition formed later on. He analysed the mechanisms by which the potential interpretations of a text deemed a classic were restricted (with his analysis going beyond the question of the national canon), noting that, in contemporary society, despite greater differentiation than in the past of "social status and cultural perspectives within the institution of literature, images of the canon of classics as a normative unity of literary meanings and rules of interpretation, etc., remain intact" [Dubin 2010: 34]. Dubin linked the construction of the idea of the classics with the formation of the public education system, including universities and schools. "Authors who draw on classical models often refer to the authority of educational institutions and it is they who develop curriculums, educational programmes, anthologies and textbooks on literature" [Dubin 2010: 36]. The sociologist almost certainly returned to the issue of the authority of classics as a result of his observations of contemporary debates and conflicts over literature. His observations, however, were also able to provide inspiration for a book on Russian theatre of the past decade.

In this book I have used primarily Russian-language sources, including monographs and published collections of documents on the work of particular artists (descriptions of rehearsals and interviews), directors' own books, press reviews, essays and critical articles, while also, on occasion, comparing the sources with my own experiences. For many years now, I have been a regular visitor to Russia, where I have not only conducted research in local archives and libraries, but also watched many theatre productions. Many of these trips would never have been possible without the support of numerous institutions and individuals in Poland and Russia, including the Golden Mask Festival in Moscow and the Institute of Slavic Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences, where I am currently employed. I give my sincere thanks to all those to whom I owe my long-lasting, numerous and inspiring encounters with Russian theatre.

Warsaw, December 2015



# 1

## THE EVOLUTION OF STUDIO AND LABORATORY THEATRES IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

### 1. Meyerhold – from Masterclasses to a Director's Theatre

The first Russian studio theatre, the Povarskaya Studio, founded by Stanislavsky and Meyerhold in 1905, did not aim to “transform the old stage” (i.e. the Moscow Art Theatre), but instead sought to create “a **new** theatre for mystic drama,” as the press put it at the time. The creation of a new theatre required new methods and a new form of acting. And it was these aspects of experimentation, the search for new on-stage techniques and new acting methods, that came to dominate Meyerhold's activities both at the Povarskaya Studio and later at the Borodinskaya Studio. The experiments conducted there were to bring about a general transformation of contemporary theatre. This was also how Meyerhold himself summed up the significance of the Povarskaya Studio, as he outlined future prospects for anyone intending to follow in the footsteps of his pioneering workshop in 1908.

Freshly ploughed soil yields fresh juices. The people belonging to the new theatre will not be able to produce creative urges by building on the foundations of “grand theatres.” New ideas will be born in small organisms (“studios”) – from there the new people will emerge. Our experience thus far indicates that “the grand theatre” will never become an experimental theatre, while attempts to locate ready-made performances for a wide audience and theatre studios under one roof will always result in fiasco.

It is high time for studios to establish independent, autonomous existence; they should not be established by existing theatres but instead should carry out their activities separately. Studios will indeed become schools from which new theatres will emerge [Meyerhold 1968a: 171].

In this period of emerging new currents and theatre reform, Meyerhold juxtaposed “grand” and “experimental” theatres, classifying the Moscow Art Theatre, the Suvorinsky Theatre in St Petersburg, and also Korsh’s theatre and Nezlobin’s theatre, both in Moscow, among the former. The second group included the Starinny (Old) Theatre under the leadership of Evreinov and Drizen, and various stages for small forms, such as the House of Intermedia and the Crooked Mirror. He considered the Vera Komissarzhevskaya Theatre typical of unsuccessful attempts to combine the two contrasting tendencies of experimental theatre and productions for mass audiences, maintaining that this unfortunate combination was responsible for the premature demise of that theatre. At the same time, he praised Stanislavsky for founding his own laboratory outside the parent theatre, i.e. the First Studio of the Moscow Art Theatre. Meyerhold believed that the MAT was inevitably aging and the founding of the studio was the only way to conduct experiments.

In Meyerhold’s view, the purpose of founding studio theatres (or stages for small forms, such as the Crooked Mirror) was the generation of creative thrust, with new ideas put into effect through experimental and laboratory-based activities transforming large stages in the future. Before the Revolution, Meyerhold himself combined studio work (at the Borodinskaya Studio) at small theatres and stages for small forms in St Petersburg with his work as head director at two imperial theatres, the Aleksandrinsky and the Mariinsky. Undoubtedly, some of the discoveries tested out on the small stages were later applied in large-scale productions of the imperial theatres. The studio thus served as a creative laboratory: the findings from experiments and research conducted there supported the formation of new techniques and a new theatre aesthetic.

Meyerhold was critical of most repertory theatres, yet in a collection of his critical articles published together as *On Theatre*, he issued an appeal to avoid throwing the baby out with the bathwater. He noted that it could be dangerous to focus exclusively on creating studios while entirely dismissing “today’s theatre”: since, if “today’s theatre is not dying then it clearly has some lifeblood left in it” [Meyerhold 1968a: 171]. An experimenter by nature, Meyerhold never lost sight of theatre, although his interest ultimately lay with theatre for mass audiences.

Still, the artist was critical of the fragmentation of theatres merely following the tastes of particular groups of spectators. "And how was it at our theatre?" He wrote in 1909.

[...] The "cultural minority," grouped around journals such as *Mir iskusstva*, *Novyj put'* (later *Voprosy zhizhni* and *Fakiely*), never created masses, it did not create higher needs in the masses, thus we essentially have no theatre here in Russia, no contemporary theatre, which would be a theatre of refined taste or a theatre of deed or passion. The dramatist has no influence on the situation. It was the audience who started to make decisions and thus created its own theatre, or rather, created as many theatres as there are social groups. And when the theatre started to serve the audience, then the dramatist became a servant to his master. Contemporary drama, depending on what is required of it, either comprises dramas *à these*, psychological tripe, or social drama – aiming at either propaganda or agitation – or comedies [...], psychopathological studies in dramatic form or, last but not least, generic drama bordering on ethnography. We now have the kind of theatre demanded by those on the streets: gaudy and tasteless, just like signboards and posters [Meyerhold 1968a: 176–177].

This way of imagining theatre produced the dream of a theatre beyond divisions, a theatre independent of bourgeois tastes, a theatre shaped by the artist. When speaking of the "grand" theatre, Meyerhold had in mind not only the specific stages that are today called repertory theatres (where productions with large casts and several acts are performed), such as the MAT or the private Korsh and Nezlobin theatres, but also – and above all – a particular conception of the Theatre of the Future:

Contemporary theatre does not concern itself with a homogeneous audience but it has, instead, achieved the greatest degree of diversity. This theatre resembles a great machine, constructed over the ages, that has suddenly ceased to work and has been stripped of its parts, which have been sent to various places for repair. If our intuition does not fail us, then the time will come when this scattered theatre can once again become a complete whole! We must maintain the hope that in today's diversified theatres we will lay the foundations for a future Universal theatre<sup>1</sup> [...] [Meyerhold 1968a: 178].

The *Ediny Teatr*, or the Universal Theatre, was for Meyerhold a gigantic theatre serving the entire nation (*Obshchenarodny Teatr*). This project, born under the influence of symbolism and clearly referencing a vision

---

<sup>1</sup> Meyerhold uses the phrase "Universal theatre" (*Ediny Teatr*) here to mean a single, exclusive and unified theatre, while also suggesting the notion of it being general and common to all.

of “total theatre,” was not far removed from the theatre of the masses, an idea that happened to be realised during the revolutionary years. The “grand” theatre would thus serve here as a synonym for both theatre that was subordinate to the authority of the director, and also for mass theatre. It is worth remembering that Meyerhold’s project emerged from the zeitgeist as a reaction to the type of theatre that depicted the “minor dramas” of everyday life, which he considered a degradation of the intimate theatre of small forms. In order to realise his vision, Meyerhold required laboratory theatres where it would be possible to work on techniques and methods that could then be applied in developing productions suitable for mass audiences.

In the summer of 1918, Meyerhold presented a series of lectures to participants of the Instructors’ Courses, which the director himself had organised in Petrograd. This cycle was repeated in 1918/19 as part of the Masterclasses in Staging, i.e. the “Kurmastsep,” a name derived from *Kursy masterstva stsenicheskikh postanovok*. Meyerhold planned to publish the lectures, although they first appeared in print only in 2001 thanks to the efforts of the Research Commission on the Creative Legacy of Meyerhold at the Moscow Art Institute [Meyerhold 2001]. In spring 1918, before the Kurmastsep had been established, Meyerhold, together with his former collaborator Vladimir Solovyov, outlined a plan for an Experimental Theatre Institute where he planned to further develop the experiments conducted at the Borodinskaya Studio. A comparison of the project for the Institute with the programme of activities at the pre-revolutionary Studio [see Osińska 2003: 191–229 (chapter “Borodinskaya Studio”)] reveals continuities in the principles guiding actor training, with Meyerhold’s existing collaborators expected to lead sessions. The programme at the new Institute envisaged teaching in the following classes:

Group A:

Texture (material) group

Common subjects: 1) An introduction to the encyclopaedia of theatre (V. Meyerhold); 2) An overview of theatrical epochs (V. Solovyov); pro-seminar: the art of make-up and facial expression (V. Meyerhold and A. Golovin); 3) Music (N. A. Malko); 4) Drawing (A. Golovin and M. Zandin).

Specialist subjects: 1) Gymnastics; 2) Fencing; 3) Dance – with a focus on stage movement techniques; 4) Breathing and vocal arrangement exercises; 5) Expunging colloquial speech; 6) Singing.

Class on-stage movements while holding an object (training) – V. Meyerhold.

Auxiliary subjects: 1) History of theatre buildings; 2) History of music; 3) History of painting; 4) Anatomy.



PS: Seminars on subjects without lectures studied on the basis of a list of recommended textbooks: 1) *Commedia dell'arte*; 2) Oriental theatre; 3) Antique theatre; 4) 17th-century Spanish theatre; 5) The theatre of Shakespeare and his predecessors; 6) 17th- and 18th-century French comedy; 7) Vaudeville and 18th- and early 19th-century Russian comedy; 8) Goldoni-Gozzi; 9) Comedies of the theatre of the Middle Ages; 10) Fairground booth theatre.

#### Classes in form (creativity)

Common subjects: 1) Introduction to and analysis of lyrical rhythm (in relation to theatre); practical classes: learning one of the choirs from antique tragedy – Euripides and Aeschylus; fragments from Tirso de Molina (V. Pyast); 2) Theory of stage design (basic course); the concept of stage design, tempo, odd and even; tension in stage action; symbols of rejection, etc. (V. Solovyov).

Special course: 1) Play and “experience” – a history of contemporary theories of theatre and analysis of moves (*priyomy*) in play<sup>2</sup> (V. Meyerhold); 2) Speech improvisation, 3) Movement improvisation – towards experimental stage actions (V. Meyerhold and V. Solovyov).

Auxiliary subjects: 1) History of versification; 2) Theory of music (beginners level); 3) History of architecture [Meyerhold 2001: 203].

The Group B teaching programme concentrated on subjects from the history and theory of theatre, including the history of genres and lessons on style and structure. The general subjects also featured “a history of theatrical poetics (exploration of the architectonics of dramaturgy);

**Fig. 1.1.** Meyerhold circa 1923



<sup>2</sup> Meyerhold's terminology was clearly influenced by the contemporary developments in linguistics and literary theory; a *priyom* – or move or play – is one of the key concepts in the formalist school and was first used by Viktor Shklovsky in his 1917 article, “Iskusstvo kak priyom,” which has been translated into English as “Art as Technique” [Shklovsky 1997].

the theory of stage composition; the structure of works for the stage; a history of the art of *mise-en-scène*; [...] an introduction to stage styles (according to epoch, country and author)" [Meyerhold 2001: 203]. These lessons were aimed at directors, which was evident in the points of the programme referring to the practice of staging, for example, and in the statement declaring "the dependence of set design on the position of the stage and the entanglement of even and odd numbers of protagonists," as well as in the inclusion of lessons on "staging in the style of a particular epoch or painter." Ultimately, the programme also featured elements of an authorial character, including experiments led by Meyerhold: "mimeticism, at its lowest level – imitation deprived of creative idealisation, its higher aim – a mask, its deformation – comic, tragic, tragicomic grotesque" [Meyerhold 2001: 203], as well as a detailed course in the history of drama and theatre. It is worth noting that the section on the realist tradition in theatre ended with Stanislavsky.

The erudition and academic breadth of these plans indicated not only the extent of Meyerhold's horizon and research temperament, but also his place in an epoch he undoubtedly played a part in shaping. The artist's programme suited the trend of linking art and science, whereby art was ascribed objective, scientific foundations. After the Revolution, words previously reserved for the sphere of science increasingly entered the language of theatre. In Petrograd, aside from studios and schools (such as Leonid Vivien's School of Acting), there were also institutes (Vsevolod Vsevolodsky-Gerngross's Institute of the Living Word), as well as institutions featuring the word "experimental" in their names (Sergey Radlov's Experimental Stage or Vsevolod Vsevolodsky-Gerngross's Experimental Theatre). Meanwhile, the word "laboratory" debuted in theatre vocabulary.

The Instruction Courses, later followed by Kurmastsep, ultimately realised a more modest programme than initially planned. However, Meyerhold deemed participation in the courses supremely important. In his editor's notes to the published lectures, Oleg Feldman cited Meyerhold's statement that he continued to work in professional theatres in 1917/18, although it was with even greater conviction than ever before that he deemed this a compromise forced upon him: "I am agreeing to compromise, I am working in a contemporary theatre without giving up the rebellious work directed against this very form of theatre" [Meyerhold 2001: 13]. In 1919, the artist did not perform a single premiere. Between staging his first version of Mayakovsky's *Mystery-Bouffe* (with set design by Kazimir Malevich), on 7 November 1918, (performed on the first anniversary of the Revolution) and the premiere of Verhaeren's *Les Aubes*, which took place on the third anniversary of the Revolution

(1920) at Moscow's RSFSR-1 Theatre, Meyerhold was intensely engaged in pedagogical, experimental and managerial work. The performance of Ibsen's *Nora* in Novorossiysk revived previous versions of the show.

Reading the collection of lectures confirms both the great erudition of the director and also his anthropological temperament. Meyerhold was a precursor in the field known today as "theatre anthropology," which owes its solid academic foundations primarily to the work led and inspired by Eugenio Barba [see Barba, Savarese 2006]. In choosing Meyerhold as his artistic mentor, the creator of the *Odin Teatret* referred not only to the legend of Meyerhold the artist, as he described in the essay "Grandfathers and Orphans," but also to Meyerhold as the founder of a field of research [Barba 2003b].

Vsevolod Meyerhold roved freely around the art of the past, as well as many spaces of traditional cultures, drawing on examples from various disciplines in order to indicate the common sources of human behaviour and actions, with these subsequently providing the basis of acting studies. Let us take, for example, lecture number 13 from 23 August 1918, which was dedicated to the subject of the grotesque.<sup>3</sup> In working towards a definition of the grotesque, Meyerhold began with an illustration – miniatures taken from fourteenth- and fifteenth-century French manuscripts (which he showed students in the form of enlarged reproductions, as the transcript mentions). He did so in order to make his audience aware that the seed of the grotesque can be found in the connection between the human element and animal and plant aspects. Further on, Meyerhold cited a fragment of Yulia Slonimskaya's article,<sup>4</sup> (which was, in itself, a discussion of Joseph-François Lafitau's experiments) on the subject of the Iroquois who, having listened to a story about events in the past told by their chief, then imitated his actions through dance "with such vigour, as if they themselves had been present during those events," and did so without any preparation [Meyerhold 2001: 138]. Later the director touched upon other examples: he referred to the inhabitants of northern Kamchatka who, through dance, imitate wolves and man's encounter with the animal; the inhabitants of Africa reproducing the movement of the boa; the Aleut people who, through dance, communicate military

---

<sup>3</sup> The published version of this lecture was based on a transcription; see: Meyerhold 2001: 137–156.

<sup>4</sup> In her research, Yulia Leonidovna Slonimskaya (1887–1960) was primarily interested in the old French theatre and various forms of puppet theatre. She was the wife of the director Petr Pavlovich Sazonov. Both of them were inspired by the discoveries made by E. G. Craig and V. E. Meyerhold in creating marionette theatre works based on seventeenth-century French dramas. For more information, see Zolotnitsky 2004.

actions, hunting, or the smooth motions of a boat. Meyerhold also referenced a report by Louis Choris, an early nineteenth-century German traveller who came from Ukraine, which described the “mime” he had observed among the Aleut. Drawing on anthropogenesis, Meyerhold made the participants of the courses aware that:

at the moments in which theatre is born we can see a will toward placing man alongside the animal, removing any differences between them. Humans have the need to imitate the beautiful movements of animals and, in transforming themselves, seek to experience the emotions connected to such movements. Man does not want to resemble himself; instead he seeks to don a mask enabling him to overcome that which is human [Meyerhold 2001: 138].

It is in the observation of actions that precede emotions that the foundations of biomechanics can be found.

Meyerhold found another illustration of the grotesque in Jacques Callot’s drawings and E.T.A. Hoffmann’s 1814 text dedicated to the French artist, titled “Fantasy Pieces in the Manner of Callot.” A single thread led from Callot to Pieter Bruegel the Elder, Hans Holbein and, of course, to Goya, as well as to other painters, writers, poets and scholars. A more recent publication of this lecture supplemented the text with his notes from 1914 on the subject of the grotesque. One repeated motif is that of the mask, likewise the comic and tragic aspects of the grotesque. The reader is struck by the number of references and quotes, while part of the notes is drawn from an essay by the German art historian Karl Scheffler.

Meyerhold’s notes, the transcripts of his lectures, and his sketches in which he analyses phenomena from the history of literature, art and theatre in Italy, Britain, Spain, Japan and China, all confirm the opinion that he was an artist endowed with the skills of a researcher. We know that, before the Revolution, he had maintained close contacts with the academic world, both with professors from St Petersburg University – including Tadeusz Zieliński, historian of philosophy Ernest Radlov, literature and folklore expert Evgeny Anichkov, who conducted research on pagan and old Russian rituals, expert on Spain Dmitry Petrov, and historians of Russian literature Ilya Shlapkin and Vasily Sipovsky – as well as with a group of young scholars who went on to become founders of the Petersburg Formalist School, including Viktor Zhirmunsky. Either side of the Revolution, theatre experts including Evgeny (Eugene) Znosko-Borovsky, Vsevolod Vsevolodsky-Gerngross and Aleksey Gvozdev, gathered around Meyerhold. The director closely read research on the history of theatre (including works by Aleksey Vesolovsky and Vyacheslav Ivanov on antique theatre) and on ballet and theatre (studies by Andrey Levinson and Yulia Slonimskaya, for example),

using them as a source of information on staging and acting methods from previous eras. His abilities in this field were immense. In his introduction to the published collection of lectures, Oleg Feldman recalled an incident from the late 1950s. During lessons at the GITIS, Pavel Markov was asked who had been the best Russian theatre historian, to which he immediately responded, “Meyerhold, of course” [Meyerhold 2001: 15].

While drafting the statute of the Guild of the Masters of Staging in 1917, Meyerhold envisaged a place for theatre historians within it, although he stressed that he did not want to engage with drama historians but with researchers investigating previous epochs in theatre, who “together with the master directors and set designers, will be involved in work on productions by preparing the necessary materials” [Meyerhold 2001: 78].<sup>5</sup>

The idea of education and self-education was fundamental to Mey-

**Fig. 1.2.** Exercises in biomechanics, sketch by Vladimir Lyutse



erhold's activities, with the period at Kurmastsep seeing him stress the self-education aspect to a greater extent than at the Borodinskaya Studio. According to the memoirs of Aleksey Gripich (one of Meyerhold's collaborators from the Borodinskaya Studio days), Meyerhold became less reserved in relation to the participants of the courses and continued to exert a great influence on his students while engaging with them more directly [see Gripich 1967: 137–145 (sub-chapter on Kurmastsep)]. This was an indication of the status he had acquired just prior to the Revolution, a status that resulted from the fact that “he is neither a pedagogue nor an organiser, but rather a student, a member of the Studio. And since the techniques of the new theatre had yet to be discovered, he had no right to teach anything” [Meyerhold 2001: 19]. Yury Slonimsky, meanwhile, recalled the courses as resembling “a fraternity of apprentices”:

<sup>5</sup> It is also worth noting that, over the following years, Meyerhold often drew on researchers' knowledge, turning not only to historians but also to literary and theatre theorists. While working on *The Government Inspector* (1926), he invited Aleksandr Slonimsky, author of an essay on “Gogol's comic techniques” [A. Slonimsky 1923], to collaborate as a consultant.

Lectures were not the most important element of the course participants' activities. Instead, discussions dominated – conversations about performances, books, sketches, with teachers and students presenting their ideas and submitting them to the judgement of their peers, where both teachers and students participated as equals. Practical contributions to the cause were demanded from everyone. [...] “Tell us how to do it and do it with your own hands – through drawings, on a set, through models,” this is what Meyerhold repeated [Y. Slonimsky 1964: 23, cited in Meyerhold 2001: 19–20].

During the Kurmastsep period, Meyerhold's experiments concentrated on inventing a new theatricality, one most frequently described as “simplified” and “conventional.” Alongside the previously-accepted principles (for which the discoveries made by Edward Gordon Craig and also Georg Fuchs and Adolphe Appia, were of fundamental significance), new ones emerged. Meyerhold began speaking of constructivism (using the term *konstruktivnost'* or “constructiveness”) and “Tatlinism for the theatre,” thus underscoring the significance of Vladimir Tatlin's counter-reliefs.<sup>6</sup> The concept of biomechanics also appeared in his programme for the first time.<sup>7</sup> New ideas slowly began to drive out the old ones, following an evolutionary path rather than a principle of revolutionary rejection.

Gordon Craig has already entered the history of Russian theatre. [...] We have adopted a new classification. One that does not rely on a division of art into painting, sculpture and theatre, but one that is based on the division of art (painting, sculpture, architecture) and theatre, with theatre being a synthesis of many forms, not in Wagner's sense but rather according to a very specific definition [Meyerhold 2001: 116].

In underscoring the significance of professionalism and the actor's and director's craft, Meyerhold was aligning himself with the idea of theatre as a workshop or laboratory (the term *masterskaya* encompasses both meanings). Already in 1921, building on the foundations of Kurmastsep, the State Higher Directing Workshop, i.e. the famous GGYRM – which later became the GGYTM (Theatre Workshops)<sup>8</sup> – was founded. These trained not only Meyerhold's actors, including Maria Babanova, Igor Ilyinsky,

---

<sup>6</sup> In his lecture of 19 July 1918 – see Meyerhold 2001: 116. Meyerhold later returned to Tatlin's counter-reliefs on many occasions in his work although he never personally collaborated with Tatlin himself; see Rakitin 1992.

<sup>7</sup> Oleg Feldman refers to the lesson plan of the Kurmastsep from early 1919, which suggested that lessons in biomechanics were held regularly on Tuesdays by Dr V. K. Petrov. These lessons corresponded with the sessions on mime led by Meyerhold himself; see Meyerhold 2001: 20.

<sup>8</sup> In 1923 this became GEKTEMAS – *Gosudarstvennye eksperimentalnye teatralnye masterskie* (The State Experimental Theatre Workshops).

Vasily Zaychikov, Sergey Martinson and Zinaida Reich, but also many famous film artists, particularly directors, including Sergey Eisenstein, Ivan Pyryev, Nikolay Ekk and Grigory Roshal. Meyerhold's programme thus differed from the ideology of the Proletkult, which primarily stressed the importance of amateur activities. Whereas Proletkult activists saw the future of theatre in amateur work and in collective action and creativity, Meyerhold instead attached much significance to the profession of the director, who was considered the creator of a "stage composition." He was active in encouraging the establishment of legal protection for the right of directors to be recognised as the authors of productions.

**Fig. 1.3.** Sergey Eisenstein in the First Workers' Studio of the Proletkult, 1923



In 1917, two commissions were created whose aim was to achieve the legal recognition of the profession of directors as a separate creative sphere, with their works granted copyright protection. The first – known as the Moscow Commission – included, among others, Fyodor Komissarzhevsky and Aleksandr Tairov, and was tasked with developing a statute for the organisation known as the Association of Stage Artists. The members of the second commission, based in Petrograd, were Meyerhold, Nikolay Evreinov, Yury Rakitin, Nikolay Foregger, Yury Annenkov and Mikhail Babenchikov, and they were to explore the issue of securing copyright protection for directors' works. In order to meet this objective, they founded the Guild of Stage Artists. The authors of the Guild's statute, penned by Meyerhold, and later included in the published volume of lectures, attempted to produce a definition of the profession of director by listing all of the functions of a director in a theatre, thus providing justification for their recognition as the authors of a production. According to the commission,

the Master-Director<sup>9</sup> is as much the author of a production as the dramatist, the author of the play. He has complete freedom in interpreting the play, with his interpretation adopting, above all, a theatrical perspective; **he is a liberal interpreter of the text into the living language of a stage narrative** [Meyerhold 2001: 78].

The Petrograd commission also developed a draft resolution concerning the intellectual property rights of producers and set designers.<sup>10</sup> The authors of the draft referred to the legal precedents, including international conventions protecting the copyrights of creators of set models and set designers. As far as directors were concerned, no such legislation existed, and the commission preparing the resolution suggested implementing such a law, which led to them using the French term defining the producer's copyright: *droit de mise-en-scène*. In one of the points, the commission defined what would constitute the material basis of the "product" to be granted legal protection. The list comprised: the director's copy of the original literary exposition (including the interpretation of the play and its protagonists), an outline of the director's plan, notes concerning the movement of protagonists "in time and space," the musical score, notes on lighting and stage directions, which go deeper than those in the original play and instead provide an original "transcript" of them [Meyerhold 2001: 79]. Interestingly, the draft suggests appointing groups of experts and "agents" who, in larger cities, would be responsible for protecting the copyright of the directors (including collecting royalties from performances created by copying original directorial productions) [Meyerhold 2001: 79–80]. In the document's sixth and final point, two opinions on the legal status of directors' work were discussed (whether or not it should be granted copyright protection). The authors of the draft resolution, who defined themselves as "a left-wing group of directors and set designers of leftist directions in the art of theatre" [Meyerhold 2001: 80], came out in favour of the former opinion, whose supporters included German attorney Heinrich Dernburg, thus recognising the work of the director in copyright law.

---

<sup>9</sup> Meyerhold differentiated the "master-director" and the "copyist-director," with the latter reproducing, with the master's permission, another person's compositions for the stage. Meyerhold thus had a strict definition of what made a director a "master" as the creator of a work. This differentiation left its mark on Russian theatre, where a clear division remains visible between the director as a producer (*postanovshchik*) and the plain director (*rezhissyor*). The latter is more than just an assistant to the director, but has the right to be declared the creator and author of a work as the exclusive privilege of the director-producer.

<sup>10</sup> This draft has been reproduced in full, having been found in Meyerhold's archive, see Meyerhold 2001: 79–80.



In the battle to secure protection for directors' work, a new concept of theatre was born, as it came to be considered the domain of the creator of the staging. The director's right to be recognised as the author of a production was considered even greater than that of the dramatist's copyright over his own work. From this point onwards, this form of theatre came to play an ever greater role, with the director considered as the creator of the performance. Such a concept of theatre then appeared throughout the twentieth century, bearing the name of the "director's theatre." It is necessary to remember, however, that the concept of a "director's theatre" does not, and should not, mean that the director has the right to treat the text of a play (if it forms the basis of a production) in a concocted manner.

Meyerhold's battle for the recognition of the specificity of the director's profession, and ensuring that this sphere of creative work was granted copyright protection, suggests that Meyerhold not only distanced himself from ideas of "collective" work in theatre, but also that his experiments conducted during the instructors' courses and workshops – as an equivalent of the pre-revolutionary studios, particularly the Borodinskaya – served the purpose of building a director's theatre, which would be aimed at a new and diverse mass audience. Such theatre was to transcend divisions, acquiring nationwide and universal status. Either side of the Revolution, then, Meyerhold consistently supported the view that studios – theatre laboratories and their post-revolutionary equivalents – courses and workshops – were essential to the creation of the creative impulse that gave rise to the "grand" theatre, the universal theatre. And without these small establishments, experimental theatre would be condemned to reproducing itself, thus facing artistic decay.

## 2. Proletkult Studios

Proletkult is not only the name of "proletarian cultural-educational organisations" that had been established already before the October Revolution (the first all-Russian congress of Proletkult organisations was held on 15–19 September 1917). It was also an ideological system whose most influential representatives were Aleksandr Bogdanov, Anatoly Lunacharsky, Valerian Pletnev and Platon Kerzhentsev. They were the leading ideologists of the cultural revolution. Put simply, Proletkult aimed to develop a new, autonomous proletarian culture that was to be, as far as possible, free of the cultural legacies of the past, whilst simultaneously meeting its objective of educating the new class through active

participation in the Proletkult's work. The ideology of the Proletkult granted unprecedented recognition of the proletariat and, from its perspective, workers – above all those representing large industrial plants – became not only recipients of the new culture, but also its subjects.

The ideal of proletarian theatre<sup>11</sup> was primarily aimed at making workers more active in the sphere of creating culture. Rejecting the art of the past as alien in class terms was part of the set slogans that Proletkult activists (although not all, since it was an organisation encompassing people holding a variety of views) gladly paraded. However, this postulate was not the whole story. This tendency to negate the past gathered strength when it became clear, following the revolution, that workers did not avoid the “temples” of the old culture but, quite the opposite in fact, were happy to frequent them. Radical Proletkult activists were disoriented by the fact that proletarian audiences attached greater value to traditional bourgeois theatre than to revolutionary art. In 1922, the volume *O teatre (On Theatre)* was published, whose authors – Proletkult supporters and activists – passionately criticised the legacies of bourgeois art, a category which included not only specific authors and works, but also general concepts, such as the notion of beauty. Valentin Tikhonovich (Proletkult activist, director and critic) made no effort to conceal his anger at the mocking of sceptics, who, in response to the concept of “proletarian theatre,” would say:

But are you aware that the proletarians are flooding the shrines of old art, those various Grand, Small, Artistic and other academic and NEP theatres? [...] But are you aware that in the laboratories of proletarian art, in the artistic studios of Proletkult, methods and principles are applied regularly which were already well-known before anyone had even started thinking about Proletkult? [Tikhonovich 1922: 88].

Tikhonovich's views echoed those of Platon Kerzhentsev and Emmanuil Beskin, among others. They can be summarised thus: at a time of great historical change, which relies upon giving voice to classes previously marginalised from the life of society, it is necessary for a new art form to come into being, one that satisfies the needs of the working class, one which is not only art for the masses but also an expression of the spirit of collectivism. Hence the rejection of “bourgeois” art, which paid homage to individualism. This was also the source of the objection to apolitical art, as well as the inspiration behind the negation of “eternal” and uni-

---

<sup>11</sup> For more on this subject in Polish, see Zołotnicki 1980 (Russian original: Zolotnitsky 1976); Tasarski 1970. In English, see: Robert Leach, *Revolutionary Theater*, especially on the “Dawns of the Proletkult” [Leach 1994: 69–81].

versal values, since these were deemed irrelevant to the needs of the new audiences in this specific historical and social situation.

The set of slogans promoted by Proletkult over time transformed into stereotypes, which served the common understanding not only of the Bolsheviks' cultural policy, but also of the entire communist ideology. Part of the Proletkult's postulates, particularly those concerning issues of comprehensibility, accessibility and art for the masses, an uneducated audience, was adopted as the doctrine of socialist realism. However, such superficial understandings of the phenomenon overlook certain matters concerned primarily with the overriding idea of granting subject status to the masses.

This issue divided Proletkult and Lenin, who was critical of the organisation, with its activities gradually restricted from 1922. The last remaining theatres with a Proletkult heritage were closed in 1932, on the basis of a decree on the reform of literary and cultural organisations. Already in 1919, however, i.e. in the period when Proletkult played the leading role in creating the mass proletarian theatre movement, Lenin attacked its activists, declaring that they primarily came from the bourgeois intelligentsia

who very often regarded the new type of workers' and peasants' educational institution as the most convenient field for testing their individual theories in philosophy and culture, and in which, very often, the most absurd ideas were hailed as something new, and the supernatural and incongruous were offered as purely proletarian art and proletarian culture [Lenin 2002].

It should be added here that Lenin recognised the danger inherent in not only the influence of Bogdanov's philosophy or the successors of the symbolists, but also in avant-garde artists – to him they all represented idealistic views alien to the proletariat.

Lenin's criticism of the Proletkult had its origins in his conflict with Bogdanov in the years preceding the Revolution. Andrzej Walicki has presented the history of this conflict in his book on communist utopia [Walicki 1995: 311–317]. The essence of this polemic can be reduced to the following: Lenin completely rejected Bogdanov's empirio-criticism, which was based on the conviction that truth is merely “the organising form of human experience” [Walicki 1995: 314]. Such an approach to the truth must, in Lenin's view, lead to the blurring of the boundaries between materialism and idealism, between science and religion. Lenin already then (i.e. while writing *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* in 1909) defended the concept of objective truth, while also critiquing all forms of historico-sociological relativism. One result of this attitude

was the recognition of materialism as the sole scientific theory, of which the Party was a manifestation.

Lenin's position did not align with the great project of granting subject status to the proletariat and guaranteeing it the chance of self-realisation in the sphere of art, among others. In his view, the self-realisation of subjects was meant to be possible only through the Bolshevik Party. Following the Revolution, Lenin reached the conclusion that "cultural and scientific activities cannot be an aim in themselves but must be directly subordinated to politics" [Walicki 1995: 319], with politics identical to the Party's programme. Lenin thus contrasted the class principle with the party principle: science, literature and art were rendered dependent on the Party. Lenin feared the emergence of separatism in the Proletkult organisations and losing control over them, hence the attack.

However, during its initial period, the ideas of the Proletkult enjoyed a great reach and spread beyond the organisation itself. Its activities were to serve propaganda purposes and underscore the achievements of the Revolution, above all the new social order and new materialist ideology. Already in 1919 around 100 local Proletkult cells were active, while sources varyingly suggest that in 1920 between 80,000 and 400,000 participants were active in the circles. It conducted a broad spectrum of activities within the sphere of publishing and issuing journals (including, for example, *Proletarskaya Kultura*, *Gradushchee* and *Gorn* among its 200 or so titles) and books, largely volumes of proletarian poetry and prose. In terms of theatre, already by spring 1918 one central and thirteen district Proletkult studios had been established in Moscow. They spread like wildfire and not just in the two capitals. In Tambov, for example, which was taken by the Bolshevik authorities in January 1918, Proletkult was established in August of that year, whilst by December some 300 people were working in the drama studio [see Bogemskaya, Solntseva (eds.) 2000: 72].

The creator of the ideological foundations of the Proletkult theatre was Platon Kerzhentsev.<sup>12</sup> His books, *Tvorchesky teatr* (*Creative Theatre*) and *Revolutsiya i teatr* (*Revolution and Theatre*), both published in 1918, promoted the idea of rejecting the entire tradition of professional theatre, and instead granted the highest status to the amateur movement and collective creative work. The studio was to provide the foundations for

---

<sup>12</sup> Also known as V. Kerzhentsev and P. Kerzhentsev, these were all pseudonyms for Platon Mikhaylovich Lebedev, the same man who, in 1937, published under the name of P. Kerzhentsev an article titled "Alien Theatre" [P. Kerzhentsev 1937, cited after Shulpin 2000: 72], which was an attack on Meyerhold. This was a crucial text in the campaign against the artist.

the development of amateur, proletarian creativity, serving as a “laboratory where, often in artificial conditions, experiments are conducted to produce new achievements in the sphere of culture” [V. Kerzhentsev 1919: 26, cited after Rumyantsev, Shulpin 2000: 25]. The pre-revolutionary idea of the studio, developed within the realm of the Moscow Art Theatre, was thus appropriated by the mass Proletkult movement. Kerzhentsev, however, who was also an economist propagating the principle of transferring experience gathered in industry to the sphere of culture, soon began to distance himself from the project of further promoting the studios. He believed that they created overly artificial conditions for artists, which resulted in their isolation from the masses. By February 1919, he was already writing that

our artists are still not completely immersed in the tasks that the current moment demands of them as they continue to close themselves off in their studios, continuing their previous individualistic existence, separated from the lives and interests of the working masses [cited in Tolstoy (ed.) 1984: 84 (doc. 21)].

In this article titled *Upryok khudozhnikam* (*I Accuse the Artists* [V. Kerzhentsev 1918, cited after Rumyantsev, Shulpin 2000: 25]), Kerzhentsev primarily criticised the avant-garde artists who participated in mass campaigns of decorating cities, accusing them of realising their own ambitions and aesthetic visions instead of adapting to the expectations of the proletariat. In 1920, however, Kerzhentsev clearly distanced himself from the Proletkult, claiming that a new culture was being created not only within this organisation but also throughout the entire new reality [see Rumyantsev, Shulpin 2000: 57].

In the meantime, the name “studio” nevertheless stuck to Proletkult, hence the large number of various Proletkult studios that were engaged not only in creating proletarian art (not just theatre but also literature, music and visual arts, etc.), but in educational activities as well, thus disseminating the old culture, which was a contradiction of the basic principles of the organisation’s ideologues. This aspect of the work of the Proletkult studios, however, met with the approval of the Bolshevik Party. Nadezhda Krupskaya wrote that

Proletkult has set out on the right path; it is necessary to open up the path to art to workers. It is necessary to give them the chance to master the techniques of music, theatre, visual art and other forms, without which it is impossible to create works of art. However, it is not enough to master the old techniques; it is necessary to put this through the fires of proletarian thought [...] and it is for this reason that the Proletkult studios are necessary, many good studios which would create conditions enabling the proletariat to master the rationale of creative work and a conscious [...] attitude to art [Krupskaya 1959: 141–142, cited in Bogemskaya, Solntseva (eds.) 2000: 25].

In practice, therefore, the majority of Proletkult studios conducted educational activities within a multi-stage system, ranging from small circles through district studios, to the central level. In Moscow, for example, studio theatres hosted lessons in the following subjects: stage exercises, declamation (at non-advanced levels), voice projection, aesthetics of movement, characterisation and visual arts, the history of theatre (*sic!*), and socio-political issues. On average, students spent around 24 hours per week in lessons. Traditional pedagogical methods were applied that had been tried and tested in both professional and folk creative works. Consequently, the curriculum envisaged active participation in various types of concerts, propaganda performances and ceremonies [Krupskaya 1959, cited in Bogemskaya, Solntseva (eds.) 2000: 26].

It was primarily non-professional artists, who distanced themselves from tradition, who were intended to participate in the creation of the new theatre. This idea, however, proved to be just another of the many utopias circulating at the time. The theoretical foundations of amateur art can be found in journals featuring supporters of so-called constructive amateurism: Adrian Piotrovsky, Aleksey Gvozdev, Grigory Avlov, and others. They made a fundamental differentiation between two lines of development of amateur theatre. The first, which had its origins in the pre-war period, relied on adapting the achievements of professional theatre to the needs of amateurs. The second line, meanwhile, was new, constructive amateur theatre, which served the objectives of the political battle of the working class by searching for new forms and media.

Adrian Piotrovsky, who dedicated the greatest amount of attention to the issue of amateur art (he wrote several dozen articles on the subject, including some theoretical texts),<sup>13</sup> disrupted this bifurcation, dividing amateur art instead into three types: the constructive type – original works which themselves create tradition; the derivative or receptive type – an imitation of professional theatre; and finally, the rudimentary type – one which recreated forgotten traditions. Piotrovsky believed that the revolution had created conditions enabling the development of a new and original amateur art (the constructive type), which would not only support the activation of workers, soldiers or peasants, thus not only enabling them to develop in cultural terms, not only training them and granting them cultural entertainment, but principally enabling the genuine transformation of workers and peasants into new people, consciously carrying out the tasks demanded by the revolution.

---

<sup>13</sup> See, e.g., Piotrovsky 1926. For a more in-depth perspective on the views and artistic biography of Piotrovsky, see Osińska 1997c.

This supra-artistic status of theatre circles, where the metamorphosis of the participants of the activities would take place, was to serve the realisation of the idea of the “man of the future,” “the new man,” i.e. someone voluntarily sacrificing his individual needs, his personal freedom on the altar of collective needs and interests. This transformation of a collection of individuals into a collectivity was to be carried out in theatrical circles, whose aim was no longer merely theatre: “it is not art, but existence; it is a path towards making festivity a manifestation of transformed being” [Piotrovsky 1925: 26].

In practice, however, many Proletkult studios reproduced old, traditional models. In 1920, Nikolay Lvov wrote with brutal honesty that

proletarian theatre, in the majority of cases, does not in any way create a new type of theatre but merely imitates the clichés of professional theatre. All the amateur circles of the Red Army, both the worker and peasant ones, stage an immeasurable number of performances of Chekhov and Ostrovsky, Sofia Belaya, and various other vaudeville nonsense. Such is the ideology of the working masses! [Lvov 1920: 53, cited in Zolotnitsky 1976: 292].

On the other hand, at the Petrograd Proletkult Studio – which was run by proletarian writer Pavel Bessalko, alongside Aleksandr Mgebrov and Viktoria Chekan, professional actors who worked with Meyerhold among others – reference was made to the symbolist aesthetic which, in juxtaposition with Bolshevik ideology, created an astonishing effect that today would be considered parody. “The worker, against a background of flashes symbolising the sun and the circle of life, preaches bravery, battle and victory.” This was how Bożena Witwicka described the staging of Aleksey Gastev’s epic poem [Vitvitskaya 1918, cited in Zolotnitsky 1976: 300]. Alongside contemporary works by the likes of Gastev and Vasily Ignatov, this studio presented poetic montages based on texts by Percy Shelley and Walt Whitman, whose volume *Leaves of Grass* was particularly popular among Proletkult theatre artists. There were also plenty of performances by Romain Rolland and Émile Verhaeren, particularly the latter’s *Les Aubes*, which had been staged not only by Meyerhold, but also by Valentin Smyshlyaev, a former actor of the First Studio of the MAT, who produced it at the Central Studio of the Moscow Proletkult. David Zolotnitsky, author of many essays on the subject of the revolutionary-era theatre, including an extensive chapter in the book *The Dawn of the Theatrical October* on Proletkult studio theatres, rightly draws attention to significant aesthetic and ideological differentiation within the organisation. It is thus necessary to consider that, while Proletkult activists rejected contact with the avant-garde, there were artists within the Proletkult framework with avant-

garde backgrounds, including Sergei Eisenstein, who staged *The Mexican*, adapted from Jack London's text, together with Valentin Smyshlyaev, in 1921 at the Proletkult Central Arena, while in 1923 they presented *Mudriec (The Sage)*, based on Ostrovsky's comedy *Enough Stupidity in Every Wise Man* at the Proletkult First Workers' Theatre.<sup>14</sup> Others with avant-garde backgrounds included directors Naum Loyter and Smyshlyaev, actors Yudif Glizer, Maksim Strauch, etc. It is indeed performances by such artists that are remembered today, and that generate the artistic standing enjoyed by the movement, all of which does not, of course, mean that Eisenstein and Smyshlyaev should be identified with Proletkult ideology (even if they were formally members of the organisation).<sup>15</sup>

The ideological rejection of professional theatre had various consequences. For example, the rejection of the "fetish," as it was put, of author's rights, meant that reworking classic dramas in such a way that they became expressions of the new ideology was not only permissible but indeed encouraged. But what was desired even more strongly were productions of new dramas, ideally written by amateurs, i.e. workers. The press of 1918–1920 listed between 700 and 800 plays, around half of which had been published as pamphlets with low print runs [Tamashin 1961]. This was thus an undeniably mass phenomenon. Theatres and dramatic circles demanded a new repertoire. In order to satisfy this demand, TEO *Narkomprosa* (the Theatre Department of the People's Education Commissariat) issued lists of recommended texts. Furthermore, a special TEO cell was created – the Communist Drama Workshop (*Mastkomdrama*), which was responsible for the collective creation of new texts and the reworking of classics, thus adapting them to new needs, while also providing assistance to amateur authors.

---

<sup>14</sup> Sergey Eisenstein was also a member of the theatre council of the Central Proletkult Arena where he prepared, among other things, a director's outline of Leonid Andreev's drama *Tsar-Golod (Tsar Hunger)*. For more on Eisenstein's artistic work in the Proletkult, see Shklovsky 1973.

<sup>15</sup> In an interesting comparative study of two films, Eisenstein's *October* and Vsevolod Pudovkin's *End of St. Petersburg*, Joanna Wojnicka claims that "the avant-garde principles" that Eisenstein proclaimed were "partially identical" to the concept of proletarian culture and its principles as outlined by "its propagator Aleksandr Bogdanov." However, even if the influence of the philosophy of the creator of the notion of "tectology" is evident in Eisenstein's ideas on art, there are nevertheless essential differences between the avant-garde and the ideology of the Proletkult. There was a clear dividing line between the Proletkult ideologues and avant-garde artists, with this just being one of the divisions among the broadly conceived political left. It could be argued that works such as Eisenstein's *The Sage* were marginal to the activities of the Proletkult, which promoted amateur work accessible to mass audiences. See Wojnicka 2008.



The idea of an art that rejected the traditions of professional theatre could not but influence the relations between actors and directors, as well as the very conception of acting. By assuming that “specialisation” within the realm of art was a result of the celebration of individualism in the bourgeois approach to labour, Proletkult theoreticians contrasted works emerging from collective activities with the art of specialists such as the director, composer, stage designer and actors. The promotion of the ideal of collective art meant directors were subject to particularly strong criticism, being depicted as representatives of the old autocratic system.

The chief creators in contemporary theatre are the director and the actors, this is the live material. It must be so if the director wishes to realise his idea since each and every actor is concerned only with himself. And the director’s autocracy is the only means of creating a dramatic whole from this mass of anarchistic desires [Tikhonovich 1922: 94].

He went on, adding that

in the proletarian theatre this situation is changing radically. Collectivist psychology and the universalisation of labour are giving rise to other developmental tendencies in theatre: from the dictator-director to the specialist and pedagogue and actors – as living machines serving a creative collective of actors and the director as an expression and executor of the artistic will and ideals of this team [Tikhonovich 1922: 94].

Oskar Blyum’s critique of the director’s theatre followed a similar vein as it drew on historical material (beginning with a description of the pre-directorial period in the theatre where actors ruled, before moving onto the period beginning in the 1880s, as the role of the director-autocrat grew). In his view, contemporary theatre was edging away from directorial violence.

The role of the director [in the future – K.O.] will not depend on him giving expression on stage to his historical erudition, demonstrating the skills of the set designers serving him, or showing off by taking the opportunity to use expensive materials or surprising people with the training of his extras. Instead he will have to assume the same position in relation to his actors as is assumed by the author in relation to the theatre as a whole. He will give actors only the foundations of actions, general directions on execution. And again the actor will breathe real life into the theatre performance. But this will no longer be as a heroic individual, but as a representative of the historically significant masses of the world [Blyum 1922: 133].

The actor thus became the chief expression of the ideal of mass theatre and collective theatre. And this was no longer an actor steered by the director but the independent actor, an actor who performed deeds, the actor-improviser:

The actor as a mere vehicle of an author's text gives way to an actor who is capable of becoming an author himself, i.e. becoming an *improviser*. The actor as a puppet in the hands of the director will give way to the actor-*creator*, a participant in the integral whole on stage. Instead of an actor specialising in speech (drama), gesture (mime), singing (opera), dance (ballet), the *synthetic* actor will appear, one capable of fully-fledged action [Tikhonovich 1922: 94].

Proletkult ideologues, activists and artists were opposed to a cosy, intimate, psychological theatre, one dependent upon contact with a specific, individual audience member. They contrasted this with

mass theatre, monumental theatre, accessible and close to the masses, one that could be heard and seen in vast spaces. No longer a theatre of small, personal experiences, but one of great collective deeds, of explicit and simple passions, common and clear aims, panoramic and sharp images, powerful and condensed actions [Tikhonovich 1922: 94].

Formulated in this way, the programme seems close to Meyerhold's idea of a Universal theatre, with the difference being that Meyerhold perceived himself as the sole creator of a performance. He sought to give artistic form to his productions, imposing his own interpretation of a literary work and his own dramatic vision. Thus, while Proletkult studios forged a project for a theatre dedicated to the masses and (to a certain extent) created by the masses, it was in fact in the laboratories, courses and workshops led by Meyerhold, that the seeds of directorial theatre could be found.

### 3. The Twilight of the Studio Utopia

Stanislavsky's system, the development of which laid the ground for the First Studio of the MAT, was intended to support the empowerment of actors and, in effect, the formation of a bond between the actor and audience. By removing his mask and revealing himself in an act of sincerity, the actor was to serve the revelation of the truth of the human experience, through which he was to connect with each spectator individually. It was in the studios that the utopia of the "personal spectator" was born, with the ideal audience member imagined as one endowed with sensibilities enabling the deep, personal reception of the performance.

During the initial period of the activities of the First Studio of the MAT (as was also the case with Vakhtangov's Studio), the essence of studio-based work was contained within the work process itself, i.e. in rehearsals and experiments on the organic nature of actors. In such studios, the focus on this process was closely linked to the way in which studio work

was treated as an activity supporting the development of the actor as a human being. This aspect of the studios emerged from the conviction that the artistic process also possessed an ethical dimension. Leopold Sulerzhitsky, the patron of this model of studio theatre, worked according to the principle that art possesses the power to transform the person morally and spiritually on the individual plane, whilst also being capable of transforming relations between people, and indeed having a duty to do so. The concept of *soobshchestvo edinomyshlennikov* (a union of likeminded people) that he introduced to the language of theatre was to encompass spectators, too, to a certain degree. It was not a matter of expressing identical views or sharing the same tastes, but rather a question of developing the principles of co-existence that take into account difference and the needs of the individual. Such an understanding of the principle of community proved incompatible with the project of collective theatre.

**Fig. 1.4.** The First Studio of the MAT. Left to right: Sofia Giatsintova, Konstantin Stanislavsky, Mikhail Chekhov, Grigory Khmara, Lidia Deykun, Serafima Birman, Anna Popova, Ryszard Boleslawski; seated on the floor are: Boris Shushkevich and Sergey Khachaturov



In the studios, fragments, studies, public rehearsals and scenes that could be presented at demonstrations all acquired autonomous value. With time, however, one outcome of this internal work was full-scale productions, meaning that the studio transformed into a theatre or, more precisely, a small studio-type theatre. The author of a review of one of the early performances of the First Studio of the MAT, a version of Gerhard Hauptmann's *The Reconciliation* directed by Vakhtangov, outlined the most significant traits of this emerging phenomenon:

A state-owned building opposite the Skobelev monument, with a tailor's sign by the gate and just next to it a small sign bearing the word "Studio."

There is no crowd by the entrance, there are no carters – that is because there is a capacity of 160. This is no grand auditorium, only a large room, with a "raised" floor in the style of an amphitheatre. There are no footlights,

or even a clear division between stage and audience. When the grey tarpaulin curtain opened, it turned out that we were sharing a single room with the actors. Should the actor take another step, he would find himself right beside me; should I take a step, then I would be next to him.

And almost no props.

Three walls and a ceiling of bare, grey tarpaulin. Two sets of doors, a snow-covered window, an iron heater, an ottoman couch, a table and several chairs. Above the door and window some deer antlers. A lamp. And that is about it. Only the essentials. The youth company of the Art Theatre is performing – it is the first ticketed performance [...].

The curtain opened.

I am not sure, but perhaps this is not art. [...]

Art is aesthetics, refinement; art is always something artificial, the effect is important, the pose, it is always something feigned.

But here... [...]

I repeat: I am not sure if this is art. But what I do know for sure is that for many, many years now I have not encountered anything that could compare to what I experienced at the Studio yesterday.

Fifteen years ago in Moscow the premiere of an amateur performance took place, which captivated audiences with its freshness and unusualness. That was the birth of the Art Theatre. Yesterday, in this small space, the young members, students and apprentices kept audiences in suspense for three whole acts in a manner that wonderful, trained actors can only manage for fleeting moments, at most [Yablonovsky 1913, cited after Vendrovskaya, Kaptereva (eds.) 1984: 126–127].

In the First Studio of the MAT, a model of theatre was born which inspired imitators, followers and inheritors throughout the twentieth century. This concerns not only its external attributes, such as the small performance space, the absence of footlights, and the poverty of stage decoration. At the First Studio, the search for the organic nature of the actor was accompanied by the strive to ensure that the spectator experienced reality in as direct a manner as possible. Thus it was not by chance that small spaces were used; this was an essential element in the generation of a reciprocal reaction between the actor and spectator. The tension that emerged was to encompass each spectator individually: the director did not control the audience's reaction through the media of *mise-en-scène*, but instead focused on leading actors in such a way that their emotions generated a response from the spectator. This "expulsion of theatre from the theatre," which Vakhtangov had proposed during the first years of his work, ensures that the spectator could, to a greater extent than had previously been possible, identify through the actor with the protagonist on stage and – through that character – come closer to his or her own identity and enjoy self-discovery.

Before the Revolution, the studios had constituted but a small patch of the theatre landscapes of Moscow or St Petersburg (the MAT also had its Second Studio, which was envisaged as a form of acting school and merged with the main theatre in 1924), but following it, an unprecedented growth in the number of such theatres occurred. In the first post-revolutionary season of 1918/19, 95 studios of various types were registered. In the following years, through to the mid-1920s, their number grew exponentially. Various drama, music and ballet studios (including the then-fashionable rhythmic gymnastics of Émile Jaques-Dalcroze) all sprang up, including studios founded by imitators of Isadora Duncan, as well as studios of ethnic and national groups (Jewish and Armenian, for example), satirical studios, etc. Some were amateur groups, but these were largely organised by professionals.

At the same time, the studios evolved and transformed into theatres. With a few exceptions, the focus on the creative process faded and instead the objective became the speedy preparation of productions and presenting them to audiences. Since these studios were an expression of the utopia of the new man, they also sought to engage with broad, indeed even inexperienced, audiences. A good example of this was the Fourth Studio of the MAT, founded in 1918 by Art Theatre actors Georgy Burdzhakov, Vasily Luzhsky and Iosif Raevsky. The Fourth Studio comprised two groups: firstly, the regional MAT group performing at people's cultural centres and workers' clubs in Moscow and the surrounding area and, secondly, a group of fifteen participants of the Central Studio of the Moscow Proletkult, who were co-opted into the main company [Mironova 1983: 17]. This studio proclaimed that it had "taken the path leading to the creation of a contemporary, socially-relevant theatre," aiming to "bring the dramatic arts to the masses, making them understandable and familiar," whilst assuming that the only way to achieve these objectives was to apply a method of "healthy realism based on the principles of simplicity and truth in art; a realism endowed with content that was deep both in terms of acting methods and in terms of the internal structure of performances" [*Moskovsky gosudarstvenny teatr* 1926: 11–12, cited in Mironova 1983: 17].

This small manifesto published in 1926 points to the causes of the exhaustion of studio-type work. Firstly, as far as questions of the reception of performances are concerned, there is evidently a clear reference to mass audiences in this case – while there is no explicit mention of mass performances, the manifesto nevertheless concerns a mass audience. Any type of elitism had been ruled out by this point, and the dream of the individual spectator had been abandoned. Sec-

only, in terms of realism on stage, this was not meant in the same way that Stanislavsky or Sulerzhitsky understood it, since “the realism of the internal truth of the human spirit” meant reaching the truth of the human condition, which was always complex. In this programme of “healthy realism” it was no longer a matter of *mimesis*, i.e. a direct manifestation of life. Furthermore, “the principle of simplicity and truth in art,” which was to serve mass audiences, indicated the obliteration of stylistic specificity. This does not, of course, mean that all the differences between particular artists disappeared, but they were maintained – in the long run – primarily by artists with roots in the avant-garde (such as Meyerhold and Tairov). It was, however, beyond a doubt that the MAT-type realism that had been reduced to clichés, would be imposed as a normative model on the Stalinist-era theatre of the 1940s and 1950s.

In the mid-1920s, critics noted a crisis in the studio model. A 1925 essay on the First Studio of the MAT by Pavel Markov ended by declaring the “exhaustion” of the studios and the need for the Studio to become a theatre:

the growing influence of the revolution cannot but leave a trace – the theatre also had to search for ways of enriching its life experience [which, we should add, was impossible within the “monastic” model of studios, according to Markov – K.O.] and new theatrical forms in order to extend its range of techniques. At this important moment in the Studio’s history, it transformed into a large theatre, and soon became known as the Second MAT [Markov 1965a: 322].

In an article published in 1932, the same critic offered an honest assessment of the studios, noting their merits – creating conditions for the comprehensive development of actors, collaborative work, fighting against the routine of the tradition, bourgeois theatre, searching for a new theatrical language – as well as contradictions inherent to the very essence of the phenomenon:

The fundamental problem was, on the one hand, whether the concept of the “studio” should necessarily have been deemed the most significant measure and ultimate theatrical form of the organism, and, on the other, the matter of the threat of the studios becoming isolated from real life, which was taking place beyond their walls. Many people were prepared to consider the studios not as a transitional form or working method, but as the most perfect form of theatre [Markov 1932: 7].

The critic’s fiercest doubts were provoked by the studio becoming “closed off” and isolated from the outside world.

Many studios assumed the form of a closed monastery with their own principles and customs, executing quiet, deep work not intended for mass audiences. Such studios limited themselves to a regular and narrow group of spectators, a fact which did not lead them to further experimentation but, on the contrary, to the preservation of old content and forms [Markov 1932: 7].

The final remark can be seen as an allusion to the accusation that the studios working within the sphere of the MAT failed to “keep up” with the demands of the Revolution. It would take another twenty years before Markov, summarising that period, noted bluntly that “it was becoming increasingly obvious that the studio form could not exist without important, specific social content, with that abstract, albeit sincerest possible, revolutionary attitude becoming barren if it is not accompanied by a clearly-defined political aim” [Markov 1974a: 455–456].

Even today, it remains common for Russian critical opinion to repeat the view that the studios, particularly those associated with the MAT, had become outdated and were no longer suited to the new epoch, with a natural consequence of this being their dissolution or transformation into theatres. At the end of the 1930s, the liquidation of studios began together with forced mergers that transformed them into institutionalised “large” theatres. During this period in the sphere of culture (and social life), there was a general purge of that which was individual, minor, different, and that which sustained its own autonomy. In 1934, the author of an article published in the journal *Rabochy i teatr* (*The Worker and the Theatre*) writing about Yury Zavadsky’s studio, declared the end of the studio form. “Zavadsky’s theatre was the last surviving studio in the old ‘classical’ meaning of this term” [Berezark 1934: 6, cited in Mironova 1983: 20–21].

The collapse of the studios and the studio form during the Stalinist period was irrepressible. The reasons for this can be interpreted in various ways. If we take into account Vladimir Paperny’s view of them [V. Paperny 1996], where he used the binary model of Russian culture proposed by Boris Uspensky and Yury Lotman to argue, on the basis of Stalinist architecture, for the pendulum-type evolution of Russian history, whereby one pole – the revolutionary, cosmopolitan, experimental Culture One – constantly solidifies into the monumental, imperial, nationalist Culture Two, then what could be found in studios were elements linking them to Culture One. Bearing in mind all the doubts that accompany such generalising and simplified views and also bearing in mind that, strictly speaking, the studios did not belong to the avant-garde, it is nevertheless necessary to recognise that their traits, such as rejecting all aspirations to authoritative roles, their doubts and questioning of once certain paths and instead seeking ever new ones, with freedom in experimentation, brought them closer to Culture One, which

was always of a fleeting nature. Given the traits outlined here, the studios were bound to lose in their confrontation with the institution of the “grand” theatre, which was based on authority and the sense that this form embodied the highest stage of development of theatrical culture.

The studios were also destined to collapse for the reason that the very essence of collective work, based on the notion of community, became impossible to accept. Studio groups were founded on the principle of voluntary agreements or – in cases where the greatest studio-type perfection was sought – on oaths. Meanwhile, every community in the Stalinist model of culture could become isolated from society as a result of duty or compulsion. Small, closed groups were viewed negatively, facing accusations of being sects.

The principle of presenting fragments of incomplete works-in-progress became irrelevant. It is worth recalling here that, in the pre-revolutionary studios, the fragments, studies and scenes that could be presented to audiences as part of demonstrations and open rehearsals, had acquired autonomous value. Meanwhile, since the late 1920s, that which was fragmentary, incomplete and still a work in progress, came to be considered dangerous, since it could not be subjected to unequivocal qualification and, consequently, could not be subordinated ideologically. It was typical in the Soviet model of culture for the most prosperous spheres of art to be those based on convention, perfected techniques, and those aiming to produce a perfect work (such as classical ballet, for example).

Ultimately, the position of the individual spectator was taken by the mass audience. The idea of creating a theatre that was not suited to everyone but was instead aimed at a specific spectator collapsed, and thus the utopia of a “personal” audience, one that understood and empathised, became history.

#### 4. *Sovremennik*, or a Return to the Sources

The rebirth of ideas associated with studios came after the 20th Party Congress in 1956. While the Stalinist USSR granted the greatest recognition to “grand,” indeed monumental, theatre, for which gigantic new buildings were especially erected (such as the Red Army Theatre, which was shaped like a five-pointed star) and whose prestige was underscored through official prizes, awards and titles (the theatres at the top of the hierarchy were those granted the soubriquet “academic”), from the mid-1950s theatres focused more on youth and inexperience rather than maturity and experience, which were traits associated with routine, and saw their right to exist restored. This was a good moment to begin searching for “novelty” and attempt to break down clichés.



**Fig. 1.5.** Queuing in front of the Sovremennik Theatre, 1960s



In 1956, the Young Actors' Studio was founded in Moscow, with actors recruited from the MAT. This studio, which initially operated on democratic principles, with time became the Sovremennik Theatre run by Oleg Efremov and, in accordance with its name, presented largely contemporary works. The Sovremennik became a symbol of the changes taking place in Russia following the 20th Congress. The group's youth, the focus on producing new drama, and the degree of courage it expressed in tackling troubling questions, greatly exceeding what was possible in the Stalinist period, all meant that productions such as Rozov's *The Eternally Alive* (1957) or Aksyonov's *Everything for Sale* (1965) became the stuff of legend, while Efremov became one of the most important political and artistic figures of the Soviet Thaw. Although the Sovremennik was founded in opposition to the excessive grandeur of the socialist-realist era, it soon abandoned the traits associated not only with studios but also with small theatres. Despite having a small performance space and being an intelligentsia theatre, almost from the very beginning, it held ambitions of finding itself at the centre of social and political events: the theatre wanted to speak (and indeed did speak) in the name of a generation; it wanted to have an opinion (and indeed did) on the most important social concerns of that time.

**Fig. 1.6.** Oleg Efremov as Boris in Viktor Rozov's *The Eternally Alive*



The *Sovremennik* emerged as an alternative to what Efremov and other young members of the company perceived to be the ossified monolith that the Moscow Academic Art Theatre had become during the Stalinist era. Efremov proclaimed a return to old studio traditions, particularly those associated with the First Studio of the MAT. His attitude was indicative of a certain tendency to idealise the past and of nostalgia for a lost ideal. During the initial period of its activities, the *Sovremennik* was an example of a regressive utopia, expressed in its call for a “return to Stanislavsky” (*nazad k Stanislavskomu*).

**8 и 9**  
апреля

В ПОМЕЩЕНИИ  
**МХАТ**  
ПЕТРОВСКИЙ 17-18 МОСКВА

**8 и 9**  
апреля

**СТУДИЯ МОЛОДЫХ АКТЕРОВ**

**ПРЕМЬЕРА**

**В. РОЗОВ**

**ВЕЧНО ЖИВЫЕ**

Спектакль в 2-х действиях, 6-ти картинах  
(по повести редакции)

Действующие лица и исполнители:

|                                                                |                                                |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| Ведущий Мещанин-Евдоким — <b>М. И. Зинин</b><br>(1880-1900)    | Доктор — <b>В. И. Сергачев</b><br>(1880-1900)  |
| Ведущий Инженер-Михайлов — <b>Л. М. Студнев</b><br>(1880-1900) | Доктор — <b>Е. Ю. Немирович</b><br>(1880-1900) |
| Ведущий — <b>О. Н. Ефремов</b><br>(1880-1900)                  | Доктор — <b>Д. Г. Качалов</b><br>(1880-1900)   |
| Доктор — <b>Д. М. Тольмачев</b><br>(1880-1900)                 | Доктор — <b>А. В. Киселёв</b><br>(1880-1900)   |
| Доктор — <b>Е. М. Тихонов</b><br>(1880-1900)                   | Доктор — <b>А. С. Филиппов</b><br>(1880-1900)  |
| Доктор — <b>С. М. Махоро</b><br>(1880-1900)                    | Доктор — <b>Г. В. Волчек</b><br>(1880-1900)    |
| Доктор — <b>Г. Д. Степанов</b><br>(1880-1900)                  | Доктор — <b>О. П. Табаков</b><br>(1880-1900)   |
| Доктор — <b>Н. В. Крылов</b><br>(1880-1900)                    | Доктор — <b>А. М. Голубев</b><br>(1880-1900)   |
| Доктор — <b>Н. И. Пастухов</b><br>(1880-1900)                  | Доктор — <b>Р. Д. Смирнов</b><br>(1880-1900)   |
|                                                                | Доктор — <b>Е. А. Бессонов</b><br>(1880-1900)  |

Режиссер — **О. Н. ЕФРЕМОВ**

Художники — **Л. В. БАТУРИН, Д. Ф. ЛАЗАРЕВ**  
(художники спектакля и постановки)

Композитор — **Р. М. ХОЗАН**  
(композитор спектакля и постановки)

Директор — **С. Л. ГЕРМАНОВ**

Помощник — **М. В. Соловьев**  
(помощник спектакля и постановки)

Спектакль выпускается при содействии МХАТ СССР имени М. Горького,  
Школы-студии имени Вл. И. Немировича-Данченко  
и Всероссийского Театрального Общества

Начало спектакля в 7 час. 30 мин вечера

Билеты продаются в кассе МХАТ и во всех кассовых пунктах

Fig. 1.7. Poster for Viktor Rozov's *The Eternally Alive*, directed by Oleg Efremov, MAT Young Actors' Studio, 1956

In his programmatic articles, Efremov referenced Stanislavsky while building up a cult of the theatre's "constant warrior." He made reference to the studio-based ideals of community expressed in the concept of *edinomyслие*, which means "unanimity" but becomes difficult to translate as a concept that signifies a community of shared ideals and like-minded individuals, which found expression in various forms in his texts from this period [see Efremov 1992: 14, 17, 46, 54, 61 and elsewhere]. In one of his manifestos, *On the Theatre of Edinomyshlenniks*, he spoke of the need to find like-minded people working towards creating a common plane of aesthetics and ideas. Within five years of forming the theatre, Efremov described the reasons why all of the young founders (including Evgeny Evstigneev, Oleg Tabakov, Lidia Tolmacheva, Mikhail Kozakov, Igor Kvasha and Galina Volchek, who, following Efremov's departure from the group in 1972, became its chief director and remains in that position to this day) left established theatres in order to build this new company. Among the most important reasons was the political change in the country: "When I look back, I can see clearly that Sovremennik was called into existence by the purifying storm which passed through the country after the 20th Party Congress" [Efremov 1992: 47]. This storm, according to Efremov and many of his contemporaries, who were Russian members of the intelligentsia born in the late 1920s and early 1930s (known as the generation of the 1960s), was necessary to purge the country of Stalinism. A particular conservatism differentiated Efremov from his theatrical predecessors, the pioneers of twentieth-century theatre. His relation to tradition is characterised by a particular paradox: while declaring loyalty to Stanislavsky's thought, he in fact contradicts its essence. While condemning the "perversion" of Stanislavsky's system under Stalinism, he called for a return to the "MAT norms" in art. On the one hand, he criticised the canonisation of the MAT, which resulted in the unification of all Soviet theatres with a single model imposed upon them, while on the other, he refused to recognise "the revisions to Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko's thought, which had laid the foundations of socialist realism" [Efremov 1992: 49]. Assuming the like-mindedness of all the members of studio theatres, he also declared, in their name, that:

We consider the merciless tone and jokes aimed at the MAT a personal affront since we are the embodied successors of that theatre, particularly its studios. [...] We are not searching for any other creative programme beyond that of the MAT, since its programme, in our view, has hardly been exhausted. We are not contemplating any other path in art beyond that which has been paved forever by Konstantin Sergeevich Stanislavsky [Efremov 1992: 49–50].



**Fig. 1.8.** *Nomination* by Aleksandr Volodin, directed by Oleg Efremov, Sovremennik Theatre, 1963. Oleg Efremov as Lamin, Evgeny Evstigneev as Kuropeevo

Such an attitude cast doubt on the creative continuity of Stanislavsky's ideas. Sovremennik cannot in any way be considered a studio that resembled the predecessors it referenced. Despite the name it adopted ("studio-theatre") and the adaption of certain external traits of the studio form (noted in the *Programma deyatel'nosti studii molodykh aktyorov* from 1956 – the Programme of Activities of the Young Actors' Studio), as well as in other documents, such as its statute and regulations,<sup>16</sup> Efremov's studio quickly became a repertory theatre.

Sovremennik is one of very few studios established by professional actors and directors after 1956. During this period the non-professional theatre movement, however, underwent a revival, with groups operating in workplaces, schools and universities. The term "studio" thus became associated in the USSR not only with the tradition of Stanislavsky, Sulerzhitsky or Vakhtangov, but also with the amateur movement.

## 5. The Rebirth of the Studios – 1970s

In the 1970s, studios again became a permanent feature on the USSR's theatrical landscape. It is difficult, however, to agree with Nikolay Pesochinsky, the author of a review on the subject of Russian studio theatres of the 1970s and 1980s [Pesochinsky 2002], who placed these studios alongside Western alternative theatres, which were operating, for example, within the scope of off-off-Broadway. It is possible to demonstrate a certain (albeit implicit) continuity between the studios of Sulerzhitsky or Vakhtangov and, let us say, the Living Theatre (owing to their common avowal of democratic values, efforts towards collectively-created works,

<sup>16</sup> These documents were published in: Efremov 1992: 264–281.

openness to failure emerging in the course of experiments, and the breaking down of the division between private life and artistic work). However, equating off-off-Broadway theatres and Soviet theatre companies would be a mistake, since the latter were still subject to state sponsorship and censorship controls. The differences between the forms emerged not only from the system of limitations and compulsions, which had to operate in the Soviet studios, but also from the attitudes of the artists. The majority of studios emerged as a result of theatre artists being unable to make a career within official, bureaucratic structures. Mark Rozovsky, founder of the *Studio u Nikitskikh Vorot* (Nikitskye Gates Studio), which is still operating today, was blunt in his assessment as he wrote of the aversion and, indeed, disgust that was aroused by work in the official theatre. "Life offered no alternatives [...]. For me and for us – I mean my collaborators and friends – the thought of a studio was born of the sense of a complete lack of perspectives and the impossibility of realising hidden theatrical ideas" [Rozovsky 1989: 12, cited in Pesochinsky 2002: 228–229].

Rozovsky makes it clear that, had he received an offer to work as the chief director in an official theatre, he would not have founded a studio. It was essentially impossible for a young director to find himself in charge of a theatre in the Soviet Union, while even making a career in someone else's theatre was almost impossible. "Creating one's own theatre in the pre-perestroika years was possible only on the condition of founding (or reorganising) a studio" [Pesochinsky 2002: 217].

Pesochinsky attempted to reproduce a map of the studios active in the 1970s and 1980s. He divides them into two categories – amateur studios and "experimental groups." The former exclusively featured non-professional artists operating in various theatrical groups (with his analysis dedicating most attention to the Leningrad Subbota Studio), while the latter were focused on experimenting with the body's aesthetic capabilities (this was in part a consequence of Marcel Marceau's guest performances in the USSR in the 1960s) and on attempts (few in number and rather cautious) to adapt the experiences of the Western avant-garde, with this type of experimental group including, among others, Sergey Kurginyan's On the Boards Studio, and the ephemeral Leningrad-based Theatre Laboratory. Among the avant-garde groups (with this term requiring cautious use) he listed the Moscow Aesthetic Drama Group led by Giedrius Mackevičius, the Litsedey Clown Theatre, which had enjoyed some fame in Poland, and several others.

We should add that, between these two categories, there existed a broad range of "small" theatres that adopted the studio moniker, such as Valery Belyakovich's *Studiya na Yugo-Zapade* (the South-Western Studio)

or Yury Pogrebnychko's *Teatr-Studiya na Krasnoi Presne* (the Krasnaya Presnya Theatre Studio). These "small" theatres, generally located in modest spaces, played a significant role in Russian theatrical life during this period. Their significance depended, among other things, on turning to plays that were absent or hardly present on the large stages, particularly in the 1980s. The studios generally enjoyed greater freedom in designing their repertoire than the "large" theatres, thus turning to Beckett, Ionesco, Różewicz, Mrożek and Petrushevskaya, as well as the OBERIU. The OBERIU was staged only at studio theatres. At the Chelovek (Human) Studio in 1989, Roman Kozak staged the play *Elizabeth Bam on a Christmas Tree at the Ivanovs'*, based on the work of Daniil Kharms and Aleksandr Vvedensky. Around the same time, Aleksandr Ponomaryov also staged *Elizabeth Bam* at the Chet-Nechet (Even-Odd) Studio. Mrożek's plays became the trademark of the Human Studio, where notorious premieres of his plays *The Emigrants*, *Strip-Tease* and *Out at Sea* took place. Meanwhile, the premiere performance of a dramatist long-since abandoned by the large stages, Lyudmila Petrushevskaya, took place in 1980 at the Student Theatre of the Moscow State University. Her *Uroki muzyki* (*Music Lessons*) was directed by Roman Viktyuk, whose primary employment was in the professional theatres.

Finally, one trait of small studio theatres was a greater degree of bravery than what existed in repertory theatres, in drawing on the experiences of the domestic and Western avant-garde, and also in adapting acting traditions and techniques whose development in traditional theatres was effectively impossible.

It was in studios where the various aesthetic models of the Western theatres, rejected by the professional stages, as well as the interrupted traditions of Russian non-realist theatre, were experimented with in particular ways, and often without an individual approach to them [Pesochinsky 2002: 234].

Such experiments were conducted primarily within ephemeral groups of an experimental nature. But they were not the only location for this: pedagogues were active from the outset in Oleg Tabakov's studio, founded in 1973 initially as a stage for youths in the final years of middle school, and based on models adapted from the earlier *Sovremennik* (in preparing the Studio's statute, Tabakov made reference to studio ideals) [see Vislov 1990]. The pedagogues included Andrey Droznin (whose main job was as a choreographer at the Shchukin Theatre School) and the young director Valery Fokin, both of whom were in some sense inspired by Jerzy Grotowski. Their contact with the Polish artist could have influenced the work of Tabakov's Studio. In 1979, two famous productions were developed there: *Proshchaj*, *Mowgli*

(*Farewell, Mowgli*), based on Kipling's works, and *Two Arrows* (known as *...znienacka w plecy!* [...in the back without warning!]) in Poland) by Aleksandr Volodin. Critics and spectators alike stressed the freshness of these works praising, above all, the actors' wonderful aesthetic and choreographic training [see Vislov 1990: 60–61]. The general acclaim, indeed rapture, with which these two pieces were met, brought Tabakov to the realisation in 1980 that "the studio has matured to the extent that it can become a theatre" [Vislov 1990: 61]. A few years later it was indeed granted the status of a theatre and continues to operate today as *Teatr Tabakova* (Tabakov's Theatre, commonly known as *Tabakerka*, or the Snuff-Box).

## 6. Traces of Grotowski

At the turn of the 1980s, news was starting to reach the Soviet Union of the activities of Jerzy Grotowski at his Laboratory Theatre. It should be emphasised that the attitude of Russians towards Grotowski and his work was never one of indifference: his theatre aroused interest, while the man himself was for many people a type of cult figure, despite the meagre knowledge available about him. This situation was described in 1989 by Anatoly Vasilev in his presentation at a symposium in Modena, Italy, titled *Grotowski, la presenza assente* (*Grotowski, the absent presence*). Vasilev noted in his talk that he

came to Moscow from the provinces in 1968 and you ought to know that, at that point, ten years after his theatre was founded, there was no information on Grotowski in Russia. And in spite of this, his name circulated among students [...]. I live in Russia and, as a Russian, I have a tendency towards mysticism. The name Grotowski was for me connected to something mysterious, something distant. I have the impression that that year, 1968, and the subsequent few years, were filled with this mysterious name [Wasiljew 1991].

Grotowski's impact on Russian theatre was not of a systematic nature. What emanated primarily was the legend of a charismatic artist, one who rejected stereotypes and transcended the limits of theatre, whilst operating in realms that were inaccessible in the USSR. From the 1960s, descriptions of his performances reached the Soviet Union, while the authors of enthusiastic reviews were people who were, apparently at least, rather distanced from the interests of the Polish artist. In 1967, a review of *Akropolis* appeared in a collection of texts by the dramatist Isidor Shtok. It was a fragment of his reports from his journey around Poland titled "Net, ne sginela, zhiviyot!" (*No, Poland is not lost, she lives!*). The author described the visit of a Russian delegation to Krakow and Opole, where

it watched a performance of *Akropolis* at the Theatre of 13 Rows. From Shtok's description it is possible to deduce that the performance did not find acceptance among all members of the delegation. The dramatist himself, however, was deeply moved by the performance, and it led him to reflect (interestingly for us) upon the evident traces of the 1920s Soviet avant-garde, with Eisenstein, Meyerhold (in his *Le Cocu magnifique* phase, based on Crommelynck's play [1922]), the experiments of Grigory Roshal,<sup>17</sup> and the young Okhlopkov coming to mind. Shtok wrote that "the theatrical devices employed by Grotowski are known to us from the 1920s" [Shtok 1992: 44], thus confirming that the native theatre of the past was the most important reference for post-war Soviet theatre.

The Laboratory Theatre never performed in the Soviet Union, although Grotowski did visit Moscow in 1976.<sup>18</sup> His visit caused a stir. Meetings with the Polish artist were invitation-only events. From the early 1970s, a small number of Russians made it to Wrocław and Brzezinka, where they took part in para-theatre events and the Theatre of Sources. In Russia, meanwhile, Grotowski's writings were distributed privately, while some made it into print, with Andrey Droznin, the first translator of the texts into Russian. The cultural press began to publish information about the activities of the Wrocław-based Laboratory Theatre. It was Elena Chodunowa who was largely responsible for disseminating knowledge about Grotowski. In 1992, she published a collection of texts titled *Teatr Grotovskogo (Grotowski's Theatre)*, which included articles, memoirs and essays by Peter Brook, Jan Kott, Konstanty Puzyna and Józef Szajna, among others, as well as several Russian theatre artists, critics and theatre studies experts, including Boleslav Rostotsky, Jan Berezniński, Mikhail Shvydkoy and Valery Fokin [Khodunova (ed.) 1992; see also Chodunowa 1989]. A selection of Grotowski's own texts did not appear until 2003, however, with translation and comments by Natella Bashindzhagyan [Grotovsky 2003: 351].

---

<sup>17</sup> Grigory Lvovich Roshal (1889–1983), film director. Between 1921 and 1923 he studied under Meyerhold at the GYVRM before subsequently becoming associated with the State Experimental Theatre Workshops (GEKTEMAS) created by Meyerhold. He developed a theoretical framework and practical innovations for new forms of children's education through art.

<sup>18</sup> One of the meetings took place at the editorial office of the monthly journal *Teatr*, with the Polish participants including, alongside Grotowski, Jerzy Jarocki and Konstanty Puzyna. Grotowski met the company of the Moscow Art Theatre. The Russian contexts of Jerzy Grotowski's biography and artistic work were discussed at the international symposium "The Reception of the Work of Jerzy Grotowski in Russia," held on 19–20 May 2000 at the Grotowski Centre in Wrocław. For more on Grotowski's connections with Russia, see Osiński 2000.



After watching *Apocalypsis cum Figuris* in 1976, and subsequently speaking to Grotowski, Valery Fokin attempted to put into practice his experiences from Poland.<sup>19</sup> Upon his return from Wrocław, he began working at the small stage of the Sovremennik Theatre on *I poydu. I poydu!* (*And I shall go. I shall go!*), which was based on Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Underground* and *The Dream of a Ridiculous Man*. The work took on laboratory form, with three actors participating: Elena Koreneva, Konstantin Raykin and Avangard Leontev. The production, which emerged from a long period of rehearsals, differed from other performances of Dostoevsky with its ascetic performance space and complex acting performances, particularly those by Raykin (the Man from the Underground) and Koreneva (as Liza). A sensitive and competent witness penned an extensive description of the performance, with the author almost certainly being Konstantin Rudnitsky. He appreciated the courage of the thirty-year-old director, who extracted Dostoevsky from furnished, domesticated spaces filled with props, where the author was usually staged, and transported him into an empty space. Fokin's performance indeed did not even take place on a stage but in an undecorated rehearsal space – in fact, in a corner of it. This director's decision met with particular approval from Rudnitsky, who perceived in this the on-stage embodiment of the metaphor central to Dostoevsky's novel about a "man pushed into a corner." The director, he wrote,

treated this corner as an essential condition and central principle of the performance. There was nothing in the corner – neither a table, a chair, nor even a stool. We saw simply the geometrical point of contact of two white walls lit by a plain white light, rather than the corner of an inhabited space. There was no wallpaper and not a single indication of human existence, not even a defective or wretched form of it. It was just a corner, pure and simple. A corner where walls met. A corner into which a human had been hounded [Rudnitsky 1990b: 19–20].

The idea of performing in an empty space, on the floor, and thus on one level with a handful of spectators, certainly generates associations with Grotowski and his "poor theatre." It seems that, in working with his actors, Fokin also sought to reach a human truth. Raykin, the Man from the Underground, began his monologue sitting side-on to the audience

---

<sup>19</sup> He first published a description of his encounters with Grotowski in 1990. This collection has a highly personal tone, which shows that meetings with Grotowski were of great significance for the Russian director. See Fokin 1990. This text was then republished in: Khodnuova (ed.) 1992: 186–212. A Polish translation appeared in *Notatnik Teatralny* [Fokin 1992].

and curled up. "Initially he spoke quickly and his words sounded dull. He mumbled something incoherent and, in this monotonous, muffled howling, the torment of a suffocating, long loneliness could be felt" [Rudnitsky 1990b: 20]. Instead of presenting a monologue, what we encounter here is mumbling, unclear speech and quiet howling. "Then, still seated, Raykin turned to the audience, his face crumpled, his hair a mess, and cruelty in his eyes. His speech took on an increasingly aggressive tone" [Rudnitsky 1990b: 20]. The initial nonsense transformed into a tirade. Liza appeared suddenly out of nowhere and silently – quiet, colourless and wearing a thin, torn blouse, shoeless and wearing only socks.

She sat on the floor beside the Man from the Underground, weary, leaning against the wall and tilting her head onto her shoulders – she was the embodiment of serenity alongside his screaming, silence alongside his endless stream of words, passivity alongside his growing arousal [Rudnitsky 1990b: 21–22].

Liza patiently remained silent as she was subjected to the pressure of intellectual nihilism and drowned in a stream of words – until she exploded. Koreneva/Liza's reaction, which certainly remained loyal to Dostoevsky's description, made a strong impression on the spectators thanks to its corporeality: convulsions and a piercing, desperate scream; "it seemed as if her weak body were in its fatal spasms." The description continued, noting "the power of theatre is sometimes difficult to bear; the actors' performance can sometimes cause spectators pain. This is what Fokin sought to achieve, without sparing his audience" [Rudnitsky 1990b: 23].



**Fig. 1.9.** Elena Khodunova, Zbigniew Osiński, Valery Fokin and Konstantin Raykin. Moscow, 1980

Although, if Fokin were truly following Grotowski in stripping bare the stage and inciting his actors to carry out actions that went beyond the "performance" of a role, he failed to measure up to the message of

*Notes from Underground* in the same uncompromising manner. According to Rudnitsky, the director aimed to overcome the insoluble contradiction in Dostoevsky's work in such a way that the finale of the piece would underscore Liza's moral superiority, hence the idea of confronting the tragic ideal of the "man from the underground" with the salvation of the utopia embodied by the "comic man." According to Rudnitsky, the Comic Man played by Leontev was to provide the spectator with that which Liza represented but could not express: love and goodness. In effect, the presence of the Comic Man flattened the powerful impression evoked by Raykin and Koreneva's performances.

It should be noted here also that such a reading of Dostoevsky remained dominant to a significant extent in Russian theatre into the 1980s. One of the first theatre artists who managed to eke out of Dostoevsky's work those "damned problems," i.e. facing up to the issue of evil, was Kama Ginkas, who had, already in the 1920s, produced adaptations of Dostoevsky.<sup>20</sup>

Fokin's attempt to transfer Grotowski's ideas to Soviet theatre was exceptional for its time. But Grotowski fascinated and inspired many Russian theatre artists, particularly those operating outside of repertory theatres, in studios and laboratories. One artist who has made direct reference to Grotowski, and indeed considered himself one of his successors to some extent, was Anatoly Vasilev.

## 7. Against Enthusiasm

The late 1980s saw a veritable boom in studio theatres. Perestroika made it possible to establish studios without having to become involved in bureaucratic mechanisms. Springing up like mushrooms (and, more often than not, disappearing again just as quickly), if they made any reference at all to the studio tradition, it was usually to its experimental, laboratory mode. During this period, however, the ethos and ethical aspects of studios faded.

The question of how studios are formed is one of the fundamental questions in the history of the culture of theatre. And for this reason it is best not to pose this question since you run the risk that you will be given a gloomily stereotypical answer in response. About a shared belief system (*edinomyslie*), for example [Inyakhin 1990: 71].

---

<sup>20</sup> This was the case with two adaptations of *Crime and Punishment* – *We Are Performing Crime* (1991) and *K. I. from Crime* (1994). Both productions were created under the auspices of the Moscow Young Audience Theatre.

This was how an article on the subject of the Chelovek (Human) Studio, published in 1990 in the *Teatr* journal, began. The author deems the failure to mention *edinomyслие* a positive trait of the studio.

One of the most attractive characteristics of the Human Studio is that it comprises an association of professionals who pay little heed to any form of declaration (no vows of loyalty to a single school). Their professionalism is rooted in a respect for art in itself. If a creative idea develops in someone's mind, even if it is one steeped in egoism (for example, an actor wants to stage a performance and serve as director), this idea is put into practice calmly and consistently. The outcome of such work is often interesting and does not result in the creator of a performance being deemed the leader of the group, and that particular work becoming the flagship production of the studio [Inyakhin 1990: 71].

The reasons for the collapse of the ethos-based aspects of studios are complex. When studios were revived after the Stalinist period, they nevertheless remained banal and ideological in form. The association of like-minded individuals (*soobshchestvo edinomyshlennikov*) conceived by Sulerzhitsky as a community of free individuals aiming towards self-realisation in harmony with others during the Soviet period, came to be treated as a community subordinated to rigour, demanding discipline and honouring shared beliefs. It is for this reason that, even if studio documents (statutes and regulations) written in the early twentieth century, and then in the second half thereof, contained similar postulates (concerning common aesthetic goals) they still differed in terms of language and form. Even in the mid-1970s, Oleg Tabakov still mentioned in the Studio's regulations that "Members of the Studio aim to consolidate the moral principles of advanced socialist society: revealing the problems and conflicts of the contemporary age and searching for new dramatic material enabling the realisation of this objective" [Vislov 1990: 60]. Even if we accept that Tabakov did not entirely believe in the views expressed here or even accept that his words were pure rhetoric (since, without the support of the authorities, the studio could not exist), then we should not be surprised that, in the late 1980s, studios came to be perceived by many artists as a socialist-era institution. The studios were thus associated with declarations such as "strength in unity," with an aura of youthful enthusiasm, as well as with the amateur movement.

At the turn of the 1990s, statements of various artists and critics on the subject of the studio form took on an increasingly biting tone. The critic cited above wrote of the Human Studio that its performances

are ultimately devoid of the mawkish infantilism of the studios, since serious people are employed here, professionals, whose skills and early maturity enable the reasoned, calm and concentrated study of the nature of human emotions, which has always been essential to every actor in every epoch. It is for this reason that, in the works of the Human Studio, we find a surprisingly low level of innovation, which is something wonderful in itself since it does not distract from what is essential to the human experience [Inyachin 1990: 79].

This quote might suggest that the author holds a conservative attitude, one opposed to theatrical experimentation, hence his praise for this specific studio and the implicit criticism of the broader concept of studios. However, negative opinions about studios as such could be found in the statements of people involved in the theatre who were profoundly interested in experiments, including those from circles close to Anatoly Vasilev. “Vasilev really does not like the word ‘studio,’” stated Nikolay Chindiyaykin, a pedagogue at the Vasilev School of Dramatic Arts, when asked in 1996 about the difference between a studio and a laboratory.

Of course, it is not simply about the word, but rather the content that it entails. For example, enthusiasm. Studios were built on enthusiasm. [...] In a laboratory, meanwhile, it is about something deeper, something that has nothing in common with enthusiasm, pleasure or specific outcomes [Czindiajkin 1997: 101–102].

At the end of the 1980s in Russia, and not only in theatre, but in social life in general behaviour suggesting that a deep-rooted complex towards certain values, phenomena and institutions associated with the socialist era, was evident. Some of the massive number of theatre companies that emerged during perestroika adopted the name “studio” unthinkingly, as a matter of course, while the name *masterskaya*, meaning workshop and laboratory, also became widespread around that time. These workshops were also the site of experiments, and thus an equivalent of the laboratory. *Masterskaya* also means mastery or artistry, i.e. something resulting from intense work towards particular objectives. This name ultimately refers back to the tradition of Meyerhold who, after the Revolution, organised the following workshops: the GYVRM (State Higher Directing Workshop) and the GYVTM (the State Higher Theatre Workshops), which combined the education of actors and directors with experiments leading towards new techniques and stage devices. Of course, it is not wise to over-emphasise the significance of terminology: adopting this or that particular name does not necessarily mean reflecting a given programme concept. The activities of Petr Fomenko’s Workshop Theatre suggest that inspiration was drawn from the studio tradition.

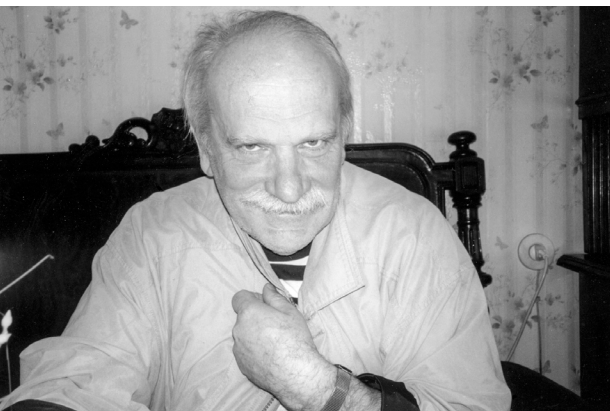
## 8. "The Theatrical Brotherhood," or the Petr Fomenko Workshop Theatre

In an interview given by the director Petr Fomenko (born 1935 in Moscow)<sup>21</sup> in the mid-1990s, he stated: "I believe that the most fertile activity is the act of building a theatre based around its actors" [Fomenko 1996]. In many of his statements, which were subsequently confirmed in practice, the artist stressed the significance of the actors' creativity. "The greatest manifestation of a director's theatre is, in my view, the kind of theatre that comprises a wonderful gamut of actors" [Fomenko 1996]. At another point in the interview, he expressed his opposition to the form of the director's theatre even more emphatically. "Generally speaking, directors are among the greatest theatrical misunderstandings of the twentieth century. Theatre ought to belong to the actors" [Fomenko 1998: 3].

This last statement should not be considered an attempt to negate the role of the director in the creation of a production. It is rather a statement signifying the necessity of empowering actors and turning them into fully legitimate co-creators of a performance. Fomenko does not criticise directing in and of itself, but rather speaks out against the tyranny of the director.

I think that if I were dictatorially-minded, none of us would survive for very long in this group. And this is not just about me. My students, who have been graduating for the past five years, are both actors as well as directors in our theatre [Fomenko 1998: 3].

The director is speaking here of the group of recent GITIS graduates and students who created, in 1992, the Petr Fomenko Workshop (*Masterskaya Petra Fomenko*), which continues to be held in high regard in terms of artistic prestige. The Workshop in many ways resembles the early twentieth-century studios, although it is less about finding proof of the direct influence of that tradition (though the views of Vakhtangov, Sulerzhitsky and Mikhail Chekhov are close to those of Petr Fomenko) and more about demonstrating that the attachment to the studio ideal implies a certain way of thinking about performance art.



**Fig. 1.10.** Petr Fomenko, photograph by Katarzyna Osińska

<sup>21</sup> Petr Fomenko died in 2012 [editor's note].

The road to forming his own theatre group was, in Fomenko's case,<sup>22</sup> long and winding, with plenty of turns, failures and disappointments along the way. After completing his studies in directing at the GITIS, under the supervision of Nikolay Gorchakov and Andrey Goncharov (he was a mature-age student, only graduating at the age of thirty, having previously been expelled from his studies in acting and then finding himself at the Pedagogical Institute), he worked in numerous theatres, including the Moscow Theatre on Malaya Bronnaya, the Taganka Theatre and the Mayakovsky Theatre, where he presented Sukhovo-Kobylin's *Death of Tarelkin* in 1966. This performance earned him significant recognition as he depicted the tragic-grotesque world of low-level spies, while Tarelkin emerged as both a rebel and dangerous individual. The performance was removed from the repertoire by censors following a press campaign "against the distortion of the Russian classic." Towards the end of the 1960s, the director ran the Moscow State University Studio Theatre before leaving for Leningrad, where he became associated with the Comedy Theatre. In the early 1980s, he returned to Moscow where, besides directing, he was also involved in pedagogical work at the GITIS. This resulted in the formation of a new theatre group, which became an important fixture in Russia's theatrical landscape.

In 1992, together with graduates from the acting course and one female graduate, Ma Jen Hun, from the directing course, he directed Ostrovsky's *Wolves and Sheep*. This performance caused a furore in Moscow and subsequently also abroad, over the next few years. The group featured the actors Ksenia and Polina Kutepova, Yury Stepanov, Madlen Dzhabrailova, Galina Tyunina, Karen Badalov and Andrey Kazakov, with some of them still constituting the core of the Workshop company today. Over the years more recent graduates have joined the group. The original company also featured Fomenko's assistants, young directors Sergey Zhenovach, Evgeny Kamenkovich and Ivan Popovsky, with the latter two still associated with the Workshop today.<sup>23</sup> The performances produced during the company's initial period of activity – *The Wolves and the Sheep* and *Twelfth Night* (directed by Kamenkovich), Gogol's *Vladimir of the Third Degree* (where work was led by Zhenovach) and Tsvetaeva's

<sup>22</sup> For portraits of the director, see Smelyansky 1999b; Davydova 2005b; Fomenko 1999a.

<sup>23</sup> For more on the Workshop company during the early period of its work, see Jakubowa 1996. There were also students educated by Petr Fomenko who were not associated with his Workshop, such as Oleg Rybkin, Elena Nevezhina, Vasily Senin and Mindaugas Karabauskis.

*Adventure* (directed by Popovsky) – amazed audiences with the high levels of inventiveness, freshness and charm demonstrated by the young actors. When the jury of the Kontakt Festival in Toruń, Poland, awarded its Grand Prix to *The Wolves and the Sheep*, it stressed in its judgement that the prize was awarded for

the creation of a new theatre that, while deeply rooted in the traditions of the Russian School, also reaches into the sources of European theatre. The prize is for the almost musical alignment of the actors as a collective, and the aesthetic performance of individual roles [Osińska 2000: 488].

Terms such as youth, lightness, charm and musicality have appeared repeatedly in reviews of the Workshop's performances.

The technique of these young actors is exceptionally pure, while their sense of humour is revelatory. Their brilliant collective improvisations clearly demonstrate that the roots of the performance style of Russian satirical comedy (they were performing Ostrovsky) can be found deep within *commedia dell'arte*,

wrote Małgorzata Dzięwulska following the Workshop's performances in Toruń [Dzięwulska 1993: 41]. She also perceived in the youth company's work an attempt at reactivating the traditions of the Second MAT, led by Mikhail Chekhov. However, it is difficult to overlook the fact that the comment regarding the roots in *commedia dell'arte* points to Vakhtangov's *Princess Turandot*.<sup>24</sup>

Petr Fomenko has repeatedly expressed his fascination with theatricality, as well as with actors and the nature of acting. This attitude means he can be characterised both as a director of performances created within the Workshop, as well as beyond it, with the most important guest productions directed by him including *Innocent as Charged* by Ostrovsky (1993) and Pushkin's *Queen of Spades* (1996), both staged at the Vakhtangov Theatre; Crommelynck's *Le Cocu magnifique* in 1994 at the Moscow Satirikon Theatre, and Ostrovsky's *Forest* (2003) at the Comédie-Française in Paris. In a sense, his theatre is self-referential – regardless of the subject matter or the literary foundation of a performance (Fomenko always remained faithful to the original text as he rejected the strategy of deconstruction or merely treating it as a pretext) – the performance space always emerges within which theatre comes to observe itself. The actors in his Workshop are never exclusively “performers,” merely executing a role. They are, above all, comics, recognisable to spectators, just as was the case with older

---

<sup>24</sup> For more on the connections between the two artists, see Picon-Vallin 2008.



travelling theatre troupes, such as groups performing *commedia dell'arte* – there were twins (Ksenia and Polina Kutepova), a Columbine (Galina Tyunina), a soubrette-servant (Madlen Dzhabrailova), and a Pierrot (Karen Badalov).

This was no mere coincidence. During his mature phase, the director entered a new stage of life in which he was accompanied solely by young people. This “theatrical fraternity” had its roots in the studio tradition, according to which an actor’s development can only take place parallel to the development of the actor as a human being. Fascinated by the very process of developing actors, Fomenko drew attention to the fact that the Russian equivalent of the term to raise or educate, *vospitat’* contains the word *pitat’*, meaning to nourish and feed, as well as to lavish. For him, pedagogy was a joyful sphere of activity.

Is it possible to exist without joy? It is the same as with love – joyful torment. It is the same with rehearsals. This is so because pedagogy is the process of supporting growth and development. It is the development of that which is good in a person. People come to us [to the theatre school – K.O.] with their own pasts. And they often hear that they are supposed to forget everything that had gone before and that they will now encounter real learning, life and education. This is a terrible approach. Nothing ought be forgotten [...]. The foundations of an actor or director are his or her own fate, personal experience, the most intimate, most sinful and boldest experiences. After all, what we weave comes from our own lives [Fomenko 1998: 3].

Testimonies, recorded by a witness to the events (a student of the theatre studies department), regarding the origins of the activities of the Petr Fomenko Workshop in the period when they were still carried out by students and the atmosphere that surrounded this period, its aesthetic and pedagogical priorities, indicate that the tradition of early twentieth-century Russian studios was an essential reference point both for Fomenko and his students.

In our year group, the person most often referred to by teachers and students alike is Leopold Sulerzhitsky. His name serves as a symbol. No one is trying to draw parallels. It is not about seeing the new Sulerzhitsky in one of the teachers, or deeming a group of students successors of the MAT’s First Studio. It is not about direct ties but about the name, which itself creates certain fields. [...] Fomenko constantly repeats: “The most important thing in our profession is human values: decency, honour, consistency in working towards a goal.” [...] Beyond Sulerzhitsky’s name, other words that come to mind are: Teacher, Faith, Religion. In our year group, we have that faith in a Master, a Teacher. It is not adoration, it is not amazement – but faith, trust. They trust the Teacher and believe in theatre. It is not by chance that

they are known as the *Fomenki*. Fomenko – a director who never managed to create his own theatre, instead created a company, a workshop. His students operate both as a theatre group and a workshop – and not only in the elevated meaning of this term, but also in its very prosaic sense. It is the workshop as a guild, a place of work, where everyone knows their craft, where it is necessary to work long and hard, and where things can only be achieved collectively. The *Fomenki* possess an exceptionally important sense of heritage, traditions and bonds [A. Ostrovsky 1991: 17].

Even if we make an allowance for the author's youth and personal engagement, this description is nevertheless confirmed by statements emanating from the director and his students. In 1997, when Sergey Zhenovach, trained by Fomenko and later a director at both the Human Studio and the Malaya Bronnaya Theatre, was asked about his relationship to Vakhtangov, he replied:

There are many spheres of Russian theatre that are dear to me, including the work of Vakhtangov. But when I read about Leopold Sulerzhitsky, I experience a sense of identification with him. It was he who introduced the concept of the "studio." It is a shame that he and what he said has been forgotten. For example, that the most important thing is the state of an actor's soul. Sulerzhitsky said that the rehearsals for *The Cricket on the Hearth* would begin with a mutual silence, since everything works out much better then because the most important thing is creating the right atmosphere and attuning to the author. Or you could all go to the woods together, that also helps... Please don't get me wrong, I am a professional director, trained in my work. The thing is, though, that being a professional director simply in order to create a well-made work seems boring to me. Of course, it is possible to come up with a clever solution, setting the actors interesting tasks, but what is truly important to me are those quiet rehearsals when we understand one another without words. Or when I say one thing and one of the actors adds something, followed by the set designer, the musical director, and slowly a production is born. What interests me in theatre are mutual relations, co-creation. A strength of the theatre is the team aspect, although it can also be a weakness. Everyone in theatre, from the director, through the actors, to the lighting technicians and set builders, ought to form a family, a single organism [Żenowacz 1997: 115–116].

We should add that, in accordance with what Sergey Zhenovach said around the same time, Sergey Sulerzhitsky's name really had been forgotten inside the Russian theatre of the 1980s and 1990s, while today it still fails to arouse significant interest. What this shows is that Petr Fomenko, together with his former student, are creating a theatre programme that goes against dominant tendencies.

**Fig. 1.11.** Sergey Zhenovach at the Malaya Bronnaya, photograph by Katarzyna Osińska



It seems that Sergey Zhenovach's project to revive the concept of the studio, as illustrated by his founding of the Studio of Theatrical Arts (*Studiya teatrnogo iskusstva*) in 2006, goes even further than that of his teacher. It is beyond doubt, however, that what they have in common outweighs that which divides them. Both Zhenovach and Fomenko distance themselves from directorial theatre, which is evidently a reference not only to studio traditions but also to the directorial devices adopted in them, above all the strategies towards literary texts. The strategy of "faithfulness" to an author takes on unexpected forms in the case of both

authors in situations where they stage prose works. It was Fomenko who initiated the form of translating prose works into stage actions unknown in Polish theatre, with adaptation relying not on dramatising the literary material, but rather on maintaining the prose text together with its narrative layer. And it is not simply a matter of introducing a narrator to the stage, since it is the actors playing particular roles who deliver the entire text, including third-person commentaries. The significance of this device lies in the director rejecting the opportunity to impose his or her own interpretation on the text, and instead bringing the author to the fore. It should be noted that both authors staged the classics of Russian literature in this manner (Fomenko focused primarily on Pushkin, while Zhenovach staged Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* in three parts in 1993 at the Malaya Bronnaya Theatre, while in 2007 he turned to Nikolay Leskov's unfinished work *A Decayed Family* at this own studio). This device can also be considered an attempt at presenting a work to the audience in its integral form, thus it is a project stemming from the conviction that the director's task is solely to present the entire wealth and complexity of the literary original.<sup>25</sup> But does literal fidelity towards a text always mean being faithful to a work? This is a matter for discussion. It seems that, in the case of both artists, who are among the best Russian directors of our era, their entire programme of ideas, with their reference to the function of art, can take precedence over reaching the essence of a vision contained in a given work.

The example of Fomenko's Workshop, as well as Zhenovach's Theatre Art Studio, confirms that working in a theatre organised according to the studio model not only shapes the way in which actors work and their relationship to a literary text, but also the understanding of the function of art. Fomenko holds dear the idea of theatre as a utopian space bringing people together. It seems that the director not only shares late-period Tolstoy's ideal of infecting spectators with emotions, but also that author's view that the value of art is a result of its power of expression and moral value. This does not, however, mean didacticism. A hectoring, mentor-like tone did indeed characterise the performance of *Chichikov – Dead Souls*, vol. 2 based on Gogol's work, which was performed at the Workshop in 1998, although this work was something of an exception in his oeuvre. Furthermore, Fomenko's work is characterised by a sense of theatricality, irony and the grotesque, which balance out the idealistic aspects of the theatre. His performances are considered examples of "delicate

---

<sup>25</sup> For more on the subject of this approach to prose in Zhenovach's theatre, particularly his production of Leskov's *A Decayed Family*, see Yakubova 2006.

direction,” of “light” and “transparent” art, and a manifestation of “fantastic realism,” demonstrating a skill in balancing the invisible border between reality and illusion. The director himself is considered a master of creating atmosphere and magic on stage.

**Fig. 1.12.** *A Decayed Family* according to Nikolay Leskov, directed by Sergey Zhenovach, Theatre Art Studio, 2007



The premiere of *War and Peace – The Start of the Novel, a Scene* (2001) followed many years of preparation. The company had been rehearsing scenes from the novel for at least seven years. These rehearsals, which were rarely presented to audiences, were long based on reading the novel out loud, having divided it into roles. Thanks to such training, the actors had enough time to familiarise themselves with the literary material of the performance. It was no coincidence that Fomenko selected the first chapters of this epic novel, those concerning the period of peace, to be staged. It should be noted that Tolstoy began writing the novel in 1863, during a period of social reforms and uncertainty affecting Russia. He opposed those processes he considered destructive, with an ideal of harmony permeating Russian society at the turn of the nineteenth century. In selecting the first chapters of the novel, Fomenko could depict a period of mythical unity, family feeling and peace, which could not be troubled by outside storms, since such a world is built on solid foundations.

Fomenko seems to hold dear this perspective on reality, although it is not truly reality as is, but rather how it could and should be. This is also expressed in the lifestyle promoted by the Workshop, with an atmo-

sphere of family and mutual trust actively propagated (which means that the actors rarely depart the theatre). It is not difficult to imagine that reading Tolstoy out loud, followed by its performance on stage, could have the goal of integration in mind.

In a four-hour performance of the first chapters of the first part of *War and Peace* – from Anna Scherer's salon to the departure of Andrey Bolkonsky – presented on the small stage of the space the studio then occupied on Prospekt Kuzutovsky, scenes from Anna Scherer's St Petersburg salon, the Rostovs' Moscow residence, and Prince Bolkonsky's rural estate were shown in intimate close-up. The Workshop actors played several roles each, while the narrative passages were read from an old edition of the novel, just as was once done when reading out loud in private homes. Delighting in the material of the novel, Fomenko omitted no plot detail and refrained from any suggestions of making priorities as to which plot thread was more important. Furthermore, it was notable that, in the episodes in which conflicts emerged (for example in the scene depicting the farewell dinner at the Bolkonsky's home before Prince Andrey's departure to war) or when death scenes emerged (the episode with the dying Count Kirill Bezukhov), the director employed theatrical exaggeration. This created the impression that devices with a comic and grotesque undertone served to eliminate the threat of death. In this performance, the director aired his affirmative attitude towards life, which, in this version, is deprived of any deep cracks. The tragic does not feature in his work thus, when he applies grotesque aspects, it is in order to generate comic effect. Fomenko created a very familiar and familial world on the stage, with the episode of Natasha Rostova's nameday seeing guests arrive dressed not as aristocrats but as the traders from Ostrovsky's drama, i.e. wrapped in furs and headscarves. What we thus saw here was an update of the myth of homely "peace" (*mir*). This is a reality that touches spectators through its simplicity and indeed even its innocence. The war has not touched this world. The performance features only an ominous indication of the impending catastrophe, with unfinished sketches for portraits of Napoleon and Aleksander, as well as a gigantic old map of Europe that provides the backdrop to the action, serving as reminders of war.

Fomenko's production evoked associations with Charles Dickens's *The Cricket on the Heath*, which was staged in 1914 at the First Studio of the MAT. Formally the director was Boris Sushkevich, although the production was inspired and hugely influenced by Sulerzhitsky and brought the studio general acclaim, with the work becoming a legendary piece of Russian theatre. Its success was ascribed to the dramatic political and social situation of the time, which, according to witnesses, meant people were ready to open up to Dickens's story, and seek some source of joy in

it. In 1918, Nikolay Efros described the prevailing depressing atmosphere following the outbreak of war: “Even in the eyes of the myopic or partially blind, even to frivolous or stupefied minds, it has become clear that we are headed towards an abyss, towards devastation and brutality; we are condemning ourselves to destruction” [N. Efros 1918: 5]. The shock caused by the war and news from the front was so strong that people became lost in despair. On the day of the premiere, the spectators brought their fear and desperation with them to the Studio:

Their faces were gloomy and the corners of their mouths turned down, while shadows formed around their tired eyes. Even before the performance had begun, people were drowning each other in questions, rumours and opinions. The performance and theatre were hardly spoken about at all [N. Efros 1918: 7].

But soon

a miracle occurred. Something unexpected happened. The armour surrounding the soul was pierced, the barriers blocking the way to the soul disappeared. [...] “Be like brothers,” this message, which was preserved by the genius of a sensitive, loving and honest heart, oozed through each part of the performance and took hold of the soul. And it managed to silence – albeit not for long – the thought that often man is man’s own wolf [N. Efros 1918: 7–8].

Although the scenes from *War and Peace* were produced under different conditions, there is a definite sense that Fomenko’s intentions were similar. By extracting from Tolstoy’s entire work those fragments containing images of harmony and “peace,” whilst simultaneously toning down the dramatic episodes by endowing them with an element of comedy, the director rejected the view of the world that saw it as a site of opposing forces producing unresolvable conflicts, as a place of anxiety and alienation. Some reviewers perceived in *War and Peace* a strong feminine element (which should be perceived as a stereotype formed by masculine, patriarchal culture). This was not only a result of Tolstoy’s female protagonists being brought to the fore (played by the director’s favourite female actresses, Galina Tyunina, Ksenia Kutepova and, the youngest of them, Polina Agureeva), but was also of the decision to remain faithful to the letter of the staged fragments (as an endeavour to loyally, but in fact submissively, follow Tolstoy without trying to interpret his work), as well as the aura of the performance: it was joyous, with the actors’ performances full of lightness and grace.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> Viktoria Nikiforova wrote with some spite:

“Lev Tolstoy was no fan of theatre or women. And these facts are wreaking their revenge in this production of *War and Peace* by Petr Fomenko, where both come together. Revenge came

It was noted with some justification that this performance formed the final link in a trilogy united by the idealisation of the past, i.e. of a world based on an old value system [see Davydova 2005b: 165–175]. Works whose message places them close to *War and Peace* are *Family Happiness*, based on Tolstoy's novella (its production was built around a similar concept to *War and Peace* in that the work's entire narrative was retained) and an adaptation of a forgotten samizdat novel by Boris Vakhtin, *An Absolutely Happy Village*. Both plays were produced in 2000. The first saw the director follow the author in expressing his sympathetic views towards past traditions, including the ideal of the early nineteenth-century patriarchal family. The second play, meanwhile, idealises a wartime village where, despite the tragedy of unfolding events, old values were retained, hence a sense of common fate and empathy, likewise toward nature. Fomenko's attitude means he is close not only to his theatrical predecessors – Leopold Sulerzhitsky and the First Studio of the MAT – but also provides proof of the vitality of a powerful strand of Russian thought whose source can be found in Slavophile utopias.

## 9. From the Underground to the Tusovka

A form contrasting with the examples presented above, where there was continuity with earlier studio-based ideas, is the phenomenon that emerged in 1991 bearing the acronym VOTM (*Vsesoyuznoe obedinenie "Tvorcheskije masterskie"* – the All-Union Association of Creative Workshops). During this period, the Union of Theatre Workers offered its support to young theatre groups, granting small subsidies and experimental freedom. Promising directors from the young generation could form their own workshops within the VOTM structures, among them Vladimir Mirzoev, Aleksandr Ponomaryov,

---

in a womanly form, with kind smiles and thoughtless allusions. All under the pretence that the novel is being treated here like the Holy Bible" [Nikiforova 2001].

At the end of her review, commenting on the fact that the production concludes with the departure of Prince Andrew to war, she wrote:

"In this caesura and allusion we can find the essence of Fomenko's directorial style. He paused at that moment in the novel since he had no intention of complicating his relations with Tolstoy. If he had gone any further, the author's most important ideals would have been unwittingly mocked. Were Fomenko to stage a production about war, then Napoleon would appear as a sentimental soul, while the Battle of Borodino would drown in detail. [...] All of these male games – war, literature, glory and philosophy – these are in essence a distraction. Napoleon's victories, the works of Tolstoy and the directorial experimentation – all of these things fade into insignificance alongside Ksenia Kutepova's smiles. But, of course, Fomenko never says any of these things directly. What he has taken from his actresses, the best actresses in Moscow, is the feminine trait of caution" [Nikiforova 2001].



Klim (Vladimir Klimenko), Mikhail Mokeev, Aleksey Paperny and Vladimir Kosmachevsky. However, two years later, the subsidies of the Creative Workshops were revoked.<sup>27</sup> Most groups disbanded, while the artists associated with them either left theatre completely (as was the case with Aleksey Paperny, who is now known as a musician and owner of fashionable Moscow clubs), emigrated (like Vladimir Mirzoev, who returned from Canada only in the late 1990s, when he took up work with repertory companies, and is now a director with an impressive portfolio), or found work in professional theatres. Some of the artists, however, remained loyal to their ideals and continued to operate in niches within commercialised mass culture. These studios, like many others that formed in large numbers in Moscow and Leningrad in the 1990s, as well as less numerous in other cities, were an upshot of the collapse in prestige of official culture and its associated institutions.

The conditions in which the Creative Workshops were created, were typified by an artistic ferment that emerged from the rejection of previously dominant hierarchies and authorities. The very fact that it became possible to found a theatre studio without reference to cultural institutions supported the differentiation of attitudes. It is also worth noting, in passing, that this conviction was ultimately illusory, as demonstrated by the ephemeral nature of many studios that lacked material support and quickly disappeared. The intellectual foundation of the Creative Workshops included the so-called youth edition of the *Teatralnaya zhizn* (*Theatrical Life*) journal. The editors of this monthly placed young critics in charge of certain editions (the editor-in-chief of the young editorial board was Tatyana Ploshko) and they extended the horizons of theatrical reflection. These editions published the views of cultural studies experts and the works of artists absent or barely visible at that time in official culture (such as Lyudmila Petrushevskaya, Vladimir

---

<sup>27</sup> This initiative, which had attracted the attentions of many theatre artists and had the intention of introducing new aesthetic ideas into Russian theatre, collapsed partly as a result of the ill-considered policies of the Association of Theatre Activists (VOTM). "The very statute of the VOTM contained a time bomb. What were the initial intentions? That a group of creative artists, led by a director, would issue a call for a particular production or would sell the 'Workshoppers' a ready-made performance. If the production turned out to be a success and opened up interesting new perspectives, then a subsequent work would be supported financially. Two or three successful productions would enable a group to gain workshop status with a two-year contract. This was the case with Aleksandr Ponomaryov's Chet-Nechet group, and with the companies of Mokeev and Klimenko. Later, VOTM took on the responsibility of helping companies become independent. And it was this point that was extremely unclear. What does independence mean?" [Sasim 1993: 19].

This question was posed by Elena Sasim after VOTM was dissolved, while adding that it was primarily a question of financial independence, which was something impossible from the outset, since "experimental groups are unable to fund themselves" [Sasim 1993: 19].

Sorokin and others), while the world of art and Western thought were brought closer together (for example, by publishing the texts of Artaud and Grotowski). Both Anatoly Vasilev and Boris Yukhananov featured regularly on the pages of such editions of the journal.

Despite the quite understandable artistic differences dividing the project participants, they were united by a common desire to distance themselves from tradition understood as a set of normative models. Alongside those artists formally associated with the Creative Workshops, it is also worth noting others, such as Igor Lysov and Boris Yukhananov, since they were also graduates of theatre schools. However, their attitude was clearly defined by the objective of finding their own paths whilst demonstrating mistrust of the authorities and hierarchies upon which official Russian theatre culture had been based for decades. The foundation of the Workshops was influenced by a phenomenon termed “the native underground” by its participants, which had been developing during the previous few years. It featured various projects lacking support from official structures, such as spontaneous movements of, largely, young people, both professionals and amateurs. An atmosphere particularly conducive to underground activities emerged in Leningrad. It was there, after all, that Andrey Moguchy’s Formal Theatre, Litsedey and Derevo, were formed. Aside from the groups that proved capable of establishing permanent structures, this movement also featured many projects of a fluid and impermanent nature.

The longest-running company emerging from those formed within the sphere of the Creative Workshops was Aleksandr Ponomaryov’s Chet-Nechet (Even-Odd) Studio. Born in 1960, Ponomaryov staged various productions there including *Nikolai Gogol – Nos* (1988), Daniil Charms’s *Elisabeth Bam* (1989) and Velimir Khlebnikov’s *Yangtze* (1992), while also pursuing his project of reviving the work of the Futurists and the OBERIU movement, including Aleksei Kruchenykh and Mikhail Matyushin’s opera



**Fig. 1.13.** Yury Kharikov and Vladimir Klimenko (Klim), photograph by Katarzyna Osińska

*Victory over the Sun*, in conjunction with official theatres, such as the Russian Academy Youth Theatre, as well as international partners.

For another few years following the dissolution of the Creative Workshops, Klim (Vladimir Klimenko, born 1952) continued his activities in spartan conditions in a basement space on Bolshoy Karetny Pereulok in Moscow. It was here that he went on to create his most famous works: *Three Expectations in Pinter's Landscape* (*Tri ozhidaniya w peyzazhakh Garolda Pintera*, 1990), *The Divine Space of Gogol's Comedy The Government Inspector* (*Bozhestvennoe prostranstvo gogolevskoy komedii "Revizor,"* 1991) and *The Government Inspector, Second Version* (*"Revizor." Vtoraya versiya*, 1992). In the following years, Klim conducted laboratory-type experiments that resulted in the "Indo-European" project that the artist named *Lestnitsa-Drevo* (with the first part of the name meaning stairs or ladder, while the second part means tree in the sense of the tree of life). The artist termed his project a "textual field," with the part titled "North" represented by *The Tale of Igor's Campaign* (a composition based around the incessant movement of actor/dancers taking place in a circle), "South" represented by Aeschylus's *Persians* in the Russian translation by Vyacheslav Ivanov, "West" by *Hamlet*, and "East" by the *Upnishads*. These works stemmed from improvisation while a ritual element was also clearly evident in them. In his later years, Klim became involved in various projects (not only in Moscow but also in Kyiv and Kharkiv), while collaborating with various directors including Vladimir Berzin and Mikhail Mokeev. He also staged his own performances in repertory theatres, but this does not mean that the director was available for hire at will to produce a performance. Instead, this formed part of his *Controversy* project, which was an attempt to incorporate laboratory methods into repertory theatre. This project was conducted between 1993 and 1995, resulting, *inter alia*, in one of the artist's most famous works, a version of Eugene O'Neill's *A Moon for the Misbegotten* (1996, Theatre on Liteyny, St Petersburg). Klim is also a dramatist and authored the drama project *Language, Myth, Structure*, which involves working on classical texts (*Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Romeo and Juliet*), as well as creating texts based on recognised literary motifs and myths (such as *August Strindberg* and *Marivaux – Marivaux*).

Typical of Klim and many other artists belonging to his generation and the next – outside the so-called official theatre – is that they do not conduct their activities within fixed structures (such as those provided by repertory theatres and studios), but instead work within projects, i.e. organisationally fluid structures that are mobile and enable participants to be involved in various contexts and artistic relationships. As far as laboratories are concerned, they are conceived not merely as an artistic centre, but rather as a method based on the search for new possibilities and new means of expression.

The laboratory work undertaken by Klim was based on “opening up” classic dramas that had been ensnared in ideological readings while also liberating the actors’ initiative by collaborating and improvising with them. Already in the first version of *The Government Inspector*, the emancipation of the drama from rigid structures was evident.

[T]he text was transformed into an unstoppable stream of words stripped of the author’s syntax and dramatic structure, hence the division into rejoinders ascribed to particular protagonists. The text almost stopped being identifiable as a work by Gogol, becoming instead a chaotic linguistic element from which new plots and meanings emerged before our very eyes. This performance gave birth to a new type of relationship to texts, one that could be termed “automatic reading,” with reference to the automatic writing of the Surrealists. It was as if “automatic writing” liberated the “sub-conscious” of a text, since “it is language which speaks, not the author” (see Roland Barthes, “Death of the Author”) [Kulik 1992: 63; Barthes 1977: 143].

The author of these words claimed that while, in the first version of *The Government Inspector*, the dramatic text, despite the amorphous nature of the language used, remained within the structure imposed by the director, in the second version

the director, that new author, also disappeared. The entire cycle of his performances constitutes a series of unrepeatable, always newly-created improvisations by actors where even the minutest fragments of Gogol’s texts – *The Government Inspector*, *Marriage*, *The Gamblers* – formed each time, as if in a kaleidoscope, a new ornament, a new narrative [...]. As each spectator perceived the work, every phrase known since school underwent a type of splitting and division, simultaneously becoming part of two worlds, two narratives – the familiar, textbook one, and the intangible story that was forming in the here and now before their very eyes [Kulik 1992: 64].

The deconstruction of the text and the abolition of the function of the director as an omniscient interpreter were linked to the principle of activating spectators and granting them equal status as subjects. One of the most colourful figures of the Moscow theatre scene, Boris Yukhananov (born 1957), also had similar objectives. Like Klim, he had studied under Anatoly Vasilev, as well as Anatoly Efros, and from the outset of his independent artistic life, had participated in a system of projects, beginning with *The Orchard (Sad)*, which was carried out within the framework of MIR, the Individual Directing Workshop (*Masterskaya individualnoy rezhissury*) [see Zielińska 1996, 1997; Juchananow 1997]. The inspiration for each “regeneration” of *The Orchard* at the turn of the 1990s – this was how the artists termed each version of the performance created with students of the MIR and its permanent collaborator, stage designer Yury Kharikov – was Chekhov’s

*The Cherry Orchard*. In future versions of this performance/mystery play, Yukhananov collaborated with actors and amateurs (hence, for example, some parts of the work involved choirs of people with Down Syndrome) in a series of studies, thus abandoning Chekhov's text and instead drawing on random words and situations. The development and finale of the studies was fundamentally unpredictable, while the results of this work were deemed excessively controversial.<sup>28</sup> What was evident in Yukhananov's theatrical apprenticeships, characterised by amorphous texts, the absence of fixed rules, and fluidity between stage and audience, was the need to counteract the hierarchical model of Soviet culture based on the authority of tradition. The fluidity of borders is the essence of Yukhananov's projects, which went beyond the limits of theatre, meaning they could be called a new form of "life-creation" in the conditions of mass culture.

**Fig. 1.14.** Boris Yukhananov, Individual Directing Workshop, photograph by Katarzyna Osińska



Another project, *The Palace*, emerged, according to its author, in opposition to *The Orchard*.

The idea of "a palace" as a space in which hierarchy and artistic spirit naturally coexist, came to fruition at the polar opposite to the project being conducted simultaneously with Yury [Kharikov] and an entire group of young directors. I am speaking of *The Orchard* project, whose principle was to find an escape from any form of hierarchy and liberation from manipulation and play [Juchananow, Charikow 1998: 111].

<sup>28</sup> Maryla Zielińska wrote, "The total 'orchard' mystery play number six imposed itself on the audience with its fundamental openness but for the same reason it also become pretentious" [Zielińska 1997: 84].

This plan was not carried out in the form of performances; instead it evolved and interlinked with other projects. It could be argued that Yukhananov adopted a trait of studios, namely the idea of “processuality,” i.e. when the process becomes more important than the outcome, taking it to its limit, beyond which the work no longer exists in a specific, manifest form.

As a result of Yukhananov’s activities in various spheres of culture, performances also emerged, some presented in collaboration with official institutions, such as Goethe’s *Faust* or Fonvizin’s *The Minor*. There were also films (the artist was one of the founders of what was known as “parallel cinema,” which emerged within the framework of the Sine Fantom club), video recordings and theoretical and literary texts. These achievements, as well as his ability to inspire many more new projects – which, from 2000 onwards, he carried out within the framework of the LaboraTorium that he founded, the name being a composite of “laboratory” and “Tora” [see Jakubowa 2009], meant that he became not only a multifaceted artist but also a representative of cultural conditions characterised by fluidity channelled into artistic projects. This does not mean that Yukhananov was inconsistent; indeed, in future theatrical projects he returned to his central idea – the desire to make actors fully-fledged co-creators of a work they come to direct themselves (which is why his studio took on the MIR name), while also submitting the artistic process to constant reflection in the presence of spectators. Thus, both Yukhananov and Klim, with their critical perspective on the idea of the director’s theatre, made reference, albeit indirectly, to the studio tradition that was initiated in the early twentieth century and thus became its most recent manifestation.

Cultural conditions in Russia of the 1990s can be described effectively by the term *tusovka*, which lacks a direct English equivalent. *Tusovka* signifies any form of human activity connected to a broadly conceived notion of cultural participation (both active and passive) that lacks institutional support and is instead a free choice taken by the people involved, albeit a choice determined by hard-to-define and often intangible priorities. A *tusovchik* is a person familiar with many spheres of culture and can recognise phenomena with creative cultural potential (regardless of whether these observations prove accurate), thus, simply put, it is a person who frequents (or exhibits in) contemporary art galleries, watches alternative theatre productions and has a mobile social-artistic lifestyle.

Viktor Miziano, contemporary artist and founder-editor of the under-rated *Khudozhestvenny zhurnal* (*Artistic Journal*, known in Russian by its abbreviation ХЖ), has described the *tusovka* phenomenon. Based on the assumption that the *tusovka* was born of the collapse in institu-

tionalised culture and over the course of the following years had failed to acquire social status that would suggest institutions of power had granted it legitimacy, Miziano outlined, through negation, other traits of the *tusovka*:

The *tusovka* should not be limited to the underground, which is a typological alternative to official culture. Alterity has been an essential component of the underground, which located itself in opposition to “grand” culture. The *tusovka* is a form of self-organisation among the artistic milieu in conditions where external repressive pressure is absent, while at the same time the opportunities for consolidation along the lines of ideological community, and ethics of opposition or “common cause,” are exhausted.

The *tusovka* cannot be identified among the bohemians, a nineteenth-century phenomenon, which was then continued in the West, or in the attitudes of the generation of the 1960s, or in Russia’s unorthodox wing of unofficial culture. The bohemian movement emerged as a response of the artistic milieu to market pressures and social demands. It was based on elites organising their own “symbolic market” (Pierre Bourdieu) that was opposed to commercialisation. The *tusovka*, on the other hand, is open, hypothetically at least, to market and social demands, and thus it finds itself in a permanent state of expectation, waiting for a buyer and sponsor.

A particular trait of the *tusovka* is that it comprises a group of individuals who are united not only by particular structures, whether institutional or ideological, but also a shared view on how to produce those structures; the *tusovka* is a form of artistic community that perceives itself as pure potential.

Essentially, the *tusovka* emerged as the spontaneous and free choice of particular individuals. Nobody forced them to do it and nobody demanded anything of them, there were no institutional motives or ones imposed from above [...].

Born of the ruins of institutional culture, the *tusovka* proved to be a free, open space in which people met who were free of any obligations towards the past and were totally open towards the future. The *tusovka* responds acutely to its participants’ potential and it is completely indifferent towards their prehistories. [...] The *tusovka* rejects tradition, it is post-historical [Miziano 2004b: 15–17].

While it is possible to find elements of dialogue with tradition in the projects of artists who emerged from the Creative Workshops, the subsequent generation of debutants, from the 1990s and later, no longer positioned itself in relation to the past. Artists such as Kirill Serebrennikov, Ivan Vyrypaev, Evgeny Grishkovets and others (I have listed only the best-known and the work of each of these individuals deserves full attention) do not make direct reference to their roots in theatre (it is often the case that their roots are to be found in other artistic spheres

anyway), nor do they draw on the authority of the schools they attended. The structures within which the majority of young Russian theatre artists operate today, such as the Aleksey Kazantsev and Mikhail Roshchin Centre for Playwriting and Directing, Teatr.doc, or Eduard Boyakov's Praktika theatre (all three are based in Moscow), are not designed for conducting long-term experiments as had been the case with studios and laboratories. Instead, the projects are to bring quick results. The artistic strategies of the directors, playwrights and actors associated with these centres are, to a large extent, an upshot of the conditions in which values, which were deemed compromised, having served ideology, were undermined, the word was discredited, while hierarchies and authorities were rejected. These new socio-cultural conditions that gave birth to the phenomena outlined here deserve greater reflection, but that would exceed the scope of this book.<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> Recently numerous Polish publications and translations from Russian have appeared (critical articles and reviews) on the subject of recent developments in Russian theatre. Scholars working on this subject (with particular attention given to documentary theatre based on the verbatim method) include Joanna Chojka – see, for example, Puzyna-Chojka 2006; Chojka 2004. See also Jamułowicz 2004; Kopka 2003; Osińska 2004. See also the section of materials on new Russian theatre in *Notatnik Teatralny*, vol. 39–40 of 2006, which includes articles and interviews by authors including A. Moskvin, P. Rudnev and K. Kopka on the subject of the work of Klim, Ivan Vyrupaev and Mikhail Ugarov, among others.



## 2

# THE AVANT-GARDE IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY SOVIET AND RUSSIAN THEATRE

### 1. The Aesthetic Avant-Garde and Theatrical Practice – Vsevolod Meyerhold and Aleksandr Tairov

The history of Russian and Soviet theatre of the first three decades of the twentieth century is closely connected to the developments taking place in this period in visual arts, particularly painting. Many theatre directors drew upon the experiences of painters, including Vsevolod Meyerhold, who was the most daring in entering into dialogue with the visual arts. Meyerhold came to be recognised as the creator of three theatrical trends in this period: symbolism, historicism (reference to former styles and conventions) and constructivism.<sup>1</sup> The inspiration drawn from painting was not limited in Meyerhold's case to its application to set design or production, but also shaped the acting systems he created. Biomechanics developed in response to the challenge posed by constructivism to art in general. In a new space with set design stripped of

---

<sup>1</sup> In her research into the relations between the work of the director and the fine arts, Alla Mikhaylova wrote:

"Meyerhold had outstanding knowledge of painting and often viewed a future production through the lens of the works of a particular painter (for Maeterlinck's *Sister Beatrix* – Giotto; for Selvinsky's *Komandarm 2* – Velázquez; for Dumas' *Lady of the Camellias* – Manet and Renoir; and for Fayko's *Teacher Bubus* – Georg Grosz). He liked to employ painters who had not yet worked in the theatre (Lyubov Popova, Aleksandr Rodchenko, Varvara Stepanova, Aleksandr Deyneka, the Kukryniksy, and others). He had expert knowledge of theatrical technique and was the creator of many technological inventions. Prior to his first encounter with an artist, Meyerhold generally already had a clear concept for the upcoming production: of the space, the style, the epoch, key staging devices, and sometimes even a colour design. He constantly followed the trends in contemporary art" [A. Mikhaylova 1993: 721].

This text does not appear in the English version of the same publication [*The Great Utopia* 1992].

any illustrative traces, it was impossible to act in old ways. New techniques enabling actors to gain perfect control over their physicality and perform dynamically yet efficiently and pointedly, were a means of transferring the ideas of constructivism to acting. The impact of contemporary art on Meyerhold's work affected the entirety of his experiments, searching for a new theatrical language. Thus, the collaboration between Meyerhold (and other directors) and painters, sculptors and architects not only changed the face of theatre, but also influenced the formation of new systems in visual arts.

Theatre had already been incorporated into the sphere of avant-garde experiments before the Revolution, with artists representing the visual arts seeking means of realising their ideas in theatre. Thus, Vladimir Tatlin became the first to introduce avant-garde abstract forms to the stage in the 1911 production of an anonymous author's late eighteenth-century folk drama *Tsar Maximilian and His Son Adolf* (*Tsar Maksemian i ego nepokornyy syn Adolfa*), which was staged by Mikhail Bonch-Tomashevsky at the Moscow Literary-Artistic Circle according to the conventions of the "tragic fairground booth." The earliest example of a performance in which the avant-garde word *zaum* – beyond reason, i.e., the poetry of Aleksey Kruchenykh, the music of Mikhail Matyushin, and Kazimir Malevich's concept of non-objective art were combined on equal terms, was the Futurist opera *Victory over the Sun*. The prologue was written by Velimir Khlebnikov. The premiere – one of only two performances – was held in December 1913 in St Petersburg as part of the programme presented by the Youth Union.

During a "trans-rational" [*zaum* – K.O.] narration, which breaks the ties with our world declared out of date, appeared for the first time "non-objective" elements – those pure pictorial planes. Having defeated "the reign of the sun" (that of the old "terrestrial" logic), the emergence of these pictorial planes established a new order situated beyond the limits of our understanding. Its logic refers no more to our "world of flesh," it was superior to it, that is why it needs no more the reference of the old aesthetic order, that of the hierarchy of "parts," of relations between "forms and colours." Their logic was definitely surpassed by the emergence of these non-objective planes which erased all possible reference to such an order of the causality of things [Nakov 1986: 14].

This is how the expert on Russian avant-garde Andrei Nakov described the piece, while adding that Malevich required another eighteen months in order to liberate his initial intuitive forms of his *zaum* language and subsequently endow it with the logic of the new aesthetic system. (He went on to create *Black Square on a White Background* in 1915, which was a new dawn in the history of art.) It can thus be assumed that work on the theatre production helped Malevich crystallise the idea of Suprematism.

**Fig. 2.1.** Vsevolod Meyerhold, drawing by an unknown author



It is for this reason that the performance is most commonly discussed in the context of the history of art rather than the history of theatre.

Meyerhold was most probably present at both the premiere of Kruchenykh, Matyushin and Malevich's opera, as well as the performance of the Futurist tragedy *Vladimir Mayakovsky*, a monodrama performed by the poet himself, with set design by Pavel Filonov and Iosif Shkolnik. This assumption was shared by one eyewitness of the time, who was also among the leading experts on the Russian avant-garde, Nikolay Khardzhiev.

**Fig. 2.2.** Poster for Vladimir Mayakovsky's *Mystery-Bouffe*, directed by Vsevolod Meyerhold, set design by Kazimir Malevich



He claimed that the elements of Futurist theatre evident in both productions developed into the “system of contemporary theatre” [Khardzhiev 1997: 303].

Malevich’s sketches for sets and costumes for the Futurist opera have been described and analysed [see, e.g., Rudnitsky 1990b]. However, no sketches or photographs have survived documenting Malevich and Meyerhold’s collaboration on the first version of Mayakovsky’s *Mystery-Bouffe*, which was staged in November 1918 on the first anniversary of the Revolution in Petrograd. Mayakovsky himself appeared on stage performing roles including the Ordinary Man, who recited a parody of the Gospels’ Sermon on the Mount while standing over the audience on a tall ladder that reached the ceiling. The piece was only performed twice – both times at the Conservatory hall – and provoked violent discussion that exceeded the realm of theatre criticism. Many people were disturbed by Mayakovsky’s text, which contained anarchistic praise for the destruction of the old world. One of the leading Petrograd critics, Andrey Levinson, who was a man of moderate views, gave Mayakovsky the poet the benefit of the doubt, although he condemned the piece as spiritually void. Levinson claimed that the audience was not impressed by the boorish wordplay or the “attacks on the intelligentsia by the intelligentsia,” since spectators prefer either tragedy or high comedy [Levinson 1997]. The performance was praised, however, by Vladimir Solovyov, one of Meyerhold’s collaborators, and Anatoly Lunacharsky, although the hastily-prepared production had many weaknesses, of which its creators were very much aware.

Malevich’s idea – in his own words, as recorded by Aleksandr Fevral’sky – was based on the Cubist principle.

I considered the production to be like the frame of a picture, while the actors were the contrasting elements (in Cubism each object is to serve as a contrasting element in relation to another object). In planning the entire piece over three or four storeys on stage, I attempted a vertical distribution of the actors in accordance with the most recent trends in painting. The actors’ movements were to enter into rhythmic relation with the set elements. I painted several planes on a single canvas. I did not perceive space as illusory but rather as Cubist [cited in Fevral’sky 1971: 69–70].

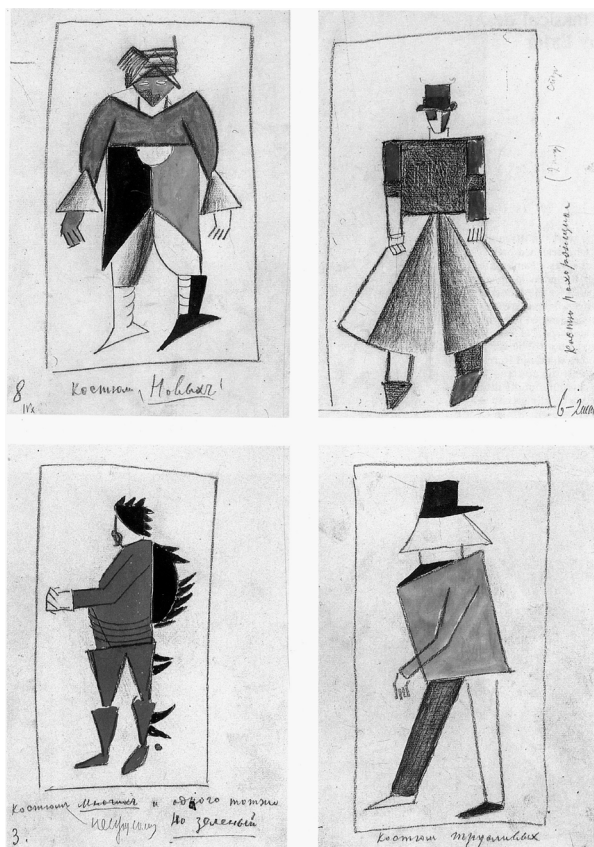
It is worth adding that Malevich, like Meyerhold, remained unsatisfied with this piece.

Many years after the premiere, Aleksey Gvozdev and Adrian Piotrovsky provided a detailed description and interpretation of the performance. Writing in 1933 – hence their negative opinion – the researchers criticised Malevich’s conception but, through their negation, confirmed its innovative nature.

Malevich's abstract costumes, which blurred the differences between characters, underlined the abstract, mechanistic character of the performance. The sets failed to fill the images invented by the poet with corporeality but, on the contrary, underscored their schematic nature that created barriers in perception [Gvozdev, Piotrovsky 1933: 220].

Furthermore, the two authors reminded readers that Mayakovsky was not satisfied by Malevich's proposals and, soon after this premiere, began working on his own costume designs for the Clean (who were presented according to the conventions of an agit-satire) and the Unclean.

**Fig. 2.3.** Kazimir Malevich, sketches of costumes for Aleksey Kruchenykh and Mikhail Matyushin's opera *Victory over the Sun*, 1913



Konstantin Rudnitsky, citing Aleksandr Fevral'sky who had discussed the production with Malevich himself, described the colouring of the show as "cold, steel-like" [Fevral'sky 1940: 196], with this same shade featuring in decorations depicting the earthly hemisphere and filling the stage in the first scene, as well as the conventional form of Noah's Ark in the second,

before featuring in the third where Hell was represented.<sup>2</sup> For Paradise, muted shades were selected, while the Promised Land took on the form of a kingdom of metal and iron mechanisms [Rudnitsky 1969: 230]. Many commentators noted that the costumes of the Unclean, who were depicted as a homogenous, grey mass, presaged the appearance of *prozodezhdy*, i.e., the actors' uniforms that Meyerhold introduced into his later productions.

The inspiring impact of the artistic avant-garde on Meyerhold's work went beyond the aspect described by Rudnitsky, i.e., perceiving the world in mechanistic categories and depicting it as a homogenous, subordinated space, thus a kingdom of machines. The avant-garde was the revaluation of existing artistic definitions of the very essence of relations between object and sign. Furthermore, in its most radical forms, abstract and non-objective art became an option that transcended the binary divisions of subjective and objective art, mimetic art, and art which created its own reality; classical and mannerist art.<sup>3</sup> Malevich's work represented a break with the old forms of painting, marking the birth of a new art, the first step towards "pure creation," which abandoned not only mimesis but also representation in the sense of a secondary manifestation of things through signs. The artist's radicalism was expressed to the fullest extent in the extreme version of Suprematism, whose theoretical formulation came in 1918 in the form of the White Manifesto. This was the period in which he created monochrome compositions in white, i.e. white squares on white backgrounds. This radicalism failed to emerge victorious from confrontations with other directions in 1920s avant-garde experimentation.<sup>4</sup> The idea of "cosmic" art, completely liberated from its epistemological functions and instead directed towards eternity, indeed suggested transcending painting, as Andrei Nakov has noted, citing Malevich himself: "there cannot be a question of painting in suprematism. Painting has been obsolete for a long time and the painter himself is a prejudice from the past" [Nakov 1986: 38].

---

<sup>2</sup> Levinson describes the colouring of hell as being purple and green; see Levinson 1997: 385. The contradiction here perhaps stems from the difference between Malevich's design and its actual execution.

<sup>3</sup> This latter binary opposition was proposed by Gustav René Hocke in relation to the history of art, see Hocke 1957. As an aside, in writing about twentieth-century examples of broadly-defined mannerism (particularly in relation to Cubism), Hocke never mentions Malevich – which is further confirmation of the fact that the vision of Russian artist cannot be incorporated into a dualistic model of the history of art.

<sup>4</sup> Christina Lodder, citing A. Strigalev, makes direct reference to this, stating that Malevich's departure from Moscow in autumn 1919 was linked to his "creative isolation" [Lodder 1992: 270].

*The White Manifesto* emerged in the period when Malevich began collaborating with Meyerhold, and it is thus difficult to imagine that the artists would have failed to discuss such essential artistic matters together.<sup>5</sup> During this period of the director's work, an acceleration of the process of the "departure" of theatre from its function of representing reality was evident, i.e., creating a stage "image" – one that was not only in accordance with the principle of real-life probability (this strategy had been adopted by the MAT but Meyerhold had abandoned it already before the Revolution), but also with conventionalised forms that made reference to previous theatrical epochs (Antiquity, the Spanish Golden Age, and Commedia Dell'Arte). Meyerhold's innovativeness was not based on his transcendence of the limits of theatre in the same way as Malevich (theatre cannot be a non-objective art form, since it is the human actor who is always at its centre). Rather, it was grounded in the fact that he undermined the principle of illusion in two meanings of the term: the illusion of life (typical of theatre that imitated reality) and the illusion of theatre evident in the conventionalised and historical forms of theatre that had inspired the director's pre-Revolution achievements.

It is worth remembering that the director's sources of inspiration were varied. In his search for a "new" theatre, Meyerhold was open to contemporary discoveries in various fields of art and thought. His interests reached beyond theatre, hence the extensive participation in his works not only of dramatists, but also the epoch's most outstanding painters, architects, composers and thinkers. His erudition in the fields of philosophy, literature and the history of art were supported by his excellent knowledge of contemporary trends in the arts, while his character – that of an incessant experimenter – meant that he was an exceptionally multi-faceted artist, who could open up new perspectives for theatre. It was said that each of Meyerhold's works constituted a new era – and this statement is hardly an exaggeration. After all, Meyerhold continually evolved throughout his lifetime in accordance with the motto formulated by Shklovsky: "It is impossible to create while using forms already discovered, because creation is change" [Nakov 1986: 28].

The programme of transcending the limits of painting was present not only in the work of Kazimir Malevich. Artists associated with Constructivism

---

<sup>5</sup> In Meyerhold's papers that have been published so far, there is no evident trace of contact with Malevich during this period, although we should also be aware that these documents have only been made public in an incomplete version. Perhaps a new edition will include further materials containing references to these and other contexts of Meyerhold's work.

also took up the challenge, including Lyubov Popova, Aleksandr Rodchenko, Konstantin Medunetsky and the Stenberg brothers, Vladimir and Georgy. The Constructivists contrasted the Suprematist “clean” evolution of forms with the reality of specific work. Consequently, a direction emerged within the avant-garde that associated art with manufacturing,<sup>6</sup> its supporters including Varvara Stepanova, Aleksandr Vesnin and Vladimir Tatlin.<sup>7</sup> They believed that the work of art ought to be representative of the era of technological progress rather than merely represent it by reflecting this era in an illustrative manner. It is for this reason that they applied the language of technology and equated the creative deed with scientific activity while also, at least in their declarations, rejecting aestheticism, and instead believing that art should not produce works of art but objects that have a practical application. In practice, the question of the “utility” of their art remains controversial. The works of the Constructivists, whether spatial constructions or images onto which constructions were projected (as in the case of Konstantin Medunetsky’s series of *Flower Constructions*), did not possess utilitarian functions and were, naturally, not used in manufacturing, but instead represented a new, mechanistic aesthetic, as noted by a certain artist, including El Lissitzky [see Lodder 1992]]. Furthermore, in contrast to their manifestos and declarations, many of the artists mentioned above combined in their work directions considered to be contradictory, such as Suprematism and Constructivism. Art historians have long since noted the artists’ “inconsistency” [see Strigalev 1993–1994: 23; Lodder 1992]. This discrepancy between the declarations in manifestos and the actual works of art should be kept in mind when discussing Meyerhold’s post-Revolutionary work.

The director had links to many of the abovementioned artists through his collaborations. Principally, initially at least, he worked with Lyubov Popova, the author of the famous construction accompanying Crommelynck’s *Le Cocu magnifique*, staged in 1922, before also collaborating with Varvara

---

<sup>6</sup> See the manifestos collected in Bowlt (ed.) 1976.

<sup>7</sup> For more on the subject of the parting of Suprematism and Constructivism, as well as the formation of the “productive” or “industrial” orientation of the avant-garde, see, among other works, Nakov 1986. It should be added, however, as Christina Lodder noted, that there were common elements in Constructivism and the movement represented by Malevich and, subsequently, El Lissitzky, who in any case stressed that the difference between UNOVIS and Obmokh (*Obshchestvo molodykh khudozhnikov* – the Association of Young Artists, which included Rodchenko among its members) was that the artists belonging to the first group were interested in material and surfaces (i.e. painting), while those in the second group focused on material and space (i.e. spatial constructions). El Lissitzky stressed that this ideal identifying art with production was represented primarily by the Obmokh constructivists, since Unovis differentiated the aesthetic and practical functions; see Lodder 1992: 270.



Stepanova and then, in later years, El Lissitzky as well, in an unperformed version of Sergey Tretyakov's drama *I Want a Child*. He also collaborated with Ilya Shlepyanov and Aleksandr Rodchenko. However, he never collaborated with Vladimir Tatlin, although it is believed that his counter-reliefs exerted a profound influence on Meyerhold's work [see Rakitin 1992]. These spatial forms, in a certain sense three-dimensional abstract collages in mixed media, including wood, metal, cardboard and fragments of authentic objects (such as table legs), which were introduced into painted reliefs by Tatlin (he had been creating them since the mid-1900s), illustrated nothing, represented nothing and interpreted nothing; they possessed no decorative value: they were works lacking any utilitarian purpose whatsoever. Already during the creation of the painted reliefs (flat compositions using the abovementioned materials), Tatlin transcended existing definitions of art, thus demonstrating that anything can become material.<sup>8</sup> By lending the reliefs a spatial dimension, he transcended the limits of painting and created a new reality based on mathematical calculation and dictated by its own laws.

In all varieties of counter-relief there is a strong element of authorial will. The importance of the author is evident in them, there is a sense of the presence of a positive, constructivist attitude (this was the trait that would be adopted by Soviet Constructivism [...]) [Strigalev 1993–1994: 30].

Theatre studies often reduce Meyerhold's innovations to the liberation of the theatre from its domination by literature – as if forgetting that such a theatre had already existed in the past. The statement that

the process of revaluation [in the avant-garde – K.O.] took place under the banner of the liberation of "painting from non-painting," i.e. from the representational element, just as the word was liberated from its bondage to meaning, and theatre from literature [Vakar 2000: 3].

fails to fully illustrate the nature of the changes taking place in Russian theatre primarily as a result of Meyerhold's activities. In contrast to the previous era in which directors collaborated with dramatists, actors, set designers and composers in creating the staging of a performance on the basis of a literary work, in the new era, i.e. after the birth of the avant-garde, the form of a performance (including acting) was determined to the most significant extent by aesthetic factors: new notions of space, the introduction of abstract form, and the use of material texture. In Meyerhold's case, the inspiration of the impact of the artistic avant-garde cannot be reduced to a simple transferral of its innovations to the stage, thus permitting the set to take precedence. In

---

<sup>8</sup> For more on the subject of Tatlin's painted reliefs and counter-reliefs, see Strigalev 1993–1994: 25–34.

keeping with avant-garde artists, Meyerhold took on the role of a demiurge; the sole creator of a work and thus creator of an autonomous reality based on different principles to those dictating real life. In the first years following the Revolution, the director himself indicated the connections most important to him, doing so in the incomplete sentences of the manifesto accompanying the performance of Émile Verhaeren's *Les Aubes* (1920) at the RSFSR-1 Theatre. Meyerhold and his then assistant Valery Bebutov, were signatories to the manifesto that stated: "We have only to talk to the latest followers of Picasso and Tatlin to know at once that we are dealing with kindred spirits... We are building just as they are building..." [Meyerhold 2016b: 213–214].

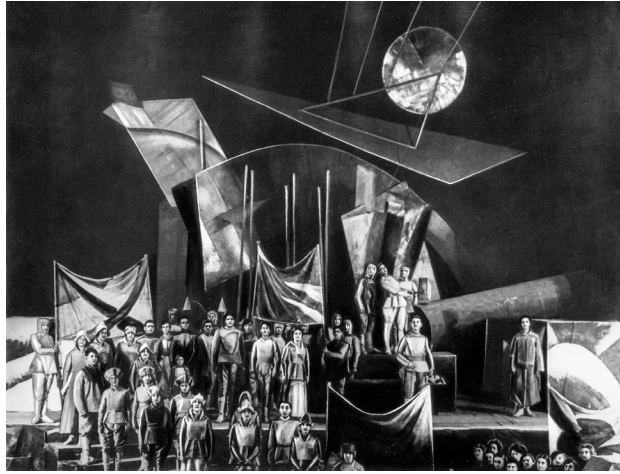
"We are building just as they are building" – this sentence is indicative of the belief that it is the director who plays the leading role in the creation of a theatre performance. In the first years following the Revolution, Meyerhold departed from theatricality in its existing sense. If, in the pre-Revolution productions, which the author himself deemed conventional, he did indeed abandon fidelity to real-life reality on stage, he did so owing to theatrical convention, which had been formed according to principles well-known from previous epochs. Following the Revolution, Meyerhold went a step further. He began abandoning theatrical illusion in favour of "stripping the theatre." In Verhaeren's *Les Aubes*, he stripped the performance space bare of props and thus revealed the "guts" of the theatre, showing its brick walls and mechanisms. This performance served as political agitation owing to propaganda texts referring to the events of the ongoing civil war, added to the Belgian dramatist's work, with these then proclaimed by actor-orators from the stage. It was performed as part of the Theatrical October programme on the third anniversary of the Revolution. Meyerhold staged *Les Aubes* in the former private Zon Theatre, which became home to the RSFSR-1 Theatre. The director and his actors received a damaged, cold, dark and gloomy space. But this was exactly what the director needed. He did not want cosiness or warmth. A witness to events at the time, theatre critic Boris Alpers, wrote:

This was a typical space for political meetings, with walls covered in damp, while the air hung heavy. There were no ticket controls at this theatre. The doors were wide open, while the winter winds sometimes swept the foyer and corridors of the theatre, forcing people to turn up their coat collars. The boxes had their balustrades torn out. Chairs and benches for the audience were put together any old how and the rows were crooked. In the lobby, people could chew nuts and smoke shag [Alpers 1977a: 48].

The work was performed with the auditorium illuminated, with "actor-claquers" or plants positioned among the audience members. In response

to the questions from the stage, they were to activate the audience. The performance ended with a group rendition of *The Internationale*.

**Fig. 2.4.** Scene from *Les Aubes* based on Émile Verhaeren's novel, directed by Vsevolod Meyerhold, set design by Vladimir Dmitriev, RSFSR-1 Theatre, 1920



Most critics, Russian theatre historians likewise, underscored that the element linking this production to the revolutionary reality was the ascetic and raw style of the piece and not only the additional propaganda texts. However, it should be noted that the performance was nothing like a political meeting in the literal sense. Meyerhold was, after all, in the midst of effacing the old theatre and constructing a new theatricality. He was introducing set design that was completely free of illustrative and abstract functions. As a student of Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin, the painter and set designer Vladimir Dmitriev erected huge silver-coloured polyhedrons of various shapes – cylinders, cubes, elliptical semi-spheres, on the stage, while a flat metal triangular object hung above it, resembling the lid of a grand piano. All of these elements were made of natural materials – metal, wood and rope. Meyerhold placed actors dressed in silver-coloured linen costumes among these fixed spatial elements.

The producer's sketch for *Les Aubes* made reference to the spirit of military marches. Meyerhold placed his silver extras in semicircles or in rows fanning out from the front. They formed the frame for this performance/rally. "The tragic choir could have been mistaken for military fighters preparing for battle,"

wrote Konstantin Rudnitsky [1969: 241] in his monograph, which reconstructed the artist's performances on the basis of numerous descriptions. Rudnitsky, like Alpers, believed that the innovativeness of this performance was to be found in its embrace of the monumental and pathetic spirit and style of the epoch.

Was it truly reality that created the model imitated by art, or was it rather a case of there being an inverse effect, where art flowed into life?<sup>9</sup> In the Soviet period, the dominant view was that, in Meyerhold's performances (likewise in the work of other artists connected to the avant-garde), it was art that imitated life in the sense that the aesthetics of avant-garde works reflected the spirit of the age. However, this relationship could also be viewed differently if we consider that the main element of the avant-garde was its reduction, i.e. the aforementioned tendency to start from scratch, while its fundamental strategy was "revealing the device," which was accompanied by the objective of recreating the world anew. And it was the avant-garde which, to a significant extent, imposed on contemporary receivers, and following generations, the image of the post-Revolutionary world.

Meyerhold sought to create an autonomous reality on stage, which is why he began creating his own theatrical code and conventions, the key components of which were Constructivism and biomechanics.

If in *Les Aubes* the director attempted to break with the "canon of the Italian Renaissance theatres" by taking on Vladimir Dmitriev to work on the artistic side of the performance then, in Meyerhold's opinion (uttered five years after the premiere, in 1926, following his first experiences with Constructivism), it was impossible to fully realise this objective. The set designer failed to go all the way, regardless of the geometrical shapes on stage [Meyerhold 1968b: 18].<sup>10</sup> In *Le Cocu magnifique*, with Lyubov Popova's famous stage construction, Meyerhold finally achieved his objective. The performance was described by Aleksey Gvozdev thus in 1927:

The stage [...] was stripped; a raw brick wall provided the backdrop to the performance – rather than the painter's canvases that had served this purpose previously. The construction located on stage had no footlights or curtain, and instead was made up of "working" parts: stairs, a ramp, a platform, a set of revolving doors and opening cages. [...] At the rear, two wheels and

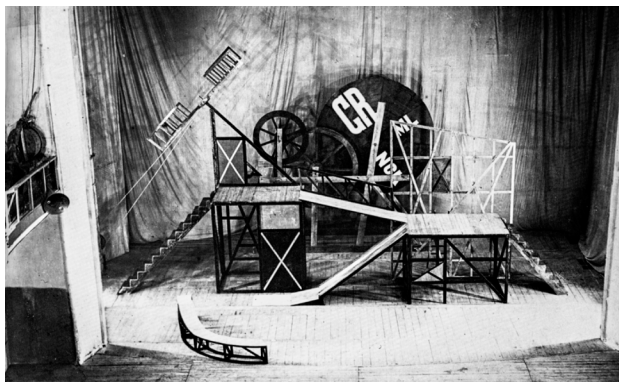
---

<sup>9</sup> In what is now a classic essay – "The Theatre and Theatricality as Components of Early Nineteenth-Century Culture" – Yuri Lotman differentiated three separate models of these relations. In the first case, "[a]rtistic and extra-artistic spaces are divided by so clear-cut a boundary that they can only interrelate and not interpenetrate." This applies to art based on conventions and employing evidently conventional symbols; in the second case, "[l]ife selects art as a model and strives to 'imitate' it"; while, finally, in the third case – "life is seen as an area of modelling activity: it creates examples which are imitated by art." The first instance, he argues, is comparable "with Classicism, the second with Romanticism and the third with Realism" [Lotman 1984: 142].

<sup>10</sup> As an aside, the iconography of the performance suggests an affinity with the surfaces applied by Dmitriev featuring Tatlin's famous counter-reliefs. Alla Mikhaylova also mentions this in: A. Mikhaylova, Davydova et al. 1995: 30.

the blades of a windmill turned, which sped up when the action became more dynamic. [...] For the first time the new actor appeared on the new rostrum as one who had shed the decorative costume of the old theatre and adopted the *prozodezhda*, the famous adapted navy blue worker's shirt, identical for men and women. The actors performed without characterisation but with their entire bodies liberated by Meyerhold's biomechanics [Gvozdev 1927: 28–30, cited in A. Mikhaylova, Davydova et al. 1995: 154].

**Fig. 2.5.** Lyubov Popova, construction for *Le Cocu magnifique* by Fernand Crommelynck, directed by Vsevolod Meyerhold, RSFSR-1 Theatre, 1922



After 1922, when the main theatrical event was the production of *Le Cocu magnifique*, the theatre began creating its own new forms – of course, only that part of theatre open to new ideas. It is necessary to remember that, alongside the avant-garde, there were still theatres whose programmes were more moderate, while there were even those which referred to old nineteenth-century traditions, such as the Maly Theatre. New theatrical forms corresponded with experiments conducted in other fields of art, including music, painting and architecture. The year 1922 is considered a breakthrough moment in the formation of the new artistic paradigm.

The focal point of experiments shifted to architecture and industrial art,<sup>11</sup> which, applying the aesthetic-formal achievements of painters, played a leading role in the formation of the new stylistic system. Leftish trends in painting and the related stylistically-innovative schools of symbolist Romanticism in architecture passed on the baton in the race to experiment with new forms to architects, who represented rationalism and early constructivism, as well as to artists identifying with art as production. These trends applied the formal discoveries of their predecessors while also rejecting them in certain senses [Khan-Magomedov 1996: 354].

<sup>11</sup> The Russian concept *proizvodstvennoe iskusstvo* refers to the art of the 1920s and does not translate easily, with “production art” also used.

\* \* \*

Aleksandr Tairov's Kamerny (Chamber) Theatre, which was active between 1914 and 1939, was unofficially termed the set designers' theatre (*teatr khudozhnikov*),<sup>12</sup> since the image of this theatre was created equally by directors and the most prominent artists – painters and set designers – of the period: Pavel Kuznetsov, Aleksandra Ekster, Natalia Goncharova, Boris Ferdinandov, Georgy Yakulov, Aleksandr Vesnin, Vadim Ryndin and the Stenberg brothers, Vladimir and Georgy. Each came from avant-garde artistic circles and theatre was just one of the spheres in which they were active. It was at the Kamerny Theatre where, thanks to Aleksandra Ekster, Cubist-inspired sets were consistently introduced for the first time. In the 1916 performance of *Famira Kifared*, which was a synthesis of mime, drama, song and dance, a practically empty performance space was punctuated by blocks and extended, sharp-edged cones [see Kovalenko 1993: 110–116]. Abram Efros defined this staging of Innokenty Annensky's version of the original ancient Greek poetic drama as “a formal parade of Cubism” [Abram Efros 1934: XXIV]. The artist's synthesis of line, form and colour (evident in her work in painting from the 1900s) found a spatial application. An eye-witness to the period, art critic Yakov Tugendkhold, described Ekster's set design as innovative when compared to the achievements of European theatre at the time. (Indeed, Ekster's work preceded the arrival of Cubism onto the French stage in 1917, with Picasso's costumes and props for the ballet *Parada*, for which Erik Satie composed the music and Jean Cocteau wrote the libretto.)

For the first time on the European stage the principle of a “visual arts” background was tested, with the background reduced to its most basic forms: blue steps of various widths, black cypress cones and yellow-and-black polyhedral stones and cliffs [...] Each and every one of these artistic forms was applied in the performance [Tugendkhold 1922, cited in Kovalenko 1993: 109].

Tairov dreamed of a set, which would become “the rhythmic framework of the performance” [Tugendkhold 1922, cited in Kovalenko 1993: 110], and Ekster fulfilled that wish – each element of the set “performed” in the piece, determining its rhythm. The simplicity of spatial forms harmonised with the choreographic score of the movements of the actor/dancers: satyrs and bacchanals in colourful costumes of azure, red, orange, green and gold, which did not inhibit their movements, while also revealing certain parts of their bodies.

<sup>12</sup> The Russian word *khudozhnik* means artist in the most general terms, including painters and sculptors, as well as set designers.

While Ekster's Cubist set for *Famira Kifared* was brilliantly innovative, the costumes – inspired by drawings on Greek vases – made reference, as the archived sketches show, to the achievements of artists of the previous epoch, namely those from the Mir Iskusstva group, including Leon Bakst and Aleksandr Golovin. But the costumes designed by her for Tairov's subsequent piece, Oscar Wilde's *Salome* (1917), were characterised by a certain architecturality derived from Cubism. According to all available witness testimonies, Ekster had a leading influence on this work. Both her set (with its simple forms – columns and broad steps) and her costumes, determined the style and dynamics of the spectacle. The raw, perhaps even monumental architecturality of the set, was punctuated by the colourful surfaces created by textiles of various sizes.

The full spectrum of possibilities was open here: in the realm of forms – diagonal surfaces, wedges, rectangles; in the realm of movement – falls and ascents, diffusion and concentration, movement upwards, sideways, and into the depths. The dynamics of the set created a double effect. Firstly, while having a single set it was nevertheless possible to change the time and place of the action in each act by coloured curtains. Secondly, the differentiation of forms, colours and movements of these different textiles symbolised a particular psychological moment in the drama. These moving, coloured surfaces affected the spectators in a purely emotional manner, like chords in music, like the element of colour in its purist form [Tugendkhold 1922, cited in Kovalenko 1993: 117].

The role of colour, both in the set and costumes, alongside the appearance of sharp, wedge-shaped forms and the prevalence of diagonal lines that introduced an uneasy atmosphere into the performance, lent the piece an overall "Romantic/symbolist" style, whose traits could be seen in the work

**Fig. 2.6.** Aleksandra Ekster, sketch of costume for Innokenty Annensky's *Famira Kifared*, directed by Aleksandr Tairov, Kamerny Theatre, 1916



of certain innovators in the first post-Revolutionary years. Like the sharp angles, zigzag lines appeared not only in the set and costumes, but also in the actors' make-up and set design for Strindberg's *Eric XIV*, staged in 1921 by Evgeny Vakhtangov at the First Studio of the MAT. The set designer Ignaty Nivinsky referenced expressionism in this case. From 1922, the sharp angles, broken lines and crooked surfaces began to give way to the aesthetics of the straight line. It was during this period that constructivism first entered the theatre, and alongside it – architects.

Three-dimensional stage construction and design was one of the fundamental principles of Aleksandr Tairov's theatre. He considered set models an essential element in preparing a production.

The actor displays his art with the help of his body. The actor's body is *three dimensional* and, for this reason, he is able to compose his character and perform exclusively in space. It follows that the stage must be constructed so as to help the body of the actor, depending on the tasks ascribed to him, gain the required space to perform while also generating a suitable scenic atmosphere. This can be developed only within the specific cubic capacity [Tairov 1978: 109–110. See also, in English: Tairov 1969: 109].

This is how Tairov described the situation in his *Notes of a Director* from 1921, with his remarks doing little more than stating the obvious. The director was not really theoretically-minded – in contrast to Meyerhold – although, as a practitioner, he opened up new possibilities for theatre, inviting representatives of the visual arts, including the architect Aleksandr Vesnin, to collaborate.

In the 1920s, the Kamerny Theatre served as a kind of laboratory where new concepts and ideas were tested. A separate issue was the accusation often levelled at Tairov that he aestheticised the ideas of the avant-garde, primarily by subordinating them to historical styles. This was how Boris Ferdinandov's Cubist-Rococo sets and costumes for the 1919 production of Eugene Scribe and Ernest Legouvé's *Adrianna Lecouvreur* could emerge, likewise Georgy Yakulov's Cubist-Futurist Baroque in *Princess Brambilla* by ETA Hoffmann (1920), or Yakulov's Cubist-Gothic in Paul Claudel's *L'Échange* (1918). The 1920 production of Claudel's *L'Annonce faite à Marie* was in a similar style, with Aleksandr Vesnin designing "architectonic" costumes that referenced Gothic cathedrals. Vesnin was also the creator of the set design and costumes for one of Tairov's most famous productions, his version of Racine's *Phaedra*. The Cubist forms that he created imposed a classicist style on the entire work. Regardless of this aestheticising tendency, Tairov's theatre continued to play a leading role in inspiring experiments, which not only enriched the dramatic arts but also proved fruitful in other spheres. The Chamber Theatre

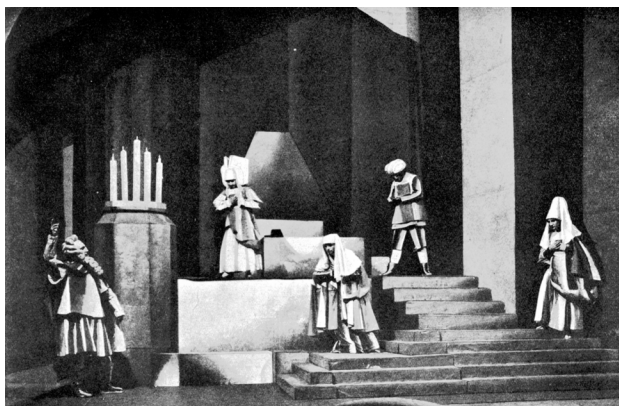


served as a test bed in this period for various artistic fields – painting, architecture and design. The massive level of energy accumulated during this period could not be exhausted solely in architecture, for example. Instead, it found an outlet in theatre, in set design, where it was possible

**Fig. 2.7.** Aleksandr Vesnin, costume design for Paul Claudel's *L'Annonce faite à Marie*, 1920



**Fig. 2.8.** Scene from Paul Claudel's *L'Annonce faite à Marie*, directed by Aleksandr Tairov, set design by Aleksandr Vesnin, 1920



to create architectural compositions and elements filling the space – not only on paper or in the form of miniature models,

wrote Selim Khan-Magomedov [1996: 38], an art historian and expert on avant-garde architecture.



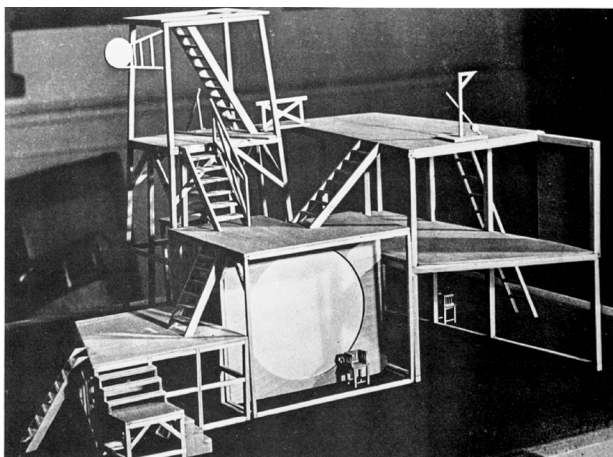
**Fig. 2.9.** Aleksandra Ekster, design for the costume of Phaedra, 1922



**Fig. 2.10.** The final scene from Jean Racine's *Phaedra*, directed by Aleksandr Tairov, set design by Aleksandra Ekster, Kamerny Theatre, 1922

The use of constructions in performances was directly linked to the idea of removing theatre from its traditional space, which itself was a manifestation of the paradigm of the age: the theatricalisation of all social space, with mass open-air spectacles providing the most spectacular example of this. It was therefore a case of creating a type of universal set that could be transferred to other buildings or into any space, thus making theatrical performances independent of the traditional theatre space. Following the debut of such constructions in the production of Crommelynck's *Le Cocu magnifique* (in April 1922), constructivist forms appeared in Meyerhold's subsequent theatre pieces: Sukhovo-Kobylin's *The Death of Tarelkin* (November 1922, set design by Varvara Stepanova), *The Earth in Turmoil* based on Marcel Martinet's texts (March 1923, literary adaptation by Sergey Tretyakov, set design by Lyubov Popova), and *Lake Lull* by Aleksey Fayko at the Revolutionary Theatre (March 1923, set design by Viktor Shestakov). The premiere of Tairov's first play, which used Aleksandr Vesnin's constructions – a version of GK Chesterton's *The Man who Was Thursday* – did not take place until December 1923. This is why, in many studies, it has been claimed that Tairov had "borrowed" the idea of constructivist set design from Meyerhold. One researcher exploring Soviet avant-garde architecture has, however, drawn attention to the fact that Popova and Vesnin's experiments not only took place in parallel, but actually resulted from a dialogue between the two artists. Both participated in the famous 5x5=25 exhibition held in November 1921. Other participants included Aleksandr Rodchenko, Varvara Stepanova and Aleksandra Ekster and, as an aside, it was after Meyerhold had viewed this exhibition that he invited Popova to collaborate on *Le Cocu magnifique*. Both Popova and Vesnin were members of the "objectivist" group that operated within the INKhUK (*Institut khudozhestvennoy kultury*, Institute for Artistic Culture). Ultimately, they jointly created a design for the mass spectacle held on the Khodynka Field in 1921, although it was never realised. They worked simultaneously on

**Fig. 2.11.** Viktor Shestakov, model of construction for Aleksey Fayko's *Lake Lull*, directed by Vsevolod Meyerhold, Moscow Revolutionary Theatre, 1923



the set design for both performances, although the premiere of the first came eighteen months before the second. However, this cannot be taken to mean that Vesnin's work was derived from Popova's.

While her construction, to some degree, met the demands of the site of the action (the wheels and windmill blades suggested that the action took place in a rural mill), it was in fact Vesnin's design for *The Man Who was Thursday* that was more complex and somehow more "constructivist." The architect included moving elements: lifts, travelators, as well as various technological components (such as spinning wheels), etc. The design was thus fundamentally autonomous and non-representational. In spite of this, however, on stage it appeared to be a schematic façade of a contemporary building, with this effect resulting from its incorporation into the mirror of the stage. Limited space meant that it could not be presented as a separate architectural object. Furthermore, Tairov primarily emphasised the theatrical impact, thus Vesnin's set was merely one component of his directorial vision, which, in itself, was hardly a radical avant-garde project.

Tairov's attitude toward the inventions of the avant-garde was utilitarian and pragmatic: he adopted avant-garde forms with the aim of lending the performance a "contemporary" aesthetic. In contrast to Meyerhold, he aestheticised the avant-garde and thus made it familiar. He took the avant-garde out of the realm of ideology and rendered it a site for art that was free of ideological obligations. At the same time as giving it a decorative role and making it accessible to audiences, he also rendered the avant-garde banal. It was therefore no coincidence that left-wing artistic circles attacked Tairov for apparent aestheticism, for praising the bourgeoisie and paying homage to decadent tastes. The fiercest critics of the founder of the Kamerny Theatre included Meyerhold,<sup>13</sup> although Vakhtangov also offered him little respite.<sup>14</sup> In the USSR, Tairov

---

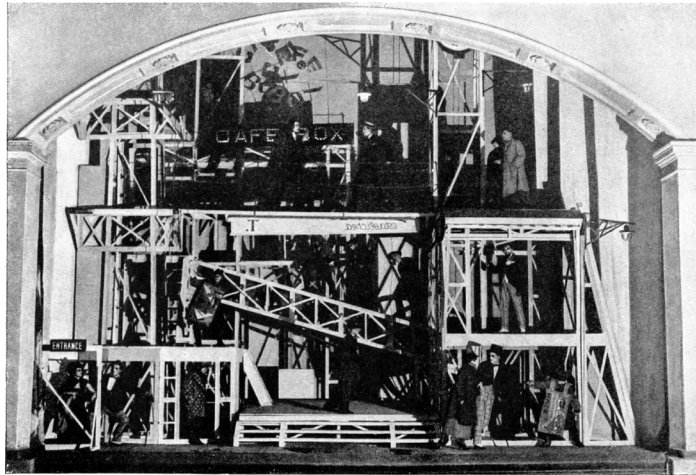
<sup>13</sup> Meyerhold launched multiple attacks on Tairov. In a 1921 review of Tairov's book *Zapiski rezhissyora* (*Notes of a Director*), Meyerhold accused Tairov of dilettantism, while calling his Chamber Theatre amateur; see Meyerhold 1968b: 37–43.

<sup>14</sup> Vakhtangov wrote:

"Tairov is, undoubtedly, a talented man. He has absolutely no knowledge of an actor. He is in need of the Moscow Art Theatre students. He will never create a theatre of eternity. He is as much of a bourgeois as Stanislavsky. But he has a feeling of form, truth, however banal and loud. The human spirit is beyond his reach: he cannot spring up to the deeply tragic and the deeply comic. His theatre is also a triviality (every fashion is trivial until it passes). The Moscow Art Theatre can at least be put in a glass case and displayed as a museum item. Kamerny Theatre that changes fashion every year and will remain a triviality, naturally" [Vakhtangov 2011a].

was not considered a radical avant-garde artist – although in the West he was perceived very differently, as critics there attacked him for being a representative of “Bolshevism” in theatre, though he also enjoyed some support from audiences.<sup>15</sup> To be fair, it should be noted that this theatrical “aesthete” created conditions for experiments in the spheres of painting and architecture, ensuring that mutual relations between the visual arts and theatre were bilateral, rather than producing a mono-directional influence. On the stage of the Kamerny Theatre, it was not only the visual arts that inspired the theatre, but theatrical experiments also exerted an influence on painting and architecture.

**Fig. 2.12.** Aleksandr Vesnin, construction for G. K. Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday*, directed by Aleksandr Tairov, Kamerny Theatre, 1923



Selim Khan-Magomedov claims that Aleksandr Vesnin's work on *The Man Who Was Thursday* played an essential role in his development as an architect, with these experiences leading to him becoming one of the key figures in architectural Constructivism. The model for the set of *The Man Who Was Thursday* was exhibited in many countries during the theatre's 1923 tour, hence before the premiere of the performance. Tairov used the performances abroad as an opportunity for organising exhibitions where he presented the models and sketches developed by collaborating artists. The set model for *Thursday* influenced the development and spread of Constructivism in Europe.

<sup>15</sup> André Antoine was one of the people who accused him of attacking the foundations of the dramatic arts and of “bolshevising” theatre. He made these accusations during the Kamerny Theatre's performances in Paris in 1923 that were part of a European tour; see *Politicheskie otkliki* 1924: 30–31.

The set model for *Thursday* always took pride of place in these exhibitions, and it was reproduced in the programmes, attracting much attention as a genuine testimony to the innovation of Soviet artists, including the then still almost internationally unknown Constructivists, whose appearance in the USSR had been written about in the West. Vesnin's *Thursday* was significant owing to its resonance beyond the theatre. This was a fully conscious "transfer" of the phenomenon of Constructivism through theatre and into architecture [Khan-Magomedov 1996: 362].



**Figs. 2.13. – 2.14.** Aleksandr Vesnin, costume designs for G. K. Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday*, directed by Aleksandr Tairov, Kamerny Theatre, 1923

Any theatre history that takes into account the context of the history of art must necessarily appear different to a history of theatre founded primarily on literary history, including drama. The exceptionally fruitful collaboration of directors, actors and representatives of the visual arts, which spawned new ideas and approaches to both the stage space as well as acting, occurred not only in Meyerhold or Tairov's theatres, but also in productions directed by Evgeny Vakhtangov, the works of the Second MAT (particularly those directed by Aleksey Diky), the Revolutionary Theatre, and many others. This relationship proved exceptionally inspiring for the theatre in the first decades of the twentieth century. In the years following World War II, however, theatre in the Soviet Union (with just a few exceptions) lost its vital connection to other spheres of visual arts. Its visual form came to be determined by set designers, i.e. artists who worked solely in theatre.

## 2. New Realism and the Socialist Avant-Garde

The evolution of theatrical forms in the early 1930s resulted from the changes occurring in the visual arts in the 1920s. The departure from radical experiments in theatre was a consequence of, *inter alia*, the fact that – from the mid-1920s – avant-garde circles had started turning away from non-objective, abstract art, while also beginning to gradually move away from Constructivism. Already in 1923, Meyerhold criticised the excessive use of constructions, stating in a lecture held on 4 October of that year that “all Russia built constructions for a while” [Fevralsky 1976: 273, cited in Rakitin 1992: 658], since they had become so fashionable. Constructions would, however, continue to be used on stage at least until the end of the 1920s. However, and above all, the experience of Constructivism (and of other avant-garde forms, too) would transform theatre, and a return to previous aesthetic forms would be impossible for many artists; a situation that remained true in the following decade.

Meyerhold had already published a text in 1922, before his lecture, dedicated to the late Evgeny Vakhtangov, where he wrote:

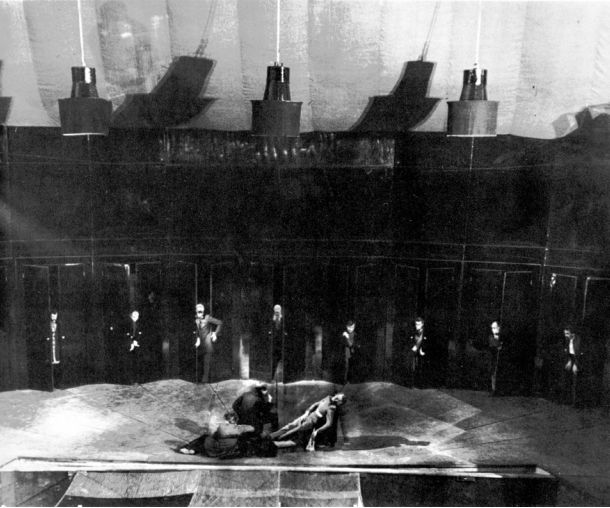
Let us take even Vakhtangov's interpretation of *The Miracle of St Anthony*, then we will still see how much this master did to give the theatre that which it was lacking. Neorealism was forged here so simply and so powerfully, and above all so healthily and in accordance with our way [Meyerhold 1968b: 50].

In mentioning “neorealism,” Meyerhold had in mind the new realism that emerged following the experiments of the avant-garde.

In 1926, a theatrical masterpiece was created: Meyerhold's version of Gogol's *The Government Inspector*. The artist, who just a few years earlier had brought Constructivism to the stage, dressed his actors in uniforms and declared the need to create a new realism, one which he termed “concrete realism” or “musical realism.” The director referred to music since the musicality of a performance was what, in his view, guaranteed that it would overcome conventionality and instead achieve simplicity and beauty. Music, as a disinterested, ideologically untouched art form, was his greatest point of reference.

Together with his assistant Mikhail Korenev, Meyerhold created a new dramatic composition, which not only used the canonical text of Gogol's comedy, but also variations of it, hence six different edits by the author, fragments once cut by censorship, as well as elements taken from other works by the dramatist. Fifteen episodes ultimately emerged, each of which formed a self-contained whole with a finale, culmination and denouement. These devices were employed not in order to give the com-

edy different meanings (ideological, for example, as had been the case in the adaptation of Ostrovsky's *The Forest*),<sup>16</sup> but instead the idea was to find the essence of Gogol's vision of Russia and indeed the essence of the comedy's text, having stripped it of the interpretations that had grown around it. Meyerhold's chief discovery was how he managed to extract the tragic elements from Gogol's comedy, with the director recommending that the actors avoid everything comic in the play and "hold their course on the tragic." In presenting a classic text dressed up in historical costumes



**Fig. 2.15.** Nikolay Gogol's *The Government Inspector*, directed by Vsevolod Meyerhold, set design by Vsevolod Meyerhold with collaboration from Vladimir Dmitriev and Ilya Shlepyanov, Meyerhold Theatre, 1926, scene from episode nine

and sets that differed from avant-garde devices (for which *The Government Inspector* would be attacked by sections of left-wing critics, who accused the director of betraying revolutionary theatre), Meyerhold also applied various strategies aimed at creating a performance free of illustrative elements. There were no more constructions on stage, but Constructivism and biomechanics remained a part of the repertoire employed by the director; set designers and actors, all of which influenced the ultimate form of the production. Work on the text was founded on segmentation and rearranging the particular elements anew. Meyerhold did not abandon his principle of reduction and efficiency in shaping the performance

<sup>16</sup> Meyerhold broke Ostrovsky's five-act comedy *The Forest* (1924) down into 33 episodes. Applying the filmic principle of quick montage of short scenes, Meyerhold increased the dynamism of the work. *The Forest* has gone down in history as an innovative work in terms of its staging. However, by intervening in the text of the play, above all, the director formulated a new message for it by bringing the motif of class war to the fore.



space – with the director himself, in collaboration with Vladimir Dmitriev and Ilya Shlepyanov, creating the set design – nor in his work with actors. In his commentary on *The Government Inspector*, Meyerhold mentioned the necessity of imposing discipline and self-restraint on the actors, making an analogy to a musical score [Meyerhold 1968b: 109]. A new challenge for the actors, who were accustomed to performing on large stages, was having to perform on a small platform in tight conditions, all of which placed emphasis on mimicry, gesture and expression through the eyes. Working on the performance, Meyerhold often referred to the cinema, hence the use of the close-up device. “I am learning from American filmmakers,” he wrote, referring to Griffith. Meanwhile, he told the actors: “Recall Chaplin, the complicated scenes that he performs, or Buster Keaton – he is able to perform on three arshines, sometimes on two, while on occasion he performs on a chair. He sits on a chair and performs” [Meyerhold 1968b: 110]. Meyerhold dressed the actors in costumes but avoided characterisation. (“I don’t like make-up, I simply don’t like it and never will” [Meyerhold 1968b: 111]). The stage was filled with furniture and props, often antique, which not only served as sym-

**Fig. 2.16.** Scene from Nikolay Gogol's *The Government Inspector*, Meyerhold Theatre, 1926, photograph by Aleksey Tamerin



bols of the Nikolaian period, but also became a kind of “apparatuses for performance” [Rakitin 1992: 658]. Actors performed with a wardrobe on stage, with Khorodnichina (Zinaida Reich) disappearing into its abyss, while a choir of officers jumped out of it. Or, in the bribery scene, they perform with the doors apparently forged together. In the fragments of the performance preserved on film, it is easy to recognise that the actors’ movement is choreographed according to the principles of biomechanics. This is most evident in Erast Garin’s performance as Khlestakov.

In this interpretation of *The Government Inspector*, Gogol’s genius was supplemented by the genius of the director/producer, thanks to which a production emerged that combined a profound study of human nature with historiosophical reflection. The human being here is both his own master and slave to his own instincts; he is dependent on the expectations of others while simultaneously seeking to impose them on others. His behaviour is determined by society and history, yet retains constant elements stemming from the permanence of human nature. Meyerhold revealed in his staging of Gogol the eternal game that takes place between human beings and the world, in a situation in which it is impossible to tell which side had initiated the game.

Kazimir Malevich’s reaction to Meyerhold’s performance can be considered typical for this period as the distinctions between various trends and directions became less obvious. In 1927, Malevich wrote to the director, sharing his impressions after viewing the performance. In his view, the piece was “very well executed,” with Meyerhold going beyond the limits of “the economic revolutionary theatre” to make a contribution to the development of art.

Revolutionary theater has vanished and it won’t be forthcoming from the subsistence cooperative [the Productivists]. The only thing that will come out of that is grocery stores. That is the main policy of the Revolution. Art, though, has a different aim—it is not revolution [...] It’s true that Marx, as people will tell you, said otherwise, yet you presented *The Inspector General* [*The Government Inspector*] otherwise, by not even trying to show a healthy peasant spirit in Osip and the girl or bourgeois corruption in Khlestakov.<sup>17</sup>

Here Malevich was not only praising Meyerhold for avoiding imposing the class element onto the drama, but also – in stressing the artistic value of the piece – speaks from the position of an open opponent of Constructivism. In the mid-1920s, it was beyond doubt that Constructivism had become an instrument in the formation of the new consciousness. It

---

<sup>17</sup> K. Malevich, Letter to Meyerhold from 1 January 1927, RGALI 998/1 1933; cited in Rakitin 1992: 654.

was for this reason that Malevich failed to mention that Meyerhold had employed the earlier experiments in Constructivism and biomechanics, internalising and transforming them.

The artists creating new programmes in art generally adopted a strategy involving the pursuit of a particular direction in their experiments until completion; that is, until such moment when going further would mean going beyond art. And, indeed, sometimes the boundary was crossed. However, it was more common that, upon reaching such boundary, the artists then reeled in their radicalism, with their work again moving closer to the previous paradigm that they had rejected. The new art that emerged after a period of radical experimentation absorbed a portion of those experiments. It was thus that immensely powerful works of timeless character emerged. Radically avant-garde works tended to be characterised by novelty, proving short-lived. One example of a work that emerged from a period of daring experiments was Meyerhold's version of *The Government Inspector*.

By the mid-1920s, the artist had gained much experience in the avant-garde and thus turned again towards realism. This tendency was evident in painting, sculpture and literature, as well as in theatre. Furthermore, a new generation had emerged, one which positioned itself in opposition to its predecessors. In painting such changes were evident in the OST (*Obshchestvo stankovistov*, the Society of Easel Painters), a group founded in 1925 by David Shterenberg, with Petr Vilyams, Aleksandr Deyneka and Aleksandr Tischler, all active participants. The group's programme was born in opposition to non-objective and abstract art, as well as resulting from a polemic with the LEF (*Levy front iskusstv*, the Left Front of the Arts) ideas of art as production.<sup>18</sup> The artists associated with OST proposed returning to easel painting while abandoning abstraction in favour of figurativeness. They thus searched for a language capable of reflecting the nature of changes taking place in the Soviet state. Subjects such as the city, industrialisation, the collectivisation of agriculture, labour, sport and other forms of leisure, therefore, took precedence in their work. The leading representative of this group, Aleksandr Deyneka, painted pictures in the 1930s with titles such as *Female Kolkhoz Worker on a Bike* (1935), *Dinner Break in the Donbass* (1935) and *Future Pilots* (1937). Despite their socialist-realist titles, these works are hardly examples of style-free eclecticism. Instead, they are characterised by simplicity in their form, powerful expression, and clear composition. Narrative and descriptive details do not dominate. Deyneka's monumental realism has

---

<sup>18</sup> For more on OST, see Kostin 1976.

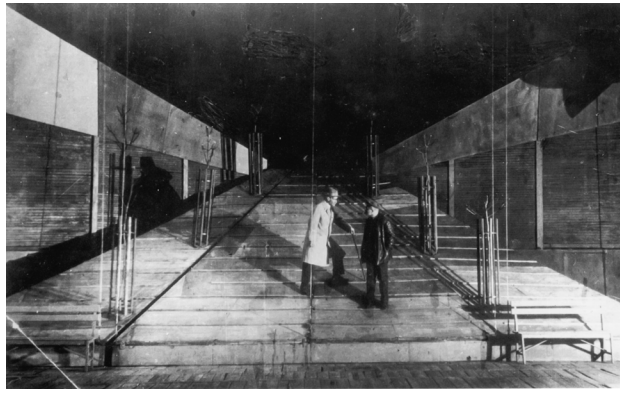
nothing in common with fussy generic painting. Instead, this is art which tried to grasp the essence of the new reality by applying methods drawn from the avant-garde. In the 1930s, there was a search for descriptions of phenomena that would prove distant from avant-garde trends, while enabling the use of approaches derived from realism, albeit a realism that was fundamentally different from its nineteenth century variety. This tendency was also evident in literature, with Aleksandr Fadeev terming the emerging trend “proletarian realism,” while Aleksey Tolstoy preferred to use “monumental realism” [see Klimowicz 1996: 260].

Applying the term “socialist-realism” to the period lasting from the turn of the 1930s to the mid-1950s is confusing, as it suggests that style-free eclecticism, based on “a total strategy of mediocrity” [Dobrenko 1994: 199, cited in Klimowicz 1996: 263] also prevailed in the 1930s. In fact, this period was characterised by stylistic and programmatic differences no less significant than those of the 1920s. In the theatre of the 1930s, a new direction was already evident, which could be considered the missing link between the avant-garde and traditionalist eclecticism or, alternatively, it could be considered a new phenomenon corresponding to the “post-Constructivism,” that has been posited in the history of architecture. This latter term was introduced by Selim Khan-Magomedov, who argued that there was evidently a situation in which a new formation emerged in opposition to the previous one, while internalising some of its achievements, thus he defined this phenomenon as “the search for neo-classicism by means of the experience of the avant-garde” [Khan-Magomedov 1996: 639].

In theatre, this trend could be termed as “socialist avant-garde,” and it formed as a result of experiments towards finding a theatrical form suited to a dramaturgy that was taking on topics connected to the new reality. The Revolution as a subject became a thing of the past with the propaganda of the new order replacing it. This tendency was created both by directors, as well as the set designers collaborating with them. It should be noted, too, that the abovementioned painters associated with OST (with the exception of Shterenberg), collaborated to a greater or lesser extent with the theatre. Deyneka serves as an example, since he created the costumes for Mayakovsky’s *Bathhouse* directed by Meyerhold (1930) while also producing the set design for the performance of *The Birthday*, staged at the Central Red Army Theatre in 1945, a building for which he also designed the interiors. This new style, however, found its fullest expression in productions whose performance space was designed by an artist not associated with OST, but instead by someone from the Meyerhold Theatre, namely Ilya Shlepyanov. He was the co-creator of the traits typifying the staging of the dramas of Nikolay Pogodin at the Moscow

Revolutionary Theatre: *The Poem of the Axe* (1931), *My Friend* (1932), and *After the Ball* (1934), with all three plays directed by Aleksey Popov.

**Fig. 2.17.** *The Poem of the Axe* by Nikolay Pogodin, directed by Aleksey Popov, set design by Ilya Shlepyanov, Moscow Revolutionary Theatre, 1931, photograph by Ilya Shlepyanov



Having been educated at the State Higher Directing Workshops (GVYRM), Shlepyanov collaborated with Meyerhold on plays including *D. E.*, based on the texts of Ilya Erenburg and Bernhard Kellermann (1924), *Teacher Babus* by Aleksey Fayko, and *The Mandate* by Nikolay Erdman (both in 1925). He also worked at the Revolutionary Theatre, contributing to the productions, including a version of Ernst Toller's expressionist drama *Hoppla, We're Alive!* (1928), directed by Vasily Fedorov, who was also one of Meyerhold's collaborators. As set designer and director, Shlepyanov was among those artists thanks to whom

the stage *image* according to the old understanding (*Bildbühne*) created by painter/decorators gave way to the *spatial dynamics of the stage* (*Raumbühne*), whose movement contributes to the creation of the performance. The static stage image, which was a source of fascination as something existing independently of the performance itself, transformed into a movement that shaped space [Gvozdev 1969: 63].

In the set design for *D. E.*, which was based on Meyerhold's plans, Shlepyanov employed moving wall-screens that enabled episodes to be set up almost immediately, thus leading critics to draw comparisons with film. The dynamic space of this performance was also created by two circular moving walkways, which moved in opposite directions, whilst the centre of the stage remained static. There was also a complex lighting score, while large screens were additionally used for projecting photos and texts providing a commentary to this journalistic show.

In the 1930s, the artist developed his earlier constructivist-inspired experiments. His works from this period were connected by the principle of creating a single set, which was transformed during the course of the performance. The internal tension characterising the performance space of *The Poem of the Axe* came from the artist's use of a shortened perspective. The pyramid form, with its base turned towards the audience, created the illusion of an extension of the stage, whose sides and upper parts could be lifted, thus changing their location and therefore indicating a shift in the place of action.

The spatial boulevard filled with a few small trees was illuminated from above by streams of light. Lifting the central part of the rostrum transformed the boulevard into the Marten hall of a factory, making a great impression with its size, well-thought-out structure, and the simplicity of its architectural construction, with furnaces implied in the distance from which the flaming lava of pig iron flowed. The same set then transformed into a workers' canteen, an alleyway or a flat. Rearranging particular elements brought about not simply a change in the place of action, but also influenced the interpretation of particular elements of the play, expressing the protagonists' battle of ideas and emotions, creating a situation in which the stage space became a representation of the events in the drama [Kostina 2002: 157].

Shlepyanov's works from this period in dramatic theatre were stripped of generic, realistic details. They were instead characterised by abstraction and a tendency towards monumentalist form.

All devices applied by the artist were based on mathematical calculation, thus creating a certain system of signs that indicated the place of action. The boulevard or Marten hall, stripped of a material dimension, were presented to spectators in the form of architectural variations, whose emotional force was derived from the energy of light [Kostina 2002: 158].

Among the most famous performances representative of the early 1930s, was the production of Pogodin's *My Friend*, in which Shlepyanov employed gigantic, six-metre-high photo-dioramas that showed bird's-eye-view shots of building sites, as well as blown-up images of factory machinery, with one featuring the projection of the silhouette of a statue of Lenin with his arm extended. Thus, these dioramas did not constitute typical blown-up photographs. They were instead photomontages created by John Heartfield, which provided an expressive representation of the theme of industrialisation. The monumentalism of the photographs meant that the figures of the actors, performing on small platforms with few props surrounding them, appeared slighter. The aim of this device was clear: it was to show the dynamics of the changes that had been made

possible owing to the subordination of people to the task of transforming the country, as set out by the Party, in order to create a new world. The ideological message was expressed in a post-avant-garde aesthetic.

**Fig. 2.18.** Maria Babanova as Anka in Nikolay Pogodin's *The Poem of the Axe*



The combination of media typical of political posters, constructivist elements, and the architectural equivalents of industrial art in a single performance, was ideally suited to the literary material inspired by Pogodin's aforementioned works. His dramas were not only an expression of the idea of building a new world, but were also perceived as being deeply embedded in the contemporary world, particularly where the language of the works was concerned. Pogodin introduced contempo-

rary language in its various forms into his dramas, such as the jargon of activists – including terms such as Taylorism, Fordism, and the scientific organisation of labour, all of which were alien to workers – the language of the workplace, urban dialect and slang elements, while also not shying away from profanities. Furthermore, he created a new type of protagonist, one stripped of psychology, who served as the manifestation of a social type – for example, a young labour enthusiast or “the new woman,” who was emancipated, independent and worked. This type was also created by Maria Babanova, a former actress of the Meyerhold Theatre, in her piece *The Poem of the Axe*. Babanova’s performance in the role of Anka was the embodiment of this mode of staging in acting. According to the testimonies of those who witnessed the performance, Babanova did not simply act out her role so much as dance it. “I knew of no other actress whose elasticity was as perfect as hers,” recalled Maria Knebel. “She carried out the most complex tasks with a phenomenal lightness. Her dance gave the impression of a freshly-created improvisation” [Knebel 1966: 43]. Furthermore, Maya Turovskaya, the author of a book about the actress, used numerous descriptions to provide a general characterisation of the works of Pogodin, Popov and Shlepyanov featuring Babanova:

In the most obvious, journalistic sense, this performance drew fresh attention to the problem of needing to overcome Russian technological backwardness. But what was of even greater significance, was the fact that Pogodin’s script was embodied in the rhythms and sounds of the human body and became a model, a symbol of enthusiasm. The aesthetics of this performance were bare and raw, like a newspaper, while at the same time, just like a newspaper, they communicated concise information with the energy of a poster slogan [Turovskaya 1981: 146].

Simplified architectural forms, lack of generic descriptiveness, minimal props and raw texture constituted a style typical of many artists active in the first half of the 1930s.<sup>19</sup> Isaak Rabinovich, for example, combined elements of Constructivism with expressionistic depiction (which was based on the use of overlapping layers and sharp angles) in performances presented at the State Jewish Theatre (GOSET), including Peretz Markish’s *Earth* (1930). Another example is Vadim Ryndin, the creator of the conception of space emblematic for the 1930s, which was then realised in the version of Vishnevsky’s *Optimistic Tragedy* directed by Aleksandr Tairov (Kamerny

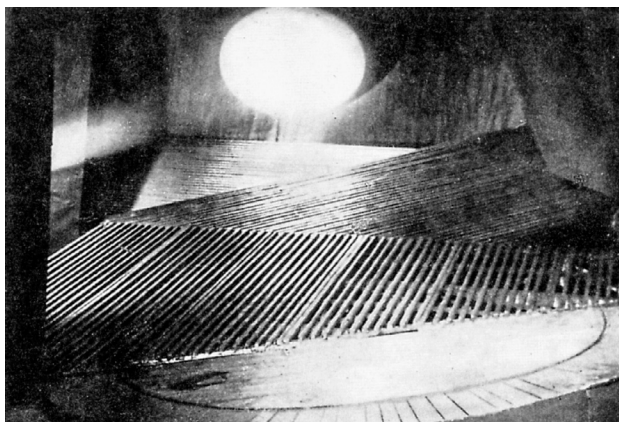
---

<sup>19</sup> Many painters had turned to work in theatre at that point not only for artistic reasons but also for material ones – theatres paid for the work (and it should be remembered that, in light of the growing attacks against the “formalists,” artists began to experience problems with presenting their works at exhibitions).



Theatre, 1933). Ryndin created an abstract form that included a round arena surrounded by a semi-circular arch of steps. It could be lowered beneath the level of the stage, thus being surrounded with stairs, or the form could be raised above the stage. This architectural form evoked parallels with antique theatre (an arena surrounded by an amphitheatre), and thus contributed to the lofty style of the performance.

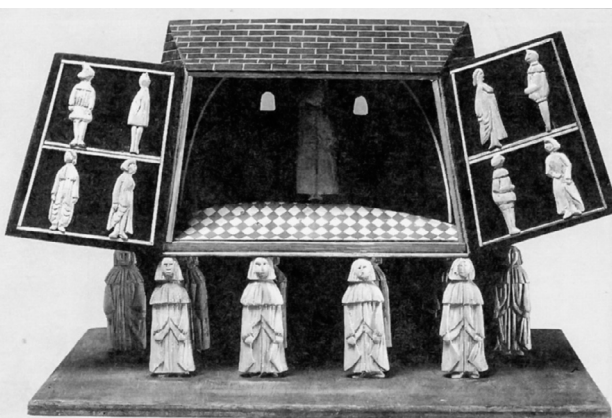
**Fig. 2.19.** Isaak Rabinovich, set design for Peretz Markish's *Earth*, State Jewish Theatre (GOSET), 1930



We should also note that, apart from the staging of new dramas, whether revolutionary or industrial, the 1930s also saw many original approaches to classic texts, with such works co-created by directors and set designers, who represented a variety of styles, ranging from monumental, simplified forms to the grotesque or folk art-inspired fairy-tale-based styles. One of the most interesting set designers of the period was Aleksandr Tischler, who became famous primarily thanks to his work on Shakespeare. Tischler made no reference to monumental forms, but was instead keen to build small spaces on stage, i.e. a form of theatre-within-the-theatre. In the renowned production of *King Lear* directed by Sergey Radlov, which became famous thanks to the outstanding performance by Solomon Mikhoels (GOSET, 1935), Tischler created a small castle on stage resembling a casket with closing doors. Critics emphasised the form-giving role of the set designer in this performance. In an extensive review of the performance, Iosif Yuzovsky wrote:

Tischler managed to show both the interior of the castle and also its appearance from afar. His design contained a trace of the Shakespearean dual-level stage, which made it possible to present action taking place on two planes, the upper and lower one, which in turn enriches the performance. The castle rested on caryatids [...]. The carved female figures lent the performance an artistic character appropriate to the style of a Shakespearean drama.

The static, dead statues corresponded to living protagonists by casting a shadow on them. Their motionlessness prophesied their tragic fate and inexorable slaughter [Yuzovsky 1982a: 414, first edition: Yuzovsky 1935].



**Fig. 2.20.** Aleksandr Tischler, model of the set design for Shakespeare's *King Lear*, dir. S. Radlov, State Jewish Theatre (GOSET), 1935

The principle of featuring a single set design element loaded with metaphorical meaning also characterised Tischler's other works, including his most eccentric yet unrealised design for a version of Sukhovo-Kobylin's *The Death of Tarelkin*, directed by Aleksey Diky (1935). The archived model for the set design includes a large pig, inside which the action of this tragi-farce criticising state bureaucracy was to take place. This pig, whose simplified shape meant it resembled a popular toy, constituted an exceptionally apt metaphorical abbreviation and, in a single artistic element, captured the entire drama, which makes reference to fairground art while also including elements of farce.

From the mid-1920s, a gradual departure from the radical ideas of the first post-Revolutionary years became evident in theatres that had emerged from the avant-garde, including attempts to extract theatre from theatre buildings, the principle of "revealing the device," breaking down the stage illusion (i.e. "stripping the theatre bare," which had been initiated by Meyerhold), the introduction of constructions and workers' uniforms instead of costumes, and the fragmentation of texts by editing them according to new principles. The avant-garde of the 1930s was entering a new phase in which the imperative to destroy the existing order and create art according to the spirit of permanent innovation, were exhausted. What also disappeared was the focus on realising a single programme (with Meyerhold's *Theatrical October* being an illustration of this), as well as the domination of a single idea, namely Constructivism. The art of directors and set designers emerging from Meyerhold's circle became increasingly individualised. The ideas and methods employed by the avant-garde remained alive, albeit

in an altered form. Constructivism left its trace in the form of the principle of a “unified set.” The stage space acquired an “architectural” nature, with almost nobody using flat painted sets in the wake of the avant-garde. Some of the solutions applied by directors and set designers, such as getting rid of the curtain, introducing screens and going beyond the footlights, became part of standard stage practices. Ultimately, the avant-garde also brought about an alternative form of acting to what had been employed previously, with acting now based around the principles of biomechanics or stemming from the traditions of eccentricism, while the 1930s and the period after that saw the extreme end of these trends challenged by the influence of the school of psychology.

The most important part of the avant-garde legacy is the phenomenon of directorial theatre. Following the avant-garde, performances became primarily a projection of the director’s vision. This strategy was represented in the 1930s, not only by the works of Meyerhold and his students, such as Sergey Radlov and Nikolay Okhlopkov, but also by Aleksandr Tairov, Nikolay Akimov, Ruben Simonov, Yury Zavatsky, as well as by directors emerging from the First Studio of the MAT (which became the Second MAT in 1924), then including Aleksey Popov and Aleksey Diky.

As a result of the growing campaign against formalism, from the mid-1930s, theatre came under pressure from a doctrine that took the MAT’s aesthetic as its normative model. In 1936 the Second MAT was dissolved, while in January 1938 the Meyerhold Theatre was closed down. Tairov’s Kamerny Theatre went into decline, before finally closing in 1950. The worst period for the dramatic arts, however, came in the immediate post-war period. In 1946, the Central Committee of the CPSU(b) issued a resolution on *The repertoire of dramatic theatres and ways to improve it*, which stressed the didactic and propagandistic function of theatre. In 1949, theatres faced a further wave of repression connected to the anti-cosmopolitan campaign. During this period, the art of theatre productions was dominated by eclecticism, with conflict-free dramaturgy taking centre stage on theatre repertoires, thus serving to whitewash reality [for a broader view of this subject, see Drawicz (ed.) 1997: 427–429].

Typical of the Stalinist period was that the authorities gave support not only to directors but also to actors, who became favourites of this period, and it was for them that the special system of titles and honours of “Distinguished Artists” and “People’s Artists of the USSR,” etc., was created. Directing means ruling over material and imposing your will onto it, thus the text was to be subordinated to your interpretation. Like the Proletkult of the 1920s, Stalinism rejected directorial theatre, having declared it a potential source of lawlessness. It was directors who were

considered the chief perpetrators of “formalism.” If we follow Boris Groys in arguing that the entire reality of Stalinism was a spectacle directed by Stalin, then the director, particularly of the type represented by Meyerhold, necessarily had to be considered a dangerous competitor, a usurper, whose ambition was to create a new reality on his own terms.

This does not mean, of course, that the destruction of the profession of the director ensued – although the most powerful directors were destroyed or at least rendered harmless. The avant-garde was also not completely eliminated. Meyerhold’s legacy was brought into the following decade by Nikolay Okhlopkov, among others.

### 3. Nikolay Okhlopkov – Socialist Realism or Academic Avant-Garde?

When the Moscow Drama Theatre, run by Nikolay Okhlopkov,<sup>20</sup> came to Warsaw in 1949, the performances presented on the stage of the *Teatr Polski* attracted much attention from critics because this was the first visit by a Soviet theatre to Poland, and it also coincided with the introduction of socialist realism as the obligatory doctrine. It was the plays directed by Okhlopkov himself<sup>21</sup> that left the greatest impression on the press archives, particularly those containing propagandistic plots following the heroic/pathetic style typical of this director – *The Young Guard*, based on a play by Aleksandr Fadeev (1947) and *The Great Days* by Nikolay Virta (1947). In his short essay “Pogranicze teatru” (“The Borderlands of Theatre”), Konstanty Puzyna outlined the weaknesses of Virta’s drama

---

<sup>20</sup> Nikolay Pavlovich Okhlopkov (1900–1967) – director, teacher and actor. He began his life in theatre as the director of a mass spectacle in Irkutsk (1921); from 1923 he was an actor with the Meyerhold Theatre simultaneously studying at the State Experimental Theatre Workshops (GEKTEMAS) run by Meyerhold. Between 1930 and 1937 he was the head of the Realist Theatre, while, from 1938, an actor and director with the Vakhtangov Theatre. From 1943 he was the main director at the Moscow Mayakovsky Theatre (which was known as the Moscow Drama Theatre until 1954).

<sup>21</sup> While in Warsaw, the theatre performed the following works: Lope de Vega’s *The Dog in the Manger* (1937, directed by V. Vlasov, co-directed by M. Babanova, set design by V. Favorsky); Gusev’s *Spring in Moscow*, (1941, directed by V. Vlasov, set design by M. Varpakh); Nikolay Virta’s *Great Days* (1947, directed by N. Okhlopkov, set design by P. Vilyams); Aleksandr Fadeev’s *Young Guard* (1947, directed by N. Okhlopkov, set design by V. Ryndin); Shteyn’s *Court of Honour* (1948, directed by Y. Zotova and S. Kaminka, supervised by N. Okhlopkov, set design by K. Efimov). A short description of both occasions on which the theatre visited Poland (the other came in 1961), together with extracts from reviews, can be found in: Balicki, Borysow, Prołow 1977: 19–22.

(the protagonists' artificial pathos and the sloganeering journalistic style), while simultaneously emphasising the formal qualities of this epic piece on the defence of Stalingrad with its combination of elements of reportage, the chronicle of wartime events, and innovative staging.

The grand theme could not be contained within the rules of clichéd, generic art. And yet this quasi-script attracted Okhlopkov. Indeed, the director has taken up the challenge that film posed the theatre. Okhlopkov begins with a montage of fragmented small scenes. As a thoroughbred man of the theatre, he did not want to let the curtain fall after each of Virta's scenes, hence he instead lowered a special curtain-map. This was a map of the Stalingrad region, a transparent map with a web of fluorescent lines. Great red and white arrows move around it, illustrating the movements of the army. After each scene, the position of these arrows is different, while somewhere around the middle of the performance, the white arrows cease surrounding Stalingrad and the red arrows begin their counterattack instead. Thus, this curtain serves the role of the clock of history, while simultaneously providing commentary on events in the drama [...]. The director goes even further. The arrows become small screens as fragments of war films are projected onto them. This is rather unnecessary, although it does achieve an additional effect, since a bright spotlight is directed onto the surface of the arrows, meaning that the rest of the stage fades into gloom. It is thus impossible to spot the stage workers changing the scenery, although it is

**Fig. 2.21.** Nikolay Okhlopkov



still possible to perceive how something is still moving and billowing behind the map. The overwhelming impression is further consolidated by the heavy, highly cinematic music [Puzyna 1960b: 34 (originally published in 1949)].

Puzyna goes on to describe further filmic devices employed by Okhlopkov, while also noting that the director did not abandon the achievements of contemporary theatre, particularly its abstract nature. Okhlopkov's performance was not characterised by the eclecticism to be expected of a Soviet work. Not only was the performance considered a "melting pot of new forms,"<sup>22</sup> but the acting was also far from naturalistic mimicry. In characterising Lev Sverdlin's role as Stalin or Maksim Strauch's as Molotov, Puzyna wrote that the credibility of the actor's performances ("the actors are almost doppelgangers of the people they represent") was primarily a result of the disciplined form [Puzyna 1960b: 32–33].

This and other spectacles by Okhlopkov shown in Poland, built his reputation as an artist who maintained connections to the traditions of the post-Revolutionary avant-garde. He was perceived similarly in the West, namely as a successor of Meyerhold. A typical characteristic of his works that has been noted is that the footlights were often transcended. In many performances, the actors appeared among the audience, or addressed spectators directly from the stage. Following in his master's footsteps, Okhlopkov turned to the traditions of oriental theatre and often employed the "way of flowers" in his works. Sometimes he made direct reference to Meyerhold's works. For example, he flooded the stage with water in the piece *The Boatwoman (Lodochnitsa)* by Pogodin (1943, set design by Petr Vilyams), and also in Ostrovsky's *Storm* (1953, set design by Evgeny Chemodurov) in order to depict the Volga River. Okhlopkov made reference in these works to Meyerhold's version of Tretyakov's *Roar, China!*, in which a water effect was used on stage. Central principles of his theatre included abandoning the curtain and introducing film screens alongside other elements taken from the cinema. Okhlopkov created a theatre of stage metaphors, thus he was keen to employ elements of monumental art and hyperbole.

In his works from the 1930s presented at the Realist Theatre<sup>23</sup> – *The Take-Off Run (Razbeg)* by Vladimir Stavsky (1932) and Aleksandr Serafimovich's *The Iron Flood* – Okhlopkov combined abstract form

<sup>22</sup> The authors of the volume *Na scenach polskich i radzieckich (On Polish and Soviet Stages)*, refer to Józef Maśliński's opinion published in the Polish journal *Odrodzenie* that "the performance is a melting pot of new forms" – see Balicki, Borysow, Frołow 1977: 21.

<sup>23</sup> The Realist Theatre was founded in 1927 and emerged from the Fourth Studio of the MAT. It was run by Okhlopkov. In 1938, the actors of Tairov's Kamerny Theatre were

with naturalist images. In *The Take-Off Run*, the dead wheezed, women breastfed babies, and peasants stripped to their underwear in order to wash, which resulted in criticism being aimed at the director, with some reviewers accusing him of overloading the performance with physiological detail [Kostina 2002: 216]. In the history of Soviet theatre, however, these works are remembered above all as examples of daring productions, which pushed the limits in shaping relations between stage and audience. In *The Take-Off Run*,

Okhlopkov not only bound together the audience and the stage, but also turned the audience into a site of theatrical action. In telling the actors to perform among the spectators, taking apart the rows in the stalls and dispersing elements of the set – huts, trees, bushes – and extending rural roads and paths throughout the entire audience, he consciously destroyed its order [...] [Markov 1977: 521].

In *The Iron Flood*, together with set designer Yakov Shtoffer, the director employed constructions depicting a mountainous landscape schematically, while also introducing many collective scenes in which, according to critics, space for the individual actor was lacking. He was also criticised for the excessive expressiveness of certain devices. “The combination of farce and puppet theatre in bad taste defines the style of this performance” [Alpers 1977b: 248].

Okhlopkov’s monumental directorial style, taken from the avant-garde and expressionism, was also typical of his later works: Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (1954), Stein’s *Hotel Astoria* (1956), Arbuzov’s *Irkutsk Story* (1960) and Euripides’s *Medea* (1961). The director continued to use giant projection screens (in *Hotel Astoria*), while also introducing choirs (in both *Medea* and also in *Irkutsk Story*), and employing a symphonic orchestra. The grand stage apparatus and the attempt to capture the audience (he was also driven by a desire the “spill out” beyond the limits of the stage, thus the famous “way of flowers” was for him not merely an artistic whim, but rather a means of extending the possibilities of the stage and giving the actors a way of transcending the box of the stage [Markov 1977: 523]) evoke associations with the grand spectacles of the initial post-Revolutionary years, although these same devices and style, when applied in the theatre of the 1950s and 1960s, were no longer a revolutionary innovation but rather an academicism.

---

forced to join the Realist Theatre. It was at this point that Okhlopkov left for the Vakhtangov Theatre.

In his famous speech of 14 March 1936 titled “Meyerhold against Meyerholdism,” given in Leningrad, rather than produce self-criticism (as the title might suggested), Meyerhold instead launched criticism of the epigones of the avant-garde, including those who had emerged from his school, such as Sergey Radlov and Nikolay Okhlopkov. “Meyerholdism,” according to Meyerhold himself, was an epigonic attitude held by artists who employed their own ideas from the period of radical experimentation and subsequently transferred them mechanically to performances in the 1930s. Okhlopkov was one example of this type of artist, since he “appropriates that which was least successful in my [Meyerhold’s] works” [Meyerhold 1968b: 343].<sup>24</sup> Meyerhold criticised the tendency towards eclecticism and epigonism in mid-1930s art. And while it seemed that he was distancing himself from his own “failed” past ideas (those various “leftish excesses” and tricks, as he called them), he was still nowhere near condemning the entire period of experiments. While occasionally using highly forthright language – which should be considered a sign of the times – and also adopting a dialectical perspective, Meyerhold claimed that the experiments and radical devices (including Constructivism) were necessary in order to challenge the “naturalistic” theatre of the previous epoch. At the same time, however, he emphasised that “there are among us some who, having taken hold of the constructivist formula, then shifted into the bogs of formalism, doing so because they have made their end what was, for innovators and experimenters, merely a means” [Meyerhold 1968b: 335].

Of course, it is impossible to ignore the political context in which the artist gave his speech. The keen battle against “formalism” in art was ongoing, while the period of the greatest repressions of the Stalinist era was just beginning. And it is only if we take into account this context that

---

<sup>24</sup> Meyerhold is not aggressive in his critique. He claims that Okhlopkov had already shown repentance: “He took the lash into his own hands and started to whip his own body to such an incomprehensible extent. How can he go on living if he has cut himself off from everything upon which he had built his fame – what will he do?” [Meyerhold 1968b: 343]. Meyerhold thus does not attack Okhlopkov as such but rather, in an ironic manner, distances himself from his approach. He is referring to Okhlopkov’s performance in Moscow on the day before his own appearance. Okhlopkov submitted self-criticism that was so far-reaching that *Literaturnaya gazeta* of 15 March noted that “Comrade Okhlopkov rightly took the path of severe self-criticism, but he lost all sense of proportion and treated the self-criticism as an order to cut himself off from even the positive elements in his own work” [Meyerhold 1968b: 566] (the article in *Literaturnaya gazeta* appeared on the day following Meyerhold’s own appearance. Meyerhold most probably did not hear Okhlopkov’s statement since he was in Leningrad at the time, and it is more likely that he received a report from someone else).



we can then appreciate Meyerhold's bravery and independence since, in speaking of formalism, he also defended the right to experiment while simultaneously defining formalism as the mechanical reproduction of old devices and methods. Equally, he warned against overly aggressive attacks on formalism, since these could result in a kind of "formophobia" among artists, i.e., ignoring forms, which, in his view, resulted in one of the greatest sins in art. We can observe in Meyerhold's statement his negative attitude towards those critics and theatre studies scholars who, in using "formalism" pejoratively, seemed not to understand that "between form and content there exists an unbreakable bond" [Meyerhold 1968b: 336].

The director defended the right to experiment:

Experimentation and pathology should not be mixed in art, although quite often it does happen so that an experimenter will adopt such devices and approaches that this might seem suspicious to a neuropathologist or psychiatrist. These two things should be differentiated with analytical subtlety. Healthy experimentation means separating that which is sick from that which must be rejected. And sometimes it can be the case that that which must be rejected is also that which is essential [Meyerhold 1968b: 330].

For Meyerhold, experiments were essential to the creation of timeless works. In music, one artist who internalised and transformed the means of the avant-garde as applied by Schönberg, Hindemith, Stravinsky and Prokofiev, and even those that seemed to be "eccentric tricks," was Shostakovich. Meyerhold considered him one of the great artists, which was a brave opinion to hold on his part, given that, just two months previously, he had been attacked for his opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*. Meyerhold spoke of the need to maintain the links between art and life, claiming to have never severed this bond himself. He emphasised the role of Stanislavsky, to whom he owed the foundations of his directorial and acting aesthetic, while also appealing for a "new simplicissimus," meaning an art that would be directed towards the human being and his or her emotions. At the same time, he expressed his scepticism towards the idea of "comprehensible" and "accessible" art, while also stressing the value of tragedy:

I believe that, when we are dealing with poetry, there must be an element of tragedy, and it is in the tragic element that we find the greatest amount of poetry, since tragedy is conflict, it is battle, it is great strength, it is the greatness of man [Meyerhold 1968b: 339].

Vsevolod Meyerhold was arrested in 1939 and executed by firing squad the following year. In 1943, his disciple Okhlopkov became

the chief director of what is now known as the Mayakovsky Theatre, one of the most important theatres in Moscow, where he staged classics alongside a propagandist repertoire. Does this mean that Okhlopkov's work, particularly from the mid- and late-1940s, should be considered socialist realism? Based on the descriptions cited above, it seems that, even when presenting sloganeering dramas that were unequivocally propagandistic, Okhlopkov, as a director, still tended to turn to the traditions of the avant-garde and employed the methods of abstract theatre. But his performances were above all characterised by a recognisable style that made him appear exceptional in an epoch which, to a significant extent, prevented individualised expression.

A normative model, based on the prevalence of a persuasive-didactic factor and references to historical styles in aesthetics, including the nineteenth-century realist tradition, as well as national traditions, came to dominate Soviet art in the 1940s. The most spectacular examples of historicising eclecticism can be found in the architecture of this period, and also in the work of artists emerging from the AKhRR group (*Assotsiatsiya khudozhnikov revolyutsionnoy Rossii*, Association of Artists of Revolutionary Russia), which was active between 1922 and 1932. This group included Isaak Brodsky, Boris Ioganson and Aleksandr Gerasimov, among others. They were the creators of portraits of the communist leadership, battle scenes and generic images that maintained the conventions of realism under the aegis of the *Peredvizhniki* (the Itinerants or Wanderers), while also making films that referenced folk traditions and – in accordance with “non-conflict” principles – presented a falsified image of the world, as was the case, for example, in Ivan Pyrev's comedies, such as *The Cossacks of the Kuban* (1950). This model, put into practice in art of the 1940s and 1950s, is today generally perceived as a synonym for socialist realism, which is then extended to cover the entire Stalinist period.<sup>25</sup> Meanwhile, it was not only a variety of styles and programmes that were evident throughout this period, but also a continuation of avant-garde ideas, with Okhlopkov's work constituting just one such example.

Between 1949 and 1953, Okhlopkov hardly staged any plays. He returned to directing with Ostrovsky's *Storm* (1953) and Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1954), a piece recorded in the history of Soviet theatre as a fore-taste of the thaw. From the mid-1950s, there was an evident turn in his work towards academicising the avant-garde. He employed the methods

---

<sup>25</sup> This applies in particular to encyclopaedia and dictionary entries, especially popular websites, such as Wikipedia, where socialist realism encompasses the work of artists such as Sergey Eisenstein and Sergey Prokofiev.

of the avant-garde, particularly those that shaped the monumental style, and made it possible to take a performance beyond the box of the stage in such a way that it appeared to be a classic device.

In the 1940s, a statement from party functionary Andrey Zhdanov – who was famous for initiating the campaign against Anna Akhmatova and Mikhail Zoshchenko – was cited regularly. He claimed:

We Bolsheviks do not reject the cultural heritage. On the contrary, we are critically assimilating the cultural heritage of all nations and all times in order to choose from it all that can inspire the working people of Soviet society to great exploits in labor, science, and culture [Zhdanov 1946: 6, cited in Groys 1992: 40].

This statement is cited by Boris Groys in his book *The Total Art of Stalinism* (*Gesamtkunstwerk Stalin*) as an argument supporting the thesis that socialist realism should be considered an epoch of eclectic style that precludes individual expression.

Groys also provided evidence supporting a different thesis explored in his book. He claims that the Stalinist era had inherited the avant-garde, by which he did not, of course, mean the avant-garde aesthetic, but rather its ideology. In his view, the avant-garde embodied the urge to master all reality and material, making it subordinate to one's own principles and the exclusive imposition of one's own idea, thus, in a certain sense, taking power. This became a source of conflict between the Bolshevik Party and avant-garde artists, as well as being a reason why the avant-garde rejected Soviet society. Groys believes that, in the case of both the avant-garde and socialist realism, the phenomenon we are dealing with was the desire to escape the museum and even history, and instead extend art over the entire sphere of reality so that it acquires a role "set apart from traditional and socially established cultural norms" [Groys 1992: 7]. And it is only the avant-garde conceived in this manner that Groys considers a "model" for socialist realism, which was itself an embodiment of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* that encompassed all of reality (for the Russian cultural studies expert, the Stalinist era was one big spectacle, a total work of art). This thesis has been criticised because the author was suspected of underplaying the significance of the avant-garde by declaring it a forerunner of socialist realism.

It is not a matter of judging both phenomena, nor is it even about the fact that, in the avant-garde, artists could decide which strategy to adopt, while socialist realism meant the Party imposing a normative model. However, the most evident division between the avant-garde and socialist realism is located elsewhere. The twentieth-century avant-garde

positioned itself in opposition to the previous epoch. It rejected it and adopted the attitude of a destroyer, before inscribing itself in history. Contrary to Groys's claims, the avant-garde was driven by the principle of innovation and thus, in assuming evolutionary change, did not position itself outside of history. As with each period of history, the avant-garde also had its own phases of origin, culmination and downfall, with the latter manifested in the ossification of methods, which then leads to academicism. In socialist realism, however, there was no place for innovation or development, change or transformation. The eclecticism that defined socialist realist art made it resistant to any form of change. Socialist realism did not have a period of *Sturm und Drang*, nor did it have its own period of downfall. It cannot be academic because it positions itself outside of history.

With his individualised style created by drawing on the tradition of Meyerhold, Nikolay Okhlopkov became the academician of the avant-garde, while his works marked the end of its presence in the theatre. In subsequent decades, the historical avant-garde did appear in art as an inspiration or citation, but always in a reappropriated mode. Meanwhile, socialist realism became the object of an ironic game and pastiche, i.e., those strategies that would give birth, particularly in the visual arts, to *sots art*.

#### 4. The Taganka Theatre. David Borovsky: between Constructivism and Reality

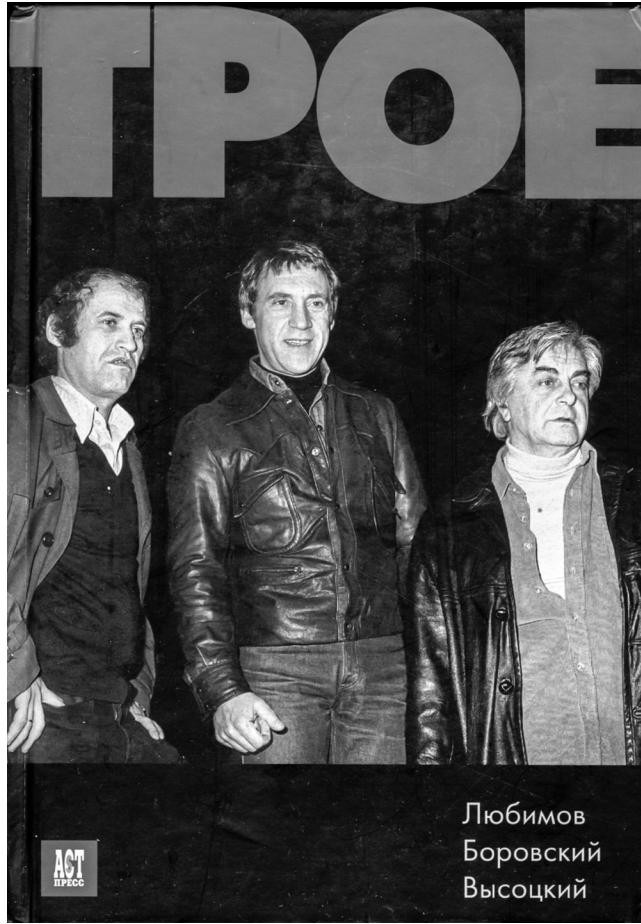
After two decades of domination in the USSR of a theatre stripped of any clear form, and after a period in which the traditions of the avant-garde had been expunged or had ossified, the emergence of the Moscow Drama and Comedy Theatre on Taganka could easily have passed unnoticed. The Taganka Theatre soon attracted great interest, admiration and almost cult status, all of which were enabled by the energy and talent of director Yury Lyubimov, the invention of set designer David Borovsky, and a strong group of actors, which included the famous bard and actor Vladimir Vysotsky. The theatre remains active to this day and, although its glory days have passed,<sup>26</sup> it continues to attract the attention of his-

---

<sup>26</sup> As a result of internal differences, the theatre split in 1992 into the Association of Taganka Actors (which took over the theatre's new space) and the Taganka Theatre (which stayed in the old space) headed by Yury Lyubimov [Yury Lyubimov headed the Taganka Theatre until 2011, he died in 2014 – editor's note].

torians and theatre studies scholars, both in Russia and abroad, as they attempt to describe the phenomenon.<sup>27</sup>

**Fig. 2.22.** Book cover for Rimma Krechetova's *Troe*. David Borovsky, Vladimir Vysotsky, Yury Lyubimov



Just as Meyerhold had done over half a century earlier, Yury Lyubimov adopted as his credo Pushkin's idea that the dramatic arts stem from folk roots, thus theatre was born outdoors and has always been a form of popular entertainment.<sup>28</sup> Lyubimov proclaimed this motto openly,

<sup>27</sup> The most important book publications on the Taganka Theatre and artists associated with it are: Gershkovich 1993; Maltseva 1999; Krechetova 2005; Beumers 1997; Picon-Vallin (ed.) 1997.

<sup>28</sup> See Pushkin 1981. Meyerhold often made reference to this text and extended Pushkin's formula to encompass the entire theatre.

with Valery Zolotukhin presenting it on stage alongside four other actors in a performance based on Pushkin's poems, *Comrade, believe...* (1973). This led him to adopt various strategies aimed at surprising spectators while engrossing them completely. The performances at the Taganka Theatre were typically inventive in their staging, with rich form, thick texture, and a piling up of "attractions." "Our theatre is never boring," said Vysotsky in the documentary film *Hamlet from Taganka Square*.<sup>29</sup> And it is difficult to prove him wrong, particularly for anyone who had seen any of the performances in Moscow where, at least until the early 1980s, crowds gathered before each performance. Lyubimov's works, which were rarely stagings of dramas but rather adaptations of poetry or prose, were typified by a dynamism achieved through quick montage and short scenes, which often contrasted in terms of rhythm and dynamics. The poetics of abstraction and abbreviation, the tendency towards revealing gestures, the intentional pithy, poster-like, journalistic style, all often linked with a lyrical element (particularly in the performances of poetry), transcending the limits of the stage, speaking directly to audience members, and constantly balancing the actors between distancing themselves from the protagonists, and embodying them, as well as the inventive, functional and yet highly metaphorical construction of space, rhythm and musicality, mixing conventions and genres in a single performance – all of this formed the singular and recognisable style of this theatre.



Fig. 2.23. Konstantin Stanislavsky, Evgeny Vakhtangov, Vsevolod Meyerhold, Bertold Brecht – portraits still hanging today in the foyer of the Taganka Theatre

<sup>29</sup> *Gamlet s Taganskoy ploshchadi*, directed by Aleksandr Kovanovsky and Igor Rakhmanov, produced by T. O. "Rakurs," Moscow, 2008.

Lyubimov's stage language was shaped through a synthesis of the experiments of early twentieth-century theatre reformers, which was something that the director never attempted to hide but instead openly manifested by hanging portraits of Stanislavsky, Meyerhold, Vakhtangov and Brecht in the foyer. Lyubimov created an overtly anti-psychological theatre, which, in its acting style, referenced the Brechtian tradition, while its set design and composition referenced Meyerhold, and its understanding of theatre as a sphere of play and theatricalisation went back to Vakhtangov and his *Princess Turandot*. One might suspect that placing a portrait of Stanislavsky among these figures was a nod to the most desirable and most commonly applied tradition at that time in the USSR. For Lyubimov, however, Stanislavsky was an element in his acting techniques and directorial approach, particularly where work with the actor was concerned. "I have been helped by the method of physical action and the analysis of art: how to break it down" [Lyubimov 1999: 273],<sup>30</sup> he said in an interview in 1998.

As an actor whose training included apprenticeships under Mikhail Kedrov, who was a student of Stanislavsky, Yury Lyubimov (born in 1917 in Yaroslavl) had been associated with the Vakhtangov Theatre from the outset of his career until the 1960s. In 1939, he graduated from the Shchukin Theatre Institute, which was linked to the theatre of the same name, before working there as a teacher in the 1950s. In 1963, together with his students, he produced a diploma piece, a version of Brecht's *The Good Person of Szechwan*. This became the opening performance at the Taganka Theatre, with the authorities giving Lyubimov and his students permission to use a decaying theatre on Taganka Square. This piece of student theatre became a major event in the theatre life of Moscow. As one spectator recalled,

[t]his unforgettable evening with *The Good Person of Szechwan* made no less of an impression on Muscovites than the famous performance of *Princess Turandot* in the 1920s. Strangely enough, both works employed Oriental parables far removed from everyday life in Moscow, which enabled lively theatrical imagination to spread its wings. Lyubimov's young actors did not hide even for a second the fact that they were performing theatre as they improvised the Chinese style of movement, gesture and speech. At the same time, the truth of life flowed incessantly from the stage to

---

<sup>30</sup> In this interview Lyubimov critically assessed the way Stanislavsky's "system" functioned in the USSR where it was deemed the sole method.

"The system itself resembles the history of the Bolshevik Party's course, which everyone had to pass yet no one understood anything of. It was like a teach-yourself acting book. But there are of course wonderful actors from all around the world who have never encountered the system" [Lyubimov 1999: 273].

the audience. The actors addressed spectators as if they were participants in the performance as they presented their passionate monologues, performed conventional scenes, broke off the action with songs accompanied by guitars; they laughed, fell into despair, cried and then laughed with us again [Gershkovich 1993: 60].

The aspect of audience participation in performances is the best illustration of what made the Taganka Theatre unique: going beyond the stage, or even beyond the theatre building, the presence of music, live singing by the actors playing guitars and accordions – as was the case in, for example, *Ten Days that Shook the World* by John Reed (1965), which began outside the theatre building, where the actors dressed as Red Army soldiers sang *chastushki* or doggerel verses, and drew the spectators into a form of rally. All of this created a playful atmosphere. The particular characteristics of this performance were determined by the mixture of grotesque, fairground theatre, circus, poster, mime and shadow theatre. Transcending the limits of genres and playing with the audience made the Taganka Theatre even more attractive, because each moment of play involved an element of unpredictability. Play is linked to the risk of losing control and so, in this respect, the Taganka was an exceptional phenomenon in the Soviet context.

This theatre owed its uniqueness and stylistic expressiveness not only to the director Yuri Lyubimov, but also to his long-term collaborator, set designer David Borovsky. When describing the achievements of the Taganka, the fact that they stemmed from close collaboration between the director and the set designer, actors and composers, should not be overlooked. The musical aspect of the Taganka performances deserves separate attention, which would exceed the aims of this chapter.



**Fig. 2.24.** *Ten Days that Shook the World* based on the book by John Reed, directed by Yuri Lyubimov, set design by David Borovsky, Taganka Theatre, 1965, scene performed outside the theatre



The renowned composers Edison Denisov, Alfred Schnittke and Luigi Nono collaborated with the theatre. Tatyana Bachelis was right to claim that “it is impossible to exhaust the subject of the form of the Taganka performances, even if limiting analyses only to the most effective stage metaphors or other elements of the language of the stage such as set design” [Bachelis 2007: 240]. But it is difficult to agree with the Russian researcher when, in the following sentence, she stresses that “it is practically impossible (and there is no need) to analyse the set design in the works of Lyubimov, even though it was created by one of the best set designers in the world, David Borovsky” [Bachelis 2007: 240].

In describing the work of the Taganka, Bachelis foregrounds the director. However, given the subject of this present chapter – the inspirational effect of the historical avant-garde, including the work of Meyerhold and the Constructivists on post-war theatre, as well as the way in which the avant-garde legacy was reworked – both the work and the figure of Borovsky deserve particular attention. It is, to a significant extent, thanks to him that the old avant-garde ideas made their way into Lyubimov’s works in a reworked form. Biographical factors were significant. In his youth, Borovsky encountered avant-garde artists and, over time, became a mediator between the historical avant-garde and the theatre of the second half of the twentieth century. Writing about the Taganka Theatre from the perspective of Borovsky’s art does not mean reducing theatre to set design. This sub-chapter is not an attempt at producing a monograph on the Taganka. It has a more modest aim, namely – to show how the transmission of the legacy took place, and in what ways it was transformed.

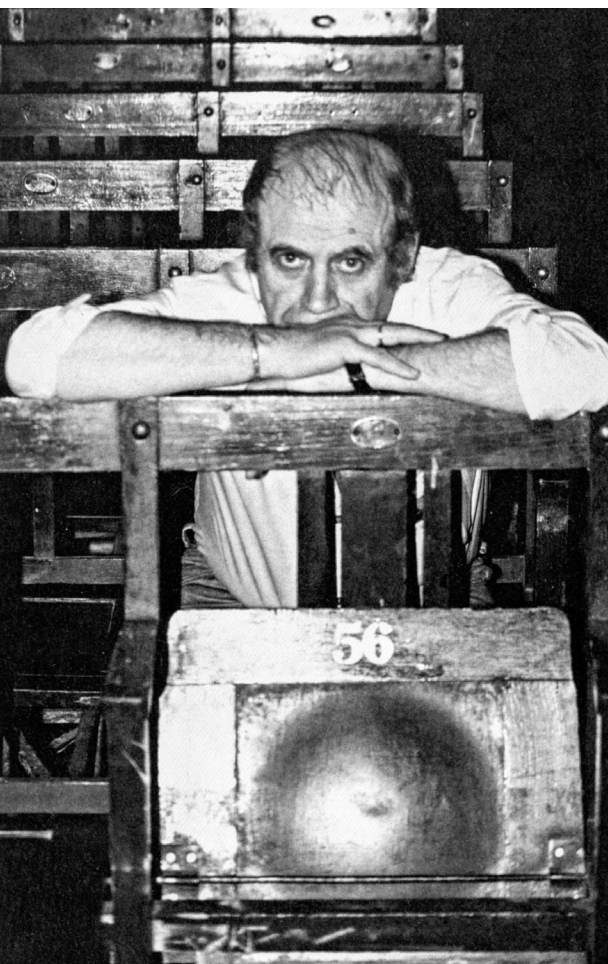
David Borovsky’s professional training<sup>31</sup> came less from schools and more from theatre apprenticeships. At the age of fourteen, as a pupil at

---

<sup>31</sup> David Lvovich Borovsky (1934–2006) was Yury Lyubimov’s closest collaborator. He also designed stage sets for the majority of significant Russian directors, including Oleg Efremov, Anatoly Efros, Georgy Tovstonogov, Valery Fokin, Kama Ginkas, Mikhail Levitin, Leonid Kheifets, Oleg Tabakanov, Galina Volchek and Lev Dodin. He collaborated with Dodin on plays including Chekhov’s *Uncle Vanya*, which audiences in Krakow and Warsaw were able to see in January 2005. He collaborated for many years with Hungarian director István Horvai. He worked with Lyubimov on many occasions on productions staged abroad, including in Hungary, Greece, Italy and the United Kingdom. They also collaborated on several operatic works, such as Luigi Nono’s *Al gran sole carico d’amore* in 1975 and Mussogorsky’s *Boris Godunov* in 1979, which were staged at La Scala in Milan. They also worked on a version of Mozart’s *Don Juan* in 1982 at the Budapest Opera Theatre, Berg’s *Lulu* in 1987 at the Chicago Lyric Opera, and Shostakovich’s *Katerina Izmailova* (or *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*) in 1990 at the Hamburg Opera House. As a set designer for operas, he also collaborated

a middle school in Kyiv, he became an assistant decorator at the Lesya Ukrainka Theatre. Bachelis is undoubtedly right when she writes that fate, in giving Borovsky the tragic experience of the loss of his parents at a young age (his father died and his mother spent a long period in hospital), was also kind to him for it shaped his route through the world of the arts. Borovsky dropped out of the Soviet education system, which meant that he salvaged his personality, since he was thus spared the direct influence of Soviet pedagogy, which hindered the development of individuality and instead demanded clichéd thinking. "Borovsky learned his trade in an organic manner, as was the case in previous eras when artists learned how to mix paints in the studios of the masters" [A. Mikhaylova, Krechetova 2002: 182–183]. The individual training in his craft and contact with artists who still remembered the age of the avant-garde favoured the development of the original, recognisable style of his works.

In a volume of his memoirs, published in Kyiv, Borovsky [2001; see also Borovsky 2006] recalls his youth, spent in the city, a place where, between



**Fig. 2.25.** David Borovsky photographed against the backdrop of the set design for *Vysotsky*, directed by Yuri Lyubimov, Taganka Theatre, 1981

with other directors and the most renowned conductor: R. Strauss's *Elektra*, 1996, dir. L. Dodin, conductor C. Abbado, at the Teatro Comunale in Florence; at the same theatre he also worked with Lev Dodin on several other new productions, including Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*, 1998, conductor S. Bychkov; Tchaikovsky's *Queen of Spades*, 1999, conductor S. Bychkov. Borovsky's works, including set models, sketches and props, have been exhibited on many occasions at both individual and collective shows. The last such exhibition during his lifetime opened in spring of 2006 in Bogota, Colombia. The artist died while preparing the exhibition.

1956 and 1967, he created 28 theatre pieces. He also recalls the people he encountered in Kyiv, including the director and set designer Leonid Varpakhovsky,<sup>32</sup> who was considered a successor to Meyerhold, having served as an assistant professor and academic secretary at the Meyerhold State Theatre between 1933 and 1935 where, under the watchful eye of the master, he developed the methodology for recording actors' performances and rehearsals. In one interview, Borovsky openly stated that, rather than official education, what was of much greater significance to him were the experiences gained as a result of contacts with the Kyiv art world.

At art school, we were taught exclusively on *peredvizhniki*. During the 1950s, however, I visited the workshops of theatre artists who were acquaintances but also much older than I; I listened to them talking and they spoke, for example, of Meyerhold. I had never heard of him. But I remembered the name; it is memorable because there is only one Meyerhold... After a while, a former student of Meyerhold came to our famous Lesya Ukrainka Theatre in Kyiv. It was his secretary, Leonid Varpakhovsky, who had sat in Stalinist camps for fifteen years. Together with him in Magadan was the great set designer Vasily Shukhaev, who was associated with the Mir Iskusstva group. Shukhaev was released before Varpakhovsky and, thanks to the assistance of friends, became a professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Tbilisi. After Stalin's death, he brought Varpakhovsky to Tbilisi. The news spread that Varpakhovsky was alive and so a delegation was sent from Kyiv in order to bring him back to Ukraine. Varpakhovsky himself had wanted to return to Moscow, but he was not allowed to, since he had a stamp in his passport that forbade him from settling there. But he arrived in Kyiv legally and, what's more, he brought with him the fantastically talented actor Pavel Luspekaev. This was in 1956. I learned who Meyerhold was from Varpakhovsky. Then everything became more accessible and, if someone in the 1960s was interested in Meyerhold, it was possible to find information on the subject. Ukraine had its own Meyerhold, anyway – Les Kurbas. I worked, among other places, at the Franko Theatre, which many actors from the excellent but dissolved Berezhil Theatre had joined. Two further great figures of the Ukrainian avant-garde were still alive, Anatoly Petritsky and Vadim Meller. Both had collaborated with Kurbas. I was lucky enough to get to know them better... So I was piecing together my knowledge bit by bit. When you are young, it is difficult to figure out what exactly is driving you. At that stage in life what is important is who you encounter along the way; it is a great fortune to encounter people who lead you to the path chosen for you by fate. [...]

---

<sup>32</sup> Leonid Viktorovich Varpakhovsky (1908–1976) was arrested in 1936, and subsequently spent over 15 years in camps. He went on to direct in theatres in Kyiv, Kharkiv and Leningrad. From 1957 he worked at the Moscow Maria Ermolova Theatre, serving as the head director until 1961. He also worked at other Moscow theatres: the Vakhtangov, Stanislavsky and the Maly Theatre.

Before I met Varpakhovsky, I worked briefly with a student of Les Kurbas – the director Boris Aleksandrovich Balaban. I encountered him for the first time during work on a Polish play, I can't remember exactly which one; the performance was banned by censors. Balaban invited me to his home then, and said: "They gave me a Ukrainian author's play to stage, it is a very poor drama but, if you agree, we can try to make an interesting performance from this poor literature." He asked me if I would agree to it and I was very happy that he was offering me this opportunity. I also collaborated with Meyerhold's most outstanding student, Vasily Fyodorov who, by that time, was already elderly, so I travelled to him. Then he came to Kyiv. These were the types of people I met along my way [Borowski 2005: 122].

A necessary digression now follows with the aim of making the reader aware of the extent to which the phenomenon that is known around the world (and in Russia) as the "Russian avant-garde" in fact owes its origins to artists originating not only from Belarusian lands (Vitebsk is just one example), but also from Ukraine, whether by birth or having been active there as artists. A list of names is unavoidable, but it is only in this way that the extent of the phenomenon can be made clear (and even now the list is far from complete).

Aleksandra Ekster (born in Białystok) lectured at studios in Kyiv and Odessa, with her students, including painters, set designers and poets: David Burlyuk, Aleksandr Tischler (born in Melitopol), as well as the figures mentioned above – Anatoly Petritsky and Vadim Meller, Isaak Rabinovich, Boris Aronson, and also Kyiv-born film director Grigory Kozintsev. As an aside, it is worth noting that a great number of directors and film actors came from Ukraine, including Leonid Trauberg (born in Odessa), who collaborated with Kozintsev in the 1920s.

Kyiv-born Isaak Rabinovich studied at the famous Kyiv Murashko Studio before going on to create the set design for the famous performance of Lopa de Vega's *Fuenteovejuna* (*The Sheep Well*), which was directed in Kyiv in 1919 by Konstantin Mardzhanov. Other figures connected with Kyiv theatres were Boris Aronson (born in Nizhyn in the Chernigov Gubernia) and Vadim Meller, a Cubist-Futurist painter, constructivist, set designer, illustrator and architect, who collaborated not only with Les Kurbas but also with Bronislava Nizhinska's Ballet Studio, where Aleksandra Ekster was also employed.

Natan Altman, meanwhile, was the creator of the set design for performances including An-sky's *Dybbuk*, directed by Vakhtangov. He was born in Vinnitsa before studying in Odessa. Vladimir Tatlin is a case of someone opting for Ukraine. Born into a Russian family in Moscow, he completed his education in Kharkiv and Odessa. He spent part of the 1920s working

in Kyiv theatres, with Kurbas among his collaborators. He stressed his connections to Ukraine in various ways – playing the bandura, becoming an exquisite performer of Ukrainian *dumky*, and taking photographs of himself in Ukrainian folk costumes.

There were other avant-garde artists who came from Ukraine or studied there (in Kyiv, Kharkiv and Odessa), including Jews, Ukrainians, Russians and Poles. The most famous Polish artist born in Kyiv is Kazimir Malevich. We should, however, also mention less famous artists who were nevertheless important in contributing to the overall achievements of the avant-garde:<sup>33</sup> Vladimir Baranov-Rossiné, Aleksandr Bogomazov, Aleksey Grishchenko, Emma Gurovich – a member of UNOVIS and fabric designer; Vasily Ermilov – who was born and died in Kharkiv, where he published the journals *Avangard* and *Novaya generatsiya*, dedicated to Constructivism in the 1920s; Ivan Klyun (Klyunkov) – the creator of many Suprematist paintings; Lyubov Kozintseva – the author of constructivist graphics and collaborator of Aleksandr Rodchenko, El Lissitzky and Abram Minchin; Kliment Redko – born in the now Polish town of Chełm, educated in Kyiv, St Petersburg and Moscow, and co-founder of the “projectionist” group alongside Tischler and others, and creator of the “electro-organism” movement, which referred to the ideas of progress and scientific industrialisation; Aleksey Rybnikov – who was inspired by the work of Mikhail Larionov and Natalia Goncharova, and was also a lecturer who worked in Moscow and Kharkiv; Aleksandr Shevchenko, who came from Kharkiv, and was one of the most famous Ukrainian avant-garde artists; Iosif Shkolnik – a set designer and painter counted among the Fauvists; David Shterenberg, born in Zhytomyr and educated in Odessa, Vienna and Paris, avant-garde artist and activist in art organisations after the Revolution, opponent of objectless art, and one of the founders of OST.

Thus Ukraine, and particularly Kyiv, was, in the early twentieth century, not only the place of origin of many of the artists listed above, but also – and primarily – the place where new ideas were born and where they interacted. Since his youth, as Borovsky recalled, he had been immersed in the traces of the avant-garde that remained in Kyiv.

In his books, the set designer recalled that Varpakhovsky, who represented the Meyerhold school, only began working on a spectacle once he had a concept for its form and spatial organisation. He successfully selected collaborators and it seems that he immediately spotted something in the young Borovsky. Their first joint work was Vishnevsky's

---

<sup>33</sup> I made use of biographies published in: Sarabyanov (ed.) 1992.

*Optimistic Tragedy* at the Ivan Franko Theatre (1961), for which Borovsky constructed three moving rostrums. When connected they formed a single uniform surface that could simultaneously rotate to form various configurations, enabling the free construction of space and composition of scenes, particularly collective ones.

This type of architectural concept of space leads to associations with the Russian Constructivist tradition. Borovsky, however, not only created abstract constructions, but, in contrast to many other Russian set designers who, in the 1960s, tended towards either abstraction or simulations of real life, managed to find a point of intersection between that which was the stuff of life and that which was abstract and conceptual. "I know of no other set designer who is more immersed in life than he," stated Alla Mikhaylova, expert on twentieth-century Russian set design.

It seems that he identifies with the words of Boris Pasternak about how it is necessary to search for poetry not in the clouds but under your feet. It is enough to bend down... Borovsky bends down and finds something wonderful. You all had passed by it a hundred times, but he noticed it – that is how his eye is trained. Rather, it is not his eye but his soul [A. Mikhaylova, Krechetova 2002: 7].

Mikhaylova outlines the "Borovsky formula," writing that his style was formed in the 1970s in close collaboration with Yuri Lyubimov. However, reading the descriptions of the performances at the Lesya Ukrainka Theatre from the early 1960s, makes it clear that Borovsky had already arrived at the Taganka as a mature and fully-formed artist. It is worth citing at this point the description of the process of creating the set for Gorky's *The Lower Depths*, directed at the Kyiv Theatre in 1963 by Leonid Varpakhovsky. Borovsky recalled that:

Leonid Viktorovich [Varpakhovsky] told me that he would like to make a polemical piece – he had in mind breaking with the canonical legacy of the Art Theatre, since everyone who turned to Gorky's drama staged not the text itself but the [1902] MAT performance. When it came to the visual image for the piece, Varpakhovsky said that, at that point, he had no ideas other than making the first act a very low extended horizontal line, while the second act would be a narrow vertical line [Kuritsyn 2003: 108].

Inspired by this direction, Borovsky created two models. In the first, the horizontal line was created by a series of sewerage and water pipes, beneath which the inhabitants of the asylum/shelter were to squat. The pipes provided the frames for chaotically situated bunks that formed a maze. The second model presented a staircase located within a narrow, vertical gap.

Here, as if in a crack in a rock face, tangled wooden stairs intertwined; it was here that arguments, fights and rows between the inhabitants of the asylum started. The same materials were used for both models: wood and bulrush, with these providing the link between the two images [Kuritsyn 2003: 108].

Borovsky's work did not stop at this proposed solution, which, it would seem, ideally matched the director's vision. In Vladimir Gilyarovsky's book *Moskva i moskvichi* (*Moscow and the Muscovites*), Borovsky read that in homeless shelters bunk beds were constructed with two levels, as if forming separate little rooms above and below. The allusion was thus obvious: the camps were organised according to the same principle – minimum space for the maximum number of people. Reading Gilyarovsky's book led the set designer to conceive of the shelter as a prison, which is why he created a second version of the model for the first act: the bunks formed a rationally-organised space. In this way he provided an image reflecting the director's main idea, as he wished to create a piece about people subjected to violence and their battle to maintain dignity in inhuman conditions. Taking into account Varpakhovsky's experiences in Kolyma, it becomes clear why he had wanted to emphasise this idea. The director chose the second model for the first act, i.e. the one in which order rules, since he had reached the conclusion that chaos was merely a temporary state, and it could not be expected to last long. Order is another matter entirely. The director of the asylum had mastered each and every square inch of the space, so there was something inhuman in his scrupulousness and in this rational organisation of space for the people in the lower depths [Kuritsyn 2003: 109].

After moving to Moscow, Borovsky began collaborating with Yuri Lyubimov. Between 1968 and 1999, he was the chief set designer at the Taganka Theatre. The reputation of the performances created together with Lyubimov spread around the world, with the most important plays (where Borovsky's achievements are concerned) being Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *The Dawns Here are Quiet*, based on Boris Vasilev's prose (both from 1971). In this latter piece, which was about the Great Patriotic War, the artist used wooden planks covered with military camouflage as his material, which changed function depending on their position and lighting. They could become the platform of a truck carrying a unit of young female soldiers, trees in a forest behind which the female protagonists took shelter from the enemy's bullets, a trench, the moving surface of a bog, or the walls of a quickly assembled bathhouse, etc. It seemed that these simple set design elements were subject to an endless process of transformation and that they could be made to represent anything at all. And yet the artist managed to avoid tightrope-walking and juggling with

theatrical ideas, since, through the materials he used – simple planks, military lights, old tarpaulin (found in a Moscow car yard – a crucial detail) covered in a pattern produced by tyre treads – he successfully maintained a link to reality.

Most simply put, Borovsky's style was typified not only through the highly inventive artistic construction of space, but also the dynamic use of abbreviations. The props in his performances combined functionality with metaphorical undertones. Borovsky managed to draw out from the simplest forms and objects a rich spectrum of meanings and emotions, while also exhibiting exceptional creativity in his use of texture and material.

In his version of *Hamlet*, he found devices that enabled him to situate Shakespeare's tragedy outside of historical time. The form of the costumes recalled dresses or chainmail, while the material used – thick-weave wool – meant that they also resembled contemporary jumpers. Vladimir Vysotsky's Hamlet wore a casual sweater and jeans. The central element shaping the performance space was the curtain. It was made of woven earth-coloured rope, whose texture, when illuminated, revealed its mesh-like construction, which was hung in such a way that it could move in all directions. The curtain thus fulfilled a dual role: metaphorically it became a symbol of inexorable fate; functionally, it could divide the stage into separate spaces (for example, Hamlet killed Polonius through the curtain, which formed a wall). Borovsky incessantly created oppositions between the conventionality of stage reality, on the one hand, and the materiality and concreteness of particular props on the other. The performance began with the crowing of a live white cockerel, while the gravediggers shovelled real soil onto the stage, before Ophelia played with this dirt in the scene depicting her madness. This device endowed this universal story with a sensual, affective suggestiveness.

Lyubimov's version of *Hamlet* became legendary thanks to Vysotsky's performance and Borovsky's inventiveness. A model of the set for this performance was displayed at a Paris exhibition showing the ten most outstanding set designs in twentieth-century performances of Shakespeare. Of course, the model could not reproduce the dynamism of the transformations that Borovsky's curtain manifested.

Commenting on David Borovsky's work, Alla Mikhaylova placed it in the context of Soviet set design of the 1970s, when the principle of the "single aesthetic environment" prevailed. This idea was based on the notion that

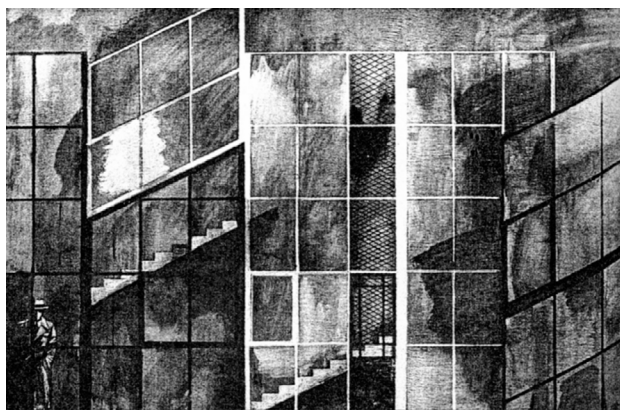
the artist created a single set which was not submitted to substantial changes during the course of the performance, but instead during the course



of it, revealed ever more meanings hidden within it. With this approach, the choice of textures, lighting, and small number of props, as well as of course the inventiveness of the director and the actors, which filled the space, took on particular significance. The aesthetic environment stimulated the development of an image of the world which evolved and “grew,” with the starting point provided by specific situations on stage, while the goal was to produce philosophical generalisations [A. Mikhaylova, Krechetova 2002: 13].

We should remember, however, that this principle, which Alla Mikhaylova described, had already been introduced into theatre by the constructivists in the 1920s and 1930s, with Borovsky directly referencing their work.

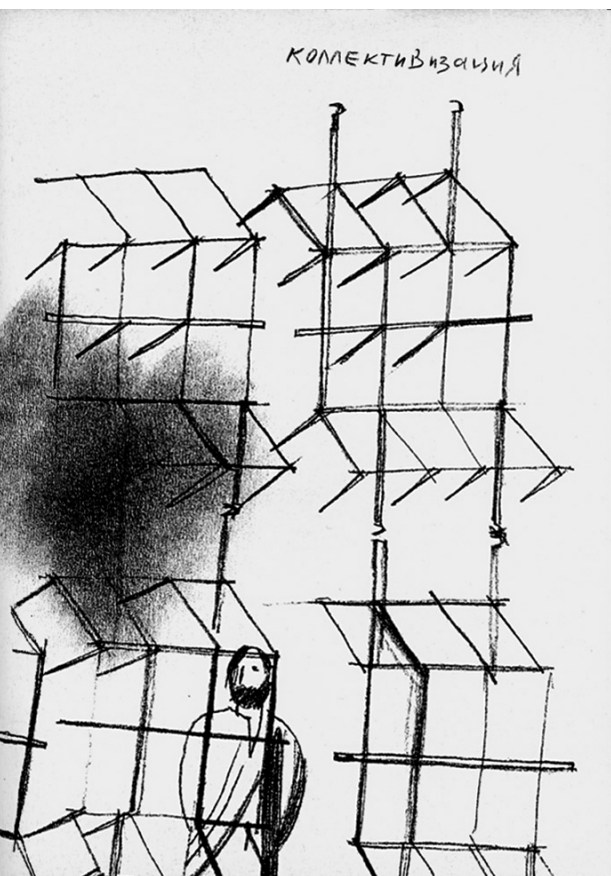
**Fig. 2.26.** David Borovsky, sketch for the set design for *House on the Embankment*, based on the novel by Yury Trifonov, directed by Yury Lyubimov, Taganka Theatre, 1989



The constructivist inspirations in the work of the Taganka Theatre, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s, became evident not only in the composition of the performance space (this becomes clear immediately when viewing the sketches for the sets in performances as different, in terms of their literary foundation, as the adaptations of Fyodor Abramov's *Wooden Horses* (1971) and Yury Trifonov's *House on the Embankment* (1980)). But these constructivist inspirations also shaped the entire form of performances. As Tatyana Bachelis noted, getting to the essence of the matter, “the Taganka performances take place in a kingdom of necessity” [Bachelis 2007: 244]. She also added that the mechanisms of necessity are encoded in the composition of each of Lyubimov's works. Furthermore, Bachelis drew attention to the principle of the right angle, which provided the foundation of the structure of many of his works.

[Since *The Good Person of Szechwan*] the right angle has not always been upheld in Lyubimov's works. However, it has been alluded to in the sketches. In any case, all of Lyubimov's designs, whatever their flexibility, have been

based on the precision contained in the hidden drawings. This provides some explanation for an astonishing feature of his performances, which is based on giving actors freedom while simultaneously limiting it. The opportunity to improvise and change the nuances in meaning and psychology, while at the same time maintaining clarity of form, is all contained in the very structure of Lyubimov's work [Bachelis 2007: 245].



**Fig. 2.27.** David Borovsky, sketch for a set design element for *The Wooden Horses*, based on the novel by Fyodor Abramov, directed by Yury Lyubimov, Taganka Theatre, 1974

When it comes to Borovsky, in drawing inspiration from Constructivism in many, though not all, of his works, he also surmounted it and, in a way, deconstructed it by introducing real elements into the set, i.e. props that were often objects taken from real life. The designs for *The Wooden Horses* present an abstract construction. In reality, it was made from authentic harrows collected from a kolkhoz. "I prepared the model of the set of *The Wooden Horses* in summer, during a holiday spent on the Black Sea coast," recalled Borovsky.

One day, during a walk, I came across a rusty harrow in a field. I stopped and lifted it off the ground. Its blades gazed at me as if they were medieval instruments of torture. And within fifteen minutes I had conceived the entire performance. I arrived in Moscow with the model of the set. For two or three bottles of vodka we managed to have the necessary number of harrows brought to Moscow from a kolkhoz on the edge of the city [Borovsky 1999: 27].

This meant that the abstract nature of the construction was balanced out by objects originating from everyday use: a curtain hanging from the teeth of a harrow and a pot of geraniums – these formed the window of a rural cottage. It was not only the harrows that were authentic; in searching for genuine rural objects, Borovsky travelled around villages near Vologda in winter: “I bought agricultural tools and objects: woven baskets, pots from birch bark and hand-woven table runners” [Borovsky 1999: 27].

In their initial performances, particularly the historical pieces (such as Tolstoy’s *Tsar Fyodor* from 1898), the creators of the Moscow Art Theatre also used authentic objects and costumes. In *The Government Inspector* (1926) and also in *The Lady of the Camellias* (1934), Meyerhold introduced authentic furniture and everyday domestic items. Borovsky, however, was aiming neither for a naturalistic reality effect, nor to recreate an epoch or its style, but for an illustration of the disjointedness of reality. These de-contextualised objects could no longer be reshaped into a new whole. The harrows and traditional, rural objects of everyday use, were relics of a lost reality in the countryside of the past (which had been transformed into a kolkhoz), and thus represented that which was lost and distant. It was therefore not simply the case, as one Russian critic put it, that

in *The Wooden Horses*, various styles were linked – genre pieces and abstract theatre. One form enhanced the other: generic pieces enhanced poetry, poetry enhanced genre pieces, and together this synergy produced a new quality. The impoverished, hungry world of Russian villages, lacking landlords and taken over by the Soviet State, appeared on the stage accompanied by the full tragedy of everyday life, without beautifying the dramatic characters, to an extent never before witnessed [Gershkovich 1993: 85].

The critic accurately perceived the director’s intentions, but the set designer had also introduced something that changed the way in which the represented world was created. We could argue that Borovsky shifted the accent from metaphor (centred on the resemblance between reality and its image) towards metonymy (indicating a relationship of contiguity). The Taganka Theatre, as a domain of abstraction and stage

metaphors produced thanks to the descriptive and discrete interventions of the set designer (after all, spectators did not necessarily need to know that the props were authentic objects although they could probably sense it), became a theatre with a direct manifestation of all that had passed through the use of these “souvenirs of the past.”

In *The House on the Embankment*, the set designer dressed the protagonists in costumes made of old, original textiles from the 1930s and 1940s [see Borovsky 1999: 28]. The conventional façade of the eponymous building, which, in the first scene, resembled a schematic construction, during the course of the performances gradually revealed its interiors (lifts and flats) and, with this, the fates and lives of the people living inside (this house, with its specific address, was inhabited during the Stalinist era by apparatchiks and party officials). In Lyubimov and Borovsky's theatre, history – the central subject of their performances – was depicted not from the perspective of a battle of ideals, but from the perspective of human fate. Thus the lives of individual protagonists came to represent the lives of many other people.



**Fig. 2.28.** Scene from *Vladimir Vysotsky*: Alla Demidova, Veniamin Smekhov

A typical example illustrative of Borovsky's strategy is the set design for Lyubimov's 1981 staging of *Vladimir Vysotsky*, which was dedicated to the memory of the bard. The performance consisted of his songs, poetry

and also short fragments of *Hamlet* performed by Vysotsky's partners from the Taganka Theatre. Borovsky used six wooden benches placed in rows, and cinema seats, which were authentic, rather than specially constructed for the performance. He acquired them from the abandoned Rusakov Workers' Club, which had been built in the 1920s in the Starominsky area of Moscow, by the most outstanding Russian Constructivist architect, Konstantin Melnikov. The seats, eleven per row, were positioned in a wooden frame, creating a mobile construction with rectangular parameters that matched the stage mirror of the Taganka space. As the performance began, spectators could see the rows of seats covered in a light-coloured cloth, as if the seats were under a shroud. There emerged the piercing image of an abandoned auditorium, one before which the crowd favourite would never perform again. The construction changed its location during the course of the performance, thus evoking various associations. When the first episode from *Hamlet* was performed, the construction was raised and suspended above the actors' heads, while the requisite lighting created a meshed shadow projected onto the white walls, thus recalling the curtain from *Hamlet*. This construction was also ideally suited to a functional role: it could "play the role" of a prison, a carriage, a cinema auditorium, or even a town when the rows of seats were positioned vertically, thus covering the entire stage mirror, while the actors, positioned behind it, opened out their seats in the direction of the audience, as if opening windows.

Looking at it today, it might seem that the set described above carried an excess of significance and was saturated by metaphors. Today, such conceptions of set design – and indeed theatre itself – are a thing of the past. Yet, at that time, this was something fresh, exciting and innovative – especially if we remember that Borovsky did not treat his constructions in utilitarian terms. What was also important was that the objects from which they emerged likewise possessed a "biography" – that the seats had really once been in a cinema; that they had been designed by Melnikov; that they had served particular individuals. Borovsky's use of authentic objects meant that the constructions became "warm" and human (upon closer inspection, the cinema seats revealed their previous lives through their worn-out veneer and traces of use). The items filling the performance space revealed their true existence – thus the memory of the past was given a voice here, while the abstract form was filled with life.

By introducing the element of memory and biography to old avant-garde ideas – and we should note that no Soviet stage director active after World War II was as inspired by the Constructivists as he – Borovsky reflected well the evolution that these ideas were undergoing in the work

of artists who made reference to the avant-garde legacy. While taking into account all the differences between the work of Borovsky and Tadeusz Kantor, the essence of the change in attitude towards the avant-garde of these two artists – particularly in its abstract or constructivist modes – was similar. Tadeusz Kantor referred to this matter thus:

Abstraction, which existed in Poland until the outbreak of World War II, disappeared in the period of mass genocide. This is a common phenomenon. Bestiality, brought to the fore by this war, was too alien to this pure idea... Realness was stronger.

Also, any attempt to go beyond it came to naught.

The work of art lost its power.

Aesthetic re-production lost its power.

The anger of a human being trapped by other human beasts cursed ART. We had only the strength to grab the nearest thing,

THE REAL OBJECT

and to call it a work of art! [Kantor 2009].

The difference between the “real object” in Kantor’s understanding, and the “found objects” in Borovsky’s work,<sup>34</sup> was based on the fact that Kantor’s plank of wood was an expression of his ideal of the poor object. “It was something disinterested and, in its disinterestedness, its lack of everyday utility, it became a kind of mysterious object, an object of the imagination – thus an object of art” [Porębski 1997: 5]. For Borovsky, on the other hand, found objects (a tarpaulin marked by tyre tracks or the cinema seats) always performed theatrical functions and, in this way, were characterised by utilitarian aspects. At the same time, it was through them that a way of exiting the theatre space and moving towards reality could be found. Borovsky was concerned with ensuring that the objects used on stage had had a previous life. In this way, the artist conducted an individualisation of history and endowed it with vital existence.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> We should remember that Borovsky employed various strategies depending on whom he was working with and the work he was directing. The example of the “found objects” relates to collaboration with Lyubimov.

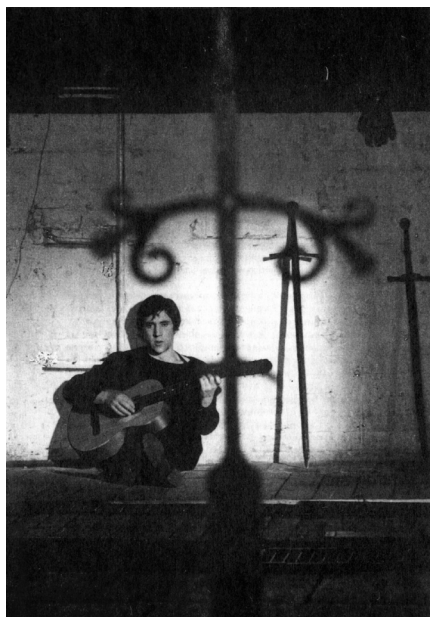
<sup>35</sup> In January 2005, during a visit to Krakow, David Borovsky and I visited the Cricoteka on Kanoniczna Street together, where an exhibition on the subject of *The Dead Class* was running. He was shown around the exhibition by its curator Anna Halczak. Borovsky closely examined all of the exhibits, while pausing for longer by the mechanical crib. This is an example of one of Kantor’s objects, which is simultaneously a “poor” and “real” object, yet also a constructed object containing traces of the artist’s interventions. Perhaps Borovsky recognised his own ideals of art in this mechanical crib.

In contrast to Kantor's theatre, Yury Lyubimov (of all the artists from the Taganka, he is the one Kantor differs most from) was interested in the human primarily as a social being. The Taganka actors, who were masters in balancing on the border between their roles and their "selves," spoke in their own name, while simultaneously representing the voice of a generation, i.e. the voice of other members of the intelligentsia like themselves, who yearned to participate in social life.<sup>36</sup> The collective scenes in many of the Taganka's performances (particularly the poetic montages) resembled Polish student theatre shows. Those works were received as the voice of a "theatre of civil engagement." The Taganka was not only unable to become an opposition theatre (it was impossible for such theatre to function in the USSR), it was also not aiming to position itself in opposition to the regime. However, in stressing the need for social activism, its work was viewed with suspicion and reluctance by the authorities (hence the bans issued by censors, as a result of which Lyubimov, before emigrating to the West, was unable to stage works, including Erdman's *Suicides*, Pushkin's *Boris Godunov*, and a performance about Vysotsky).

The power of the Taganka Theatre was evident not only in its surprising performances, which counted on being able to captivate audiences, but also – and perhaps above all – in the passion and engagement of its actors, who permeated their roles and radiated beyond the armour of form. Vysotsky reached the greatest heights, appearing before audiences as himself – a bard – often performing songs that had been included in spectacles especially for him. He sang in plays including *The Good Person of Szechwan*, Reed's *Ten Days that Shook the World* and Esenin's *Pugachev*, while also performing Pasternak's poetry in *Hamlet*. It should also be stressed that this on-stage spontaneity was not, of course, the spontaneity of Vysotsky the person, but only of the actor, bard and poet, who was aware of his role as the embodiment of collective desires. Vysotsky was both himself and a projection of the spectators who, especially in *Hamlet*, wished to identify themselves with his rebelliousness. His characteristically deep, gravelly voice had an emotional effect and was received as an expression of the human desire for freedom. His spontaneity and the great energy emanating from him, gripped spectators. This element of spontaneity, with the living presence of an actor who was also a human individual, distinguished the acting of the Taganka not only from Meyerhold's disciplined form of acting, where there was no place for individual- and personality-based factors, but also from acting that was completely role-oriented, i.e., that of Stanislavsky.

---

<sup>36</sup> For more on the actor from the Taganka Theatre, see Maltseva 2002.



**Fig. 2.29.** Vladimir Vysotsky as Hamlet, Taganka Theatre, 1971

In reaching for legacies of the past, Lyubimov and Borovsky referred to it in various ways. Lyubimov not only made use of ready-made ideals of the theatre, but also employed citations: in *Ten Days that Shook the World*, many of the scenes were drawn directly from the mass spectacle *The Storming of the Winter Palace* (1928), directed by Nikolay Evreinov. Lyubimov also employed self-referentiality – in *The Master and Margarita* (1977), he referenced his earlier works (by using props from previous spectacles, for example). His particular repertoire of directorial devices and methods of adaptation was given its fullest expression in *Comrade, believe....* (1973) based on excerpts from Pushkin, drawing on fragments of *Eugene Onegin*, the poet's correspondence, documentary materials, and replicas from *Boris Godunov*.

Everything was in it: poetry and prose, literature and documentary... Poems and songs, and directly addressing the audience – the actors performed them as if doing so in their own names, with the transition from actor to protagonist and back again taking place in a flash [Maltseva 2002: 115].

Yury Lyubimov was free and inventive in drawing inspiration from the achievements of Meyerhold, Vakhtangov and Brecht, as well as journalistic and campaigning theatre. The power of his work was contained in the surprising and original combination of elements drawn from various traditions and ideas, which produced his recognisable style. Lyubimov was the founder of an epoch, which summarised the achievements of the past without proposing a new gesture.



When it comes to the work of David Borovsky, we can speak of the inspirational role of the historical avant-garde, particularly Constructivism, which shaped the way in which he produced images. He also adopted the principle of a “single aesthetic environment.” This artist, who maintained formal discipline, was not interested in limiting himself to simple geometrical forms or exploiting the tensions between them. By introducing elements of reality to the stage through authentic objects marked by that which was individual and subjective, Borovsky situated himself among those artists (alongside Tadeusz Kantor and Anatoly Vasilev, albeit in another variant of the avant-garde), for whom the early twentieth-century avant-garde constituted a living tradition and a source of inspiration to draw upon. At the same time, it should be stressed that Borovsky’s stance was something of an exception in Russian theatre.

## 5. The Myth of the Avant-Garde Artist – from Hooligan and Red Army Soldier to Victim and Martyr

One of the more important – if not the most important – themes in Lyubimov’s spectacles was the issue of relations between the artists and the authorities, as well as the role of the artist in society. This theme was already present in one of the early works at the Taganka, *The Living and the Dead* (1965), which was a montage of poetry by Vladimir Mayakovsky, Nikolay Aseev, Mikhail Svetlov, Aleksandr Tvardovsky, and others. This performance explored the tragic fate of poets under Stalinism and during the war. The relation of artists to power was the hidden theme of the montage of Pushkin’s poetry *Comrade, believe...* (1973), as well as the piece based on Mayakovsky’s works, *Listen!* (1967), in which five actors performed the role of the poet. While this was not a biographical piece in the literal sense, the issue of the conflict between the artist and those surrounding him was also drawn out of the poems. He was presented as a romantic whose uncompromising attitude was the source of attacks on him, with these ultimately leading to his suicide. In the finale of *The Master and Margarita* (1977), based on Bulgakov’s novel – a performance that emerged only after Lyubimov had battled censors for years – the actors brought portraits of the author from various periods in his life onto the stage. Finally, the poet as a victim was also the hidden subject of *Hamlet*, with the title character played by Vysotsky as a Romantic bard, while the eponymous work about Vysotsky continued the theme.



**Fig. 2.30.** Scene from *Listen!*, based on works by Mayakovsky, directed by Yury Lyubimov, Taganka Theatre, 1967

This turn to the figures of dead artists was linked to contemporary creative figures shifting their focus away from the ideological sphere, and instead towards biography and legend. This phenomenon extended beyond the Taganka, occurring throughout almost all official culture of the 1960s and early 1970s. History in this period appeared not only as a “kingdom of necessity,” but also as a site of moral choices. The past, including the revolutionary past, was not submitted to complete revision, of course (beyond the Stalinist period – although, even in this case, revisionism was limited to condemning “errors and distortions”), but was instead presented from an alternative perspective, namely that of the individual.

*The Good Person of Szechwan* began with the entrance of two actors – one holding a guitar, the other an accordion – followed by the entire cast, who then, together with the audience, listened to a recording of Brecht’s statement on the subject of street theatre. A portrait of the author was projected above the stage during this scene. The biographies of authors whose works were being shown on stage served as metatexts for many of the performances at the Taganka. Hence, it can be argued that this theatre was driven by a desire to “individualise” history, thus depicting it on a human scale, i.e. at the level of the history of the life of an artist. Of course, as has already been mentioned, these individuals were to personify the collective experience. Lyubimov was never interested in the psycho-

logical dimension of human beings. In his theatre, the human individual operated as a subject of historical and moral discourse.

Meyerhold was never the central protagonist of any of the performances at the Taganka. It is worth noting, however, that the director, a colourful and expressive character, was someone who proved fascinating not only for photographers and painters, thus ensuring that his image is well-known today. He had also been the subject of literary depictions already during his lifetime. On several occasions he appeared as a character in 1920s dramas, either overtly or covertly (alluded to by a different surname, for example), as an object of parody or admiration. For example, in *The Crank (Chudak)* by Aleksandr Afinogenov, listed among the minor characters is Gennady Yakovlevich Meyerhold the Second. In the first drafts of the drama *A List of Good Acts (Spisok blagodeyany)*, staged by Meyerhold at his own theatre in 1931, Yury Olesha included the character of the “genius director” Rosmer, with a clear indication of having Meyerhold in mind. The character was to die in the first act. Ultimately, however, this figure was removed from the drama [Gudkova 2008: 115–116]. The director and his performances also found their way into works of literature on several occasions, as was the case in Ilf and Petrov’s *Twelve Chairs*, in which the Meyerhold Theatre and its creator were the models for the Columbus Theatre and director Nikolay Sestrin. Chapter thirty of the novel describes a fictional performance of Gogol’s *The Marriage*, with this scene containing a distorted image of all the traits of the new “Futurist” theatre, as avant-garde phenomena were most commonly described in that period. Bulhakov’s novel *Fatal Eggs*, meanwhile, contains the following description:

The theater named in honor of the late Vsevolod Mejerhold<sup>37</sup> – who, as you know, died in 1927 during a production of Pushkin’s “Boris Godunov,” when the trapezes with the naked boyars collapsed on him – flung out a multi-col-

**Fig. 2.31.** Vsevolod Meyerhold, drawing by an unknown artist

<sup>37</sup> This is how the artist’s name was transliterated in the translation of the novel cited here. Incidentally, in the first Polish edition of *The Fatal Eggs*, the surname was transcribed as “Majerhold,” cf. Bulhakov 1928: 66.



ored, moving electrical sign announcing a play by the dramatist Erendorf called "Chicken Doom," directed by Meyerhold's student, the distinguished Director of the Republic Kukhterman [Bulgakov 2010: 44].

Equally, in opinion pieces from this time, Meyerhold and his theatre were often the subject of mockery and jokes (which, as an aside, were provoked by the very name of the institution, the Meyerhold Theatre, which was seen as a sign of hubris and excess, intolerable according to older theatrical customs). Bulgakov himself, seen as a representative of those favouring tradition and reluctant towards the avant-garde, in his "Biomechanical Column" from 1923, presented a caricature of *Le Cocu magnifique*:

In a shabby, bare and austere theatre there is, instead of a stage, simply a hole (without, of course, any trace of a curtain). In the depths of it, looms a plain old brick wall with two boarded-up windows.

In front of the wall there is a construction in comparison with which Tatlin's design appears to be the epitome of clarity and simplicity. There are kinds of cages, slopes, sticks, small doors and wheels, with the letters *s*, *ch*, *t* and *e* written in reverse on them. The theatre carpenters walk around the stage without a care in the world and, for a long time, it is impossible to fathom whether or not the performance has already begun.

Once it actually begins (a fact that can be established thanks to a light that is illuminated somewhere to the side of the stage), some people dressed in blue appear. Theatre critics call these work clothes. If they actually visited a factory for a day or two, then they might find out what work clothes really look like!

The action takes place thus: a woman, having rolled up her blue skirt, slides down a slope on something that men and women usually sit on. The woman then cleans a man's bottom with a wicker brush. She then rides the man's back, covering her legs shyly with the skirt of her work clothes.

"This is biomechanics!," an acquaintance explained to me. Biomechanics! But those blue biomechanics who had earlier been taught how to give touching monologues are completely useless. Furthermore, all this takes place just a stone's throw away from the Nikitsky Circus, where the clown Lazarenko performs amazing somersaults [Bulgakov 1995: 219–220].

In spite of his evident unwillingness towards – indeed rejection of – any attempts to understand unfamiliar art, Bulgakov demonstrated (against his own will, since his entire statement is ironic) great insight in noting that Meyerhold was ahead of his time.

May Meyerhold be kind enough to die and resurrect in the twenty-first century. Everyone would benefit from this, particularly the man himself. He would be understood then. The audience would be satisfied by his wheels, while he would receive the recognition his genius deserves [Bulgakov 1995: 220].

As an aside, these death fantasies projected onto the director by his enemies, as well as fellow artists close to him, including Yury Olesha, are striking. They confirm that, as a genuine forerunner, Meyerhold had to be destroyed symbolically.

**Fig. 2.32.** Isaak Makhlis, a caricature of Meyerhold



In discussing examples of the mythologisation of artists and their biographies, it is impossible to ignore the issue of efforts at self-fashioning undertaken by the artists themselves. It is well known that artists in the modernist era were particularly keen to adopt various poses. Mayakovsky and Meyerhold's self-creations, as well as those of many other avant-garde artists, incorporated "roles" as varied as hooligan, philosopher, scholar, craftsman, worker – a creator of things (which do not reproduce reality but constitute reality in themselves) – Bolshevik commissar and Red Army soldier. Meyerhold did not only wear the leather jacket of a commissar or a soldier's uniform in the first years following the Revolution, but also stressed his support for the new ideology in almost all spheres of his activities: as the organiser of theatrical life, becoming head of the TEO (the Theatre Department of the People's Education Com-

mittee), as the organiser of the *Theatrical October* programme, and, finally, in his texts and manifestos, in which he used revolutionary or military vocabulary. All this contributed to the image of a revolutionary and Bolshevik becoming permanently associated with Meyerhold in spite of him rejecting the revolutionary costume from the mid-1920s onwards. Yuri Elagin, author of the first post-war monograph on the director, published in New York with a foreword by Mikhail Chekhov, claimed that Meyerhold's "Bolshevism" was, on the contrary, highly exaggerated, as he quickly came to understand the direction in which the Soviet Union would evolve. Thus, from the mid-1920s, the most important aspect of his contacts with the authorities were efforts at guaranteeing conditions in which he could remain a creative artist [Elagin 1955, first published in Russia as Elagin 1998]. We should also add that, although, since the late 1980s, if not before, the question of the director's political engagement has been the subject of descriptions in numerous press publications (often of a sensationalist nature) and books [see, e.g., Zolotnitsky 1999; Agranovich 2004], there has not, as yet, been a single work in which this issue has been explored in a scientifically accurate and broad perspective that also takes into account the historical context.

Since the end of the 1980s, the myth of the avant-garde artist as a man of action, a warrior dedicated completely to the matter of revolution and art (which, in essence, were united as one), has been accompanied by the myth of the victim,<sup>38</sup> with the latter, in time, coming to overshadow the former. The opening of the Stalinist-era archives spawned a wave of publications on the subject of victims of repressions. Among the revelations were shocking materials relating to Meyerhold's trial, which mean that he too, like many others, including Isaac Babel, became the subject of the attention of historians and journalists. As a result of interest in Meyerhold as a historical figure, a spectacle titled *Triumfal'naya Ploshchad'* (*Victory Square*) was developed, which was directed and scripted by Mark Rozovsky at the Nikitsky Gate Theatre. It presented the artist as a victim of the system, with the protagonist known as the Master (played by Sergey Desnitsky), conducting a dialogue with the Government Inspector, who simultaneously represented both the hero of Gogol's play and the Master's tormentor – the KGB officer who interrogated him. Rozovsky attempted to reconstruct fragments of the 1926 performance of *The Government Inspector*, which became an element of historical journalism.

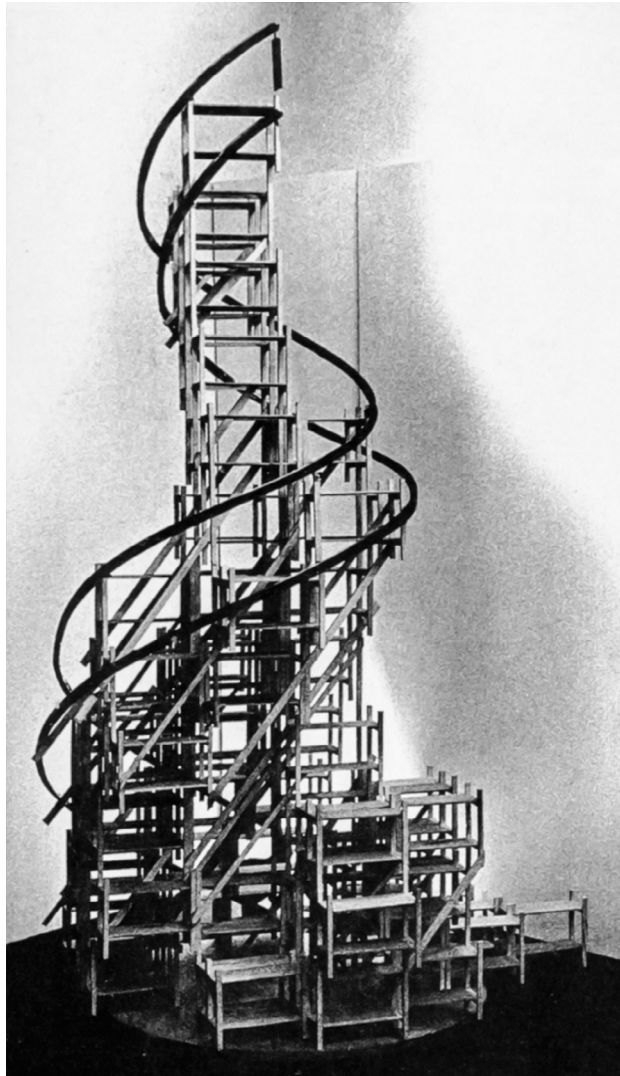
Photographs of Meyerhold from the period in which he was interrogated at the Lubyanka were reproduced in many of the publications

---

<sup>38</sup> This was also evident in Kantor's final work from 1991, *Today Is My Birthday*.

dedicated to him. This focus on Meyerhold's death, and the deaths of many other artists – not only those belonging to the avant-garde – found expression in publications, as well as documentary films and exhibitions. In 1989, at the Central Artists' Building (TsDKh) in Moscow, an exhibition of works created in camps took place. Over time, this collection was supplemented by mementos, photographs and everyday items, thus providing the foundations of the collection of the Creativity and Everyday Life in the GULAG Museum, sponsored by the Memorial Society. The subject of repressions also featured in the works of painters, with one example of a work in which the avant-garde was associated with political repressions being David Borovsky's 1998 design for the Bell Tower of Martyrs (*Kolokol'nya zamuchennykh*). The eponymous bell-tower was a direct reference to Tatlin's Memory to the Third Communist International. Thus, a work

**Fig. 2.33.** David Borovsky, design for the *Bell Tower for Martyrs*



that embodied the energetic gesture of creativity and intervention, in reality became – in the “corrected” version – a mausoleum of dead ideals.

We should also add at this juncture that, in the case of Meyerhold himself, the interest in his biography, particularly its tragic ending, gave way with time to research, and in some cases very detailed investigation, on various aspects of his work. Over the last two decades or so, dozens of articles and books dedicated to his oeuvre, including the publication, for the very first time, of his writings and documentary materials (for example, rehearsal records), as well as albums rich in iconography, have appeared.<sup>39</sup> The documentation and dissemination of his work has been carried out primarily by the Museum and Home of Vsevolod Meyerhold, which was founded in 1991 by the artist’s granddaughter, Maria Alekseevna Valentey, who had dedicated a vast portion of her life first to securing the rehabilitation of her grandfather, and later to the memorialisation of his works.<sup>40</sup> The museum, located in the artist’s final home, which he shared with his wife Zinaida Reich, is in a Constructivist building at 12 Bryusova Street in Moscow. It is a branch of The Aleksey Bakhrushin Central Theatre Museum in Moscow and was opened to the public in 1997. Beyond this, a certain role in disseminating knowledge about Meyerhold is played by the Meyerhold House Museum, founded in 1984 in Penza, his birthplace, as well as by the Meyerhold Centre in Moscow, founded by Valery Fokin.



**Fig. 2.34.** Maria Valentey in the Museum and Home of Vsevolod Meyerhold, photograph by Katarzyna Osińska

<sup>39</sup> The most important book publications are: Meyerhold 1998, 2001, 2006; Sherel (ed.) 1992; Feldman (ed.) 2000; Pesochinsky, Kukhta, Tarshis (eds.) 1997; Sitkovetskaya 1993; A. Mikhaylova, Davydova et al. 1995 and also Gromov 1994; Kolyazin 1998; Pesochinsky (ed.) 1998; Tarabukin 1998; Picon-Vallin, Shcherbakov (eds.) 2001; Gudkova 2002; Zvenigorodskaya 2004; and Eisenstein 2005.

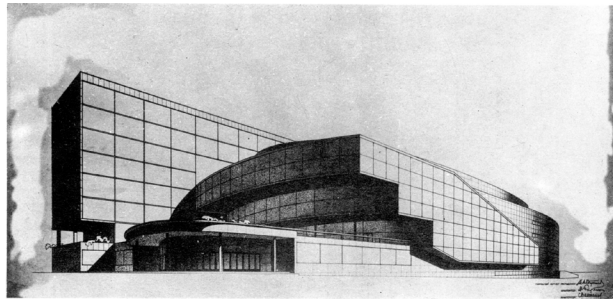
<sup>40</sup> A book on her life has been published in recent years: Makerova (ed.) 2009.



## 6. Meyerhold-Inspired Theatre Architecture

Even before the Revolution, Meyerhold had reached the conclusion that new ideas for staging theatre works must be accompanied by a change in the conceptions of the performance space. His experiments towards new relations between the stage and audience are well known and well documented. The director displayed an extraordinary degree of inventiveness in this field, whether in relation to performances staged in traditional theatre buildings with a classical Italian stage, or those performed in small theatres and cabarets, or even private apartments. Very early on, already in 1907, Meyerhold began developing the idea of building a theatre-in-the-round in connection with the plans for creating an arena-type stage for the performance of Fyodor Sologub's drama *The Gift of Wise Bees* (*Dar mudrykh pchyl*), which ultimately never came into being. Following World War I, various versions of this idea, not necessarily inspired by Meyerhold, were circulating around Europe. In Poland, this was manifested in the plans for a simultaneous theatre, for the Syrkus Theatre in Warsaw's Żoliborz district, and for the Cyrk Theatre in Okólnik Street.

**Fig. 2.35.** Vsevolod Meyerhold, Mikhail Barkhin, Sergey Vakhtangov, concept design for the Meyerhold Theatre's new building, 1932 (overview)



Throughout the post-Revolutionary period, Meyerhold was forced to stage his works in spaces that were not only traditional but also very uncomfortable. His Meyerhold Theatre, i.e., TiM and later GOSTiM, was based in the building of the former Zon Theatre between 1922 and 1931, before later having to move to the even less comfortable space by the arcade on Tverskaya Street, where the stage was low and wide, while the auditorium was of disproportionate depth. The design of the new Meyerhold Theatre, begun in the late 1920s, was a result of both the desire to realise new ideals and also necessity. In addition to this, the theatre had a unique trait in that it combined functionality

with the author's vision. This does not mean that it lacked a storeroom of traditions. On the contrary, Meyerhold was inspired by antiquity, Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, and also by very recent developments in theatre architecture, namely Hans Poelzig's 1919 design for Max Reinhardt's theatre.

The director engaged a pair of young architects, Mikhail Barkhin and Sergey Vakhtangov (son of Evgeny), in the project. Years later they would recall conversations with the artist, during the course of which he would specify his expectations, while also outlining plans for the future:

we spoke of the duties of art and the role of the director, of the role of the theatre, and the history of architecture, of Shakespeare and Greek choirs, of Roman theatre and Wagnerian operas, of Mayakovsky, Olesha and Bezymensky, of Le Corbusier and Tatlin, of Reinhardt, van de Velde and Erenburg, of acoustics and optics, of descriptive geometry and mechanics, of cranes and cars, of everything that was connected to the new theatre [Barkhin, S. Vakhtangov 1967: 571].

Meyerhold did not envisage the use of traditional technologies as far as the footlights, backstage and hierarchical division of the auditorium (stalls, balcony and boxes) were concerned. Drawings and photographs depicting the model of the design have survived, showing that the amphitheatre-like auditorium with three steep sides (which was to provide all spectators with improved sightlines) surrounded an elongated stage, which itself was positioned on the same level as the first rows of the amphitheatre. The director wanted to achieve full "three-dimensionality" in his scenes on stage, and in the figure of the actor. This was his old ideal from the period when he had made a radical departure from experiments involving a flat, painterly set and relief-like conceptions of actors, which had been applied most fully in the production of Maeterlinck's *Sister Beatrix*. The stage featured two rotating arenas: one with a diameter of ten metres located closer to the audience and another, larger one, positioned further away. Both arena-trapdoors could be lowered beneath the stage, where the sets could be changed, or raised at various angles in relation to the spectators. Thanks to special tracks installed in the stage roof, they could be moved into various positions at varying heights. The design also incorporated an option for creating additional "stage points" on special balconies that could slide out of the rear wall of the auditorium. On both sides of the stage at ground level, the installation of great sliding gates, through which cars, groups of people or, in a word, the street could enter, was envisaged. Meyerhold also thought of creating a sliding roof that would generate an open-air space,

particularly for balmy summer evenings. This final idea, however, as both architects soberly noted, was impossible to put into effect in 1930.

Meyerhold was attracted by the idea of free movement around the stage and auditorium. The director revealed his dreams to the set designer and painter Yury Annenkov, stating that he would like to find not only a rotating stage in the new building, but also one that “surrounded the entire auditorium, one that even went outside! Why not? Straight onto the street and into a crowd of passers-by” [A. Mikhaylova, Davydova et al. 1995: 48].

The design also envisaged a multi-storey “creative tower,” which was to be the dominant vertical element of the entire design. Workshops, a theatre school, and also the educational and research departments of the theatre, were to be housed on various floors. The actors’ dressing rooms, whose doors led directly onto the stage, were to be located on the ground floor, at stage level. From the audience’s perspective, the dressing room doors formed a semicircle, recalling the set device employed by the director in his version of *The Government Inspector*. This was just one of the artist’s conscious strategies: referring in the design of the new building to archi-

**Fig. 2.36.** Vsevolod Meyerhold at the construction site of the new theatre, 1937



tectural and set-design ideas applied in previous works, thus “marking” the building with his own achievements and personality. This objective was also served by design elements: the mosaics on the external walls of the tower were to illustrate scenes from the most important works of the Master, as Meyerhold was generally referred to.

Towards the end of the 1930s, the first foundations of the new theatre were laid, although it was being constructed according to an altered design. From around 1933, Soviet architecture made increasingly clear references to classicist models. Thus new theatre buildings in the USSR were decorated with Roman-style columns, while the stages and auditoria were based on Renaissance forms. Pseudo-classicism became prevalent in architecture and this could not but influence the assessment of Barkhin and Vakhtangov’s design. It was deemed to be overly ascetic, hence one of the leading Stalinist-era architects, Aleksey Shchusev, designed a new façade for the building. Selim Khan-Magomedov does not consider this design to be part of the socialist-realist trend, but rather classes it among “post-constructivism, which was about ‘allowing’ avant-garde ideas into neo-classicism” [see Khan-Magomedov 1996: 644]. The director accepted the changes to the façade, hoping that the interior design would remain unaffected, since the authorities had not expressed any particular concerns in relation to it. In the later 1930s, the campaign against Meyerhold began, with the order to close down his theatre issued in 1938. This meant that the building was ascribed a different function and it currently houses the Tchaikovsky Concert Hall.



**Fig. 2.37.** Aleksey Shchusev, concept design for the State Meyerhold Theatre, 1934 (overview)

During the Stalinist years, Moscow gained several new theatres, including the Mossovet Theatre and the most spectacular theatre building of the era, the Red Army Theatre (today the Army Theatre), which was

built in the shape of a five-pointed star. The grand scale of the new theatres not only reflected the ideology of theatre for the masses, but was also dictated by practical factors, namely the real requirements of a growing audience. Going to the theatre in the USSR was, initially, an indicator of social advancement, but with time it became a cultural obligation fulfilled without any particular compulsion. At the same time, the grand scale of the stages imposed a monumental aesthetic on the works performed there. In spaces as massive as the Red Army Theatre, there was no place for directors who sought a more intimate form of expression.

Meyerhold's old ideals also re-emerged in designs for other theatres, whether realised in practice or not. It was not by chance that the first design for Nikolay Okhlopkov's theatre from 1934 was named Okhlopkov's Theatre-in-the-Round, while twenty years later Okhlopkov

together with the architects V. Bykov and I. Maltsin, developed a design for a new theatre with a complex system of stage platforms that could be transformed along with a mobile auditorium whose angles of inclination and position on various levels of the building could be changed [Kostina 2002: 214].

The theatres that emerged during the post-Stalinist "thaw" distanced themselves from the previous epoch not only in respect of ideals and aesthetics. It was also important for them to be able to move away from both gigantomania, as well as the hierarchical organisation of large repertory theatres. *Sovremennik*, the most popular intelligentsia theatre of the 1950s and early 1960s, was located in the rather uncomfortable auditorium of a former cinema in Chistye Prudy, and still occupies the same space today, although a new stage with modern equipment was only recently installed. The tight, uncomfortable auditorium was not only an unavoidable necessity, but also became part of a programme that contested the monumental theatre of the Stalinist era.

The Taganka Theatre was given an old space on Taganka Square. In 1972 work began on a design for a new building to be located directly next to the old one. The result was a contemporary theatre whose main asset was the ability to shape the performance space almost without limitations.<sup>41</sup>

Along the sides of the auditorium, away from the main stage, small performance platforms were located. The right-hand side stage was located below a huge window measuring 10 x 4 metres, which could be shielded by a large concrete wall covering up the view over Moscow. There was the option of opening the window in summer and performing in front of

---

<sup>41</sup> For more on this subject, see: Anisimov 1984.

the window, i.e. against the background of the city's hustle and bustle. The creators of the new building were thus inspired by Meyerhold's unrealised design, in accordance with which the street was to penetrate the performance space. Lyubimov also made overt reference to this tradition by making his old piece, *Ten Days that Shook the World*, adapted from John Reed's text, the premiere performance in this new building, on 22 April 1980. It was not only dedicated to the theme of revolution but, in its aesthetic, referred back to the performances of the 1920s. Actors entered the auditorium through the aforementioned window directly from the street.

The new theatre offered many opportunities for directors to go beyond the traditional space of the stage box. Under the first six rows of seats was a mechanism that allowed a ring to be formed on the main stage, with spectators thus surrounding it from all four sides. Alternatively, a second stage platform could be created which then split the amphitheatre into two sections (a flower path). The theatre foyer was designed in such a way that the action could be transferred there from the stage. The original multifunctional design by a trio of architects, including Aleksandr Anisimov and Yury Gnedovsky, was awarded a double silver medal prize at the Prague Quadrennial in 1976.

The first premiere prepared specifically for the new theatre was a 1981 version of Chekhov's *Three Sisters*, directed by Lyubimov with set design by Borovsky. The spectacle began by the open window against the backdrop of Moscow, while the orchestra was positioned on the side stage in grey, early twentieth-century greatcoats, playing a melancholy march. Soon after this premiere, the director left the Soviet Union and remained abroad until 1989. After returning to the country, he again took up his position at the head of the Taganka Theatre. However, as a result of conflicts, the group split in two, with the theatre building coming under the control of the rebel group led by Nikolay Gubenko. Thus the whole grand enterprise of building the new theatre did not ultimately produce any exceptional results. Paradoxically, following the construction of the new theatre, the Taganka became increasingly less significant, although audiences continued to flock there for many years. However, they were primarily interested in older pieces performed on the old stage. The exceptional potential of the new space was never exploited and today the Taganka Theatre is of secondary importance on the Moscow theatre scene.

The year 2001 was notable in the chronicles of Moscow theatre life, with the three-month-long Theatrical Olympiad – organised with unprecedented vigour – and the opening of two new theatre buildings:

the Meyerhold Centre run by Valery Fokin, and the School of Dramatic Arts under the direction of Anatoly Vasilev.<sup>42</sup>

Established by Fokin in 1986, the Centre initially did not have its own permanent base. Construction began in the early 1990s, i.e. not only in new, but also quickly-changing, economic conditions. The project could be completed (thanks to the subsidising of construction work by the city authorities), but what emerged on Novoslobodskaya Street was a new building, the greater part of which was occupied by offices and banks, while just 15% of the space was given over to the Centre.

Fokin, who made Meyerhold the patron of the new institute, created a programme involving his particular vision of reviving traditions and applying them to the demands of contemporary theatre. As part of this programme, Fokin staged works including *The Government Inspector* at the Aleksandrinsky Theatre, for which he used Meyerhold's theatrical score. It should thus come as no surprise that the architectural design of the Centre – one of the creators was Yury Gnedovsky, the co-designer of the Taganka Theatre – was partly inspired by Meyerhold's old dream of performing in the open air, as was the case with the Globe Theatre. The main stage, the floor of which could be lowered, was built on the sixth storey of the building, and equipped with a roof that could be partially opened, meaning that, as Fokin put it himself, "we could perform beneath the stars." There are extensive opportunities for transforming the performance space: it is able to host performances for several hundred spectators or an intimate audience of twenty. The theatre is fitted out with ultra-modern lighting and sound equipment. Beyond the main stage, the Centre also has large rehearsal spaces and, on the fifth floor, a foyer where original posters from Meyerhold's performances are displayed. The foyer can also host talks and performances. The aesthetics of the entire complex are contemporary, simple and unassuming, which is significant because the Centre's theatre serves primarily as a space for touring theatres from Russia and abroad. It is also used for film screenings, workshops and meetings within research-based artistic projects, such as the Artaud Year, the Antiquity Project, the Tadeusz Kantor Days in 2005, or the programme presented on the tenth anniversary of Jerzy Grotowski's death in 2009. The Centre collaborates with other organisations, supporting the activities of young artists and promoting theatre that is connected to experimental or studio-type work. For example, the various editions of the Open Stage project are hosted there, as well as some of the performances taking place within the New Drama Festival.

---

<sup>42</sup> On the subject of the new building of the School of Dramatic Arts, see Chapter 6 in this book, titled "Anatoly Vasilev – an Innovator in Dialogue with Tradition."

Equally, since 2006, the Centre has been a co-organiser of the NET (New European Theatre) Festival. Following in Meyerhold's footsteps, Fokin launched directors' workshops at the CIM (with this commonly-used acronym echoing Meyerhold's TiM), while also giving his students the chance to stage performances. The Centre also plays host to various events and has, over recent years, become one of the most popular spots on the cultural map of Moscow. And what of Valery Fokin's own work? This is not a subject that could be covered in a few sentences. But it does seem that he created his most interesting works as a director when he had no permanent performance space, and was instead staging his productions in rented theatres. I have in mind *A Hotel Room in the Town of NN* (1994) in particular, based on Gogol, and *Metamorphosis* (1995), adapted from Kafka.



**Fig. 2.38.** Valery Fokin in his office at the Meyerhold Centre, 2004, photograph by Katarzyna Osińska

The question thus emerges as to the extent to which theatre architecture influences the art of directing, and whether it can inspire experiments in search of new, original stage forms? The conclusion that can be drawn here offers little comfort to those who favour the idea of creating contemporary performance spaces. The best things that have emerged in the last century of Russian theatre have primarily come from traditional, cramped and uncomfortable spaces. Paradoxically, the opening of new bases for theatres has often coincided with a tailing off of artistic innovation among the creators of new spaces. Tadeusz Kantor was categorically against any idea of creating his own theatre, particularly a large theatre: He wrote that: "A theatre's standard can only be improved by individuals. Through their own art that they will produce in a dark room, in a dark hole, at night, in pain, in suffering" [Kantor 1999: 116]. Considering the history of the Cricot 2 Theatre, it is difficult to dispute his opinion.



Thus projects that assume that the realisation of new theatrical ideals requires contemporary buildings must be placed within the realm of avant-garde utopianism. The dream of new possibilities opened up by architecture certainly inspired artists, stimulating their imagination. However, the realisation of these dreams, i.e., the construction of a new theatre, rarely had the desired artistic impact. It seems, instead, that the truly inspirational discovery of early twentieth-century theatre (i.e., the revival of old, forgotten ideas), was the recognition that theatre can be created anywhere: on the street, on a square, in a circus, as well as in small spaces – in a loft or basement. The theatre is not the building, or even the stage – but the relationship between the actor and the spectator.



# 3

## ECCENTRISM, BIOMECHANICS AND MIME (FROM THE CIRCUS TO DANCE)

### 1. FEX and Eisenstein

Eccentrism owed its greatest achievements in the theatre of the initial post-Revolutionary years primarily to artists who would go on to become associated with cinema. The authors of the manifesto titled *Eccentrism*, published in 1922, were Grigory Kozintsev, Leonid Trauberg, Sergey Yutkevich and Georgy Kryzhitsky. In the same year in Petrograd a new theatre workshop opened named the Factory of Eccentric Actors (FEX). Of the four abovementioned artists, the first two would become renowned supporters of Eccentrism in art as the chief representatives of FEX, before going on to create a version of Gogol's *The Marriage*, which bore the subtitle "A trick in three acts, the absolutely incredible adventures of Serge the eccentric."<sup>1</sup>

*Time is Money!!! Allô! Eccentric Theatre! Eccentrism*  
presents:  
operetta, melodrama, farce, cinema, circus, *variétés*, Guignol –  
all in one performance!  
*A revue* of the contemporary age!  
Charlie Chaplin! Albert Einstein!  
The completely unbelievable adventures of N. V. Gogol!  
FEX Music Hall  
American dances. Death-defying rain. Jazz band.

---

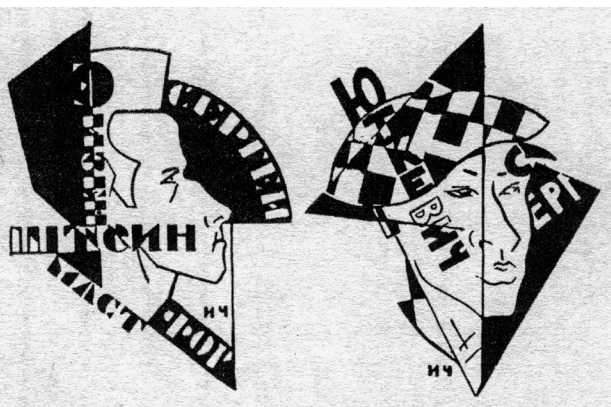
<sup>1</sup> This is from a description of the production – see Senelick, Ostrovsky (eds.) 2014: 188, in Russian: Zorkaya 2000.

*Conférence automatique.*

The electro-radio-steam mechanisms are running.

Engineers of the performance: Grigory Kozintsev – Leonid Trauberg.<sup>2</sup>

The poster for the performance indicated which fields of art and the metropolitan industrial reality fuelled the imaginations of the young generation of left-leaning Soviet artists. Quite typically, what dominated were areas of art and phenomena considered part of Western bourgeois art, such as the operetta, melodrama, *variétés*, jazz and popular dances. The manifestos of artists working in this direction were also indicative of a fascination with sport, particularly boxing.



**Fig. 3.1.** Caricatures of Sergey Eisenstein and Sergey Yutkevich by Ivan Chuvelev

Neya Zorkaya has attempted to reconstruct the “quite incredible” production of *The Marriage*, whose subtitle was “An absolutely incredible incident in two acts” [Gogol 1969], which, in the version comprising “tricks” – i.e., skilfully executed devices, intended to produce a surprising effect – became a phantasmagoria. The dramatic text was treated as the starting point for a crazy game of theatre, which some considered an example of theatrical hooliganism where Gogol’s protagonists transformed their image, becoming icons of the new industrial world and the emergent mass culture. Agafya Tikhonovna became Miss Agatha; the bride and groom-to-be were given nicknames – steam, electric and radioactive; Albert Einstein appeared on stage, split into Albert and Einstein – with this number involving two protagonists performed by the famous Petrograd clown duo, Serge and Taurek. Podkolyosin was replaced by Charlie Chaplin, while the mysterious American Mister Bill

<sup>2</sup> This is only a portion of a textually dense poster, reproduced in: Rudnitsky 2000: 124.

played the role of Kochkaryov. This figure turned Agatha off a series of fiancés, saying: “Steam fiancé. I appeal to the imagination. Night. Fiancé. Enters. Noise. Rumpus. World. Steam. Smoke. Soot. Swish. Whistle... Radio fiancé? Wireless? He’s no good!” [Zorkaya 2000: 394]. Ultimately, Agatha was left with only Podkolyosin, i.e. Chaplin, with whom she fell in love and of whom she demanded immediate marriage, with Chaplin protesting in turn: “Forced marriage. Never in my life.” He subsequently attempted to jump from the twenty-sixth floor of a skyscraper. It then turned out that the mysterious Mister Bill was in fact the king of detectives called Pinkerton... and so it went on in the same vein. In the finale, Nikolay Vasilevich Gogol himself appeared on stage, dancing the *hopak* and shouting, “Mummy! They are postponing my drama *The Marriage!*” before dying of despair [Zorkaya 2000: 395].

**Fig. 3.2.** Nikolay Foregger’s *Mechanical Dances* (sequence *Stroll, Passion, Death*), 1923, drawing Sergey Yutkevich



The production featured many “Americanisms”, not only in the text but also among the props, which included adverts, neon lights and other elements of contemporary America, such as a machine from which sandwiches popped out. Soon afterwards, these emblems of Western reality, and also its music and performing arts (such as jazz or musicals), became commonplace in theatre. They came to feature in performances by Aleksandr Tairov (his version of Chesterton’s *The Man Who Was Thursday*,

1923), Vsevolod Meyerhold (for example in his version of Fayko's *Lake Lull*, from 1923), and in works by many of their followers. American art, whether in film, music or the stage, inspired the work of many artists in this period: from Sergey Eisenstein to Nikolay Foregger, the man behind the famous *Mechanical Dances*.<sup>3</sup> Stereotypes of the Western world also featured in Soviet drama of the period, particularly in satirical comedies about the native and Western bourgeoisie.



**Fig. 3.3.** Mikhail Eskin – clown. *The Wise Man* according to Aleksandr Ostrovsky, directed by Sergey Eisenstein, First Workers' Theatre of the Proletkult, 1923

<sup>3</sup> Nikolay Mikhaylovich Foregger (real name: von Greyfenturn; 1892–1939) – director and choreographer and today largely forgotten founder of the renowned Mastfor Studio, where he created dance sequences that were popular in the 1920s. He was considered a master of eccentricism in dance, with his productions also incorporating elements of the circus and popular stage. His choreographed sequences, such as *Mechanical Dances* or the *Constructivist Hopak*, reflected ideals of urban design. Towards the end of the 1920s, he created a choreographed reworking of motifs from Chaplin's films, see Chepalov 2001. Foregger also wrote a manifesto, "Pesa. Syuzhet. Tryuk. Aksioma" ("Art. Plot. Trick. Axiom"), which has been reprinted in: Foregger 1996.

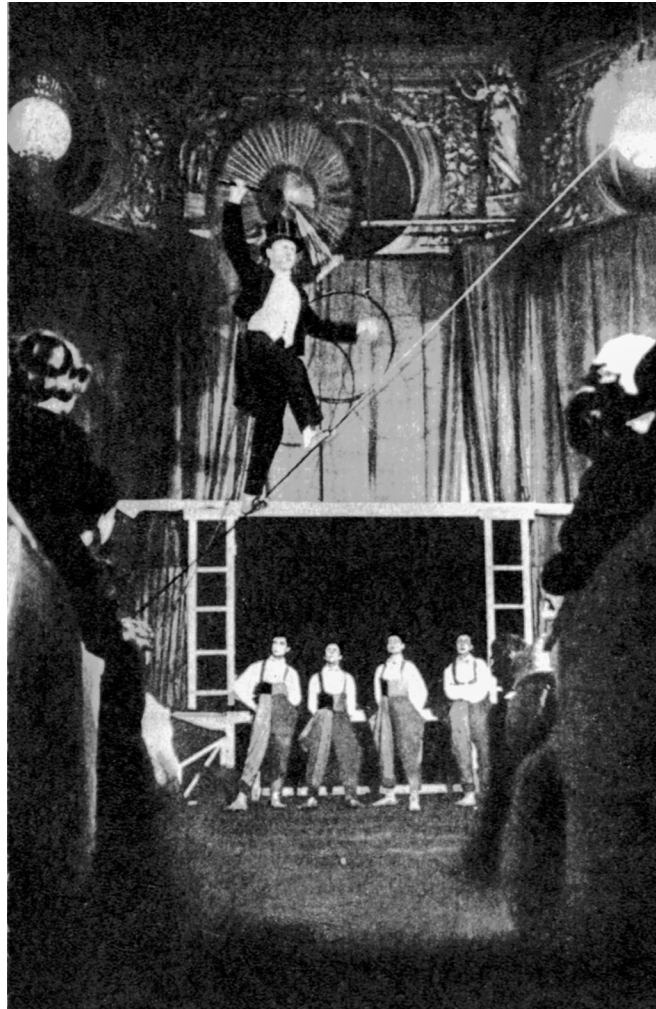
The first FEX performance did not yet feature any ideological elements; instead, it was more of a game with theatre based on the juxtaposition of the most absurd and least compatible elements. In the manifesto *AB: The Parade of the Eccentric*, published by Kozintsev in 1922, it is stated, among other things:

Life requires art that is  
*Hyperbolically crude, dumbfounding, nerve-wracking, openly utilitarian  
mechanically exact, momentary, rapid.*

otherwise no-one will hear, see or stop [Kozintsev 2002: 178].

The Manifesto also featured slogans such as “We prefer Charlie’s backside to Eleanora Duse’s hands” or “We prefer the twin soles of an American dancer to the five hundred instruments of the Marynsky Theatre” [Kozintsev 2002: 179] – all of which was maintained in the conventions of Futurist provocation.

**Fig. 3.4.** Scene from an adaptation of Aleksandr Ostrovsky’s *The Wise Man*, directed by Sergey Eisenstein, First Workers’ Theatre of the Proletkult, 1923



Eccentrism meant taking things, phenomena and human behaviour out of accepted contexts and instead showing them in a new light and combining them according to new principles. The aim of these devices was to constantly surprise the audience, challenging their habits of perception. Such an aesthetic strategy corresponded to the experiments of the formalist school, particularly its Petrograd faction. Viktor Shklovsky dedicated one of his essays to FEX [Shklovsky 1928], while his theory of technique or device, (*priyom*) and his concept of *ostranenie* – estrangement or defamiliarisation – prove perfectly applicable in an analysis of the strategies of eccentricism. Shklovsky himself derived the origins of Eisenstein’s “montage of attractions” from the work of the FEX. Essentially, Eisenstein’s theatrical experiments moved in the same direction, beginning with the performance of *The Wiseman* (*Mudrets*), based on Aleksandr Ostrovsky’s *Enough Stupidity in Every Wise Man*, staged at the Proletkult First Workers’ Theatre in 1923. This production has gone down in history for introducing a fragment of the film titled *Glumov’s Diary* (the previous year a short film titled *Charlie Chaplin and Beautiful Betsy* featured in the FEX version of *The Marriage*, with the projection accompanied by a live actor playing Chaplin) [Zorkaya 2000: 397]. Eisenstein and Sergey Tretyakov transformed Ostrovsky’s comedy into a series of devices, or attractions, involving the participation of completely transformed protagonists (Krutitsky, for example, became General Joffre, while Mashenka became Mary McLack, etc.). This production was indicative of the tendency towards the “circusification” of theatre: the stage became a circus arena, with some of the actors in clown costumes, performing juggling numbers and acrobatics. (The anecdote about Eisenstein ordering the future film director Grigory Aleksandrov to balance on a tightrope without any safety measures has gone down in history.) It was a similar story at the FEX, where clowns and jugglers were fundamental to the theatrical work (in the studio founded alongside the Factory of Eccentric Actors, lessons were led, among others, by the clown/acrobat Aleksandr Aleksandrov, known by his stage name Serge, and the juggler Tokeromo).<sup>4</sup> In future productions, Eisenstein’s “attractions,” which he defined as an “aggressive moment in theatre,” affecting the senses and psyche of the audience, started taking on a greater role in transmitting

---

<sup>4</sup> Most of the artists considered to belong to the avant-garde, from Meyerhold to Evreinov, drew inspiration from the circus. Sergey Radlov was particularly active on this front, with his productions at the People’s Comedy Theatre, which he ran, resting “on the shoulders of circus actors.” He aimed to create a new genre, namely theatre-circus. The chief theorist of this strand of theatre was Konstantin Derzhavin; see Zolotnitsky 1976.



ideological content, particularly in performances based around Sergey Tretyakov's texts: *Are You Listening, Moscow?* (*Slyshish, Moskva?*, 1923) and *Gasmasks* (*Protivogazy*, 1924).<sup>5</sup> Equally, the subsequent FEX production *Vneshtorg on the Eiffel Tower*, based on Kozintsev and Trauberg's script, was described by them as an "agit-review" (*agitobozrenie*).

**Fig. 3.5.** Scene from an adaptation of Aleksandr Ostrovsky's *The Wise Man*, directed by Sergey Eisenstein, First Workers' Theatre of the Proletkult, 1923. Konstantin Kochin, Aleksandr Levshin, A. Semenyak – Wrangel's Hussars Trio (Kurchaev); Ivan Yazykanov – Zhorzh Glumov



The Factory of Eccentric Actors ended its activities in 1924, with its artists going on to work in cinema. Sergey Eisenstein was no exception, as he presented his final theatre pieces at the Proletkult Theatre that year, with his experiences in theatre laying the foundations for his theory of the montage of attractions. Equally short-lived were the activities of the Petrograd People's Comedy Theatre (1920–1922), where Sergey Radlov put his idea of the theatre-circus into practice. Foregger's Mastfor was active until 1924. Eccentrism did not last long in the theatre; radical avant-garde gestures generally have a short lifespan. The question is, however, what is their legacy?

Cultural studies specialist Boris Groys highlights the contradictions inherent to the theory of "laying bare the device" (which was, we should add, put into practice by the FEX, as well as Eisenstein himself), which became one of the reasons Stalinist culture ousted the avant-garde. This contradiction was thus manifested in the simultaneous impact on the audience's subconscious through "engineered" methods of mastering it in order to manipulate it, and in the strategy of revealing this manipulation and achieving the effect of conscious recognition. In such a situation, according to Groys, art was expected "to shape reality and then, in a spirit of 'permanent revolution,' immediately destroy what it had shaped in order to comply with the demand for constant novelty"

<sup>5</sup> For more on the subject of Eisenstein's work in theatre, see Koenig 1982b.

[Groys 1992: 43] and surprise the audience. Stalinism, however, desired the systematic formation of the subconscious without revealing the mechanisms employed in this process. Groys reached the conclusion that Stalinism was not simply opposed to the avant-garde, but that its effectiveness came from overcoming this contradiction inherent to the avant-garde, which exposed its technique “of exposing the technique.”

The fact that the radical theatrical experiments of the late 1920s exhausted themselves was the result of a paradoxical phenomenon: the urge towards permanent innovation and achieving shock-value meant that this strategy became increasingly less effective with time, dulling audiences’ perception, which had become tired and consequently evoked the desire to hide the “device” again. This need was ultimately satisfied by Stalinism and the socialist realism it proclaimed. Stalinist culture rejected the concept of “novelty” since – as has already been mentioned here – it identified itself as a “post-historical culture” (which had ended with the success of the Revolution) [Groys 1992: 41–42]. Rejecting the avant-garde paradigm of originality and innovation, Stalinist culture<sup>6</sup> became focused on exploiting the achievements of previous eras, drawing on that which had been ascribed classical status. This meant that, as of the late 1930s, both in art and also theatre, the dominant tendency was traditionalism.



**Fig. 3.6.** Scene from Sergey Tretyakov's *Are You Listening, Moscow?*, directed by Sergey Eisenstein, First Studio of the Proletkult, 1923

<sup>6</sup> Groys consistently avoids the term “socialist realism” and writes of Stalinist culture or the art of Stalinism instead. He noted various aesthetic tendencies in the Stalin era, while also drawing attention to the fact that, in the visual arts, there are relatively few examples that could be considered examples of socialist realism. However, there are plenty of examples of epigonic art relating to the trends set by Cézanne or other artists in the past.

## 2. Critiques of Eccentrism – the 1930s

In a 1932 summary of the achievements of the Soviet theatre in the field of the art of acting in the 1920s, the critic Pavel Markov contrasted two phenomena typical of the previous era: the studio form and eccentricism, the latter understood not only as a trend in art, but also as a method for educating actors, which was of great and sometimes indeed decisive significance in the first post-Revolutionary years. In contrasting these phenomena, Markov subjected both to critique, while describing eccentricism from the perspective of a supporter of realist and psychologically truthful art. As an intelligent and competent critic deprived of any doctrinaire zealotry, while also being associated with the MAT, having been its literary director since 1925, his views of what was emerging from the avant-garde could be considered moderate:

Eccentrism – this is more than a theatrical device; it is a worldview. Finding itself in conflict with the psychological interpretations of the protagonist and the idea of fidelity towards the truth of everyday life, it protested against any form of verisimilitude and any real-life determinants. It identified those acting clichés that stank of fraud with the foundations of the realist and generic theatre, of which it held a negative opinion. It sought support in the newly-awakened expectations of audiences, citing (as an example and inspiration) the tempo of life in Western cities.

The exponents of this artistic trend held the opinion that the spectator is not in a position to stand a five-act drama or the five-hour performance of a monumental Shakespearean tragedy. They showed that the change of the tempo of life brings in train the need to transform artistic expression, which, from this point onwards, would be based on a radical sharpening of the traits of the protagonists while also revising the existing understandings of the stage image. In rediscovering the principles of external expression in musicals and the circus, they made use of devices typical of the popular stage, clown acts or the fair-ground booth. They were not interested in the development of this or that character. Instead, they created a chain made of links composed of a particular protagonist's emotions, which were then linked through either complementary or opposing associations, rather than on the basis of psychology.

The eccentric actor did not care about the motivations leading to transition from one state to another, and did not consider the purpose of such transitions. He chose the most evident traits and searched for an equally sharply-focused, excessive action in order to, following the exhaustion of one state, be able to transition to another, often contrasting one [Markov 1932: 9].<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> A different and extended version of Markov's text, from September 1936, is published in English as Markov 2008. The corresponding, yet substantially altered, passage can be found in: Markov 2008: 191.

Markov accused eccentricism of “liberating actors from traditional clichés while imposing new ones on them” [Markov 1932: 9]. He also contrasted it with art forms in which the human being is viewed holistically, rather than being reduced to a few selected expressive traits that are then depicted with hyperbolic exaggeration. Markov perceived a threat to a theatre that was interested in the living human being, a theatre built on collective action and discerning character studies, in eccentric “masks” and costumes, i.e. essentially the destruction and the reconstruction of the image of the protagonist. He accused supporters of eccentricism of using their condensed means of expression to mock the protagonists and produce “a cruel settling of accounts with this or that phenomenon drawn from life.” Markov thus defended the theatre of “living beings” and spoke in favour of a realistic art that attempted to conceive of the individual in all his or her complexity. He thus defended the type of theatre that the MAT had always represented, while opposing a socially-engaged theatre that attacked relics of the old system and mocked human weaknesses.

Markov’s attitude accurately typifies the changes taking place in the 1930s, which was a transitional period between the avant-garde and socialist realism. Following a period of domination by the avant-garde, voices calling for art that was more modest in its means and also linked to the realist tradition were heard. While he was critical of eccentricism, it should be noted that Markov did not speak in favour of art that would be subordinate to ideology opposed to experimentation, and open to didacticism. In treating eccentricism as the embodiment of all those trends in the theatre that rejected literary theatre in favour of spectacles combining influences from the circus, the popular stage, musical and folk theatre, Markov thus drew attention to the fading energies of the trend. He believed it had entered into decline once the elements that had made it a force to be reckoned with – its spontaneity, daring associations and freshness – had given way to routine. But it was the intention of his critique to eliminate the phenomenon from art completely. After all, he recognised the artistic value of eccentricism in the performances of some actors, including Yudif Glizer and Sergey Martinson. What he did oppose, however, was its aggressive domination and the belief that it was a panacea for all the problems of the realist and generic theatre. “Eccentricism in its pure, naked form, has become outdated and ought to return to its rightful place in theatre, to the type of theatre and genre where it belongs” [Markov 1932: 10, cf. Markov 2008: 193].

It is worth adding that, even now, many years after his death in 1980, Pavel Markov still occupies an important position among Russian theatre historians. His authority can be attributed to his moderate attitude. While

criticising, in the early 1930s, a form of theatre understood exclusively as a spectacle, devoid of literariness, and instead employing elements of the circus and popular stage with its exaggerated acting, all based on a simplified image of protagonists, he also remained aware of the force inherent to these ideas that pushed the theatre beyond the clichés of representational art.

**Fig. 3.7.** Lyubov Popova, sketch of *prozodezhda* (workers' clothes)



This is why he was able to offer a just assessment of Tairov's Kamerny Theatre, particularly the synthetic acting developed there with its “all singing, all dancing” actors. He also emphasised the value of biomechanics, which lent the art of acting rhythm. “The revolutionary significance of biomechanics lies in its battle against, on the one hand, the pettiness of generic theatre, and, on the other, the deathly decorativeness of aestheticism” [Markov 1932: 11, cf. Markov 2008: 193]. He found that Meyerhold's strength was in his references to previous theatrical epochs (Shakespeare,

Molière, oriental theatre and folk theatre), which enabled him to liberate theatre both from its representational realism and also from aestheticism. In recognising the genius of Meyerhold as a director, Markov highlights the acting in his theatre which, he believed, combined the expressiveness, rhythm and purity of form with attention to the internal development of protagonists. In his view, Crommelynck's *Le Cocu magnifique* from 1922

consolidated the masterful acting in its most pure and most categorical form. Meyerhold liberated the actor from the burden of pedantic characterisation and elaborate costumes, dressing him instead in workers' clothes (*prozodezhda*), and ordered him to perform almost without make-up. Movement was explored not on an abstract aestheticising level, but as a completely goal-orientated action, which expressed the internal essence of a given part of the work [Markov 1932: 11, cf. Markov 2008: 193].

Furthermore, according to Markov, the actor who most perfectly embodied Meyerhold's ideals in practice, was Igor Ilyinsky.

Markov was also unable to ignore Evgeny Vakhtangov. Indeed, in his view, Vakhtangov was the embodiment of all that was good in 1920s theatre. Writing about the close similarities between Vakhtangov's practices and Meyerhold's method, he also stressed that the former's real achievement was combining "the culture of Stanislavsky's theatre," i.e., psychological art, with "a new theatrical form." The idea of synthesising the two strands marked the thinking of subsequent generations of Russian theatre artists. Such strategy ruled out the extremes in both the case of psychological theatre (when actors working on a role engage in deep introspection and give voice to that which is intimate and hidden) and also in the theatre of forms, which would soon be condemned for its "formalism." Claims about Vakhtangov's synthesis of the two directions, which were repeated both before and after Markov's statement on them, over time became a platitude about the combination of the individual with the social and the typical, or the internal and external. In effect, the originality of the director's achievements was effaced [see Osińska (ed.) 2008]. Most certainly, all traces of Vakhtangov's sense of tragedy were cast into oblivion, since these were expunged from Stalinist-era culture. It was not by chance that the traditions of *Princess Turandot* were upheld in the Soviet Union, yet *The Dybbuk* was forgotten. At the same time, however, the theory of the combination of the traditions of Stanislavsky with the theatre of forms embodied the promise of Soviet "mainstream" theatre, which extended beyond the Stalinist era.

It is difficult to overstate Markov's perspicacity as a critic, who already in the early 1930s could pinpoint the strengths and weak-

nesses of Russian theatre, as well as indicate the directions it would take in approaching decades. Russian thinking about theatre would be shaped into the 1980s by a mistrust of the radical avant-garde, which was associated with aggressive ideological engagement and political battles. This does not mean it was solely realist traditions that were maintained, but those theatres and directors who did continue (or at least returned to) the traditions of the avant-garde (such as Nikolay Okhlopkov, Valentin Pluchek and Yury Lyubimov), never opted for radical experimentation but merely referred to the achievements of their predecessors. The art of directing would never see phenomena equal to the innovativeness of Meyerhold's theatre. Furthermore, provocation was never completely eradicated from the theatre scene. Unlike Western or Polish theatre, mistrust of the avant-garde but also, and above all, ideological reasons and censorship, meant that Russian theatre remained closed to the influences of Western theatre, such as Dadaism, surrealism, the theatre of the absurd, as well as the avant-garde of the second half of the twentieth century, and post-dramatic theatre, into the 1990s.

In contrast to the experiments rooted in an opposition to the legacy of the past – indeed, of the very recent past (we should remember that, paradoxically, the avant-garde did draw on the past, albeit the distant past belonging to distant epochs and cultures), Russian theatre of the second half of the twentieth century did turn to the recent past and referred to certain phenomena from the early part of the century. It was this recent tradition that would become the “natural environment” of Russian artists, with tradition understood as a set of models and also values to be cherished. This does not mean that no original works emerged in this period – after all, the best pieces by Tovstonogov, Efros and Lyubimov were characterised by forceful aesthetic expression that was in no way derivative. In the case of the most interesting phenomena from this period, we can speak of a living tradition characterised by a sense of historical continuity. It was for this reason that the greatest influence on Russian theatre was exerted by those achievements from the past that had not been rejected or condemned. Russian artists were thus inspired by the work of Stanislavsky, Vakhtangov (particularly *Princess Turandot*), and even Meyerhold, who was gradually rehabilitated after 1956. In spite of the great variety of directorial styles, in stage design there were no references to the radical experiments, nor were there any evident new gestures pointing to a break with tradition. On the other hand, however, the traditions of synthetic acting, based on physicality, were transferred into the post-Stalinist era, lasting into the 1970s, with actors such as

Sergey Martinson, Erast Garin, Yudif Glizer, Maria Babanova and Igor Ilyinsky. In the case of the latter two mentioned here, however, it might be better to speak of an adaptation of their style, which had developed through biomechanics, to new demands, with Babanova leaving Meyerhold's theatre to join the Revolutionary Theatre, while Ilyinsky joined the Maly Theatre.

### 3. Eccentrism and Biomechanics in Acting – Yudif Glizer, Erast Garin, Igor Ilyinsky and Others

Yudif (Judith) Glizer (1904–1968) began her acting career in 1921. After spending a short period employed in workers' theatre circles, she joined the Proletkult Central Arena, which then became the Proletkult's First Studio. She made her debut in the role of the Dancer in *The Mexican*, adapted from the text by Jack London, in a 1921 production directed by Valentin Smyshlyaev and Sergey Eisenstein. She soon became one of Eisenstein's regular collaborators, alongside Maksim Strauch, Ivan Pyrev and Grigory Aleksandrov. She performed in his subsequent plays, first as Marge in *Are you Listening, Moscow?* in 1923, and then as a Worker in *The Gas Mask (Protivogazy)* in 1924. Both plays were authored by Sergey Tretyakov. She also performed at the Proletkult Studio as the Decadent in Vasily Ignatov's 1921 play *The Dawn of the Proletkult (Zori Proletkulta)*, as well as acting in various productions of Afinogenov's dramas. She achieved greatest recognition for her performance as Madame Scobleau in a production of Anatoly Glebov's *Power (Vlast')* directed by Naum Loyter. Glizer soon became known for her masterful ability for on-stage transformations, through which she grasped the most essential traits of a character, presenting synthesised, condensed images of protagonists. Even her performances of minor characters or secondary roles attracted attention owing to their expressiveness and artistry. Glizer was recognised as an "eccentric" actress who had mastered the art of the grotesque. In 1928, she moved to the Revolutionary Theatre, which, from 1954, was known as the Moscow Mayakovsky Theatre.

In a text dedicated to Yudif Glizer, Sergey Eisenstein [Eisenstein 1968] discusses her early roles in the Proletkult studios, and analyses the discovery he made during that period about actors lacking real-life experiences assisting them in getting closer to the protagonist, but that does not hinder them in finding the essence of the stage image. He considered Glizer an illustration of this principle, as she came from a very poor family later arriving in Moscow from the Kyiv gubernia immediately



**Fig. 3.8.** Yudif Glizer in Sergey Tretyakov's *Are You Listening, Moscow?*, directed by Sergey Eisenstein, First Studio of the Proletkult, 1923, drawing by Sergey Eisenstein



after the Revolution, in order to work in a factory, which was her entry point into theatre. She thus had no experiences to draw on that would tell her how to play a “fallen” bourgeois poet, as was the case in *The Dawn of the Proletkult*, and yet she created an expressive performance as a decadent woman. She managed to do so, says Eisenstein, thanks to understanding the intention of the role description during rehearsals, comprehending the expressiveness of the artistic image, as well as the precision of the protagonist’s internal development. Writing in 1947 about her achievements as an actress, including those in later performances with which he was not involved – including, among others, Césarine in Augustin Eugène Scribe’s *La Camaraderie* (1936); Elisabeth in Schiller’s *Mary Stuart* (1945); Constance in Leonov’s *An Ordinary Man* (1945) – Eisenstein stated that “her technique is as precise as the work of an eccentric; her movement is as precise as a mathematical formula; her mastery of rhythm is as faultless as the verse of the most outstanding poet” [Eisenstein 1968: 368]. Eisenstein

commented further on the actress's ability to create an "image" of a character in a manner that could be both predatory and ironic yet, at the same time, "quite simply fun. Sometimes pathetic, sometimes tragic. But always consistently complete thanks to applying all of the options proposed." He ends his remarks by mentioning the "great lesson in the techniques of the eccentrics and acrobats to which I once mercilessly submitted my friend and student" [Eisenstein 1968: 368].



**Fig. 3.9.** Yudif Glizer as Glafira in Anatoly Glebov's *Inga*, 1928; Césarine in Eugène Scribe's *La Camaraderie*, 1936; Elizabeth in Friedrich Schiller's *Mary Stuart*, 1945; Constance in Leonid Leonov's *An Ordinary Man*, 1945

Глафира («Инга» А. Глебова, 1928)

Цезарина («Лестница славы» Э. Скриба, 1936)

Елизавета («Мария Стюарт» Ф. Шиллера, 1940)

Констанция («Обыкновенный человек» Л. Леонова, 1945)

According to Eisenstein, the actress's talent came from the fact that, owing to her developed sense of intuition and keen eye for observation, she applied all of the data that both the text and her own albeit modest

experience offered her, whilst also managing to fill, to the greatest extent possible, every second of her existence on stage. Eisenstein thus compared her to Chaplin and other comics who were impeccable in noting the fatal danger lurking in every empty second in their work. In placing Glizer within the broader historical context, the director considered her an heiress to the tradition of composed acting (i.e., where the actor was the constructor of a role), which had been represented by Mikhail Shchepkin, Pavel Mochalov and Kostantin Varlamov, while more contemporary examples, according to Eisenstein, were Fyodor Shalyapin and Ivan Moskvina (who performed at the MAT, which suggests that the kind of acting that Eisenstein was talking about not only transcended temporal boundaries, but also did not need to be associated with a particular school). Unable to find a precise term for this kind of acting (indeed, he complained that while Russian has many words for describing the subtleties of experience, it lacks equivalents for an on-stage *brio*), he thus turned to analogies from other art forms:

Glizer works by combining the textures and timbres of material.  
Hence the healthy sensuality and density of her on-stage images.  
Hence her odd proximity to radical trends in music and painting.  
When one observes her work, one is reminded not of Somov or Borisov-Musatov, but of Tatlin and Malevich.  
Not Mozart or Debussy.  
But Prokofiev and Stravinsky [Eisenstein 1968: 375].

**Fig. 3.10.** Yudif Glizer as Madame Scobleau in Anatoly Glebov's *Power*, directed by Naum Loyter. The dedication to Sergey Eisenstein reads: "To my dear teacher! the god of my theatrical confession, [you have] poisoned [this] ex(centric) fool! Actress Ida Glizer. Moscow, 18 April 1928"



Дорогому учителю!  
Богу моего театрального вероисповедания  
отравиле эке (цифры)-дурру  
на всю жизнь!

актёрка

москва 18 апреля 1928 г.

Ида Глизер.

Eisenstein shared a flat with Glizer (and her husband Maksim Strauch) in the early 1920s, and was thus witness to the everyday work of the actress, as she spent hours polishing one successful intonation of a line. Glizer's technique meant that, by means of a few details, one gesture or the appropriate mimicry, she could find the essence of the character of the protagonist she was playing. The essence and value of her technique was based on finding the apt and decisive gesture, look or step that would characterise the figure and reveal her biography, which also represented the experiences of many people, or even an entire epoch. Eisenstein wrote here of "typicality," yet it should also be emphasised that, firstly, this form of typicality was not identical with the phenomenon that stemmed from nineteenth-century theatre when ready-made "types" appeared on stage, shaped by acting practices then reproduced by subsequent generations of actors (for example, in every version of *The Government Inspector*, Sobakevich was thick-set, overweight and neckless, as his head was sucked into his shoulders, while also sporting sideburns and short, spiky hair – as in Petr Boklevsky's famous illustrations<sup>8</sup>). Secondly, this form of typicality was not identical with the slogan of typicality issued by socialist realism, where the point was to create a protagonist featuring all the ideologically-desirable traits of a positive hero or the ideologically-sanctioned undesirable traits of an anti-hero. Eisenstein referred to the term *typage*, which was known from silent films. He understood it as a "socio-biological hieroglyph," or a sign-image [see Mironova 2005]. When referring to typicality in reference to the type of acting represented by Glizer, what it means is achieving that magical moment when the protagonist suddenly appears before the eyes of spectators, thanks to which they are unexpectedly enlightened: they recognise something that was previously known to them but that they could not quite grasp. It is true that, quite often, this form of acting (and theatre) was used for satirical ends, mocking undesirable social phenomena. However, it also lacked the didactic element whereby it was reduced to indicating a positive model.

Glizer represented a form of acting based on the ability to perform sudden transformations (achieved thanks to training involving sport and acrobatics), i.e., eccentric acting. She continued this tradition into the 1960s, when she performed one of her most interesting roles: Mother Courage in a production of Brecht's drama directed by Maksim Strauch at the Mayakovsky Theatre in 1960.

---

<sup>8</sup> This protagonist was portrayed identically in a series of porcelain figures depicting characters from Gogol's works that was produced by the Lomonosov Porcelain Factory in Leningrad in 1950.

This form of acting has appeared in various fields of twentieth-century Russian theatre, including performances by Faina Ranevskaya and Arkady Raykin, but also more recently by Konstantin Raykin. The fundamental difference between acting that referred to the tradition of eccentricism and the grotesque, on the one hand, and that of the school of Stanislavsky on the other, was based on the fact that the former was concerned with finding (most often intuitively) the correct trait, gesture or movement that would characterise a given protagonist, while the latter was not only about finding psychological motivation but about the constant questioning – in the course of developing a role – of an already established truth. This was the “freshness” effect. In the first form of acting the aim was for spectators to recognise that which was typical in a given protagonist, i.e., what was repeated in human behaviour, while in the second form it was about seeing that which was individual, unrepeatable and transitory in a human being. Stanislavsky was motivated throughout his entire life by a fear of clichés, hence his need to undermine methods that he himself had uncovered. It should be emphasised, however, that these strategies were not mutually incompatible and indeed sometimes complemented one another. Consequently, the most outstanding representatives of Stanislavsky’s school could depict in their performances that which was common in human experience, while actors from the eccentric tradition or biomechanics could reveal to spectators the truth of individual human existence.

Eisenstein outlined various ways of achieving the synthesised image. With Glizer, it was achieved through intuition and observation skills, while in Strauch’s case it was erudition, knowledge of past cultures, observations drawn from watching many actors, and also thanks to his “keen eye.” Strauch was an assistant to Eisenstein on the set of *The Battleship Potemkin*, and proved capable of picking out from the mass of sailors the particular face that was desired and to which the camera was then turned. Eisenstein considered several other actors to be equals to Glizer and Strauch: Serafima Birman and Sofia Giatsintova, who were both associated with the First Studio of the MAT, and also actors from Mayakovsky’s circle, namely Maria Babanova, Igor Ilyinsky, Erast Garin and Sergey Martinson.

In contrast to the eccentric actors from the first wave of the FEX, and those from Eisenstein’s works in which an actor would perform a series of numbers, biomechanical training was based not only on gaining physical ability, remembering movements and gestures in order to create a precise externalisation of a character that would subsequently evoke the appropriate feeling, but also on the conscious introduction of dissonant elements that generated internal tension. One such element, for example, was the *otkaz*, or refusal, according to which each phase of exercises was to begin with

a counter-movement, thus hitting would begin with retracting the hand before moving it towards the object to be struck. This meant that a complicated structure emerged from the exercises, one that, according to Eugenio Barba, was based on a “torturous, zig-zagging procedure,” through which “the actor is weaving a dynamic web where theme and action do not always coincide” [Barba, Savarese 2006: 177]. Meyerhold defined the art of acting through reference to the grotesque, with its tension between comedy and tragedy, rather than by referring to eccentricism. With time, however, the actors emerging from the tradition of eccentricism achieved effects similar to those of actors educated in Meyerhold’s biomechanics. Thus, in her later performances, Glizer created complex characters with a tragic element to them. It is worth recalling Meyerhold’s opinion of Chaplin, whose eccentric moments and “every single piece of clowning,” he believed, revealed upon deeper analysis “his profound and painstaking observation of reality” [Meyerhold 2016a: 391]. If we are to believe the descriptions of her performances, then Yudif Glizer also mastered this deep conception of reality.



**Fig. 3.11.** Scene from Fernand Crommelynck’s *Le Cocu magnifique*, directed by Vsevolod Meyerhold, RSFSR-1 Theatre, 1922

Meyerhold's production of Crommelynck's *Le Cocu magnifique* has gone down in history primarily as a demonstration of virtuoso acting by the Il-Ba-Zay trio, i.e., Igor Ilyinsky, Maria Babanova and Vasily Zaychikov. As Elena Rakitina wrote:

The shroud of secrecy was removed from the actors' role-playing, which was transformed into a creative activity. Intuition was placed under control, and "temperament held in check." The expedient gesture, that is, one purged of everything superfluous, chance, or ill-defined, stood in opposition to artificially "beautiful" movement. The actor's body became material that he consciously organized, laying out in space an image of his role, not identifying with it and not hiding behind a mask. By studying biomechanics, the actor learned the "ironclad truth of human nature." Biomechanical exercises were as necessary to the actor's training as the etudes of Czerny were to the musician's.<sup>9</sup> They developed consciousness of each gesture, elasticity, balance, and a precise sensation of one's body in space. Each gesture is preceded by a pre-gesture. Not even the smallest movement exists in isolation. It reverberates not only in oneself but in one's partner. Actors studied this "electric reaction." Moving to music developed an actor's sense of time, calculated to the second. Exercises with an imagined object trained his fingers to react to a material's texture, be it wood, shards of glass, water, or iron. This technique of the new actor could be labeled Constructivist, so long as one doesn't forget that Meierkhol'd [Meyerhold] arrived at these biomechanical exercises after analyzing the work of outstanding actors worldwide [Rakitina 1992: 654].

The art of actors such as Ilyinsky, Erast Garin or Sergey Martinson (who, in the early stages of his career, worked with both FEX and Meyerhold) has been preserved for posterity primarily through films. Ilyinsky's roles in Yakov Protazanov's films have been compared to Chaplin's performances, although, as Meyerhold himself noted, the Russian actor never reached Chaplin's heights, since he stopped at repeating gags and was unable to reach the level of "high comedy" [Meyerhold 2016a: 393]. It was a different story when it came to his theatrical performances, however, and this will be discussed later on in this book. Garin and Martinson did not only perform in theatre, but in films as well, with the latter's filmography being particularly impressive. They appeared alongside one another in films including Isidor Annensky's *The Wedding*, a screen version of Chekhov's vaudeville, produced in 1944. Garin played the role of Aplombov, the fiancé, while Martinson played the telegraphist Zhet. This movie has been remembered in the history of Soviet film not so much for its cinematic qualities (it resembles a recording

---

<sup>9</sup> Rakitina refers here to E. Garin's opinion, expressed in: Garin 1974: 32.

of a theatre performance), but rather for the actors' masterful performances from various schools of acting. Alongside Garin and Martinson, the film also starred Zoya Fyodorova, who was trained by Yury Zavadsky, among others, before moving to the Revolutionary Theatre; Aleksey Gribov, who spent his entire career associated with the MAT; and the legendary character actor Faina Ranevskaya. Erast Garin's role might be best described as a "living palimpsest," since his portrayal of Aplombov clearly contained traits taken from Khlestakov as he appeared in Meyerhold's production of *The Government Inspector* – there were the similar, composed, repeated and rhythmic gestures, and a stiffness of movement accompanied by an extraordinary level of plasticity. And yet, in Aplombov, Garin created a completely different, though a no less suggestive, type of figure: a boring malcontent individual filled with pathological suspicion and cowardice.

The level of Garin's skills is clearly evident in photographs that captured his performances as Khlestakov, Gulyachkin (in Erdman's *The Mandate*, 1925) and as Chatsky in a performance titled *Woe to Reason* (*Gore umu*, 1928), based on Griboedov's *Woe from Wit* (*Gore ot uma*).<sup>10</sup>



**Fig. 3.12.** Erast Garin as Khlestakov in Nikolay Gogol's *The Government Inspector*, directed by Vsevolod Meyerhold, Meyerhold Theatre, 1926

<sup>10</sup> The richest iconography of the actor can be found in the wonderful volume of documents edited by Andrey Khrzhanovsky [Khrzhanovsky (ed.) 2004].



After leaving the Meyerhold Theatre,<sup>11</sup> he found employment as a director at the Leningrad Comedy Theatre with Nikolay Akimov between 1936 and 1949, while also working as a film actor and director. In 1936, he produced a version of Gogol's *The Wedding*, where he played the role of Podkolesin. The film evoked extreme responses, from awe to condemnation. A year after its premiere it was removed from screens as part of the battle against "Meyerholdism," while all copies of it were destroyed during the war. In 1950 he began working in the Film Actors' Studio (*Teatr-Studiya Kinoaktyora*) in Moscow, where a number of actors and directors primarily associated with film were based. Besides Garin, Khesya Lokshina and Martinson, others employed by the Studio included Grigory Aleksandrov, Mikhail Romm and Aleksey Diky. In the 1950s, this Studio sought to revive the traditions of Meyerhold's theatre. Garin staged a production of Evgeny Schwarz's fantastic fairy tales here, as well as Erdman's *The Mandate* in 1957, in which he again played the role of Gulyachkin. This premiere marked the return of Erdman to Soviet theatres after a thirty-year ban on staging his

**Fig. 3.13.** Igor Ilyinsky as Arkashka Schastlivtsev in Aleksandr Ostrovsky's *The Forest*, directed by Vsevolod Meyerhold, Meyerhold Theatre, 1924, photograph by Aleksey Tamerin

<sup>11</sup> Meyerhold valued Erast Garin's opinion more than that of any other actor. Garin remained faithful to his Master both as an artist and privately. He was not afraid to maintain contact with Meyerhold even during the period when he was under attack and being persecuted. In 1955, he was one of the first to sign a letter supporting Meyerhold's rehabilitation. He also signed a letter to Khrushchev regarding the "de-legalisation" of the order to close the Meyerhold Theatre in 1938. Garin was one of the organisers of the first evening meeting commemorating the memory of his master. This took place at the Student Club of the Moscow State University in 1961. He published a volume of memoirs on Meyerhold and his own life in film and theatre: Garin 1974.



dramas.<sup>12</sup> Critics noted references to the 1925 production, thanks to which, as Inna Solovyova wrote in 1957, “following twenty years of silence, Meyerhold’s name was, for the first time, mentioned again in large letters on a public poster” [Khrzhanovsky (ed.) 2004: 100].



**Fig. 3.14.** Erast Garin as Gulyachkin in Nikolay Erdman’s *The Mandate*, directed by Vsevolod Meyerhold, Meyerhold Theatre, 1925

---

<sup>12</sup> Owing to censorship, Meyerhold was unable to stage the premiere of *The Suicide*, which had been planned for 1932. Following the premiere of Meyerhold’s version of *The Mandate*, Erdman’s plays disappeared from Soviet theatre repertoires. Yury Lyubimov, for example, was denied permission to stage *The Suicide* and the premiere first took place at the Taganka Theatre only in 1990.

In the mid-1960s, two former students of the State Film Institute (VGIK) in Moscow recalled how

it was difficult to put into words what the name Garin meant to us, students, in the 1960s. It meant a great deal. Erdman's *The Mandate* was reborn on the stage of the Film Actors' Theatre. [...] Garin was in the lead role, displaying many similarities to Garin's Gulyachkin from thirty years ago. [...] This was one of the revelations of the theatre season, one that outstripped many other sensational events and pointed towards a new trend in theatre life. Around this time, the voices of Schwarz, Tynyanov, Zoshchenko and Sukhovo-Kobylin could be heard anew [Bogomolov, Kushnirov 1965: 75, cited in Khrzhanovsky (ed.) 2004: 100].

The greatest achievement of Russian theatre after 1956 was the rediscovery of native art forms from the first three decades of the twentieth century, though not in all fields. The repertoire that had been eliminated by Stalinist-era censorship was revived, while older performances were referenced, as was the case in *The Mandate*. It was not a case of exact replication, but rather a matter of referring to the traditions of Meyerhold and other avant-garde artists. Equally, Valentin Pluchek's productions of Mayakovsky's works at the Moscow Satirical Theatre, including *The Bathhouse* (staged in 1953 together with Nikolay Petrov and Sergey Yutkevich), *The Bedbug* (1955 with Yutkevich) and *Mystery Bouffe* from 1957, all made reference to Meyerhold's versions. If indeed there were a living memory of the historical avant-garde, it was evident not simply in the stage productions themselves, but in the performances of certain actors who had inherited the traditions of eccentricism and biomechanics. In a suggestive portrait of Igor Ilyinsky's work by Konstanty Puzyna from 1954, following the performances by the Moscow Maly Theatre in Warsaw and Krakow, the Polish critic wrote of the actor, who had been at the theatre since 1938, that "Ilyinsky's acting borders on a Chaplin-like form, art that is equal in rank to poetry and music. The role here becomes not an exclusive aim in itself, but one of the means of expression alongside the body and voice." He continued, noting that,

in mastering the entirety, Ilyinsky inhabits fully each small part of this totality: his leg or eyelid seem to contain as much independent, autonomous, inventive imagination as the brains behind the entirety. The borders are blurred between the world of humans and animals: a drunk Yuzov [a character in Ostrovsky's comedy *A Lucrative Position* – K.O.] and a drunk hare are creations from the same peculiar species. The difference between tangible reality and that of the imagination disappears: a threatening and buffoonish Actor, conjured from the pages of Chekhov's novellas, is just as visible as Ilyinsky himself, as he justifies himself before the former on a stage that is,

after all, empty. The borders between living and dead material disappear: Ilyinsky's shoe is alive, it feels, battles and experiences its own despair and triumphs to no lesser an extent than the protagonist to which it belongs. "He is no actor but a devil," someone said, leaving the theatre. If this could explain any of Ilyinsky's mysteries, then I would believe in the devil [Puzyna 1960a: 152, 155].<sup>13</sup>



**Fig. 3.15.** Igor Ilyinsky as Prisyppkin in Mayakovsky's *The Bedbug*, directed by Vsevolod Meyerhold, Meyerhold Theatre, 1929

<sup>13</sup> The Maly Theatre performed the following works during its visit to Poland in spring 1954: Griboedov's *Woe from Wit* (*Gore ot uma*), Gorky's *Barbarians* and *Vassa Zheleznov*, Ostrovsky's *A Lucrative Position*, Pogodin's *When the Copies Fade*, and Popov and Stepanov's *Port Arthur*. Ilyinsky also appeared additionally in a dramatic medley, with Puzyna's description referring to this final piece.

## 4. Biomechanics

### – Reconstruction or Transformation?

Erast Garin, whose contribution to the rehabilitation of Meyerhold was immense, exercised restraint when asked about the possibility of reactivating biomechanics. In response to a request from the editors of the Russian-language encyclopaedia of theatre to comment on the entry on biomechanics, Garin – according to one version of his reaction – accepted the view that biomechanics had failed because it had been a means for “formalist” art. This accusation may seem strange to some, since it came from the lips of an artist who himself had faced accusations of “formalism” on many occasions. What Garin had in mind, however, was that biomechanics should not be considered in dogmatic terms, i.e., as a universal method for training actors. He stressed that everything depended on who applied any particular system, since any method was in danger of transforming into cliché, dogma or formalism [see Khrzhanovsky (ed.) 2004: 105]. Garin’s statement can thus be understood as a critique of mechanical attempts to reproduce Meyerhold’s techniques.

**Fig. 3.16.** Andrey Droznin, photograph by Katarzyna Osińska



Biomechanics was absent from the curricula of Soviet theatre schools as a systematic method of training actors. There were, however, evident attempts to apply elements of it where particular attention was placed on the physical condition of the actors. This was especially the case at the Shchukin Theatre School, which operated alongside the Moscow Vakhtangov Theatre. A teacher of stage movement working there reaffirmed Garin's view thirty five years on by stressing the futility of precisely reproducing biomechanical training. Andrey Droznin wrote that "every idea has an aesthetic part and a technological part. Aesthetics age, thus there is no point in repeating Meyerhold's exercises. It is impossible today to seriously consider machines the height of perfection" [Droznin 1995: 34]. At the same time, Droznin emphasised the value of Meyerhold's tradition, as well as that of Tairov. The return to them had enabled actors and teachers, after a period of domination by the misconception that was the reduced form of the "system," to discover the corporeal and physical aspects of acting. "I discovered a lot of things myself," Droznin stated when considering the origins of his career in the theatre,<sup>14</sup>

because tradition had been murdered in our country. [...] It was only in the 1960s that Meyerhold could be recalled. Zosima Pavlovich Zlobin returned from Siberia – he was one of Meyerhold's students and actors who then began leading lessons in biomechanics. [...] In the beginning it was difficult; we were looking for old books, for example those of Sergey Volkonsky (who promoted the Jaques-Dalcroze method in Russia) that were published before World War I. There were very few talented people. Most of us, today's specialists in on-stage movement, began from scratch.

---

<sup>14</sup> Andrey Borisovich Droznin (born 1938) graduated from the Lviv Polytechnic with a degree in construction engineering. This, as he stated, enabled him to gain a good understanding of the principles of biomechanics. He then studied at the faculty of directing at the Shchukin Theatre School under Boris Zakhava, who was trained by Evgeny Vakhtangov. Following a period in which he worked in amateur theatres, Droznin began collaborating with Oleg Tabakov's Studio where, together with Konstantin Raykin, he staged, among other plays, an adaptation of Kipling's *Jungle Book*. From the very outset of his work in the theatre, he took an interest in issues of movement and actors' artistic expression. It was in this field that he acquired the status of Russia's most renowned specialist. He became a lecturer in movement and stage art at the Shchukin Theatre School and other institutions. He ran courses and workshops in many countries, building up a long-term collaboration with American universities. He is currently a professor at Harvard University. As a director of movement he has collaborated on over fifty films and theatre productions. His contributions include choreographing dances in the popular children's animated film *The Blue Puppy (Goluboy shchenok, 1976; directed by Y. Gamburg)*, where the protagonists (animals) imitated Droznin's own movements. See also Droznin 1997.

Theatre schools tended to understand movement in a very primitive way. There was no understanding that actors had to be absolutely universal, that they needed to have bodies like putty, because only then are they capable of everything [Droznin 1995: 34].

Droznin showed that many of the principles relating to movement discovered by Meyerhold were also evident in Stanislavsky's work and thus it was the latter who was actually his greatest inspiration. He also claimed that it was Zlobin who showed Stanislavsky the principles of biomechanics in the final years of his life, and that Stanislavsky's reflections on the issue of movement and the body would make up an extensive volume if they were compiled from all of his books. At the same time, according to Droznin, the aim of physical exercises could never simply be the development of good physical condition. They were instead to serve the development of the ability to think through the body. It was precisely this understanding of the physical aspect of the art of the actor that was dear to Stanislavsky, and he believed that it shaped the best traits of Russian acting. He was not mistaken when he claimed that "in purely technical terms, Russian actors do not match the perfection of those on Broadway. But when they manage to make contact between body and soul, things get very interesting" [Droznin 1995: 35].

Exceptional emphasis was placed on the physical condition of actors at the Shchukin School. A significant portion of the curriculum was filled with exercises in movement: acrobatics, martial arts skills, dance, fencing, eurhythmics, foundations of stage expression – understood as a combination of physical training with work on acting techniques. Consequently, graduates from this school were considered ideally prepared in physical terms, which opened up a broad spectrum of opportunities for them.

In the early 1990s, attempts were made to reproduce Meyerhold's methods. Biomechanics, understood as actor training and based on classical exercises, formed the basis of the work of both Gennady Bogdanov and Aleksey Levinsky, while Mel Gordon also attempted to reproduce Meyerhold's techniques in the United States. Bogdanov was a student of the Meyerhold Theatre actor Nikolay Kustov, who had been a biomechanics instructor in the 1930s, before becoming a lecturer in stage movement at GITIS, the State Institute for Theatre Arts, in Moscow, and running workshops in biomechanics in many countries. He was associated with the Mime Centre in Berlin, where he collaborated with Jörg Bochow [see Bochow 1997] and popularised the method, convinced of its universality and potential for effective practical application in theatre. It was not simply a matter of actors attaining high levels of physical fitness,

but rather a question of treating biomechanics as a starting point for creating a theatre production subjected to rhythmic rules and dynamic tensions between word and gesture. Furthermore, the development of the actors' energetic message required the following stages to be completed: the *otkaz* (refusal) – recovery or counter-movement; the *posyl* (sending) – or the action itself; the *tochka* (point) – the point or the completion; and the *stoyka* (standstill) – or the stop or stance; and with this the body has reached its goal (*telo dostiglo tseli*).



**Fig. 3.17.** Biomechanics exercise: "stabbing with a dagger"



**Fig. 3.18.** Biomechanics exercise: "shooting a bow"



For Bogdanov, biomechanics was more than a clearly-defined technique. Instead, it was a particular ideal of theatre.

Like every complex system, biomechanics not only forms an actor's technical apparatus but also his personality. It is a kind of language of the art of acting, one that can tolerate no generalisations. Instead, it is a method for preparing an actor for a role, always with this particular objective in mind. [...] It is not only about the particular emotion of acting – opening up to performing, but also a principle for creating a piece of theatre. [...] The work of the actor is constructed according to the following scheme: the author's text is the starting point, drawing from it its rhythmic construction before transferring this rhythm to the space of the body and stage. The concept of the "dactyl," as the start and end of the exercise. However, each actor possesses his own rhythm, which defines the rhythm of his actions. Acting in partnership is based upon the mutual control and definition of common and individual rhythms. The next stage of the method: playing with the surfaces of the body or its outlines. The actor must sense the space and rhythm of the body, while also being able to transmit the dynamics of surfaces: from back to breast. He should be able to pause the actions and construct them according to the following scheme: braking – controlling actions. This study is also a model for performance during shows. Even the minutest action must be defined according to this model or study [from a Russian description of Bogdanov Canadian masterclass, Bogdanov 2003].

Bogdanov presented his experience as a theoretician and, indeed, above all, as a practitioner in the film *Meyerhold's Theatre and Biomechanics*, which was produced by the Berlin Mime Centre. The film recorded a lecture and a series of exercises led by Bogdanov, which reproduced Meyerhold's classical exercises (for example, shooting a bow and stabbing with a dagger). The second part of the film shows excerpts from performances that followed Bogdanov's principle and were created according to the biomechanical rhythmic-dynamic models. It is in this part of the film that we see how problematic it can be to treat biomechanics as a method for constructing theatre productions. In the fragments shown in the film, what becomes evident is the monotony caused by the repetitiveness of rhythms, despite the fact that they were created by different directors, as well as the familiar, formalised forms of expression from the actors. It is difficult to point to a contemporary piece of theatre based on the faithful reproduction of the principles of biomechanics that would be anything more than a one-off experiment.

There are at least two reasons for this. Firstly, there are doubts about the very idea of reproducing a technique which, as has been repeatedly stressed, was closely connected to a particular aesthetic. Secondly, the reconstruction of exercises results in their aestheticisation (even if

this is unintended). They cease to perform a useful function and instead become a demonstration of historical exercises faithfully reproduced in their external form. Indeed, the reproduction is performed on the basis of photographs and film recordings of the original exercises. Such an approach to biomechanics had already been criticised by Eisenstein in his lecture on the subject from 28 March 1935. He drew attention to two negative tendencies typical of this form of training: firstly, turning it into a drill and “bone-breaking” exercise (Eisenstein blamed Pavel Urbanovich, a biomechanics instructor, for this); secondly, the aestheticisation of the exercises. Eisenstein claimed that the most important element in the exercises was the mechanism of movement. At the same time, he believed, the actors of the Meyerhold Theatre attempted to reproduce an external line of movement and, in attempting to please the Master, they reproduced his way of moving. Eisenstein blamed the director himself for this, accusing him of incorporating a biomechanical element into the 1924 production *D.E.*<sup>15</sup>

Since exercises which, as a matter of principle, are supposed to be carried out in private, were transferred to the stage, we saw for a moment in the actors the desire that they always possess – but it was no longer enough for them to perform something; it became important for them to show it. And it is this which had a negative impact on biomechanics [Eisenstein 2005: 219].

Eisenstein then went on to explain to his students that “biomechanics can never be mixed with performance. It is not a performance but only ever training” [Eisenstein 2005: 220].

Eisenstein saw the universal significance of biomechanics in its recognition of the principles of movement. What he had in mind was a form of neutral movement unburdened by individual traits, i.e., the pattern of organic movement. Eisenstein drew his students’ attention to Meyerhold’s discovery (although it was not exclusively his, since Rudolf Bode had also made similar remarks) that the entire system of movement is involved in carrying out any kind of movement or gesture. This means that if the actor lifts a finger, the entire organism is involved, to some extent, in this action. Furthermore, one of the key issues raised by Meyerhold was that of finding the centre of gravity in an organism and becoming

---

<sup>15</sup> In his commentary to Eisenstein’s text, Vladimir Zabrodin writes: “In *D.E.*, the decadent dances, such as the shimmy or foxtrot that were typical of the ‘depraved bourgeoisie’ (in Kasyan Goleyzovsky’s choreography), were contrasted with ‘the healthy vigour of Soviet youth.’ In the episode titled ‘On the construction site,’ beyond their abilities in boxing and football, the actors demonstrated exercises in biomechanics” [Zabrodin in Eisenstein 2005: 223].

conscious of it, so that the ability to shift it develops, since this is crucial for the movement of specific parts of the body. (Eisenstein based his discussion on the example of a puppet.)



**Fig. 3.19.** Photograph of Vsevolod Meyerhold with his dedication to Sergey Eisenstein written on the collar: "I am proud of my pupil, who has become a master. I love the master who has already created a school. Before this pupil, before this master – I bow"

Biomechanics-based training can be helpful for actors provided that it concentrates on the very essence of movement. Eisenstein, however, claimed that if he were at the time, in the mid-1930s, to have worked on forming a company of actors, then he would have excluded all of the biomechanics exercises and introduced a new set that was completely visually transformed [Eisenstein 2005: 221]. In his view, the classical biomechanical exercises were burdened by the style imposed by Meyerhold. The essence of biomechanics was, he argued, the discovery of the principles of neutral movement, with its chief value being liberation from elements that were individual and typical of a particular actor. The goal instead was attaining a common level of movement, with this providing the foundation for deviations from the neutral line of action that then provided the foundation for constructing the traits characterising a particular protagonist. Such interpretation of biomechanics was closely linked to Eisenstein's own conception of acting, in which the most important thing was achieving a sense of credibility for the protagonist and filling it with an image of traits that differentiated this figure from all others. In the 1930s, Eisenstein did not envisage the individual human being but a protagonist representative of a particular social class, national or professional type. He was interested in the laws dictating history.

Such notion of biomechanics could hold no real appeal to artists who, in the late 1950s, following the period of domination of the collective element, turned to the individual, conceived not only as a social being but also as exceptional and unique. From the perspective of directors such as Oleg Efremov and Anatoly Efros, biomechanics could not but evoke associations with formalist theatre, where acting was deprived of spontaneity as it was subordinated to the rhythm of strict rules.

The universal significance of biomechanics, understood not only as a set of specific exercises, but also as "the laws of the body-in-life," as Eugenio Barba described it [Barba, Savaranese 2006: 177], is based on the fact that it liberated actors' actions from being merely illustrative – i.e., a situation whereby gestures imitated thought, which was an aspect of biomechanics that Eisenstein also highlighted. Meyerhold's actors could indeed work in such a way that the various aspects of their activities could be isolated before being brought back together in the final stage of work. The essence of Meyerhold's art was the practical implementation of the convictions he had developed before the revolution in the period of experiments in abstract theatre: stage movement and the word must be subordinated to a rhythm other than the rhythm of everyday behaviour. Meyerhold remains an inspiration to this day, although this is rarely the case when it comes to reconstructing his experiments. His inspiration

is evident in the work of artists who reference him, including Anatoly Vasilev, who places great emphasis on separating the various layers of the actor's on-stage existence (physical, mental and verbal) before recomposing them according to new principles.

## 5. Tairov's Hidden Line

In the early 1960s, the experimental Mime Studio Theatre was founded at the Moscow State Institute of Cinematography (VGIK). The film director Sergey Solovyov recalled years later:

The first perestroika, known then as the thaw, was coming to an end then. One of its inexplicable outcomes was that a new thaw-era subject was introduced into the curriculum – pantomime. The grey-haired and beautiful Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Rumnev, a former actor in the Kamerny Theatre, was in charge of the whole mime section at VGIK. Two of his assistants, Sasha Orlov and Zhenya Kharitonov, led the practical sessions in the acting course. [...] Marcel Marceau was in fashion then. The intellectual elite was crazy about him [Solovyov 1993: 152].

Zhenia, or Evgeny, Kharitonov was a director, poet, prose writer and dramatist, who died at a young age.<sup>16</sup> He played a crucial role in the revival of mime theatre, both in practice (as a teacher and director), and as a theorist reflecting upon the art of mime. In 1972 he defended his “candidate's thesis,” i.e., his PhD, on the subject of mime and the train-

---

<sup>16</sup> Evgeny Vladimirovich Kharitonov (1941–1982) graduated from the faculty of acting at VGIK before working as an assistant to Aleksandr Rumnev as a specialist in the art of movement. He was associated with various studios and small mime theatres in Moscow. He founded his own studio, the School of Non-Traditional Stage Movement. At the Moscow Theatre of Mime and Gesture, he worked with deaf-mute actors, among others. He also ran the mime studio at the Moskvoreche House of Culture, which was renowned for its original initiatives. He was also employed at the institute of psychology at Moscow University, where he worked on speech defects. His literary output remained unknown outside of a small circle of readers in his lifetime (he only published a few pieces, with censorship just one of the barriers he faced). He was, however, known to underground artistic and literary circles. It was only in 1993, thanks to the efforts of the poet and critic Yaroslav Mogutin, that a two-volume collection of his works and papers, as well as memoirs dedicated to him, appeared [Kharitonov 1993b, 1993c]. It is believed that his literary works inspired the experiments of such conceptualist writers as Viktor Erofeev and Vladimir Sorokin. Kharitonov is considered the founder of the queer strand of Soviet literature. His status is legendary, although this legend also had its dark sides (he was famous for his uncompromising anti-Semitism). Memoirs dedicated to him have been published by Dmitry Prigov, Vasily Aksyonov, Evgeny Popov, Viktor Erofeev, Nina Sadur, Sergey Solovyov, Roman Viktyuk and Igor Yarkevich, among others.

ing of film actors. Kharitonov used the term “pantomime,” although he certainly had the art of mime theatre in mind.<sup>17</sup> In the introduction to the summary of his thesis, he wrote:

Mime is not considered here in terms of genres, styles, or the history of art. Instead, what is explored is one specific type of pantomime. The actor in this form of mime theatre ought to accept unconditionally the on-stage conditions for performance that are presented to him, and thus he ought to exist directly in performance rather than transpose what he is performing according to rationalist judgements about what he is performing at that moment (as, for example, would happen if a performance is based on Brecht’s alienation effect). Mime is understood here as conditions for performance that do not, of course, demand any verbal action from the protagonist (nor, all the more so, any gestures that should act as substitutes for words). Instead, those conditions should inspire aesthetic and corporeal actions and reactions. This form of mime constitutes the drama of organic silence. It differs, however, from ordinary pauses in dialogue, and from silent studies that trainee actors prepare during the first year of studies. It differs from such forms because of the exceptional circumstances of mime, which force the protagonist into aesthetically, expressively and eccentrically rich action [Kharitonov 1993a: 60].



**Fig. 3.20.** Charles Lecocq’s *Day and Night*, the final scene, directed by Aleksandr Tairov, set design by Vladimir and Georgy Stenberg, Kamerny Theatre, 1926

<sup>17</sup> It is only recently that a clear differentiation of “pantomime,” as a form of theatre performance, and “mime,” as body language and gestures, has emerged in Russia. These concepts are often used interchangeably.

Kharitonov considered the art of mime in primarily semiotic terms, i.e., as a system of signs. Making semiotics his methodology was of ideological significance, since it referred to the function and significance of art. Kharitonov stressed what was for him a key point, namely the separation of the signifier (contained in gestures that entered the system of signs) and the signified.

For actors performing in this kind of mime theatre, signifiers (i.e., the language of a given system) do not constitute an abstract mode of communicating significance. If actors were to transpose what they were performing by means of rationalistic judgements about what they were performing at that very moment, the language of mime would become, for those actors, a system of sign-symbols that would communicate certain meanings indirectly and in an abstract manner [Kharitonov 1993a: 61].

Kharitonov thus expressed his opposition not only to signifiers, which imitated that which was represented, but also to “abstract” signifiers, which “in a hieroglyphic manner communicate an image of what is represented” [Kharitonov 1993a: 61]. He counters both cases with a signifier that he termed the symptom. “This means nothing more than what it is. It does not replace, in an abstract manner, any concept of an object” [Kharitonov 1993a: 61]. In the art of mime, therefore, actions speak for themselves. According to this concept of art, there was no mention of the representation of reality. Art was to be a pure depiction of that what it is, in and of itself.

Another quality of the art of mime, according to Kharitonov, was its corporeal aspect, i.e., acting by means of the body, thus wordlessly. As opposed to the actor who performs through words, what is essential to the mime actor cannot be found in the mind but in the solar plexus, and it is this which provides the origin of every deed: the protagonist’s “self” does not use gestures to substitute words, said Kharitonov, since it does not even know words [Kharitonov 1993a: 74].

Kharitonov’s thesis appears very interesting when placed in the context of what was dominant in Soviet theatre at the time. His work was certainly appreciated by certain artists and specialists. The supervisor of this thesis was renowned film director and VGIK lecturer Mikhail Romm. In his review, he not only emphasised the qualities of the work as a theory of the art of mime, while also stressing the significance of this form for actor training more generally (since it teaches students how to understand movement as a symbolic act rather than as simple action), but also noted Kharitonov’s practical achievements as a director of mime productions. Romm recalled the historical context that was essential for Kharitonov.

What I have in mind is that form of mime that was developed by us here at VGIK whose foundations were laid by Aleksandr Rumnev, who made reference to the mime tradition in Tairov's Theatre, as well as to the pre-Revolutionary Russian mime, and also to the best traditions of silent cinema [cited in Kharitonov 1993c: 188].



**Fig. 3.21.** Vadim Ryndin, portrait of Aleksandr Tairov

Equally enthusiastic were the opinions of the two reviewers – the theatre historian Marianna Stroeva and the renowned linguist and semiotician Vyacheslav Ivanov, who had, by then, received numerous awards. The most important aspects of the thesis were subsequently published.<sup>18</sup> If, however, we concentrate on the significance of the dissertation for theatre, then we can speak not only of an indirect effect (after all, mime and pantomime remained marginal in Soviet theatre), but of its broader impact – it inspired a new form of thinking about theatre, as an art form that constructed

<sup>18</sup> In the journal *Voprosy istorii i teorii kino*, no. 5, 1972.



an alternative reality through movement, which was a means of transmitting energy rather than meaning, and through signs, which need not be synonymous with words. Central to the ideal of the art of mime and, more broadly, pantomime, which developed on the margins of Soviet theatre, was a distrust of words and simultaneous fascination with movement that could directly communicate emotions and thoughts.

**Fig. 3.22.** Aleksandr Rumnev as Maras-kin in Charles Lecocq's operetta *Giroflé-Girofla*, directed by Aleksandr Tairov, set design and costumes by Georgy Yakulov, Kamerny Theatre, 1922



What was of particular significance to this theatrical trend, which was undergoing a renaissance in the 1960s and 1970s, was the legacy of Tairov's theatre. This tradition was represented by Aleksandr Rumnev, the charismatic actor, dancer and teacher. In describing his work, Kharitonov recalls the cult that young actors developed around their teacher. Kharitonov describes Tairov's work, using terms like simplicity of performance, purity, childlike simplicity, naivety, sweetness, eroticism, unpretentiousness and

a stirring way of presenting tragic stories, as was the case in *Phaedra and Hippolytus*. He also wrote of the magic of the Kamerny Theatre and the fascinating echoes of its decadence. This form of art, cultivated in Rumnev's Experimental Mime Theatre (Ekstemim, as he called it), was the polar opposite of the dominant theatre of the late 1950s, which was focused on thought, subtext and social engagement. In presenting Rumnev as the personalisation of an aestheticising art, Kharitonov thus admitted that, in creating the image of his "idol," he stylised him and that, essentially, Rumnev's own art had, since the age of Tairov, become saturated with realist elements and even conventionality, while his productions were more moving than impressive in their pure, disinterested beauty. In reality, then, the former actor of the Tairov Theatre did not perform the kind of art with which he was identified by his students. However, having contact with him enabled them to revive the forgotten tradition. In his manner of being, his approach to art, and even his appearance, movement and gestures, there was something extraordinary and exotic that attracted young admirers to him, while also enabling them to find in him traces of a bygone era. Kharitonov became acquainted with him as an older man, yet eyewitness accounts and old photographs suggest that he managed to fashion his image.

Rumnev was beautiful, possessing a refined beauty, yet he was also styled – in make-up and costume, in expressionist dance (his long figure, eyebrows raised high, the sadness of the downturned corners of his mouth, that melancholy smile recalling something that had passed and would never return...) [Kharitonov 1993d: 190].

As opposed to "physical" and "sporting" biomechanics, acting with Tairov referred to the art of ballet, and was subtle and aestheticising. There are no extensive recordings of the performances of the Kamerny Theatre available that would enable the verification of the above description, but it is possible to use photographs of productions and performances in films by Tairov's actors to the same end. I have in mind principally Nikolay Tseretelli (who was, alongside Alisa Koonen and Sergey Tsenin, one of the most important members of the Kamerny Theatre) and his double role as Engineer Los and Spiridonov in Yakov Protazanov's film *Aelita* (1924). His performance is striking because of the way in which he moved, as this made him stand out among the other actors in the film, including Igor Ilyinsky (from the Meyerhold Theatre), Nikolay Batalov (who was associated with the MAT), and Yury Zavatsky (who was trained at Vakhtangov's Studio). Tseretelli played the role of a romantic lover and moved fluently, as if he were dancing. He had subtle, fine gestures, a flexible body and a gait

that recalled the movement of a dancer or model. The image he created contained female elements. The quintessence of Tairov's aesthetics was embodied, of course, in the diva of the Kamerny Theatre, Alisa Koonen.

**Fig. 3.23.** Alisa Koonen and Nikolay Tseretelli in Charles Lecocq's *Giroflé-Girofla*, directed by Aleksandr Tairov, set design and costumes by Georgy Yakulov, Kamerny Theatre, 1922



Rumnev did not leave behind a system or technique for subsequent generations to follow; his legacy was instead the memory of the Kamerny Theatre and a general concept of art as a disinterested deed that was not seeking instant impact or to change reality. He also left behind something as intangible as the atmosphere and charm of a bygone era. It is difficult to speak in this case of him having inherited a tradition. Instead, it was a matter of memories of something that played an inspiring role, with the process comparable to a fascination with old photographs, old-fashioned clothing and an old way of life. Kharitonov wrote that

[t]he things that were typical of Rumnev charmed some, but left others unmoved. It was, however, impossible to analyse them with critical distance. They could not be considered a “product” in light of their construction, devices and techniques. They did not stand out in terms of a strong, clear form, or a construction built upon stern rules and special techniques, which needed to be perfected over a long period through inventive engineering born as a result of competition. There was a sense of freedom in what he did and no trace of speculation. And all this, of course, stemmed from culture and art while at the same time being so natural and characteristic only of him – as natural as the human voice can be [Kharitonov 1993d: 193].

The 1970s saw mime theatre become fashionable. During this period, many mime groups were formed, most of them amateur. The majority remained ephemeral, although there was one group that certainly acquired a more permanent presence on the Moscow theatre scene. In 1973, at the House of Culture of the Kurchatov Institute, a studio was formed that resembled many others, at least as far as its name was concerned: the Pantomime Ensemble. It was led by Giedrius Mackevičius, a recent graduate of GITIS who had studied under Maria Knebel. The studio was soon renamed the Artistic Drama Group, with this change indicating the group’s distance towards mime theatre in the sense of a classical genre, while also suggesting the development of a new direction in the dramatic arts based on the hybridisation of various genres: dance, mime, acrobatics and image-based theatre. The group’s very first production, *Preodolenie* (*Overcoming*, 1975), about the life of Michelangelo, attracted the attention of both critics and spectators. According to descriptions of the work, this performance not only brought to life the images and sculptures of the Renaissance master, but also saw the actors and directors transmit wordlessly the dramatic battles that the artist faced in pursuing his creative work. The group’s most ambitious works included *The Yellow Sound* (*Zhelty zvuk*, 1983) and *The Red Horse* (*Krasny kon’*). The first piece was created in a collaboration between Mackevičius and the composer Alfred Schnittke, with Wassily Kandinsky’s texts providing the inspiration. The second piece was inspired by the work of painters including Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin, Nikolay Roerich, Edgar Degas and Edvard Munch, among others. The group celebrated triumphs both at home and abroad in the 1980s, surviving into the 1990s. It should also be noted that Genady Abramov, a long-term collaborator of Anatoly Vasilev and creator of the Class of Expressive Arts (*Klass ekspressivnoy plastiki*), has been leading experiments in artistic movement in Moscow for many years.

In the early 1990s, the genre of contemporary dance started to gain popularity. The year 1990 saw the premiere of the first performance

by the Provincial Dances ensemble, formed in Ekaterinburg by Tatyana Baganova.<sup>19</sup> Mackevičius is considered to be the artist who prepared the ground for the emergence of this genre, which has developed dynamically in Russia over the last few years. However, any in-depth discussion of this varied and colourful phenomenon, which is closer to dance than dramatic theatre, would exceed the scope of this book.

The traditions of pantomime, particularly its more aesthetic and decadent forms, were expressed within the sphere of commercial theatre, which aimed for a mass audience. This was the case, for example, in the work of Roman Viktyuk, particularly in productions staged at the first private theatre in Russia, the Roman Viktyuk Theatre, founded in Moscow in 1991. Spectacles such as *Madame Butterfly* by David Henry Hwang, Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* and, above all, Jean Genet's *The Maids* (which was performed with an all-male cast, with the premiere in fact held in 1989 at the Satirikon Theatre, before being transferred to his own theatre), employed elements of mass culture and kitsch aesthetic alongside dance and mime. Typical of Viktyuk's productions were rich and glamorous sets and costumes, stylised gestures and loud music. Elements of camp and gay aesthetics have been noted, quite rightly, in Viktyuk's theatre, which most Russian critics ignore, considering it a decadent product of the late twentieth century. However, its popularity, particularly in the early 1990s, led Maya Turovskaya to analyse this theatre as a social-cultural phenomenon. She considered the great popularity of this type of theatre a symptom of "psychopathological poverty," i.e., the inverse of excess wealth, when spectators, lacking access to material wealth, desire ersatz luxury and contact with a world that is distant from everyday reality [Turowska 1994].

## 6. Derevo, or Metaphysical Eccentrism

The traditions of eccentricism only returned to Russian theatre in the late 1980s, returning to Leningrad, where they would appear to be more at home than in Moscow. However, the contemporary theatres, which could

---

<sup>19</sup> Ekaterinburg, known as Sverdlovsk between 1924 and 1991 is considered the centre for contemporary dance. In the 1990s, the Centre for Contemporary Art opened here and included dance in its programme. The city's Humanities University has opened a dance faculty. Contemporary dance companies also operate outside the main urban centres in Russia (Ekaterinburg, St Petersburg and Moscow), with Chelyabinsk being home to one of the most renowned centres, the Contemporary Dance Theatre (*Teatr sovremennogo tantsa*), founded by choreographer Olga Pona.

be linked to this tradition, represent a different aesthetic and are rooted in a different cultural situation. Before groups such as Derevo, Andrey Moguchy's Formalist Theatre, or the AXE group, appeared in Leningrad, and then in Petersburg, the famous mime artist and world-renowned clown Slava (Vyacheslav) Polunin<sup>20</sup> had already founded an amateur pantomime studio in 1968, which later became the Litsedey clown theatre. In almost all interviews, Polunin answered the question about what inspired him to become a clown by stating that his greatest inspiration was Charlie Chaplin, whom he saw in the film *The Kid* as a child. Meanwhile, he considered Arkady Raykin, Rolan Bykov and Yury Nikulin, the famous actor and clown, his greatest artistic inspirations.



Fig. 3.24. Vyacheslav Polunin as Asisyay

Polunin created the character of the red-haired clown named Asisyay with his big, red nose, classic make-up and oversized yellow overalls, a red scarf and huge red shoes. This type of clown differed completely from Bip, the character invented by Marcel Marceau. Bip was more of a melancholic, a subtle Pierrot, rather than a harlequin, with his character representing moderation and reason. Asisyay is an anarchic, unpredictable, spontaneous figure who does not recognise limits or taboos. The 1980s productions of the Litsedey theatre, including *The Dreamers* (*Fantazioriy*) and *The Catastrophe*, gained much attention in Russia and also beyond its borders. Polunin's most famous work, *Snow Show* (*Slava's*

<sup>20</sup> Vyacheslav Ivanovich Polunin (born 1950), known as Slava Polunin, was trained at various centres including the first Soviet Mime Studio, founded in 1957 by the circus artist Rudolf Slavsky, in Leningrad. Since the late 1980s he has lived in Britain and France, performing most recently largely in solo, self-authored pieces. He is known for inspiring and organising many international theatre projects, such as the international Peace Caravan festival (1990) and the Academy of Fools (1993–1994). In 2001, he created a street theatre programme as part of the Moscow Theatre Olympics.

*Snow Show*) from 1993, which was made after he had left Russia, encompasses the most significant traits of his creative output: going beyond the borders of the traditional circus (the clowns from the Litsedey group refer loosely to their classical prototypes; women have been part of the group from the outset), ambitious staging, effective use of lighting, skilful use of famous pieces of music and, finally, going beyond the footlights and engaging spectators: in the finale of this show, spectators are always included in the fun through large balloons, while children run onto the stage (from which the actors disappeared unnoticed) and the whole production becomes a fiesta, a spontaneous, anarchic game in which the adult spectators discover their inner-child.

There were at least two reasons for the huge success of the group and Polunin himself in Russia in the 1980s. Firstly, this was a theatre that was completely liberated from civil obligations and political engagement. Secondly, the Litsedey shows appealed to human emotions. This second aspect differentiated Polunin's work from the achievements of the avant-garde of the early 1920s despite both phenomena sharing identical roots: *commedia dell'arte*, fairground theatre, vaudeville, *variétés*, and other popular forms, including Chaplin, as the most important reference points.

**Fig. 3.25.** Litsedey actors: Nikolay Terentev, Valery Keft and Robert Gorodetsky, 1980s



Eisenstein or the creators of the FEX group turned to these sources of inspiration in order to create a reality comprising completely incongruous elements. The eccentric shows of the 1920s depicted the essence of the revolution: the world became unbalanced, old norms had ceased to apply, and reality was in a state of permanent turbulence. Nothing was certain, while spectators had to learn to respond quickly. Meanwhile, the strategies of eccentricism did not take into account the audience's expectations, but imposed their own vision on a world that had been constructed anew. Let us recall that an "attraction," according to Eisenstein's definition, "is every aggressive theatrical moment, each element that affects the senses and psyche of spectators, while being so experimentally-proven and mathematically-calculated in its actions that it guaranteed complete perception of the ideological content of the work" [Eisenstein 1964: 270].

The productions by Polunin and the Litsedey group inverted this situation. In their small scenes and sketches that together formed full-scale shows, the artists created a world in which every spectator could find a place. Despite its spontaneity or even anarchism, this is a secure world, since the rules dominating it are familiar to each *homo ludens*. The Litsedey shows principally made reference to emotions, evoking laughter and moving audiences. They were free of any aggressive critique of humankind, instead offering acceptance of its imperfections. In one interview, Slava Polunin stated that he always recalled the words of one of his masters, Arkady Raykin, who, in response to being asked what was most important in their profession, said that "[y]ou have the right to laugh at someone or something only if it is someone or something close to you. And you can only laugh because you empathise and want to help. If that is not the case, then you may not laugh" [Polunin 2007].

Anton Adasinsky, founder of the Derevo Studio Theatre, came from the Litsedey group where he was trained by Polunin.<sup>21</sup> This theatre was founded in Leningrad in 1988 and has a charismatic leader who is experienced not only as a mime artist and clown, but also as the leader of the rock group Avia. Adasinski's versatility was also evident in the aesthetics of his theatre, which adopted traditions and genres as varied as pantomime, *commedia dell'arte*, the Russian tradition of travelling actors, *skomorokhi*, the *grand Guignol*, the circus, contemporary dance, happenings, and physical theatre. Derevo's biggest influence was *Butoh*,

---

<sup>21</sup> This English transliteration is the theatre's name, which it uses abroad as well as in Russia. Since 1990 the group has been based in various cities abroad, including Prague, Amsterdam and Florence, and since 1996 it has been dividing its time between St Petersburg and Dresden.



which the core group (comprising, alongside Adasinsky, four other artists: Tatyana Khabarova, Elena Yarovaya, Oleg Zhukovsky and Aleksey Merkushev) learned during workshops run by the inventor of the dance form Kazuo Ohno. Butoh combines traditional Japanese theatre with elements of Western culture. And it was thanks to Butoh that Derevo, operating between various traditions, cultures and genres, created its own inimitable and instantly recognisable style. In contrast to the extremely conventionalised genres of oriental theatre, Butoh has emerged from meditation and signals each actor/dancer's potential to choose an individual path. Thanks to the liberation of body and soul from external influences in Butoh, a state of "total presence" is achieved, which means producing strong emanations of energy. It should be noted at this point, however, that Derevo is a Russian variant of Butoh that differs from the ascetic, abstract dance of Japanese actors thanks to its comical and lyrical elements. Similarly to the case of avant-garde trends, such as futurism, for example, the model borrowed from another cultural tradition was subject to a fundamental transformation.

Derevo is primarily about physical dance.<sup>22</sup> The group's first performances, including *The Red Zone* (*Krasnaya zona*, 1988), were completely free of words. It was in *The Rider* (*Vsadnik*, 1992) that the actors spoke for the very first time, and since then some new works have also included speech. Derevo can also be considered a contemporary manifestation of eccentricism, as it plays with the clichés of contemporary mass culture. As improvised collective works constructed from grotesque and poetic, visually beautiful images, its performances explore universal themes, including loneliness, and the need for love and intimacy. This has been most evident in *Once upon a Time* (*Odnazhdy*, 1995) and *South. Border* (*Yug. Granitsa*, 1996). These productions do not feature a continual narrative. They are instead built around a series of scenes and numbers that appear allusive and surreal. One artist to which Adasinsky has made regular reference is Alejandro Jodorovsky. Derevo can be situated within the broadly-conceived field of *cirque nouveau*, with the caveat that it nevertheless has its own original and recognisable style.

In contrast to the ephemeral groups of the historical avant-garde, such as FEX, Derevo has always been viewed as a long-term project. The exceptional agility and perfection of the actors is rooted in the manner in which they function within the structure they have themselves

---

<sup>22</sup> Derevo is sometimes linked back to the pantomime tradition – see, for example, Smużniak 2002: 164–165. However, it seems that the company's main principle is the transcendence of traditional genres.

created. Strict discipline ensures that the slender and almost anorexic bodies of the actors become near-ideal tools capable of communicating each and every emotion.

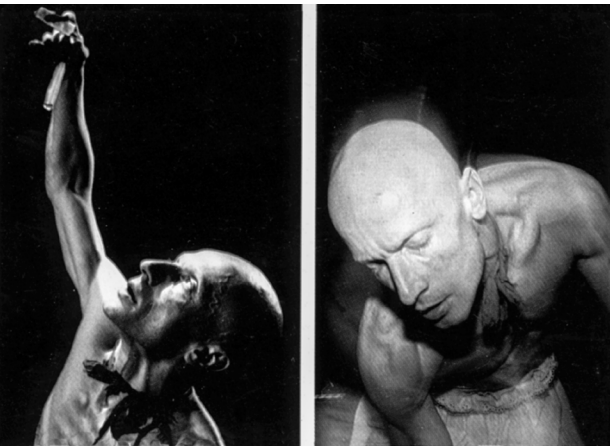


Fig. 3.26. Anton Adasinsky

The members of the group, with their recognisable shaved heads, form an order of dancer/clowns completely dedicated to their art. Anton Adasinsky admits that despite the actors' living standards having improved over the years, they have remained true to their old principles with regular exercise, meditation and specific diet.

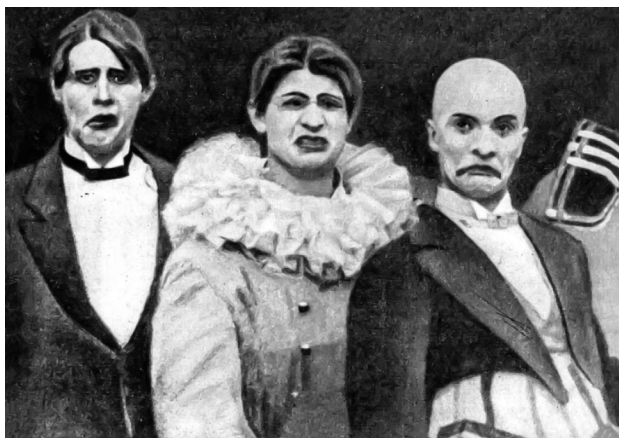
The principles of a sect or commune remain relevant; each day we eat a modest meal of rice together and we always train between 10 a.m. and midday, followed by evening rehearsals – and this structure has remained unchanged over the years. This is a monastic way of life, in which the most important thing is isolation – to the greatest extent possible – from reality, in order to transfer to the stage organically and deftly this other world that we are developing within ourselves. If we soak up that which is taking place around us, then what could we bring to the stage? [Adasinsky 2007].

\* \* \*

On the face of it, it might seem that the history of Russian theatre has come full circle. One might be under the impression that, while the early twentieth-century response to a theatre subordinated to literature (drama) came in the form of the circus and other forms of eccentric spectacles,

then the spread, since the 1970s, of mime theatre and, since the 1990s, of contemporary dance, is the result of a crisis of trust in the word in theatre. However, comparing such phenomena to traditional, word-based theatre produces a false analogy. The circus, as one of the most important points of reference for the abovementioned early twentieth-century phenomena,<sup>23</sup> referred to collective emotions. The “circusification” of the early 1920s, as manifested by FEX, Nikolay Foregger, Sergey Eisenstein and Sergey Radlov, was to serve the transformation of spectators’ consciousness by forcing it out of its habits of perception and long-held views. The theatre/circus produced an image of the world during a period of revolutionary ferment, where concepts and values were turned on their head, and when that which had been an anomaly was now the norm, and vice versa. The reason for circus artists becoming role models for theatre actors could be found not only in the desire to master one’s own body in order to guarantee the perfect execution of tasks set by the director (which was the case with Meyerhold). It was also a way of ascribing to the idea of the new man, with the actor’s trained, agile, sporty body, with its cultivated willpower, thus better able to realise the common goal – building a better world.

**Fig. 3.27.** An adaptation of A. Ostrovsky’s *The Wise Man*, directed by Sergey Eisenstein, First Workers’ Theatre of the Proletkult, 1923. Ivan Pyrev – the fascist (Gorodulin), Aleksandr Antonov – General Joffre (Krutitsky), Maksim Strauch – Mamilyukov-Prolivnoy (Mamaev)



<sup>23</sup> They are points of reference because Meyerhold, for example, protested against the mixing of theatre and the circus, since he considered the circus to be one of the sources of the lost element of theatricality, while acrobatics was an aid to actors in training their bodies.

“It is not the theatre/circus that should become the dream of contemporary theatre reformers; instead, before an actor chooses one path or the other – the circus or the theatre – he should, in his early childhood, attend a special school that would help him make his body flexible and strong. It is not a case of simply being able to execute a death-defying leap, but rather a matter of being able to perform any tragic role (let us recall two names: Sada Yacco and Hanako)” [Meyerhold 1978: 34].

The phenomena emerging in Russian theatre since the 1970s were initially marginal. But in recent years they have become increasingly central, with contemporary dance and groups mixing various genres being good examples of this. They do not treat the physical, corporeal aspect of acting merely as a way of transcending a word-based theatre that treats the word as the sole medium of meaning. Instead, they see this as a way of manifesting actors' individuality. The trained body is no longer an aim in and of itself, and instead becomes a means serving introspection, and a way of reaching the emotional sphere through movement that is no longer the result of externally-taught and strictly-defined rules, as was the case, for example, with biomechanics. Based on the principles of kinesthesia, this approach increases awareness of one's own body. This form of theatre thus realises the ideal clearly outlined in the entire culture of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, which declares that it is indeed through the body that the uniqueness of a human being as an individual is revealed.



**Fig. 3.28.** *Islands (Ostrova v okeane)*, Derevo, 2002. Anton Adasinsky, Elena Yarovaya, Tatyana Khabarova and Oleg Zhukovsky

## 4

# THE BURDEN OF TRADITION, OR HOW TO STAGE CHEKHOV IN RUSSIA?

The list of Russian directors who have not staged Chekhov's dramas (I am thinking of multi-act dramas here, rather than his short pieces for the stage) is not much shorter than the list of those who have done so. The list of those directors who have brought Chekhov to the stage includes such luminaries as Konstantin Stanislavsky, Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko, Georgy Tovstonogov, Anatoly Efros, Oleg Efremov, Adolf Shapiro, Galina Volchek, Mark Zakharov, Sergey Artsibashev, Kama Ginkas (who primarily staged adaptations of Chekhov's short stories), and Lev Dodin. However, the list of those who have never staged Chekhov is no less impressive, given that it features Vsevolod Meyerhold, Evgeny Vakhtangov, Aleksandr Tairov, Nikolay Okhlopkov, Nikolay Gorchakov, Aleksey Popov, Andrey Goncharov and Valentin Pluchek. When it comes to contemporary artists, Yury Lyubimov, Petr Fomenko and Valery Fokin have indeed staged some works by Chekhov, but his dramas do not make up a significant portion of their oeuvre.

Anatoly Vasilev turned to Chekhov's dramas as workshop material for participants of actor traineeships and laboratories. Asked in 1995 about the foundations of the training offered at his School of Dramatic Arts, Vasilev stressed that, although he was interested in non-psychological art (during this period his students were practising "verbal action" on the basis of Plato's *Dialogues*), he eventually reached the conclusion that actors lacking the art of working with psychological aspects are unable to bring life to their performance and, consequently, "everything becomes barren." He went on to add that:

I am currently running a workshop with French actors, with whom I began with *Uncle Vanya*, since it is impossible to explain anything to them without first completing this stage. Previously, I had always begun with Plato but then

I understood that what I would later tell them about Plato would be more comprehensible if I first worked through Chekhov with them [Wasiljew 1995: 46].

When asked if Chekhov ought to be read on a realist-psychological level, Vasilev answered:

Not completely, but the tradition indeed exists and they have to recognise it [...]. I believe that it is a good thing that Chekhov's dramas have continued their existence in our twentieth century. It is good that, in the coming [twenty-first] century, they will only rarely appear on our stages. Chekhov is reaching the end of his life. In the coming century, he will enjoy a rest. I am not sure how long this rest will last: perhaps ten or twenty years. What I do know, however, is that Chekhov's works – *The Cherry Orchard*, *Three Sisters* – are awaiting a new stage language, and that is why they should rest for a while. A new generation of actors and directors needs to approach Chekhov's works, a generation that will be ignorant of the practices of those traditions to which productions of Chekhov make reference in today's theatre. This is very important [Wasiljew 1995: 46].

Contrary to Vasilev's prediction, Chekhov has not left the stage. However, the question he raised regarding the relevance of the existing stage language to Chekhov's works in Russian remains pertinent. This question has troubled artists and critics since the era of Chekhov, i.e. for over a century



Fig. 4.1. Anton Chekhov, Yalta, 1898

Fig. 4.2. Poster for *The Seagull*, MAT, 1898



now. Doubts were already raised by the productions of his plays at the Moscow Art Theatre. In his 1906 article titled “The Naturalistic Theatre and the Theatre of Mood,” which was part of a larger work titled *Theatre. Toward a History and Technique*, Vsevolod Meyerhold accused the “naturalistic theatre” of “den[ying] the spectator’s ability to imagine for himself,” while also ensuring “banishment from the stage of the power of mystery” [Meyerhold 2016b: 31]. Referring to the performance of *The Seagull* at the Moscow Art Theatre,<sup>1</sup> Meyerhold gave the example of the first act in which spectators witnessing the introduction of Treplev initially disappeared into the dark abyss of the stage (the spectators did not have any indication of where they were headed) before learning, after the action was renewed, that the stage had been completely filled and an arbour with a dome, small columns and gorge had appeared. It was thus evident how Arkadin, Trigorin and others had entered the gorge. This type of illustration, according to Meyerhold, stifled the spectators’ imagination.

<sup>1</sup> The premiere of *The Seagull* at the MAT took place on 17 December 1898, with both K. Stanislavsky and V. Nemirovich-Danchenko as directors. The year 1905 saw a revival of the production and Meyerhold analysed the changes evident since the first version in which he had performed as an actor in the role of Treplev.

Another problem that Meyerhold noted was the excessive attention to illustrative detail of those staging Chekhov. In *The Cherry Orchard*, for example, a large number of generic props were introduced into the realistic set, meaning that the harmony of the whole was disrupted. At this point in time, Meyerhold considered this work to be a symbolist/mystery drama.

In *The Cherry Orchard*, as in the plays of Maeterlinck, there is a hero unseen on the stage, but whose present is felt every time the curtain falls. When the curtain falls at the Moscow Art Theatre, one senses no such presence; one retains only an impression of “types.” For Chekhov, the characters of *The Cherry Orchard* are the means and not the end and the lyrical/mystical aspect of the play remains unrevealed [Meyerhold 2016b: 33].

After citing the well-known anecdote about Chekhov, a painting by Kramskoy and a real nose, Meyerhold wrote: “The urge to show everything, come what may, the fear of mystery, of leaving anything unsaid, turns the theatre into a mere illustration of the author’s words” [Meyerhold 2016b: 34]. Meyerhold read Chekhov at this point through a symbolist prism, while at the same time perceiving a “new tone.” But, he comments: “the naturalistic theatre has not availed itself of this new element, introduced by Chekhov’s ‘music’, to stimulate its further development” [Meyerhold 2016b: 36].

The now forgotten dramatist and critic Osip Dymov explicitly linked the need for theatre reform to Chekhov’s dramas. “In order to stage a wonderful version of Chekhov’s tetralogy,” he wrote, “a new theatre must be created, one that bears no resemblance to anything that has been created before” [Dymov 1902, cited in M. Mikhaylova 2004: 196]. He considered the MAT productions overly generic, noting that “when there is a noise in one of the rooms, plaster falls from the ceiling, furniture rattles, and all this signals that life is escaping from these walls” [Dymov 1902, cited in M. Mikhaylova 2004: 196]. What was interesting was that Dymov was probably the first who, already during Chekhov’s lifetime, attempted to determine the essence of what made his dramas different by referring to associations evoked by Japanese theatre. While watching the 1902 guest performances of a Japanese company in Russia featuring the actress Sada Yacco,<sup>2</sup> he got the impression that the on-stage action was taking place during an interval, “far from the spectators’ eyes, and it was only after raising the curtain

---

<sup>2</sup> In 1902, the company of Otojiro Kawakami and his wife, actress Sada Yacco, visited Russia. The theatre’s performances, which represented the New School (*shimpa*) that differentiated itself from the classic styles of kabuki or nō theatre, had already made a great impression on audiences in the United States and Europe. The company’s visit to Russia was to prove a highly significant event, for it influenced Meyerhold, among others, to take an interest in Japanese theatre.



that part of this hidden, secret action was revealed" [Dymov 1902, cited in M. Mikhaylova 2004: 196]. The Japanese theatre, according to Dymov, revealed the elusiveness of being, which only came into view in between significant episodes, at least by European standards, in a person's life. Thus, as in Chekhov, what was elusive and apparently without meaning said more than that, which was tangible, named and visible in the foreground.

The accusation that the MAT productions were overloaded with generic details was one of the arguments shaping early twentieth-century discussions about the form of the future theatre. In the battle over so-called abstract theatre, it was the "naturalistic method"<sup>3</sup> that was criticised. Without going into the details of this historical argument, it is worth noting that its participants, including Valery Bryusov and Meyerhold himself, were aware of the schematic nature of the radical divisions, and they used the productions of Chekhov at the MAT, despite the various accusations, as an example of the way in which extreme tendencies could be reconciled. Meyerhold stressed that it was thanks to Chekhov that the Art Theatre could "succeed in accommodating under one roof both the naturalistic theatre and the theatre of mood" [Meyerhold 2016b: 36], whose mystery was based on the rhythms of language. He stressed that this rhythm was discovered by the MAT's actors, and that it was they who reproduced the musicality of Chekhov's dramas.

**Fig. 4.3.** Anton Chekhov with members of Moscow Art Theatre, 1899. Rear, from left to right: Aleksandr Vishnevsky, Vasily Luzhsky, Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko, Olga Knipper, Konstantin Stanislavsky, Maria Roksanova, Maria Nikolaeva and Aleksandr Andreev; front: Evgeniya Rayevskaya, Aleksandr Artyom, Anton Chekhov, Maria Lilina, Ioasaf Tikhomirov, Vsevolod Meyerhold



<sup>3</sup> Critics like Innokenty Annensky, who blamed Chekhov himself for the form of the productions at the Art Theatre were few and far between in that period. Annensky accused the dramatist of nothing less than "Chekhovism," which he used to define a certain stereotypical conception of Russianness in the mould of the average "image of the soul" of a member of the Russian intelligentsia. Annensky believed that this interpretation of Chekhov was imposed by the text on the Art Theatre, with "Chekhovism" rooted in the author himself. See Annensky 1979.

It should be not be forgotten that the performances of the MAT were highly acclaimed, while the Art Theatre's productions of Chekhov acquired canonical status so quickly that Chekhov's writing came to be perceived through the prism of these spectacles. The canon of production forged on the stage of the MAT became, in time, part of Russia's cultural heritage, acquiring the form of a set of models. It was for this reason that, for decades, it was not in fact Chekhov who was staged but the MAT versions of his works with, at most, only minor modifications introduced. Meanwhile, those artists who came from a different aesthetic background to the MAT, took no interest in the dramatist. For this reason, there was no other mode of staging Chekhov in the first decades of the twentieth century. Neither Meyerhold (ignoring the productions prepared by the Troupe of Russian Dramatic Artists led by Aleksandr Kosheverov and Meyerhold in Kherson during the 1902/03 season, about which all we know is that they reproduced the approach of the Art Theatre),<sup>4</sup> Vakhtangov, nor Tairov,<sup>5</sup> nor, years later, the Second MAT, led by Mikhail Chekhov, which was considered one of the best Russian theatres, staged any of Chekhov's "great" works.

In his youth, Meyerhold was fascinated by Chekhov, with whom he had maintained personal and epistolary contact since 1898, when he played Treplev in *The Seagull*.<sup>6</sup> In his article titled "Russian Dramatists," published in his 1913 book *On Theatre*, he considered Chekhov to belong to a passing epoch [Meyerhold 1913b]. His judgement was not the result of an inability to appreciate the dramatist's innovativeness. By placing Chekhov in the tradition of Turgenev, whom Meyerhold considered responsible for introducing a new genre to Russian theatre, namely musicality, Meyerhold noted that it was Chekhov, however, who had become a master of this feature. According to Meyerhold, Stanislavsky's discovery of Chekhov constituted an important stage in the formation

---

<sup>4</sup> For the season opening event, which featured the Troupe, Meyerhold prepared the production of *Three Sisters* (22 September 1902). Four days later, the premiere of *Uncle Vanya* took place, followed by *The Seagull* and then, finally, *Ivanov*. The premieres took place every few days, with Meyerhold and Kosheverov presenting over one hundred performances in the first season. Almost the entire MAT repertoire was transferred to Kherson, with some lighter material also included in the programme. With only a few exceptions, Meyerhold considered his works from this period to be derivative imitations of Stanislavsky. He did not include any of the productions of Chekhov in his list of achievements published in the volume *O teatre* [Meyerhold 1913a: 177–182].

<sup>5</sup> Aleksandr Tairov turned to *The Seagull* later on in his career. His 1941 production of the play was considered an artistic failure.

<sup>6</sup> See Polotskaya 1960. On the subject of relations between Chekhov and Meyerhold, see also Kořakowski 1989.

of a new sense of theatricality, although this was a stage that the theatre had already completed. In his view, the insufficiently theatrical nature of Chekhov's dramas meant that they turned out to be, regardless of their virtues, very much of their time.

Even the theatre of Chekhov was not a direct link in the chain of the great triad (Gogol, Pushkin, Lermontov); it survived the test of time for barely one decade. Turgenev and Chekhov were unable to connect their plays with the line in the theatrical repertoire that represented true theatricality [Meyerhold 1913b: 113].

Another reason for Chekhov losing contemporary relevance was, according to Meyerhold at least, the fact that the times when his works were created had become history. The director saw in his dramas an expression of the climate of the 1890s, a period in which social pessimism grew stronger, together with a sense of powerlessness and despondency caused by the politics of counter-reform in the final years of Alexander III's rule and during the first years of Nikolay II. Placing Chekhov's dramas in their historical context, Meyerhold wrote that "it is hardly surprising that Chekhov's theatre died the moment social apathy disappeared, when it was buried by the events of 1905" [Meyerhold 1913b: 113].

Ultimately, Meyerhold believed, Chekhov's theatre of mood suffered from banalisation as a result of the appearance of a whole host of epigones, with Gorky among them. The director accused such dramatists of violating the harmony between literature and theatricality that existed in the works of Chekhov, by giving precedence to the literary element.

Meyerhold's genius was founded on, among other things, his perfect ear for the contemporary age. He was the perfect medium for the age in which he lived and, since he lived in turbulent times, his oeuvre underwent transformations – thus the Meyerhold of his time at the Aleksandrinsky Theatre is completely different to the Meyerhold from the period of revolutionary spectacles and different again to the Meyerhold who created *The Government Inspector*, and again from the period of *The Lady of the Camellias*. When he wrote the words cited above, he followed the ideal that art is born of art, rather than of nature, and this was the reason he turned to the legacy of previous theatrical epochs, including Moliere's court theatre and commedia dell'arte. Chekhov could not find a place in Meyerhold's theatrical vision, since his dramas focused on human nature. This sensitive sphere could not be subjected to such form of theatricalisation. Furthermore, before the Revolution nullified the ambivalence of Chekhov's world in favour of simple, unequivocal choices, Meyerhold

accurately sensed that spectators would soon feel lost in the world of *The Seagull* or *Three Sisters*.



**Fig. 4.4.** Konstantin Stanislavsky as Vershinin in *Three Sisters*, MAT, 1901

Meyerhold and Vakhtangov's interest was piqued, symbolically enough, by Chekhov's slapstick scenes, vaudevilles and comic sketches, i.e. genres that demanded expressive and clear forms. In the notes to the 1935 work *33 Fainting Spells*, which comprised the one-act plays *The Jubilee*, *The Bear* and *The Proposal*, Meyerhold wrote: "The Chekhov of *The Cherry Orchard* and *Three Sisters* is not at all close to us today" [Meyerhold 1968b: 310]. Indeed, as the non-ideological and "non-theatrical" Chekhov was unsuited to a theatrical and ideological epoch, Meyerhold felt greater affinity to the Chekhov of a different era, when he was the author of short forms, an unmatched creator of portraits of ordinary people together with their shortcomings. This kind of Chekhov could

be made into “a comrade in the battle with relics [...] of the bourgeoisie in all their forms” [Meyerhold 1968b: 310].

In contrast to Meyerhold, Vakhtangov sought to overcome binary oppositions and the divisions between the “artificial” in art and that which emerged from the desire to manifest reality. It is for this reason that, unlike Meyerhold, Vakhtangov placed Chekhov alongside Ostrovsky, Gogol and Pushkin, while envisioning a place for *The Seagull* in his own theatre. Although he respected Stanislavsky for discovering the theatrical means of creating the necessary stage atmosphere for Chekhov [E. Vakhtangov 1959: 208], he perceived his own production of Chekhov differently.

I want to stage *The Seagull*. Theatrically. The way Chekhov has.

I want to stage [Pushkin's] *The Feast During the Plague* and Chekhov's *Wedding* in one evening. [...] In Chekhov's plays we find tragedy rather than lyricism. When a man shoots himself, this is not lyricism. This is either an act of triviality or heroism. Neither triviality nor heroism has ever had anything to do with lyricism. Both triviality and heroism have their tragic masks. Lyricism, however, has had everything to do with triviality [E. Vakhtangov 2011b: 133].

Vakhtangov never realised his project of a tragic staging of *The Seagull*. He did, however, stage *The Wedding*, which featured an eccentric, “unnatural,” exaggerated and tragicomic image of the world. Ruben Simonov, who was trained at Vakhtangov's Theatre, claimed that the comic aspect also evident in Chekhov's multi-act plays came to the forefront in the spectators' reception of his works during the first years following the Revolution.

More than any other dramatist, Chekhov evoked the interest of young theatre-makers who remained under the great influence of the MAT. Both actors and directors alike sense that spectators had come to react differently to Chekhov. If, in the past, Chekhov's plays were listened to in intense silence and spectators blew their noses while wiping away tears, then now a great deal more laughter could be heard during performances of his plays. The joy that dominated the auditorium meant that the comic scenes in his works were highlighted [Simonov 1959: 12].

However, the avant-garde turned away from the dramatist. The Revolutionary theatre was indeed vigorously opposed to Chekhov. In the prologue to *Mystery-Bouffe*, Mayakovsky mocked Auntie Manyas and deemed Uncle Vanyas a relic of the past. From the perspective of the avant-garde, Chekhov seemed old-fashioned, overly psychological, and generic. He was not valued. He did not suit the new age, which

praised collective zeal, common action, and had an optimistic view of the future, while also condemning individual weakness, including the concerns of the provincial intelligentsia. Chekhov's relevance evaporated after the Revolution, since his works were ambiguous, which was something that could not be squared with Revolutionary fervour, with the order to act, and the spirit of mass spectacles. These same traits in Chekhov's dramas that had attracted criticism during his lifetime, particularly from nationalist circles,<sup>7</sup> including failure to pass definitive judgement on his protagonists' behaviour (following the principle of "no scoundrel, no angel"), and the absence of an unequivocal ideological message, meant that Chekhov was a marginal figure in post-Revolutionary Russian theatre.

The late theatre critic and theatre historian Konstantin Rudnitsky published an essay in 1965 in which he explored the issue of reading Chekhov through the Russian theatre of the socialist era, right up to the early 1960s [Rudnitsky 1965]. Writing about the position of Chekhov's dramas in the USSR, Rudnitsky mentioned some interesting facts. He drew attention, for example, to the fact that not only did representatives of a broadly-conceived avant-garde, including Meyerhold, Tairov and Vakhtangov, not stage Chekhov's great works, but also that, after 1917, he actually disappeared for some time from the repertoire of the MAT. The artists at that theatre also sensed Chekhov's irrelevance to the zeitgeist. In 1921, *The Cherry Orchard* and *Three Sisters* were performed exclusively during foreign tours, with Stanislavsky writing to Nemirovich-Danchenko from Berlin and noting:

When we perform the scene with Masha's farewell in *Three Sisters*, I feel embarrassed. After everything we have been through, it is impossible to cry about an officer going away and leaving his lady behind. [...] I have no desire to perform Chekhov [Stanislavsky cited in Rudnitsky 1965: 136].

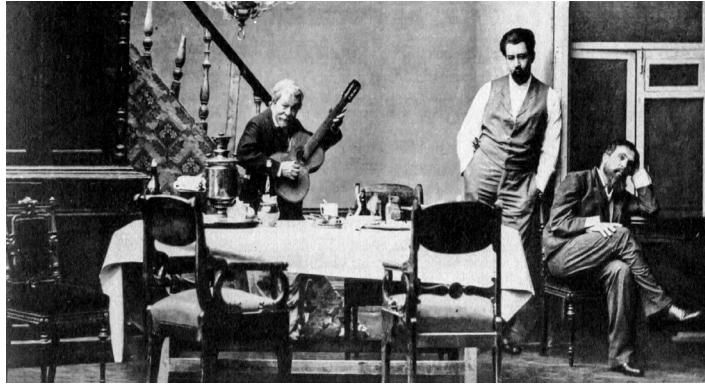
In the context of the age, Chekhov's plays seemed to overflow with pessimism and hopelessness. The writer was deemed a "doom merchant." In the 1920s, his plays had almost disappeared from Soviet stages. The *Glavrepertkom* (Central Committee on Repertoires) marked *Three Sisters*, *Uncle Vanya*, *The Seagull* and *Ivanov* in its 1929 list of works

---

<sup>7</sup> Chekhov faced criticisms from democratic circles (including Gleb Uspensky, Nikolay Mikhaylovsky and others) following the publication of *Ivanov*. The writer was accused of abandoning and betraying the ideals of the 1860s, expressing sympathy for the figure of Ivanov, who led a senseless life, and lending legitimacy to the claims that democratic aspirations were in vain, reinforcing social apathy. See Śliwowski 1986: 137–138.

sanctioned for performance with a letter B, which, in the language of apparatchiks for cultural matters, meant “such a work possesses formal qualities while being of no social value.” Only *The Cherry Orchard* received an A-rating, with the value for Soviet audiences being its depiction of the collapse of the old order through the figures of Ranevskaya and Gaev, the representatives of that order.

**Fig. 4.5.** *Uncle Vanya*, Act 2, MAT, 1899. Aleksandr Artyom (Telegin), Konstantin Stanislavsky (Astrov) and Aleksandr Vishnevsky (Voynitsky)



In the 1930s, *The Cherry Orchard* was the sole drama by Chekhov that was performed and, as Rudnitsky wrote, it was included alongside the “satirists,” namely G riboedov, Gogol and Sukhovo-Kobylin. Classifying Chekhov this way made sense in relation to his short pieces, with Meyerhold providing an accurate depiction of the comic essence of the one-act plays:

Chekhov’s comic technique and his wordplay continued the tradition of Gogol: Chekhov often plays with alogical associations between words and comic names. His “jokes” are not, however, as abstract as they may first seem. As with Gogol, there is always something more than a mere pun hiding behind this merriment [Meyerhold 1968b: 311].

The comic aspect of *The Seagull* and *The Cherry Orchard*, however, transcended the limits of recognisable genres and conventions (although it also referenced some of those elements, with Chekhov himself writing that *The Cherry Orchard* is “in parts pure farce”). But making the protagonists of Chekhov’s final play into objects of satire and turning the work into a denunciation destroyed the essence of this drama in which, regardless of all the inventiveness in the fields of rhythm and intonation, the focus had shifted away from an external intrigue towards the internal battles of the human psyche.

In the 1934 production of *The Cherry Orchard* at the Studio run by Ruben Simonov, the director Andrey Lobanov mocked the liberal eloquence of Petya Trofimov, Gaev's peevishness, and Ranevskaya's moral bankruptcy. The only characters who could count on the sympathy of the audience were Lopakhin, as a representative of progress, the new class and a man of action, and Anya, who was too young to be made responsible for the collapse of the old intelligentsia and nobility. If Chekhov was performed at all during this period, then it was always as if he were, in fact, Gorky. Productions thus employed a class-based system for judging protagonists, with representatives of the old order always subjected to uncompromising criticism. Chekhov, however, resisted such negative readings, meaning "it was almost always possible to find in his works arguments in favour of those people that directors tried to mock" [Rudnitsky 1965: 139]. Thus, regardless of the state's policies towards theatre repertoires (although this factor should not be dismissed entirely), Chekhov did not attract the attention of artists who adhered to the principle that theatre must, in one way or another, engage with the realities surrounding it if it is to be considered vital. Chekhov was not attractive either to directors producing agitational theatre, or to artists such as Tairov, who were creating their own aesthetic programme critical of dominant tendencies. Likewise, artists at the Second MAT also showed no interest in Chekhov. The spirit of the new age manifested itself in clear forms, the aesthetics of the spectacle and clearly-drawn conflicts. None of these traits featured in the theatre of Chekhov. By the end of the 1930s, no renowned director had staged any of his dramas.

This situation changed only after the performance of *Three Sisters*, produced by Nemirovich-Danchenko at the MAT, on the eve of the war in 1940. According to contemporary critics, this production was of landmark significance at the time,<sup>8</sup> and today remains a significant moment in the history of twentieth-century Russian theatre. The history of the reception of this production could serve as a starting point for exploring the production's legendary status. According to authors belonging to the older generation who witnessed this production of *Three Sisters* in their childhood or youth, Nemirovich-Danchenko created a work "about yearning (*toska*) for a better life," which is how the director himself described the "kernel" of the piece. It idealised Chekhov's protagonists,

---

<sup>8</sup> All authors who were working at the time on the matter of staging Chekhov in the Russian theatre wrote about or at least mentioned this production. Inna Solovyova, a specialist on the work of Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko, dedicated significant attention to this production; see Solovyova 2007.



giving the work an optimistic tone with a genuine desire for change, and faith in a better future. In creating a performance with a positive message, Nemirovich-Danchenko satisfied audiences' deep-seated desires. Rudnitsky wrote that the "production created a genuine emotional rush. The flood of passionate desire for a better life is what drove the Prozorov sisters, Tuzenbach and Vershinin. [...] They were painful reminders for spectators" [Rudnitsky 1965: 139]. In his view, Nemirovich-Danchenko's production was, at the time, seen as a critique of both traditions shaping earlier versions at the MAT, where the end of an era was stressed alongside satirical readings of Chekhov. The protagonists of the drama, members of the intelligentsia with rich personal experience, were instantly sympathetically perceived by audiences, with "this intelligentsia-status a guarantee of success" [Rudnitsky 1965: 140].

Many years after first watching the performance, Maya Turovskaya reflected upon it, seeing in it "a collective image" of the early MAT productions of Chekhov.

The completeness of this production was always a mystery to me, although I had carefully read copies of the play, critical articles, and even transcripts of Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko's rehearsals. I thus knew that his leit-motif was the "yearning for a better life." But it is only now, as I reflect, that I can imagine what perhaps has not been preserved in any archives (thus going against the sense that we normally trust archives more than ourselves). For Vladimir Ivanovich this "yearning" was much more specific. It was the yearning for one's own youth, for the youth of the Art Theatre, for those first encounters with Chekhov and past productions of his dramas [Turovskaya 1987: 46].

Maya Turovskaya therefore suggests that the 1940 production of *Three Sisters* became something of a meta-performance, with the director not necessarily idealising the past as depicted by Chekhov, but rather the theatre of his youth. Either way, this idea of a "better life" had become the life of the past. Turovskaya's words, recorded in 1978, confirm the changes in the perception of the production, with dominant interpretation into the 1960s (Rudnitsky's text dates back to 1963) [see also Stroeva 1955] treating Nemirovich-Danchenko's work as an expression of hope and yearning for a better life while, with time, the realisation came that the secret of its success could be found in the way it brought to the stage an atmosphere from a time that was recognised as forever lost, thus the performance evoked the spectators' yearning for a lost world.

It was most probably the production itself that made it possible to reconcile both these perspectives, and this laid out the foundations for its lasting legendary status. There is, however, plenty of evidence to

suggest that Nemirovich-Danchenko did not avoid bias in his judgement of the protagonists. In contrast to the Prozorov sisters, Vershinin and Tuzenbach, there was a negative portrayal of Natasha, Andrey Prozorov and Kulygin. The treatment of Solyony remained ambiguous, with the actor Boris Livanov having created a character full of contradictions, with Rudnitsky arguing that this was a deliberate ploy to attract the attention of critics and spectators alike. In order to stress the positive tone of the production, Nemirovich-Danchenko carried out a small alteration of the text. Directly after Olga's monologue, which begins with the words "The bands are playing so gaily, so bravely, and one does so want to live!," the director omitted the issue of Chebutykin, who responded by singing "Tara... ra-boom-deay... It is my washing-day," and then stating "It's all the same! It's all the same!" [A. Chekhov 2005]. Indeed, the character was removed from the stage. This small change was significant, however, in that it gave this final scene a pathetic loftiness. Marianna Stroeve wrote that this was Nemirovich-Danchenko's way of discovering the masculine and heroic element of Chekov's dramas [Stroeve 1955: 302–303].

The reassurances of the protagonists that they were firm in their belief that, in one or two hundred years' time, all would change and life would become better and more just could be considered "sincere" and "true," even enabling a naïve identification of the author's position with such views by treating them as individual discourse. However, this "truthfulness" must necessarily disappear once it is treated as an element of a globalising discourse within "a tendency to homogenise the characters' lines through the hallmarks of the playwright found throughout, which lend a certain rhythmic, lexical and poetic uniformity to the whole" [Pavis 1998: 106]. In light of this, the issue of Olga can be read differently. "The bands are playing so gaily, so bravely, and one does so want to live!" This declaration is perceived differently when it is read as an autonomous statement and then again completely differently when it is seen in the context of the rhyme repeated by Chebutykin – "Tara... ra-boom-deay..." It should be noted that it took over a quarter of a century before his "Tara... ra-boom" was restored to Russian performances.

Konstantin Rudnitsky presented the theory that Nemirovich-Danchenko's intuition was founded in the accurate recognition of what audiences in 1940 might expect of Chekhov, namely hope and optimism, rather than in a profound reading of his dramas. The updating of Chekhov by Nemirovich-Danchenko's successors led to the complete deformation of the meaning of his works. If Nemirovich-Danchenko transcended the interpretation of *Three Sisters* as a drama about "yearning for a better life," which was just one possible way to understand the text, then

his successors came to stress “the struggle for a better life.” This change meant that Chekhov came to be staged in a spirit of enthusiasm. From this point onwards, Irina could be treated as a heroine of socialist labour. Chekhov was no longer differentiated from Gorky. When the MAT produced *Uncle Vanya* in 1947, with Mikhail Kedrov, Nina Litovtseva and Ilya Sudakov directing, one of the more intelligent critics of that period, Iosif Yuzovsky, who would soon afterwards be accused of cosmopolitanism, noted that the actor Boris Dobronravov was playing Egor Bulychev rather than Uncle Vanya [Yuzovsky 1982b: 326].

The idea of a heroic Chekhov led to the almost complete isolation of staging from the actual texts of the dramas. Chekhov’s great discovery, which opened up new horizons for twentieth-century drama, was his understanding that real-life phenomena cannot be subordinated to the principle of causality. The qualities of Chekhov’s dramas that made them appear so original included the lack of a clear narrative arc culminating in the finale. Instead, many plot strands were treated equally and there were no clear motives behind the actions of the characters. Pauses illustrated the difficulties of dialogic exchanges, thus signalling dramas and problems concealed by the protagonists. All of these traits were a result of Chekhov rejecting the principle of cause and effect. Chekhov’s view of the human being was similar to that which would later be outlined in the work of Carl Gustav Jung, who questioned the role of determinism in the human psyche. He wrote that “no psychological fact can ever be explained in terms of causality alone; as a living phenomenon it is always indissolubly bound up with the continuity of the vital process” [Jung 1974: 448, cited in Samuels, Shorter, Plau 1986: 127]. Chekhov depicted his characters in their “normal,” everyday existence, in all their complexity, together with all their inconsistencies, since he understood that human behaviour is not determined by the principle of logic. He showed that the sources of fears and troubles are deep-rooted in the human psyche, and that the individual can fail to recognise them for a long time. He also refused to answer the question of where this “general ideal,” which could soothe the human fear of death, could be found.

Meanwhile, the reading of Chekhov in the spirit of “the struggle for a better life” did not end together with Stalinism. Rudnitsky notes that Nemirovich-Danchenko’s pathetic-heroic interpretation of Chekhov continued to influence the productions made in his time, giving the example of the MAT’s 1960 production of *The Seagull*, directed by Viktor Stanitsin and Iosif Raevsky, as one that reinforced a tendentious interpretation of

each protagonist and thus led “to the deformation of all the figures in the play” [Rudnitsky 1965: 145].

He concluded his essay with the reflection that it was only into the 1960s that a mature and objective reading of Chekhov’s works became possible, following a period in which “they were ascribed lyrical tones, an ironic sharpness or programmatic theories.” While these were certainly accurate remarks, Rudnitsky himself could not avoid writing in pathetic tones about the dramatist when describing his “sober, solid, sincere, deep and powerful faith in the human being, which was stripped of any illusions” [Rudnitsky 1965: 159].

As a dramatist Chekhov represented neither a utopian nor dystopian vision, which was why he was left out of the theatre of the Revolutionary and Stalinist periods. If his works were staged at all, it was always in a tendentious manner that ensured they were distorted according to prevailing ideological demands. Since it was difficult to submit Chekhov to such manipulation, mature directors, aware of the situation, steered clear of his works. Between the era of the early MAT and the early 1960s, beyond Nemirovich-Danchenko’s production, no significant performances of Chekhov’s dramas took place.

We should also add to Rudnitsky’s observations that Chekhov was absent from the most important theatre of the era of Khrushchev’s thaw, namely the *Sovremennik* Theatre, which was founded in 1956. During the first years of its existence, this theatre largely concentrated on staging Soviet drama. It is also difficult to consider the mid-1950s as a period of a major breakthrough in the sphere of culture. However, it was certainly the start of an evolution, the full results of which became evident only in the 1970s. In the mid-1950s, in place of the idealisation of the present with its development, industrialisation and achievements of five-year plans, there was a focus on a return to the myth of the revolution, this time with a romantic take on it, that was to provide the foundations of a new Soviet identity. In the cultural sphere there was also a restoration of certain elements of a native tradition rooted in the first two decades of the twentieth century, with some of these elements even acquiring a form of cult admiration. In spite of this, however, this period remains perceived as one of transition even in current writing on the history of theatre.<sup>9</sup> This is related to the conception of history (most commonly

---

<sup>9</sup> In the standard work on the history of Soviet dramatic theatre published in 1971, the sixth and final volume on the years 1953 to 1967 posits in the introduction (which is not attributed to any particular author) a link between the new tendency in political and economic life with a cultural transformation. The author or authors consider

written with a capital letter) as a synonym of national wellbeing, which excludes alternative conceptions of it. In such general models, culture thus becomes highly ideological and comes to reflect the worldview of the Russian intelligentsia [see Gudkov 1988]. The sociologist Boris Dubin has drawn attention to the fact that the peculiarly “increased” significance of culture in conditions of delayed and traditionalist modernisation is a result of the politicisation or “ideologisation” of the very idea of culture. In Dubin’s view:

such functional simplification and overloading of the concept of culture (and also history) is generally typical of certain phases of modern social life, particularly periods of nation-state-building. But in Russia, the pragmatics (practice) of “political use” has entered the very lexicon of the abovementioned concepts and is subsequently reproduced in the content of representations and ideas of culture. Most often culture is identified with a particular political projection of it – the myths of those in power together with later corrections and additions [Dubin 2004: 105].

In such a situation, history, like culture, can only be singular and common to all people.

Dubin provides an illustration of the model that has ensured there have been no far-reaching reassessments of history, and in particular of the history of culture, in Russia. The root of the problem is the attitude towards classics. The canon of such works that forms cultural foundations becomes a model resistant to any rationalist conceptions. At the same time, there is an absence of reference points beyond those that are officially accepted. The intelligentsia thus has no equal partners in discussions or partners with whom it could exchange views, hence it lacks any motivation for independent action that would generate alternative views and interpretations of history. In Dubin’s view, the intelligentsia offers only corrections of the generally-accepted image of history [see Dubin 2004: 105]. The same could be said of the attitude

---

the fundamental indicators of this tendency to be “the development of people’s critical initiative” and “the embedding of a truly socialist conception of the subject” [Anastasev (ed.) 1971: 6]. In a more recent piece on the subject, where the period from the mid-1950s to the 1990s is discussed quite superficially, covering just 78 of 730 pages – the date of the cultural transformation is given as 5 March 1953, when Stalin died, while the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU (February 1956) is also marked as the beginning of the changes, although certain indicators of the new course were already evident following Stalin’s death, for example, in an editorial piece in *Pravda* from 27 November 1953, which called on artists to be braver in their choice of genres and styles, since – as the piece claimed – the greatest misfortune of art is homogenisation and the pursuit of a single model; see Smolyakov 2005: 677.

of Russian theatre artists towards the classics after 1956, although it should also be noted that even small corrections encountered criticism from the authorities.

At the turn of the 1960s, Soviet theatre returned to Gogol, Griboedov and Sukhovo-Kobylin, while, from the mid-1960s, Chekhov also reappeared on Soviet stages (beginning with two productions of *Three Sisters* – Tovstonogov's in 1965 and Efros's in 1967).<sup>10</sup> The works of these dramatists were treated as a reflection of contemporary Russia, thus the classics revealed the eternal mechanisms ruling Russia. Since the "corrected" directorial interpretations of canonical works, eking out situations and conflicts typical of the contemporary age, contradicted the canon of interpretations of these classical works that were accepted by the authorities of the late-Khrushchev era, authorities launched a press campaign in the late 1960s denouncing the "distortion of Russian classics in the theatre." One of the victims of this campaign was Efros's version of *Three Sisters*, which was withdrawn from the repertoire after only a handful of performances. The withdrawal of various productions of other classics, including Petr Fomenko's 1966 staging of *The Death of Tarelkin* at the Moscow Mayakovsky Theatre and Ostrovsky's *A Profitable Position*, directed by Mark Zakharov at the Moscow Satirical Theatre in 1967, were interpreted by society as a confirmation of the end of the thaw. Banned by censors, these works came to be remembered as symbols of dashed hopes, illustrating the disappointment of the generation of the 1960s.

The greater the erosion of the utopian foundations of the system, with the gradual exhaustion of the collectivist vision of society, the more Chekhov regained his position in Russian theatre. However, his revival was gradual. Writing of the generation of theatre directors who made their debut in the 1950s and 1960s, Anatoly Smelyansky stressed that their experiments initially avoided Chekhov. He suggested the main reason for this was the impact of the influence of the MAT productions. "The tradition of interpreting Chekhov formed at the Art Theatre proved to be so unshakeable, strong and unquestioned in terms of its creative authority, that none of the younger generation of directors was brave enough to challenge it until the mid-1960s" [Smelyansky 1981: 267].

---

<sup>10</sup> Efros returned to the production of *Three Sisters* at the Theatre on Malaya Bronnaya in 1982. He directed *The Seagull* in 1966 at the Lenin Komsomol Theatre, and *The Cherry Orchard* in 1975 at the Taganka Theatre (revival in 1985). He also staged Chekhov abroad, including in Japan and Finland. See Fridshteyn 1993; Nikolskaya 1995; Zayonts (ed.) 2000; see also the director's own writings (second edition, four volumes): Anatoly Efros 1993a, 1993b, 1993c, 1993d.

The image of ideal productions of Chekhov's dramas was formed by notions of the early performances by Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko, as well as the latter's 1940 version of *Three Sisters*. The Art Theatre's productions of Chekhov were generally performed for many years – *The Seagull* had the shortest run, lasting only until 1905, with sixty performances in total, although each subsequent play achieved a higher number of performances, with *The Cherry Record* having the most, at over 200 performances by 1950, although, of course, this figure included breaks and revivals. These productions therefore entered spectators' and collective memory in the form of clichés. Over time, the potential of these versions was exhausted as, for example, the actors aged (Olga Knipper-Chekhova played the role of Ranevskaya into her old age), while what remained etched in memories were the realist sets and props (as we know, Stanislavsky placed great emphasis on detail and the selection of props; archives have kept his rehearsal notes, which include finely-detailed lists of the objects that ought to be located on stage).<sup>11</sup> Other aspects of the productions that are deeply ingrained in memory are the famous sound effects, the costumes from the Chekhov era, and the acting, which had also become fixed in stereotypes. Furthermore, during the Stalinist era, the MAT had been recognised as the only true model of realist art. This was the origin of the long-standing apologia for tradition, understood in the USSR and maintained by conservative sections of theatre critics as an inviolable heritage. This meant that even the most minor attempts at innovation, such as a new reading of dramas, or new forms of staging, were rejected. Any endeavours to transcend the status quo defended by conservatives were deemed sacrilege. Critics made habitual use of the phrase "this is not Chekhov" – applying it Efros when his production was taken off the stage, as well as in relation to Lyubimov's 1981 version of *Three Sisters*. Even Oleg Efremov, who was loyal to the Stanislavskian tradition, was criticised for minor alterations to the original text.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> In describing the set design for the second act of *Uncle Vanya*, Stanislavsky listed around two hundred objects. These included: "on the table – a tray, a samovar, a tablecloth, a large tray, a teapot, a sugar pot, six cups, six glasses, twelve spoons, a jar of jam, buttery buns in a dish, a knife and some butter on a small plate," while also adding that "on one of the chairs is a blanket and two hot water bottles" [Stanislavsky 1994: 30].

<sup>12</sup> Efremov began his version of *The Seagull* at the MAT (1980) with the scene that sees Treplev preparing for a performance and uttering the words "Just like a real theatre!" rather than with the dialogue between Medvedenko and Masha: "Why do you always dress in mourning?"/"I dress in black to match my life." The director's interventions into the text met with a negative response from the majority of critics. See Rudnitsky 1990b: 102.



**Fig. 4.6.** *Three Sisters*, directed by Yury Lyubimov, set design by David Borovsky, Taganka Theatre, 1981. Lyubov Selyutina (Irina), Alla Demidova (Masha), Maria Politseymako (Olga) and Anatoly Serenko (Ferapont)

Was it really the case that the model developed at the MAT had lost its authoritative function in the late 1960s, as Russian critics and theatre studies scholars had desired? We should stress that Smelyansky's words refer to the issue of the "interpretation" (*istolkovanie*) of Chekhov, rather than to the tradition of staging him. "In order to bring life to tradition it was necessary to overcome the canon," wrote Smelyansky [1981: 268]. We should also emphasise that this applied to the canon of interpretation as well. This meant that the following question had become relevant: what should Chekhov's productions be about? But the question of how to stage Chekhov had been left open.

The critique of tradition could be reduced primarily to a different, often updated interpretation of Chekhov's dramas. In the 1960s, productions began to appear, which emphasised the pessimistic tone of his work.



**Fig. 4.7.** Scene from *Three Sisters*, directed by Anatoly Efros, Theatre on Malaya Bronnaya, 1967



We should add that this form of reading Chekhov from the mid-twentieth century onwards, and not only in Russia but also in the West, resulted from utopias giving way to dystopian visions. According to these new interpretations, Chekhov had created a world in which a feeling of the senselessness, emptiness and futility of human existence had become dominant. The adoption of such perspective meant that the faith in the future of which the eponymous three sisters spoke could only be mocked. It was assumed that the writer had intended an ironic tone for his characters' talk of progress and their "philosophising" about human happiness in one or two hundred years' time. This was the case in Lyubimov's *Three Sisters* at the Taganka Theatre in 1981, when Olga presented the finale to the drama in the style of a speaker at a rally, thus provoking laughter among the audience. Such interpretation, which goes against the essential ambivalence of Chekhov's drama, can be considered the other side of the same coin, i.e., a simple inversion of the thrust of interpretation. Lyubimov staged *Three Sisters* once he had become disillusioned with attempts to improve the world around him – this was May of 1981, on the eve of his departure to the West. The eponymous sisters found that Moscow, the city for which they yearned, was inaccessible to them. Yet, from the spectators' perspective, the city was a prison. Lyubimov revealed the true Moscow of the late-Brezhnev era to audiences. During the performance, one of the theatre walls opened up to reveal the cityscape. The director seemed to be telling spectators: there is nowhere to escape to; only dreams remain.

In Soviet interpretations of the 1960s and 1970s, the attachment to the critical assessment of the male and female protagonists of *Three Sisters* or *The Cherry Orchard* remained evident and was a result of social

and historical circumstances. Towards the end of the 1970s, Anatoly Smelyansky judged the theatre productions of that decade to be examples of a “new tendentiousness” [Smelyansky 1981: 268], which meant that Chekhov’s protagonists were either idealised as the representatives of a better past era, or their passivity was emphasised, as they were perceived as members of the Russian intelligentsia, who had become victims of history through no fault of their own.

The ruthless attitude of directors in respect of Chekhov’s protagonists could in no way be squared with the author’s sympathetic treatment of them. Chekhov’s “secret,” to which the artists at the Art Theatre had acquired the key, sometimes evoked pure despair and exasperation in directors who demanded a clearly-defined stance from the author [Smelyansky 1981: 268].

At the end of the 1980s, Rudnitsky wrote that

the idea of a “cruel” Chekhov came into being long ago, following Tovstonogov’s production of *Three Sisters* in 1965. It also accompanied Efremov’s productions and was then confirmed by Efremov’s *Seagull* at the Sovremennik in 1970. Two productions of *Ivanov* [at the MAT, directed by Efremov, and at the Leninist Komsomol Theatre, directed by Zakharov, both in 1976 – K.O.] could also not avoid the label. Critics keen to comment on the “cruel” and “tragic” Chekhov over time, started to complain that a Chekhov stripped of hope had become monotonous, and that it was thus time to return to a “broader and freer” reading of his dramas [Rudnitsky 1990b: 87].



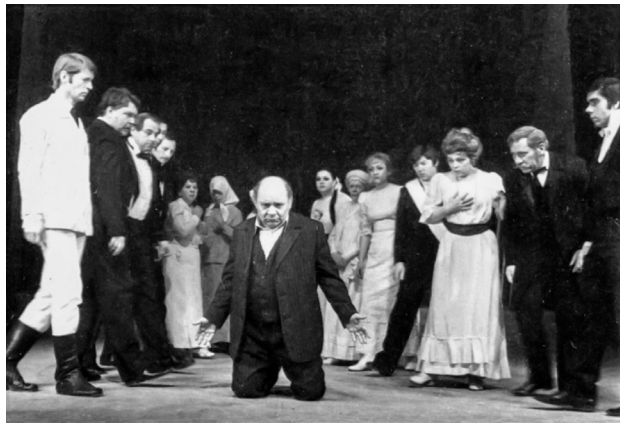
**Fig. 4.8.** *Ivanov*, directed by Oleg Efremov, MAT, 1976. Innokenty Smoktunovsky (Ivanov), Andrey Popov (Shabelsky)

The two productions of *Ivanov* are good examples of one-sided interpretations of Chekhov’s protagonists. In Efremov’s production, the lead-

ing role was played by Innokenty Smoktunovsky, where he appeared as a romantic, melancholy member of the intelligentsia.

Smoktunovsky played a human being completely immersed in the past and unable to perceive the present. His Ivanov moved about the stage like a sleepwalker. Nostalgia and yearning for a lost youth evoked no dissatisfaction or peevishness in him. This Ivanov did not fight himself. Instead, he continued to delight in his own youth and past zeal, in his belief in goodness and readiness to engage in acts of bravery. Even if his dreams were never realised, Smoktunovsky's Ivanov never left them behind. He carried with him the baggage of unrealised but beautiful illusions, of exhausted yet noble ideals [Rudnitsky 1990b: 82; see also Smelyansky 1981: 271–278].

**Fig. 4.9.** Mass scene from *Ivanov*, directed by Mark Zakharov, Leninist Komsomol Theatre, 1976. Kneeling at the centre is Evgeny Leonov (Ivanov)



Zakharov's choice of actor for the leading role already indicated his intention to challenge traditional conceptions of the character. Evgeny Leonov was the very opposite of the image of Ivanov as a romantic, neurasthenic, "provincial Hamlet." Short, stout and balding, he seemed to be an ordinary person with no real distinguishing features, someone who almost certainly did not have a noble background and was none too intelligent, perhaps even lacking a complete education.

If Smoktunovsky's hero suffered because of his failure to fully realise himself, then Leonov's protagonist suffered because everyone wanted to "complete" him – they tried to turn him into Hamlet, a lover, a man of action, an intelligent and even handsome man. And yet he wanted none of this, he could have none of this and he hated it [Smelyansky 1981: 273].

This commentator recognised the link to tradition in both Efremov and Zakharov's productions: the former created a work that kept alive

the memory of the old Art Theatre, while the latter, even in a clearly polemical work, still made reference to the MAT tradition, albeit by negating it.

Many productions of Chekhov from the 1970s and 1980s (it should be noted here that the generalising nature of these remarks gives a far from complete image of the issue of how Chekhov was staged in Russia<sup>13</sup>) were haunted by the approaches described by Meyerhold: denying audiences the ability to use their imaginations and fill in the blanks, while at the same time seeking unequivocal, psychological or social motives for the protagonists' behaviour. The impression emerged that even Russian critics, at least those most visible in theatre life, had noticed the powerlessness of Russian theatre in the face of Chekhov's secret. This created something of a paradox, since, if any particular country could be considered a specialist in realist and psychological theatre, it was Russia. Anatoly Smelyansky considered the source of the weakness of Soviet-era Russian theatre to be the loss of bonds with the culture of the past. This argument suggests that the memory of the past had at least retained the clichés of the old theatre, whereas it was the living tradition that had been abandoned. But does the legacy of the old Art Theatre and the living memory of Chekhov's era necessarily guarantee the "correct" staging of his works?

The question of how to stage Chekhov continues to haunt not only Russians, of course. Nicola Chiaromonte wrote in 1960 that "the most difficult task for a director, beyond staging a Greek tragedy, is staging Chekhov, while for actors the most difficult thing is performing in one of his plays" [Chiaromonte 1996: 324, originally published: Chiarom-

---

<sup>13</sup> The last twenty five years have seen many different ways of staging Chekhov beyond traditional modes. The creators of the most famous or indeed most controversial productions include: Yury Pogrebnykh with *Why did Konstantin shoot himself? (Ot chego zastrelilsya Konstantin?)*, based on *The Seagull*, at the Studio on Krasnaya Presna, 1988; Andrey Zholdak, *Seagull Experiment*, at the Moscow State Theatre of Nations, 2001. Sergey Artsibashev also made reference to tradition, albeit polemically, with his version of *Three Sisters* at the Theatre on Pokrovka (1991), likewise Mark Zakharov with *The Seagull* in 1994 at the Moscow Lenkom Theatre. Lev Dodin's productions of Chekhov at the Maly Theatre are worthy of separate in-depth exploration, as are the adaptations of Chekhov's novellas directed by Kama Ginkas. This also applies to Boris Yukhananov's seven regenerations of *The Cherry Orchard*, with his work situated beyond the sphere of official culture. When it comes to the youngest generation of directors working in Russia, some of the most promising approaches to Chekhov come from Mindaugas Karabauskis, who is associated with the Oleg Tabakov Theatre Studio. There have been hundreds of publications on Russian and Soviet productions of Chekhov. The productions of the last three decades have been considered in works including: Zingerman 2001, 2002; and also (in essays in collected volumes): Smelyansky 1999a, 2002a, 2002b; Gulchenko 2002; Davydova 2005a.

onte 1960]. The Italian philosopher and essayist considered the simplicity of Chekhov (“which in itself is hardly simple”) to be what makes it difficult, with directors attempting to stage his plays needing to be able to reconcile contradictions.

Chekhov is a realist writer and perhaps nobody else can express the *weight* of reality, its deepest, crushing, inevitable essence, as well as he can. Perhaps, too, nobody else who has attempted to do so had stripped reality as fully as he of the ordinary attributes that constitute its claims. Thus staging Chekhov must solve the unsolvable puzzle on stage: to be simultaneously real and immaterial, to depict not only the sensual reality of things but also the truth that emanates from it, [...] while depicting exactly and exclusively that which exists in the strictly-defined and singular moment to be expressed [Chiaromonte 1996: 325, originally published: Chiaromonte 1960].

**Fig. 4.10.** Mass scene from *The Cherry Orchard*, directed by Anatoly Efros, set design by Valery Levental, Taganka Theatre, 1975



From the 1980s, Russians began to compare Russian and Western versions of Chekhov, including those by Giorgio Strehler, Peter Brook and Peter Stein. This changed their perspective on native practices, including the issue of faithfulness to the original text. Comparing Strehler’s *The Cherry Orchard* (1974, Piccolo Teatro di Milano) with Anatoly Efros’s 1975 version of it at the Taganka Theatre, Konstantin Rudnitsky recalled that the Italian director considered some of the stage directions in the second act, which describe abandoned chapels and gravestones, as illustrations of a “symbolism of questionable taste.” In abandoning these cemetery-based props and even the famous “sound of a broken cord,” Strehler created a masterpiece. “His readiness to question certain dialogue and stage directions meant the director liberated himself and could attempt to become a co-creator equal to the author” [Rudnitsky 1990b: 95]. Rudnitsky noted that the “questionable symbolism” rejected by Strehler came to completely dominate the work of Anatoly Efros and his stage designer,

Valery Levental. They opted to place the mound of a freshly-dug grave surrounded by gravestones and crosses on stage in order to highlight the mortality of the world depicted. Paradoxically, by remaining faithful to the words of the author, Efros came to make a sociologically significant statement: that Chekhov had depicted a world of people condemned to defeat. Challenging Marianna Stroevas's view, Rudnitsky argued that, in his production, Efros did not follow in the traditions of the MAT, which were "nostalgic and lyrical." Most importantly, he argued, in contrast to Strehler, Efros had been unable to capture the musicality and poetry of the drama.

Strehler was the first to suggest the use of a "white theatre" in staging Chekhov. He made a genuinely astonishing discovery in dressing all of the characters in white against a white background. This pure whiteness encompassed not only the stage but also the audience. And in this whiteness Strehler reproduced the captivating impulses of life, with all the colours of the rainbow emanating in constant movement. Efros borrowed his white costumes and set from Strehler, but he halted the movement and killed the colours. There is no life in his cemetery. In Efros's production, Chekhov's heroes did not live but instead floundered around in their ugly death throes and final spasms of their fading emotions [Rudnitsky 1990b: 96].

It is generally accepted that Oleg Efremov's productions at the MAT are the best examples of following the traditions of the theatre where he staged *Ivanov* in 1976, *The Seagull* in 1980, *Uncle Vanya* in 1985, and *Three Sisters* in 1997. The extensive 2007 publication of materials relating to Oleg Efremov's work included notes taken during rehearsals for *Ivanov*, which Galina Brodskaya prepared for publication, and for *Three Sisters* (edited by Tatyana Zhdanova) [Efremov 2007]. The notes on the first of these works run to 250 pages, while those from the second total 450 pages. The premiere of Efremov's *Three Sisters* took place on 27 February 1997, with rehearsals having commenced in June of 1995 and featured, among others, Stanislav Lyubshin, Viktor Gvozditsky, Elena Mayorova and Vyacheslav Nevinnny. The extent of this material, the sheer number of utterances, and the extensive period of rehearsals, is all very revealing of the experience of being overwhelmed by the drama, as well as giving a significant indication of the traditions around staging it. A significant portion of Efremov's statements refer to his analysis of the drama and establishing the given conditions and key focus of the action. In short, Efremov's basic analytical tool is Stanislavsky's "system." He is aware of the trap that can be laid by detailed, rational explanations of the protagonists' actions, which is why, in his approach to particular roles, he went beyond the living conditions of the figures, explicitly stating that

he would like to go beyond a generic production [Efremov 2007: 358] and instead seek explanations in nature. Many pages of the notes refer to work on establishing how much time had passed between the acts of the drama, which season the action is taking place in, and what influence these factors could have on the behaviour of particular characters and the relations between them. Efremov suggested that, since the first act takes place in spring, it ought to be considered a period of hope, whereas the second act is set in winter, hence people seek to come together as they lack human contact, etc. [Efremov 2007: 350–354]. Despite his declaration that the element of mystery and allusion is important in Chekhov, the director and actors got bogged down in detailed discussions in relation to each and every statement and gesture, which ultimately resulted in quite simple generalisations. This approach, based around filling the gaps in what Chekhov had intended to say, is a consequence, it would seem, of being bound up in the traditions of early Stanislavsky, albeit a stereotypical version of his approach. Rejecting what he considered to be the “updated” interpretations of Chekhov carried out by Lyubimov and Nekrošius, Efremov consequently tended to idealise the world depicted by the dramatist.

We are not performing Vampilov here; we do not want to perform Chekhov in the way it is currently done. We need you [the actors] to discover the deep-seated stores of beauty present in each and every human being. If you do so then we will have a performance about the wonderful process known as life, rather than one about yearning for a better life. That can come later [Efremov 2007: 385].

This manner of staging Chekhov in Russia had for decades enjoyed the acceptance of the majority of audiences, who were accustomed to the “ideal” image of Chekhov in theatre. Efremov’s productions at the Art Theatre enjoyed great success, which was helped by the star-studded casts. Beyond the abovementioned actors, the productions also featured stars from the older generation, including Angelina Stepanova, Mikhail Prudkin, Andrey Popov, Innokenty Smoktunovsky, Evgeny Evstigneev, Anastasia Vertynskaya and Ekaterina Vasileva. At the same time, however, these productions faced criticism from certain artists. In 1990, for example, Anatoly Vasilev accused the Russian theatre of lacking psychological subtlety.

These wonderful plays lose their lightness when transferred to the stage, with the reason for this seeming to be that they had been written from a psychological perspective. They are heavy, indeed overburdened, with human life appearing over-naturalistic, lethargic, languid, lacking breath-

ing space, with no light emanating from it. [...] It is quite unbelievable, but two of Anton Pavlovich Chekhov's plays are being performed in Russian by two Western theatre companies. These have been the best productions of Chekhov in at least the last twenty years. I have in mind the productions of *Three Sisters* by Stein and *The Cherry Orchard* by Brook. Those two directors presented to Russian audiences what it really means to stage Chekhov, and showed them how it should be done. It is astonishing that the West has shown Russia how to stage Chekhov. It is not about Stein and Brook telling a great story through Chekhov. It is about how they did it. What we have completely lost sight of is the fact that how it is done, should be the most important thing [Vasilev 1990b: 19].

At a meeting at the Stary Theatre in Krakow [see notes taken during rehearsals of the performance: Dodin 2004b], Lev Dodin, the creator of famous productions of Chekhov in Russian theatre at the turn of the twenty-first century, including *The Cherry Orchard* (1994) and *Untitled Work* (i.e. *Platonov*, 1997),<sup>14</sup> in which he depicted a world being destroyed (thus making reference to the situation in Russia at the time), and also a version of *Uncle Vanya* (2003) that can be considered most faithful to the original drama, made reference to Brook's famous 1981 piece. Dodin noted, similarly to Vasilev some fifteen years previously, the astounding lightness and near-immateriality of Chekhov's protagonists as they moved about the near-empty stage.

In his own comments on Chekhov, Brook called for the greatest possible fidelity to the dramatist's texts, without, of course, sacrificing innovation as a director. He declared that each of Chekhov's words, indeed each and every comma and dash, ought to be maintained as faithfully as possible, since, in Brook's view, the punctuation contained the rhythm and tension of the dramatic works. Chekhov "searched for naturalness and desired that the actors become as transparent as life itself" [Brook 1997: 118].

Brook's reflections correspond with those of contemporary conceptual poet and performer Dmitry Prigov, who responded to the question of why it was so rare in Russia for the delicate substance of Chekhov's dramas to be preserved in stagings of his plays by stating that Russian productions are too literal and too material. Furthermore, according to Prigov, the problem lies primarily in acting. Chekhov's protagonists are aware, he argues, that they are on the edge, and so actors ought to speak

---

<sup>14</sup> The guest performances of the Little Drama Theatre in Poland took place on 22–23 January 2005 (National Theatre, Warsaw) and 26–27 January 2005 (Stary Theatre, Krakow). The meeting took place on 25 January 2005 as part of the Guests of the Stary Theatre cycle.



their lines as if they were treading on shaky ground beneath which there lies an abyss.<sup>15</sup>

In the hundred years following the premieres of Chekhov's dramas at the MAT, the question of how to stage Chekhov in order to retain the balance between the sphere of "inconsequential," realistic details and the realm of imagination and thought, while also finding a means to combine this attention to realist details with the ability to overcome ordinary *Sachlichkeit* [Bentley 1953: 354], thus achieving a uniquely harmonious communion of the specific and individual, on the one hand, and the general and timeless, on the other, has always remained relevant.

---

<sup>15</sup> I am citing Prigov's statement on the basis of notes that I took following a meeting with the Russian poet in Warsaw on 13 November 2004. Prigov was visiting Warsaw as a result of the opening of the Warsaw-Moscow/Moscow-Warsaw 1900–2000 exhibition.



# 5

## LEV DODIN – BETWEEN THE STUDIO AND A DIRECTOR'S THEATRE

### 1. Teachers. Legends

When asked about his teachers, Lev Dodin (born in 1944 in Leningrad) usually named two people: Matvey Grigorevich Dubrovin and Boris Vulfovich Zon. He emphasised that the former had been trained by Meyerhold, while the latter owed a great deal to Stanislavsky.

In describing his first master, Dodin pointed to two qualities – firstly, his exceptional pedagogical abilities, which manifested in his ability to create a climate of theatrical community while making his students aware that theatre could be a space of freedom. Thanks to Dubrovin,

theatre became a place for the kind of honest and serious discussion that is never possible in everyday life. Theatre transcended existence, while at the same time making it possible to understand so much of existence and the life around us. Although we never discussed politics with Matvey Grigorevich, we nevertheless understood that we inhabited a space completely different to that of our surroundings [Dodin 1999: 108].

His second major quality was that he was highly qualified as a director.

Furthermore, Matvey Grigorevich was an exceptionally talented director. I remember to this day his rehearsals, his exceptional sense of rhythm, which came into being during the course of the scenes he directed: during a rehearsal, a metronome would suddenly spring to life – not a real one but an internal one. What was not yet fully formed suddenly took on a clear shape and an internal vigour appeared. He was a slight, balding, large-headed and big-eyed Jew, slightly resembling both Mikhoels and Zuskin. And so he would enter the stage and start demonstrating something. And

he did so in a fantastic manner; immediately he would adopt ten different masks and everything became clear on stage. Completely unexpectedly, that which was leaden, unclear and empty (and often we were rehearsing some second-rate Soviet plays) metamorphosed into an astonishing spectacle. The effect would fade soon after that because none of us was able to repeat the demonstration. However, I have remembered well the ability to glide away into another dimension and make a scene out of nothing [Dodin 1999: 108].

Dodin met his second teacher several years later. "I got lucky a second time at the Theatre Institute because I met a wonderful master and pedagogue there, Boris Vulfovich Zon" [Dodin 1999: 109]. Zon was a student of Fyodor Komissarzhevsky,<sup>1</sup> who, in his adult years as a fully-formed artist, became a supporter, perhaps even a believer, of Stanislavsky's "system." The manner of Zon's conversion in relation to his aesthetic opinions is the stuff of legend. Dodin has given one account:

B.V., as we called [Boris Vulfovich], became a student of Stanislavsky in rather strange circumstances, which today are quite difficult to comprehend and appear highly idealistic. In the 1930s he trained quite a talented cohort of students, who staged several excellent productions. This is how the Leningrad Theatre of Young Spectators came into existence, while B.V. became its manager and the most popular person in the city. [...] And thus, given his status as a popular artist, he got to read the manuscript of Stanislavsky's as-yet unpublished book *An Actor Prepares* [initially called *An Actor's Work on Himself in the Creative Process of Experience*]. He was so struck by this book, which radically transformed his image of the theatre, that he travelled to Moscow and gained access to Stanislavsky. And then, for several years, until K.S.'s death, he would board the train each Thursday and travel to the exercises taking place at Leontevsky pereulok. He would then travel overnight on Sundays to return to his duties at his theatre on Monday [Dodin 1999: 112].

Thanks to Boris Zon, Stanislavsky's approach to the art of acting and actor training found supporters in a city where an aversion to the influence of the MAT was, by and large, commonplace. Dodin claims

---

<sup>1</sup> Fyodor Fyodorovich Komissarzhevsky (also known as Theodore Komisarjevsky; 1882–1954) – theatre director, teacher and theorist. Brother of the great actress Vera Komissarzhevskaya. Between 1906 and 1909 he was a director in her theatre. He was influenced by symbolism. In 1910 he moved to Moscow where he worked at the Nezlobin Theatre. He founded his own studio, which then became the Komissarzhevskaya Theatre. In his essays on theatre he also demonstrated an interest in contemporary philosophy and psychology, including Bergson's intuitionism. He left Russia in 1919 and, from 1939, lived in the USA.

that he learned a great deal from Zon as regards actor training. When asked to specify exactly the content of the experience Zon gained from Stanislavsky, Dodin was able to only give a vague answer. "The most important thing, as I see it, was trust in the individual human being, in the human personality, and in a strong personality" [Dodin 1999: 112]. There are, however, two radical proposals contained in this answer. Firstly, as Dodin himself rightly noted, the director's attentive, sensitive and indeed adoring attitude towards actors' individuality, was an exceptional trait in an era when the individual was considered important only as a member of the collective. Secondly, his fascination with the human personality translated into an understanding of the practice of the director as a metaphor of the task of a midwife: the director focuses on helping the actor "birth" a role.

While Dubrovin was active at the margins of the main institutions, working outside of official structures, Boris Zon was a representative of the respected Theatre School founded in 1779 in St Petersburg which, during the years that Dodin studied there, was called the Leningrad Institute of Theatre, Museum and Cinematography (LGITMiK). Today, it is known as the Saint Petersburg State Theatre Arts Academy. As a famous actor and respected director, Zon was regarded as an outsider in his role as a pedagogue by at least one student.

Zon was every inch the professional, he was highly disciplined and could appear somewhat dry and aloof. In an era of all-pervading spying, students reported him for his anti-Soviet attitude. Indeed, he was removed from the Institute and condemned to several years' unemployment without any perspective for a change in his situation. I met him when he was re-employed by the Institute following the 20th Party Congress. The title of professor in the old sense, one almost completely forgotten, suited him. Each year he ordered a new suit from a tailor in Tallinn where he also acquired a fresh supply of bowties... I remember clearly his first meeting with us, first-year students. He entered the lecture theatre in a snow-white suit – it was a rarity back then. And then he removed his jacket, beneath which he wore a pure white shirt, while throwing his jacket casually over some rickety chair. An artist [Dodin 1999: 108].

Zon must have been an exceptional individual since he was already an adult when he set off to Moscow to learn from Stanislavsky. As an outsider not belonging to the group of students anointed to transmit knowledge of the "system," he probably enjoyed greater freedom in constructing his own version of it. In the 1990s, Dodin again spoke of Boris Zon and presented the following version of the essence of Stanislavsky's practices that Zon had transmitted to him:

The final years of Stanislavsky's life have, as yet, been described only fleetingly and so they remain a mystery. These were years he spent re-considering his "system." Out of the strictly-defined method described in his books with the key concept being "the central thrust of action," "principal task," etc., and which, for many, forms the essence of Stanislavsky's "system," he discovered a logic of free experimentation, of the free life of the free human spirit – which is the most difficult thing to describe, and very difficult to investigate. Meanwhile, it was with experiments on these seconds of vital life that occasionally come into being in the course of rehearsal, that Stanislavsky busied himself in his space at Leontevsky pereulok [Dodin 1999: 111].

Dodin's narrative about his teachers touches upon issues concerning the transmission of traditions: how do the experiences of great predecessors enter the minds of successors in cases when there has been no direct contact between either? This form of transmission, with experience formed on a similar principle to the construction of oral histories, has been suggestively described by an artist representing a completely different field of theatre. In the Polish translation of his essay "Grandfathers, Orphans, and the Family Saga of European Theatre," Eugenio Barba notes:

A huge part of twentieth-century theatre, particularly of the second half, is inhabited by orphans who have created their own theatre without drawing on a direct heritage and thus have not been granted recognition by the "recognised" theatre. I come from this region of theatre [Barba 2003a: 17].<sup>2</sup>

Dodin's theatre was, of course, recognised by the "recognised" theatre. In the Soviet Union, lacking official recognition was the equivalent of not existing at all. In contrast to Eugenio Barba, however, who had no parents and thus made reference to his grandfathers, Stanislavsky and Meyerhold ("Orphans cannot invent parents for themselves, but they can invent grandparents," Barba claimed), Lev Dodin was never an "orphan." People such as Matvey Dubrovin and Boris Zon, his adopted parent/teachers, played the role of mediators between Russian directors of Dodin's generation and their great forefathers. At the same time Dodin, like Barba, stressed the great significance of other factors, including that of legend, particularly when it transcended the official cult, and books he had read. In his testimony, which was oriented towards the past by paying homage to his forefathers, as well as towards today's readers,

---

<sup>2</sup> The English version [Barba 2003b] does not contain an exact version of this quote, but similar sentiments are expressed.

particularly younger ones, Barba also attached great significance to the role of books in transmitting a legacy. In referring to Meyerhold, he attaches as much importance to his texts, which outline his programme for a revolution in theatre and his specific instructions regarding techniques as to those writings, which have received less attention from researchers, including his letters, memoirs and transcripts of conversations with students. Barba not only pays homage to books, doing so as a practitioner, but also recognises the role of legends and the intangible aura of the legends of theatre, which emanate from more personal, rather than documentary, records. He writes of his fascination with “the sense of adventure, of discovery” that accompanied his experiments and discoveries [Barba 2003b: 110].

Dodin recalls that, when he was founding his theatre, it was particularly important to follow “traditions drawn from teachers and books.” In an interview with Olga Egoshina, he noted that

[d]uring this period I read a great number of books about theatre. But now I read them less often. [...] In those years, the cult of Stanislavsky prevailed, which did not really lead to anything good since it was all done in a very Soviet way. But, on the other hand, young people need legends of some sort. They provide foundations, they inspire, and are an impetus to learning... I was fascinated by the legend of Stanislavsky. It was a legend full of significance and a human theatre, rather than a derided and buffoonish theatre. It should be said that we often encountered buffoonish, pitiful and largely impure forms of theatre. We had seen quite enough of it in our youth already. And this was then accompanied by various stories and rumours that circulated around the Theatre Institute. Boris Vulfovich would say, “These walls are full of the miasma of trivialities... This is the most anti-artistic place in the world.” Everything that we watched, with very few exceptions, contradicted what we had read in our beloved books: about relations between people, about the seriousness with which they approached their work. And all of this was crowned by the beauty of the building designed by Schechtel [the old MAT building at the Kamergersky pereulok], that home of theatre in which each and every metre had its purpose [Dodin 1999: 113].

The director's words disrupt the commonplace notion that the tradition of Stanislavsky was limited in the USSR to the “system,” and a deformed version of it at that, meaning that it was associated with the ideology of socialist realism. It turns out that Stanislavsky's tradition had another dimension to it: that of the role model. In 1956, Stanislavsky was not perceived as a politically engaged artist, which consolidated his position as an acceptable precursor (in contrast to Meyerhold, who, as a radical revolutionary and avant-garde artist, could arouse mistrust).

Dodin's statement can serve as a starting point for considering various approaches to the issue of tradition. Firstly, it is a personal testimony that informs us that Stanislavsky's legacy was of fundamental significance in his vision of theatre. Secondly, it can be considered in the context of questions about how traditions and legacies are transmitted in theatre when subsequent generations generally have no access to older theatre works. The very mention of the role of legends in theatre tempts the researcher into engaging with this controversial and unverifiable issue. Thirdly, and finally, the director's statement can be considered a starting point for discussing the relation between Russian artists of the mid-twentieth century onwards and the legacy of Russian theatre produced in the early part of that century. This is indeed a fundamental matter for anyone wishing to understand the culture of Russian theatre of the second part of the twentieth century – its successes and failures alike.

Lev Dodin claims that it has been his teachers who have acted as mediators of tradition throughout his life. However, the director's own memoirs, as well as those of friends from his youth, suggest that Matvey Dubrovin was important to him not only because he had been a student of Meyerhold (there is, in any case, not a great deal of information available about this, since his name never appears in publications about Meyerhold). As a charismatic pedagogue, he was able to transform the energy of adolescent youth into a passion for theatre and thus influence their choice of path in life. This is what happened with Dodin, who, while at the Youth Art Theatre (TYuT), experienced a revelation under Dubrovin, as his schoolmate, the famous film director Sergey Solovyov put it, with his fascination with the theatre having a precocious character from the outset.<sup>3</sup> Dubrovin was completely dedicated to the mission of education and created his own school of education through theatre. He organised summer camps, with older students working with children, while always encouraging independence. At the age of fourteen, Dodin, together with his colleagues, staged his first theatre production. Apart from lessons in theatre, Dubrovin was also socially active and, together with a female colleague, organised the Theatre Youth Club, to which he invited leading St Petersburg artists Georgy Tovstonogov, Arkady Raykin and Sergey Yursky.

Many years later, when he came to found his own theatre, Dodin placed great emphasis on actor training and not only in the general-

---

<sup>3</sup> Sergey Solovyov's memoirs were published in an anniversary publication marking Lev Dodin's 60th birthday [Dodin 2004a: 8].



ly-accepted form within the official structure of the Theatre Institute, but also beyond it: he took students out into the field and encouraged them to engage in unconventional methods of self-education. If Dodin continues to recall his teacher today, this is not merely a matter of courtesy; the history of their mutual relations could serve as inspiration for an essay on the role of teachers and pedagogues in the history of theatre (and not only theatre, of course). As Dodin himself suggests, he would not have become who he is had he not encountered Dubrovin along the way.

## 2. *Zachin* – Chronicle – Ikebana

Rehearsals at Dodin's theatre are a very long process. Legends abound about preparations lasting one or two years before a performance was ready. His core principle involves collective rehearsals involving the entire company. Each actor tests out several roles, seeking the most appropriate for him or herself.

Any actor is able to join a rehearsal if he feels the need or an irresistible urge to test out an unexpected move or new logic in connecting episodes. The energy driving this persistent improvisation is generated by the director himself by means of his persistent questions, asking "What if?," "And how about this?," "And what about?" – there is nothing here that could be called a director's plan or a rehearsal method,

wrote an eye-witness who observed Dodin's work in the late 1980s [Bazhenova 1993: 35]. In laying the foundations of his own pedagogy, the director opted to begin with the act of awakening the actor's own imagination. Starting with a particularly literary text, he worked with actors in such a way that they forged the closest possible contact with the world depicted in order to thus master "the nature of emotions" typical of a particular writer [see Bazhenova 1991]. The process of familiarisation with the author's world (at the turn of the 1990s, Dodin worked on adaptations of novels by Fyodor Abramov, Yury Trifonov and, later, Dostoevsky, and was perceived in Russia as a producer of epic theatre) began with the exploration of the historical-cultural context of a particular novel. This stage was accompanied by intensive reading sessions of the works of Dostoevsky, Chekhov, Pasternak and other Russian poets and philosophers, including Florensky, Solovyov and Berdyaev. In the course of work with students (some of whom would go on to join the company) on adapting Trifonov's novel *Starik*:

the entire cohort was “sent out” in search of knowledge. The working process involved the collection of various information “about the author.” This was a period of active reading, visiting exhibitions, listening to concerts, and meeting people. This entire mass of information, impressions and facts was to be appropriated, internalised, contemplated, and ultimately put into practice. Indeed, the act of putting it all into practice meant the transformation of information into the energy of actor’s means of expression in order for the actor to be able to operate in the world represented by the author. For this reason, the methodical internalisation of the material was of a theatrical, rather than literary, nature – it occurred through performance. Lev Dodin attempted to direct students’ imaginations towards the development of literary motifs by setting them a great variety of tasks. Various forms of individual creative activity were used: lectures, chronicles (diaries kept by actors), actions known as “preludes” and “ikebana,” free-form compositions, drawing, musical rehearsals, and other creative inventions. This whole constellation of tasks and exercises was an everyday component of the actors’ training [Bazhenova 1991: 112–113].

Exercises in awakening the actors’ imaginations, for example, were based on students taking all the information they had gathered on the French Revolution (Trifonov made reference to this idea) and expressing it in the form of a monologue: such individually-written and performed monologues were then woven into Trifonov’s narrative if it reflected the ideals, aspirations and interests that motivated the lives of the protagonists of the novel.

Similar methods were applied by Dodin not only in his pedagogical work. The first stage preceding the creation of each of his productions was also linked to intense reading, discovering the cultural contexts shaping the work of a particular author, and collecting information and turning it into a theatrical performance. The aim of these activities was for the actors to feel at home in the world represented in the novel, growing accustomed to its atmosphere and harmonising with the protagonists inhabiting it. One exercise that was a permanent feature in Dodin’s theatrical work was the “prelude” (or *zachin*), which opened each rehearsal, i.e. “free imagination, on-stage allusion, independent interpretation of the problems of the novel,” expressed in a free, theatrical manner. A “prelude” could serve various objectives not necessarily directly connected to the creation of a production. A prelude would take on a different form in the first stage of work on a future performance when the actors were concentrating on recognising the author’s intention and entering the world of the novel, and would be different again once work had begun on creating a stage version of the literary work. The author of an essay on training the imagination involved in work on adapting Trifonov’s novel

gives the following example of a “prelude” prepared during the second stage of work:

On stage there are two groups of birches bound in white bandages. There are people standing among the birches: one circle comprises “the dead” [victims of historical events], the other “the living.” Against a background of organ music, the leading protagonist of the spectacle delivers a monologue while at the same time removing the bandages from the trees, and forms a single circle using them. Movement begins as the people form a single large circle: one temporal sphere enters another [“the dead” mix with “the living”]; human voices can be heard; isolated responses become a passionate argument. Eventually the bandage circle is broken and the “prelude” transforms fluidly into a rehearsal [Bazhenova 1991: 114].

The significance of this and other exercises, which demanded common action, was based on understanding the central motif of Trifonov's work: “the motif of the connection of each human being to everything that was taking place on earth” [Bazhenova 1991: 115]. The “preludes” thus came into direct contact with Trifonov's historiosophical ideal, which presumed the subordination of individual human existence to history. In training exercises conducted at Dodin's theatre, each “prelude” created the context for subsequent rehearsals.

It would seem that the greatest strength of a prelude, beyond the central objective of awakening the imagination, is the mobilisation of actors to engage in intellectual effort, creating an individual connection to a particular novel or drama. Like other twentieth-century theatre directors who created their works through collective theatre, Dodin challenged himself to find ways of sparking his actors into action. Nearly all of the outstanding directors who created their own programmes in theatre, searched for ways of reconciling two elements of the creative process: the director's personal inventiveness and the actors' own initiative.

Contemplating the permanently fluid relations between absence and presence in acting, Peter Brook stressed the role of exercises that developed a sense of rhythm, tempo, timbre, a good ear, collective thinking, and critical consciousness. He stressed that such exercises ought not be applied through a strict method, since doing so would result in actors failing to increase their interest in the questions posed by art:

What they [such questions] can do is increase the actor's concern – in body and in spirit – for what the play is asking. If the actor truly feels this question to be his own, he is unavoidably caught in a need to share it: in a need for the audience. Out of this need for a link with an audience comes an equally strong need for absolute clarity [Brook 1987: 66].

Dodin has headed in a similar direction in his work, at least in terms of the relations between director and actor, rather than the director's approach to the text. What links him to Brook's views is his belief that strict methods ought to be avoided in working with actors. If we speak of training at Dodin's theatre, it is in the sense of a fluid set of exercises, which together make up actor training, with these exercises always intended to contain new impulses in order to stimulate the actors' imagination. We should add, as an aside, that linking Dodin and Brook is hardly a random association. Each director has, separately, expressed mutual admiration for the other's activities. On Dodin's seventieth birthday, Brook presented the following outline of the essence of the Russian director's attitude:

He has mastered a mass of art forms, sciences and crafts, which enables him to breathe life into performances and attain the moment of true theatre. As an artist he has never been a slave to old, worn-out traditions. He has the courage of an innovator as he searches, takes risks and experiments [Brook cited in Dodin 2004a: 39].

Another element of training in Dodin's theatre are exercises known as *latopis*, or chronicles and diaries. The actors' daily chronicles were transformed into oral performances, with the actors creating "lyrical" summaries of the previous day that could encompass both the private sphere (for example, meetings with other people), as well as social aspects (including political events), and mention ongoing work on theatre productions. Such lyrical performances could take on any form: poetic, musical, prose or theatrical. At the same time, as part of their daily activities, the actors contemplated the visual aspects of the upcoming production. In the course of rehearsals for *Starik*, "the students created spatial compositions from objects, costumes and props," making reference to the epoch in which Trifonov's novel is set. Such compositions, formed around a particular idea, were termed "*Ikebana*" [Bazhenova 1991: 117].

In his work with actors, Dodin has been inspired by a belief in the necessity of gaining greater insight into the literary material of the performance being prepared. There have been precursors to Dodin in this respect, including Stanislavsky and Vakhtangov, with the latter believing that each literary work being prepared for performance demanded a different working method, hence actors should create a new system of rehearsals each time around. Such rehearsals should contain elements of internal and external psychotechniques, which would then enable the gradual revelation of the nature of the future performance.

### 3. Home. Brothers and Sisters

Without doubt, the strong point of Lev Dodin's theatre lies in his revival of the idea of collectivity. Dodin brought new life to the idea of the theatre-as-home. The Maly Drama Theatre's own "prelude" was the work Dodin began in 1977 with a cohort of students, led by Arkady Katsman, on the diploma piece *Brothers and Sisters*, based on Fyodor Abramov's novel of the same name. That year's cohort of actors joined Lev Dodin's company after he took over as manager of the Maly Drama Theatre in 1983. As he began rehearsals for Abramov's epic,<sup>4</sup> Dodin decided to turn to the tradition of the MAT and make use of Stanislavsky's discoveries. Indeed, he never concealed his source of inspiration, which was also obvious to Russian critics.

Dodin attempted to rescue not only the external form of the "theatre-as-home," but also the innermost essence of the theatrical ideology that was rooted not in the MAT of the 1930s but in the non-state "association" that was constituted by the pre-Revolutionary Art Theatre [Smelyansky 1999a: 270].

This old idea reflected yearnings and desires that emerged in the course of the 1970s, a period in which the hopes of "fixing" socialism were dashed, and social apathy and alienation prevailed. This situation generated a desire to create a type of theatrical asylum in which Dodin could realise his own artistic and personal programme.

Fyodor Abramov came to Dodin's aid through his epic work depicting a rural world which, in spite of the degradation caused by collectivisation, the tragedy of war, poverty and hunger, still appeared to be a bastion of long-established, traditional values. Abramov's peasant tetralogy depicted the fate of the Pryaslin family, who led a troubled existence during and after the war. It should also be noted that Abramov's novels were part of a broader trend for rural prose that was particularly visible in the 1960s and 1970s, which stemmed from the idea of a return to the roots within a particular conception of neo-Slavophilism. This movement saw an opportunity for the moral revival of the country in the rural population who were unspoiled by civilising efforts and remained authentic in their humanity. The leading figures in this strand of literature – besides Abramov – were Vasily Belov, Sergey Zalygin, Boris

---

<sup>4</sup> *Brothers and Sisters* (*Bratya i systry*, 1958) – a novel by Fyodor Abramov about life in the village of Pekashino (located in the northern territories of Russia, the homeland of the writer himself) during World War II. This was the first part of an epic cycle also including *Two Winters and Three Summers* (*Dve zimy i tri leta*), *Byways and Highways* (*Puti-pereputya*) and, finally, *Home* (*Dom*).

Mozhaev and Valentin Rasputin. The literary works of these writers were read as critiques of a system that promoted civilisational and industrial progress at the expense of villages, while also rejecting traditional (read: religious) values. Rural prose also proved attractive during this period for theatre. The most famous productions at the Taganka Theatre included a version of Mozhaev's *Alive* (*Zhivoy*, 1968), which featured the protagonist Fyodor Kuzkin, who was typical of this entire strand of literature (and the performance was ultimately banned by censors), as well as *Wooden Horses* (*Derevyannye koni*, 1974), based on Abramov's novel. In contrast to Lyubimov, for whom the above productions were single voices in the polyphonic structure of the Taganka Theatre's repertoire, Dodin made Abramov's rural novels the very foundation of his theatre. The titles of two works staged, *Brothers and Sisters* (student premiere 1978; premiere at the Maly Drama Theatre, 1985) and *Home* (*Dom*, 1980), contained metaphors useful in realising his own vision of the theatre-as-home – a brotherly and sisterly theatrical community.

His interest in rural prose also had another practical effect. Lev Dodin reached the conclusion that young trainees, who generally came from urban backgrounds, would be unable to play peasants unless they became acquainted with rural life, work and customs, and also encountered the peasant mentality and dialect. And it was at this point that the experiences of the "old" MAT came in useful, particularly from the period of preparations for the production of Gorky's *The Lower Depths*, when Stanislavsky and his actors, accompanied by the painter Simov, were led by the writer Gilyarovskiy on a visit to the Khitrov Market in order to peer into the very depths of the lives of "ex-people."<sup>5</sup> Dodin's application of the ideal of empirical investigation of "complex circumstances" meant that the entire cohort taking part in rehearsals for *Brothers and Sisters* also participated in an excursion to Abramov's home village in northern Russia. This and subsequent trips have become the stuff of legend in Russian theatre, with the actors living in peasants' houses, working alongside locals, listening to and transcribing their stories. Fyodor Abramov, who was living in Verkola at the time, noted in his diary entry for 19 August 1977:

A most glorious, joyous day! And to whom do I owe this sense of joy? The students of the Leningrad Theatre Institute. For seven hours they sat at a table in one of the cells of the local monastery by gaslight. They spoke of Pineda and Verkola, about local people, then they sang, before

---

<sup>5</sup> This experience has been described colourfully and with great verve by Stanislavsky [1952: 395–397].

speaking again. And so it was for seven hours, from five until twelve. [...] I am not sure what will come of this, but I am certain of one thing: this will be a sincere and pure performance [Fyodor Abramov's diaries cited in Dodin 2004a: 24–26].

Despite being inspired by the specific task of investigating the realities described in the novel, Dodin's project became part of a broader context: excursions in search of the sources of traditional cultures were a trend among theatre groups in the 1970s around the world. In 1972, Peter Brook took a thirty-strong group on a three-month trip to Africa. In 1974, Eugenio Barba and the Odin Teatret went on their first trip – to southern Italy – which was followed by several further excursions, including a visit to South America. The Gardzienice Theatre was founded in the year 1977, and from the outset, this group, led by Włodzimierz Staniewski, embarked on a series of expeditions in search of “the new natural environment of the theatre.” These are the most famous examples. Of course, each example should be explored separately. Dodin primarily searched for a way to make the future work of his actors believable and fill developing performances with life, while also recovering the moment of vital on-stage truth. He likely found what he set out in search of, since his rural expeditions resulted in two productions that brought the director and his young company recognition first in Russia and, soon afterwards, around the world.

## 4. The Soviet Epic

On the fifteenth anniversary of the premiere of *Brothers and Sisters* (which, it should be noted, is still in repertory today), the famous Moscow theatre critic and writer Anatoly Smelyansky published an article in *Moskovskie novosti* titled “A Soviet *Mahabharata*” [Smelyansky 2000 (reprinted 2002c)], in which he pointed out the shared traits of the work of Dodin and Brook, including the dominance of epic elements over the dramatic. The extensive running time (Dodin's work was eventually edited down to six hours from the initial seven) meant that Maria Shevtsova, the British author of a book about Dodin, placed *Brothers and Sisters* in the context of other mega-shows also created in 1985, including, among others, *Mahabharata* and Ariane Mnouchkine's work about Norodom Sihanouk. Shevtsova, however, also drew attention to the fundamental difference between the Western directors' works and Dodin's production: whereas Brook and Mnouchkine turned their attentions eastwards, Dodin remained firmly rooted in his own Russian historical and cultural contexts [Shevtsova 2004: 22]. Brook

sought to transcend cultural barriers by casting actors from all parts of the world in his plays, while avoiding transferring European categories into the Indian epic as a means of creating a supposedly universal language that could communicate a universal message. Dodin, however, created a reality in his production that was influenced by the time and setting of the Soviet novel he was staging.



**Fig. 5.1.** Scene from an adaptation of Fyodor Abramov's *Brothers and Sisters*

Abramov's peasant saga did not possess epic qualities in the classic understanding of this term. This was the case not only because the content of the novel did not hark back to legendary origins where the heroes would also be the original fathers, founders of a tribe. The lack of traditional epic traits was primarily the result of his novel avoiding a closed-off "absolute past," separated from the present because of an impenetrable barrier. Bakhtin wrote that:

[b]oth the singer and the listener, immanent in the epic as a genre, are located in the same time and on the same evaluative (hierarchical) plane, but the represented world of the heroes stands on an utterly different and inaccessible time-and-value plan, separated by epic distance [Bakhtin 1981: 14].

Abramov, meanwhile, depicted the recent past that remained present in the memory of the nation, which is why audiences received the reality represented in his work as part of a common history with which they identified, and in which they recognised the "salt and pain of our earth" [cf. Dmitrevskaya 1986].

Depicting the lives and times of several families, focusing on the Pryaslins and their neighbours in Pekashino during the war and immediate post-



war years (1945–1949), Abramov's novel depicted people denied the right to individual history. Their behaviour was determined by the "spirit" of the age and the state's interests, which appropriated history, leaving no space for the human individual. Comparing the Soviet saga to the ancient Indian epic is not completely justified. If the key term for the *Mahabharata* was *dharma* – a higher, cosmic order that is also an individual set of values belonging to each individual together with the entirety of holy ritual and custom duties [Ziółkowski 2000: 279–280] – then *Brothers and Sisters* spoke of people who were denied these holy ritual foundations in their everyday life and had had their connection to the cosmic, supra-historical and timeless order taken away. Yet even here, in this Soviet village, that reality was given voice in defiance of everything, albeit beyond the consciousness of the protagonists.

For it should be stressed that Abramov's novel (like other works in the rural strand of Soviet literature), while not in any sense an open critique of the system, did undermine the idea of its inviolability, permanence and durability by confronting it with nature. The cyclical changes in nature linked to the seasons revealed the powerlessness of the system in the face of nature. What made Abramov's novel exceptional against the backdrop of socialist realism and schematic Soviet literature of the earlier decades, was that it gave voice to thinking rooted in an old order and in the traditions of predecessors. Cracks appeared in this poor, hungry and degraded reality, penetrated by the remains of an old ethos, while a moral, human reflex sometimes took precedence over the party's orders.

In this on-stage chronicle of the lives and times of the village of Pekashino, Dodin attempted to identify, as far as possible, the world represented on stage with the reality that manifested itself in the here and now, together with the realities of wartime and post-war Soviet villages. The intended effect was achieved through a precisely-developed form and by introducing into the thread of the performance various props that played the role of "testimonies and mementos" of the lost reality.

Donkey jackets and *valenki*, patent leather shoes come by during the war, tried on once the foot wraps are removed [...], the smell of the warmed up birch brooms with which Mikhail and Egorsha resurrect their exhausted bodies, a loaf of bread shared in a ritual in many portions in order to celebrate the memory of a killed father, the Esenin-style tuft on Egorsha's head, and the iron teeth of Ganichev's representative – all of this was necessary in order to melt the prose into a moving theatrical performance [Smelyan-sky 2002a: 75].

## 5. Eduard Kochergin – “a Wooden Metaphor of Russia” and the Truth of Mementos from the Past

The stage design for *House* and *Brothers and Sisters* was created by Eduard Kochergin.<sup>6</sup> His contribution to the creation of both performances was certainly significant given that Kochergin had first-hand knowledge of the Russian north. In the 1960s, during his private expeditions, he had made his way into Russian villages, initially in the Pskov and Novgorod

---

<sup>6</sup> Eduard Stepanovich Kochergin, born in 1937 in Leningrad, had an exceptional biography: along the maternal line, he is related to the noble Polish Odyniec family. Following his mother's arrest he was raised in children's homes, from which he regularly escaped. As a fifteen-year-old, with the experiences of a “homeless” childhood now behind him, he was accepted into a specialist art-focused middle school before commencing his studies at the faculty of set design of the Leningrad Theatre Institute in 1956. He had outstanding teachers both at the Institute itself (including Tatyana Bruni, a well-regarded Leningrad set designer), as well as beyond it. Kochergin stresses that he owes the fundamental elements of his education to his contact with Georgy Moseev, a student of Vladimir Dmitriev (one of Meyerhold's collaborators). As a set designer, he gained recognition following his contributions to Lev Dodin and Georgi Tovstonogov's productions (including the legendary *Story of a Horse* (1975), based on the writings of Lev Tolstoy). The list of directors with whom he collaborated includes: Ruben Agamirzyan, Kama Ginkas, Genrietta Janovskaya, Mark Rozovsky, Yuri Lyubimov, Sergey Yursky and Efim Padve. He has won numerous prestigious prizes in Russia and around the world, including at the Prague Quadriennale and at the Triennale of Set and Costume Design in Novi Sad. His drawings, sketches and designs for costumes and decorations have been presented in numerous individual and collective exhibitions, including at the famous Contemporary Gallery in Warsaw, run by the Boguckis, in 1976. He emphasises that pedagogy has been an important aspect of his activities: since 1983 he has led the Theatre Set Design Workshop at St Petersburg's Repin Institute of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture. He is a professor and member of the Russian Academy of Fine Arts. He is also recognised for another of his talents: he is a wonderful speaker and teller of extraordinary stories. In his short stories, initially published in literary and theatre monthlies, before being collected in the volume *Angelova kukla* (*The Angelic Puppet*) that has now been through several editions, including a German translation, he described his childhood and youth, the Russian north, and his home town, which he knows like the back of his hand both from the side of official theatres and intellectual salons, as well as the criminal underground and various dens of iniquity hidden in dilapidated and overgrown old parks. He owes his knowledge of Petersburg not only to twists of fate, but also thanks to regular research he conducted himself. In his youth, he spent four consecutive summers penetrating this northern metropolis with the help of an old map, street by street, house by house. He familiarised himself with the city's urban planning principles, got his teeth into architectural details, explored the histories of inhabitants, and observed their habits and customs. Kochergin's short stories resemble the forgotten twentieth-century genre of “physiological sketches” – their value cannot be overestimated as they describe the aspects of life in post-war Leningrad that were hidden from view. See Osińska 2004a; Koczergin 2004.

regions, before heading to the Russian north, which he traversed on foot and using waterways. He brought back various sketches and drawings from the region, in which he depicted rural cottages, rooms, ovens, wells and furniture. He also brought back various small domestic items and tools, which were mementos of the forefathers of the peasants from whom he had purchased the objects. He was interested not only in the architecture and landscape, but also in how people lived. The experiences he gained during these expeditions helped Kochergin complement the director in the realisation of his plans. Thanks to his abilities and indeed passion and love for rural Russia, Kochergin became the ideal collaborator on the production, and undoubtedly introduced a great deal of freshness to it. Thanks to his inventiveness he created an on-stage image full of meaning and emotion. In *Brothers and Sisters* he positioned two mobile perches to the side of the audience, which served to open up or close off the stage space. At the centre of the stage was a wooden screen made of simple, jagged logs that resembled the wall of a rural room “which had somehow become suspended in emptiness. This wall/screen, wall/earth, wall/raft – a wooden metaphor for Russia,” wrote Anatoly Smelyansky [2002a: 338]. Kochergin’s wall was compared to David Borovsky’s famous curtain in *Hamlet*. In both cases, functionality went hand in hand with metaphorical significance. The wooden surface could change its function freely. For example, it served as the screen of a mobile cinema.

**Fig. 5.2.** Eduard Kochergin, photograph by Katarzyna Osińska



The screen made of logs came alive with scenes from a wartime film chronicle, while from the radio there came a familiar voice with a Georgian accent. Stalin was addressing the Soviet nation, but rather than “comrades” he was speaking to “brothers and sisters.” The former seminary student had recalled the Bible at a critical moment and changed the nature of the discourse about it. Then the wooden “screen” moved upwards, while a group of people looking into the distance appeared before our eyes. Cut. A slogan paused. From a distant epoch, from the past, those same “brothers and sisters” gazed at us [Smelyansky, 1999a: 259].

After this, the hungry peasants were shown the propaganda comedy film *Cossacks of the Kuban* by Ivan Pyryev on the screen. The screen transformed into the room’s ceiling, floor and ground, etc.

Kochergin’s visual image for the performance – a wall made of rough, shoddily-cut logs, two poles serving as gates and, finally, all the above-mentioned “real,” authentic objects – those mementos of the past – styled the performance, whose essence could be found in the combination of the abstract and the material, metaphor and literalness, myth and history. The lives and times of the inhabitants of Pekashino were presented by Dodin within a framework of ritual symbolism. A good example is the image of the first post-war crop sowing, “when the women, illuminated by beams of light, poured out of the darkness towards the audience, while each movement of their arms brought new life to the soil” [Smelyansky, 1999a: 260].



**Fig. 5.3.** An adaptation of Fyodor Abramov’s *Home*, directed by Lev Dodin, set design by Eduard Kochergin, Maly Drama Theatre, 1980. Igor Ivanov (Egorsha) and Tatyana Shestakova (Liza)

Dodin referred both to original pagan rituals and Christian symbolism, while also blurring the boundaries between them. The appearance of bread, seeds, water and soil was not only of symbolic significance, but also created the material, sensual and corporeal thread of the performance. In one of the scenes, the intertwined, twisted bodies of the women, deprived of contact with men for years, created an image of a “massive human body or sunflower” pointed towards the sun, begging for life-giving energy.

The director himself stressed that, in aiming to render the represented world more believable, he had to create a theatrical reality that resembled real life but was expressed in a different, “non-life” form, hence the crucial significance, in his view, of the combination of authenticity and abstraction in Kochergin's designs for the stage [statement from Lev Dodin in *Proza* 1987: 316]. What was also essential, Dodin added, was:

the concreteness of each and every movement, even the very smallest. It is for this reason that water, bathhouses and authentic grain were so important to us. I am convinced that we have lost the ability to build physical existence on stage, that which Stanislavsky called physical wellbeing. Everything we do is overly abstract, we do not know what warmth is, what extreme heat is, what cold or warm water is – all of this is abstract. And yet the greatest spiritual truth begins at the level of the actor's nervous system, while the truth of the “nerves” begins with a response to even the very smallest physical impulse. It is for this reason that we need water, grain and bread on stage. Without the truth of water, the truth of washing, could not exist, etc. It is in these most simple concepts, in these specifics, that the greatest sense is hidden [*Proza* 1987: 316].

## 6. Corporeal and Vocal Realism

Dodin and Kochergin's approach to the issue of realism on stage, both in staging and set design, as well as in the actors' performances, proved to be fundamentally revolutionary. It should be noted that Soviet theatre, in contrast to its proclaimed realism (which, in the Stalinist era, was accompanied by the adjective “socialist”), essentially had little in common with realism understood as the depiction of the laws that rule reality, while also being deprived of its corporeal element. During the Stalinist period it was more a case of “simulating” the desired reality and a great deal has already been published about this, with some even arguing that socialist realism could be seen as a forerunner of postmodernism since it produced “simulacra” and virtual realities [see Epshteyn 2000]. Even if such views are deemed controversial, and the changes that occurred

in Russian culture after the collapse of Stalinism are acknowledged, it is nevertheless difficult to ignore the fact that, in seeking to imitate real life, theatre almost never “lowered itself” to the material and corporeal level. The Soviet understanding of materialism, based on the primacy of ideas, led to the “absolutisation of the concept of matter, while at the same time expressing complete disregard for experience in relation to matter in its concrete and tangible manifestations” [Epshteyn 2000: 28]. It is for this reason that, in Soviet art of the Stalinist period, at least the part that enjoyed official approval (Andrey Platonov’s writings, for example, are excluded here), the corporeal base, was evidently eliminated in favour of the profound “peaks,” i.e., ideology.

It was typical that the most interesting phenomena in post-Stalinist Soviet theatre were manifestations of the triumph of abstraction, theatricalisation, and the art of constructing on-stage metaphors (in the works of the Taganka Theatre, for example) or psychological realism, which assumed that human behaviour was determined primarily through psychological experiences rather than physical conditions (which was evident, for example, in the works of Anatoly Efros). Dodin’s theatre did not produce an explosion of corporeality or a triumph of Bakhtinian material/corporeal essence. Yet, in *Brothers and Sisters*, he transformed ways of thinking about theatre, by moving it away from a domain concerned exclusively with form, ideas and “spirit.” It should also be noted that the introduction of material/corporeal elements into a play about a Soviet kolkhoz was so innovative that critics could not find the right words to describe its impact on the rural epic. Following the premiere, the generally impressed critics pointed to the sense of truth that emanated from the performance without, however, stating exactly where this feeling came from. Theatre studies scholar Vidas Silunas claimed that “the Leningrad performances showed how theatre could be renewed and revived by connecting to some as yet undiscovered realms of reality” [statement by Silunas in *Proza* 1987: 308]. On the other hand, literary critic Zinovy Paperny wrote about “feeling a deep penetration of the layer of life,” noting the lack of imagery and decorativeness in the creation of the image of the home in the performance *Home* [*Proza* 1987: 308]. And yet it was only Konstantin Rudnitsky, who was endowed with an exceptional level of perceptiveness, who got to the core of the matter in his description of one of the plots of the performance:

What made the greatest impression on me was the figure [...], whom I would call the village idiot. Such saturation with pain and truth, concentrated in this figure who was present in both parts of *Brothers and Sisters*, has never before been seen on our stages. [...] I am impressed by the daring which

accompanied the selection of this particular figure from among the rural community, with this village idiot, as was also the case with the holy fools in Pushkin [in *Boris Godunov*], having no obligation to speak in the name of history and thus able instead to simply represent – in the most vital, **physiological** [emphasis – K.O.] embodiment – the concentration of irreversible human misfortune. This daring indicates the courage and honesty of the direction [*Proza* 1987: 309–310].

Rudnitsky also drew attention to the presence in the text of such semantically-differentiated elements as metaphor, choreography, documentary, as well as the literalness of mud, dust and pain [*Proza* 1987: 309–310].

It was also significant that, in achieving this truth effect in relation to Soviet wartime and Stalinist-era villages, which received so much approval, actors appearing to be “non-actors” were used, as theatre studies expert Aleksey Bartoshevich put it [*Proza* 1987: 313]. They were, he said, largely young people who possessed an ordinary or even quite banal appearance. This is quite an apt remark. The faces of Natalia Akimova, Sergey Vlasov, Sergey Bekhterev and Petr Semak recalled those of ordinary people. They are not the highly memorable faces of stars, but rather those of people of whom there are many.

The path leading to the actors reaching this deep on-stage truth involved navigating a great deal of work on words – what proved essential here were the experiences gained in the course of the expeditions to Abramov's native village. During rehearsals, lasting many months, the actors honed their intonation of “the unique northern dialect.” The pedagogue Valery Galendeev, a specialist in stage diction, worked with students on the phonetic and linguistic level of the performance (we should remember that these were students who producing *Brothers and Sisters* as their diploma piece). During the course of the exercises the students discovered

the harmony of full vowel-sounds (if there is an “o” then it is an “o,” a “u” is a “u” – all said in full voice),<sup>7</sup> they penetrated the acoustic secret of the hard “g” (it is spoken as it is written, so *chego* rather than *chevo*), they learned how to joyfully combine [consonants] that hummed with those that hissed into some new form of music. [...] The young men and women who came from the cities appropriated the dialect, turning it into a linguistic mask; they found courage and discovered unknown potentials in themselves. Thanks

---

<sup>7</sup> In the Russian language, non-stressed vowels undergo reduction, hence the word *moloko* (milk), which is stressed on the final syllable, is pronounced *malako*, with both “a’s” effectively shortened (the first more than the second) and not fully enunciated.

to their penetration of the authenticity of language, in one move they overcame the distance separating them from the people and their misfortunes. They adopted this fate and these misfortunes, and passed them through their own bodies [Smelyansky 2002a: 335].

It is worth adding here that a similar strategy was adopted by Peter Brook in his work on the Ik language, as he sought to identify the actors with the protagonists. In Brook's work, an equally central role in the process of making the message appear real was played by the experience of the African expedition, as well as inviting Colin M. Turnbull to collaborate. An author of books on the Ik people, Turnbull "taught the actors many expressions from the Ik language" [Ziółkowski 2000: 232].<sup>8</sup>

Dodin differed from Brook, however, in that he did not belong to the group of theatre artists who were "infected by ethnology," as Leszek Kolankiewicz put it [see Kolankiewicz 1991]. Dodin was not interested in coming closer to the sources of traditional culture and seeking out the "Other" in it. The village he depicted was a Soviet village from which any direct traces of cults or faith had been effaced. And yet it was only with this kind of community that Russian spectators could identify in a sense of fraternity, with "this earth that we have known so well, which has moved us to the core with its poverty and eternal truth that grows from untruth" [Dodin 2004a: 116]. Dodin's performance space enabled the formation of a deep bond between the spectators, performers and protagonists. There was even a certain familiarisation of the protagonists in the audience's reception in that they identified the actors with the characters they were playing (for example, Petr Semak was for a long time identified with Pryaslin).

Lev Dodin did not shy away from depicting the dark sides of life in a society that was condemned to poverty, hunger and bondage. In spite of this, however, he still sought to produce an affirmative representation of humanity in this cruel and even inhumane reality. The premiere performance took place on the eve of perestroika, with this new age that encouraged working through the past enabling a better appreciation of the director's courage. He had begun work on the production many years before the political changes, which was something that was noted and appreciated. In the abovementioned discussion, the theatre critic and

---

<sup>8</sup> Ziółkowski notes: "It is also not a matter of chance that the assistant on this production [*Les Iks*] was Yutaka Wada, the Japanese director, who had studied Stanislavsky's technique for many years in the USSR" [Ziółkowski 2000: 232]. Thus the origins of this approach to the problem of identification, both in the case of Dodin as well as Brook, were identical yet there were fundamental differences in the outcomes of this work.



historian Marianna Stroeve reflected the views of many contemporary audiences.

This production is not only a phenomenon in the theatre world. It is an event of social, civil, political and moral significance. [...] In this spectacle we see the entire tragic image of a people that survived the war and the post-war years of poverty, taking their story almost into the present. The director shows no fear, he acts courageously. He has not only set a new standard of theatricality but also a new standard for our spiritual life, since there was no way of speaking so openly before about the life of the nation [Stroeve in *Proza* 1987: 311–312].

Konstantin Rudnitsky, meanwhile, as someone blessed with exquisite taste and thus unwilling to engage in exaltation, claimed that he received Dodin's production as one of the most important events in his life. As he watched it, he forgot about the professionalism expected of a critic, since "the most important thing [about the spectacle] is its mixture of anger and joy, the happiness of knowing that the truth has been told and the pain of knowing that this is the truth" [Rudnitsky in *Proza* 1987: 310].

The success of Dodin's work in Russia was down to the fact that he undermined the idea of a higher necessity that justified the bondage of humanity, while also avoiding extreme pessimism in his judgement of human beings. Even if they behaved dishonourably, his protagonists always appeared human, with this fact aided by the dedicated, spontaneous acting and tangible personal relations with the protagonists depicted. And what was most significant for audiences was that the director did not erect barriers between them and the stage, thus enabling spectators to come closer to the reality depicted and thus perceive it in an engaged and emotional manner. Over time, however, the interpretation of both pieces, according to some critics, underwent significant corrections. One critic noted that, following the premiere, he interpreted the spectacle as a history of "the destruction of people by a regime that seemed to be a plague and disease brought upon this village by winds that thrust rubbish into the air," while in 2000, fifteen years on, he saw in this same work a history "of a people, from the depths of which each despotic and long-lasting regime emerges, including Soviet rule" [Smelyansky 2002a: 336]. This same critic noted that, even in this collective nation, which accepts that life in "an anthill" is inevitable, it is nevertheless possible to maintain a level of humanity.

The absence of unequivocal condemnation and the ability to depict life, even as it was then – in all its complexity – was almost certainly connected to the epic form of the work. Dodin was able to avoid a closed

construction while simultaneously maintaining the traits of a work open to multiple interpretations. The director was, after all, aware of the strategies he employed. Speaking of the unwillingness with which he presented his two pieces to audiences in Moscow, who he believed “start clapping before the end of a performance because they know where the end should be,” Dodin explained that

[t]hings carry on after the point where we have become accustomed to putting a full-stop. Here [i.e. in Moscow] there is a need for theatrical works that are easy to decipher. Meanwhile, one dreams of a theatre that cannot be so easily digested and understood, while desiring one that consumes you: you live in it, you go on a journey with it [Dodin in *Proza* 1987: 317–318].

With his two productions, Dodin satisfied the needs of a particular moment. *Home* and the initial student-based version of *Brothers and Sisters* were created in the mid-1970s, among the cracks appearing in the monolithic Brezhnev-era state. These cracks could not be fully controlled and thus heralded the erosion of the system.

There were thus three factors that combined to generate the exceptional success of the Maly Drama Theatre’s rural epic. Firstly, the themes of the performance – the painful past, effaced from consciousness, which had not been worked through or integrated but instead constituted an open wound. It should also be noted that, in some parts of society in the 1980s, a readiness had emerged to come to terms with the dark aspects of history. Secondly, the epic form of the spectacle which was open and challenged the established views and judgements of the audience, enabled spectators to freely move about the performance space and experience it personally (*Home* and *Brothers and Sisters* served, to some extent, as therapy sessions). The third, and final, factor was the youth and engagement of the company of actors.

## 7. Collective or Community?

The company of the Maly Drama Theatre (MTD) first toured in the West in 1988, performing in Glasgow and at the London LIFT festival, where it presented *Stars in the Morning Sky* by Aleksandr Galin, a play about Moscow prostitutes interned on the eve of the summer Olympics, that the company had first performed in Leningrad in 1987. That same year the group also made a transatlantic trip, visiting Toronto and New York. A year later it performed *Brothers and Sisters* at the Paris Autumn Festival, which marked the start of Lev Dodin and his theatre’s triumphal march around almost the entire globe, from Japan to the USA. The success of

the artist and his company was undoubtedly aided by the historical and political circumstances of the time: the late 1980s, the opening of the Iron Curtain, and the beginnings of perestroika, all of which produced great interest in Russia in all of its forms, from politics to culture (the West, particularly Germany, France and Italy, witnessed the phenomenon of "Gorbymania," a peculiar cult of Gorbachev; as an aside, it was in these three countries that Dodin's works were best received). After years of isolation, the West could finally confront its memories of the great Russian art of the early twentieth century with the contemporary age. During this period, a great number of Russian theatre artists and companies caused a furore in the west, including Anatoly Vasilev, who staged Slavkin's *Cerceanu* and Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* at the same festivals and in the same countries as Dodin. By 1991, Dodin's theatre was already accepted into the elite company of the Union of Theatres of Europe. The director himself, meanwhile, was awarded Europe's most prestigious theatre prize, the Europe Theatre Prize/Premio Europa per il Teatro in 2000. He was, and remains, received in the West as a bona fide member of the international theatre Areopagus.

**Fig. 5.4.** Scene from an adaptation of Sergey Kaledin's *Gaudeamus*, directed by Lev Dodin, Maly Drama Theatre, 1990



Months of touring the world meant being absent from home, with this absence almost becoming the norm by the time Dodin accepted offers from theatres in Germany and France for him and his company to work on new productions for Western audiences. And so it was that, in 1990, the premiere of *The Demons* took place in Brunswick (Braunschweig), Germany. At the MC93 Theatre in Bobigny, near Paris, Dodin worked on the new productions of *Gaudeamus* (1992) and *Claustrophobia* (1994), while the premiere of his *Cherry Orchard* took place in 1994 at the Odeon

in Paris. It was during this period at the turn of 1990s, as the Maly Drama Theatre was enjoying great success abroad, that a series of publications appeared in Russia, which undermined the artistic value of the theatre's achievements. The year 1992 saw the publication of the first issue (numbered zero) of a new monthly theatre journal, *Petersburgsky teatralny zhurnal* (*Petersburg Theatre Journal*) which featured a substantial block of texts dedicated to the subject of Dodin and his theatre. It began with an article by the editor-in-chief Marina Dmitrevskaya, whose title was taken from the translation of the first line of the Latin hymn *Gaudeamus igitur*: "Let us rejoice, therefore/ While we are young" (*Dlya veselya nam dany molodye gody*). This was, of course, a reference to the company's latest production, which used this line as its subtitle. The production was a free translation for the stage of Sergey Kaledin's 1989 novella *Stroybat* (*The Building Battalion*). All of the critiquing articles, including Irina Boykova's "Lost paradise," presented the view that Dodin and his theatre were taking the wrong path and that, from their current viewpoint, they cannot see Russia, have lost contact with it, and yet they seek to speak about it. The director faced accusations that he presented an exaggerated, dark and indeed repugnant image of Russia in the final years of socialism. There was even a suggestion that Dodin was meeting the expectations of the West by exposing Russia's "dirty laundry" abroad. What caused the greatest outrage was that his home country was represented as a cesspit. "The protagonists, shaven-headed recruits, ran onto the stage and fell, one by one, into drilled holes, rubbish pits and manure," wrote Dmitrevskaya [1992: 6]. Stressing Dodin's tendency to construct total metaphors, she juxtaposed the metaphor of the home, which was carefully crafted in Abramov's dialogues, with the metaphor of the barracks (the country as a jail) in *Stars in the Morning Sky*, and especially the metaphor of the rubbish pit and cesspit in *Gaudeamus*. "From these holes matchboxes were fired upwards, as if they were a gun salute, containing analyses of soldiers' faeces, with all this accompanied by the soldiers' song *Ya, ty, on, ona – vmeste tselaya strana* (*You, me, him and her – that is our whole nation*)" [Dmitrevskaya 1992: 6]. Dmitrevskaya concluded emotionally:

For many years Dodin assured us that our life, like our pain, is shared. And then, gradually, starting with *The Lord of the Flies*, through *Stars in the Morning Sky*, he distanced himself from that life, before stating explicitly in *Stroybat*: "That is all yours: your life, your mud – not mine" [Dmitrevskaya 1992: 9].

Other accusations followed, this time encompassing Dodin's entire oeuvre, both as director and teacher. Dmitrevskaya and the other authors demonstrated that Dodin was failing in his duties as a pedagogue and head

of a theatre company; that the production of *Gaudeamus* failed to give opportunities to young actors (the actors, lacking individual characteristics, carried out the tasks imposed on them from above by the director); that the older MDT actors (those from *Home* and *Brothers and Sisters*) had not been given any new roles for years on end, and were thus denied the opportunity for artistic development; that Dodin had become a tyrannical director who limited his actors and forced his own agenda upon them. Irina Boykova claimed that this apodictic tendency of imposing a “rigid” staging structure on productions was already evident in *Brothers and Sisters* from 1985 and that, even by then, Dodin had begun to lose the traits that made *Home* a success: withdrawing his own agenda as a director and leaving it up to the actors to make the piece organic. What was typical of all of these attacks on him, was the extension of the present-day critiques into his past achievements and undermining those elements of his theatre that were previously presented as ideal models, namely the continuation of the studio ideal or the use of certain pedagogical methods, such as keeping diaries and sharing those observations, which were not necessarily related to art, with the director and the rest of the company. Marina Dmitrevskaya saw this approach as a legacy of Soviet totalitarianism, although this accusation appears petty or even slanderous.

Dodin, meanwhile, who declared his 1992 production “a musical fantasy that gives a metaphorical take on nationalism, which was threatening to disorientate society,” stated that *Gaudeamus* was based on improvisation by his actors, who did not deny this claim. It should also be noted that *Gaudeamus* was already the second production prepared by the director in collaboration with a cohort of students, with first-year students and extras participating in it as well. The novella *Stroybat*, with its dark image of the Soviet army, was a metaphor for society as a social melting pot “in which the human individual, *homo sapiens*, becomes a two-legged creature known as *homo sovieticus*” [Smelyansky 2002a: 182]. It provided an opportunity for creating a theatrical extravaganza, an improvised performance and a student’s “Guignol,” whose participants danced and played various instruments, thus turning the description of terrible realities into a jolly funeral for the Soviet empire. *Gaudeamus* was connected to Dodin’s other works staged in the late 1980s and early 1990s by way of the subject of utopia and socialist practices,<sup>9</sup> with *The Demons* featuring a prophetic nineteenth-century vision, while *Home* and *Brothers and Sisters* transferred it to the collective farm. *Gaudeamus* presented

---

<sup>9</sup> Marina Davydova drew attention to this aspect of Dodin’s theatre in her book *Konets teatralnoy epokhi* [Davydova 2005a: 98].

an extreme image of collectivism in the army, along with the 1994 piece *Claustrophobia*, which depicted life in the so-called era of stagnation of the 1970s. It was based on motifs taken from contemporary Russian writers including Vladimir Sorokin, Lyudmila Ulitskaya, Mark Kharitonov and Venedikt Erofeev. What interested Dodin was not so much a critique of the system but rather an analysis of the phenomenon of collective society. In a certain sense, his production of Golding's *The Lord of the Flies*, where manipulation was a central theme, also made reference to this, as did a much later work, *Chevangur*, which premiered in 2000 and was based on Andrey Platonov's novel of the same name.

It is difficult to find in the Russian mentality a clear differentiation of the concept of community, which refers to "common" roots, and the concept of collectivism. In the abovementioned spectacles, conflict between the individual and the collective did not occur. In *Brothers and Sisters* collectivism is, to some degree, a natural state for those who experience it. By depicting the dark side of life on Stalinist-era kolkhozes, Dodin illustrated the suffering of the entire collectivity in which everyone is a victim to some degree, even those representing the authorities. In presenting the problem in this manner, he incorporated all audience members into the performance space to some extent. This ritual of unification of both spectators and protagonists within one joint circle enabled all those present to relive the experience of Stalinism; indeed, they experienced and survived it, without engaging any critical distance towards that period.

In *Gaudeamus*, on the other hand, Dodin showed a collective image of life in a manner that made it impossible to identify with it. If the Soviet village depicted in *Brothers and Sisters* aroused empathy, it was because this image comprised particular people with their particular fates. In *Gaudeamus*, however, spectators were presented with an image of the collective in a kind of "pure" form, i.e. the military, which is collective by definition. A barrier appeared between the stage and the audience. For many Russians, Dodin's ghostly image of a collectivity in barracks, deprived of individual traits – as emphasised by the identical uniforms and shaven heads of the actors – was unacceptable.

We should also note that the attitude of the Russians towards the Stalinist past evolved after 1986. In an article on this subject, the Italian historian Maria Ferretti used sociological research alongside a rich collection of press, literary and film materials, to distinguish three stages in Russians' search for identity and the role of memory in this process. She considered 1986–1990 the first stage and a period of painful reintegration of Stalinism into social memory (during this period, Russia saw a flood of publications on Stalinist-era repressions). The second stage,

between 1990 and 1995/96, saw the beginning of a purge of Stalinism from collective memory in parallel to a process of reinterpreting the Revolution and idealising pre-1917 Russia. If Stalinism was treated as a deformation of the Revolution after 1956, then by the time Dodin staged *Gaudeamus* it was increasingly considered a continuation of it. From this perspective, condemnation of Stalinism was equal to the condemnation of Bolshevism in general, with many more people holding the view that Bolshevism was the act of a small group of individuals, with the idea imported from abroad, and thus it was essentially a phenomenon alien to Russia. Ferretti attributed this gradual purge of Stalinism to the impact of the shock caused by the emergence of knowledge of mass repressions. In the late 1990s (Ferretti's article was written in 2000 and first published in 2002), a third stage began, signalling the construction of a new, official vision of history. It was composed of two apparently contradictory elements: the myth of tsarist Russia, and a revised myth of the Stalinist era. The starting point for the construction of this new official history became the search for positive moments from the past that would prove capable of strengthening collective identity. A central fact enabling the rehabilitation of the Stalinist era was the Great Patriotic War and Stalin's victory over German invaders [Ferretti 2003].

Lev Dodin's stage adaptation of Vasily Grossman's *Life and Fate*, premiering in October 2007, was polemical in relation to the official version of history outlined above (in very broad strokes).

## 8. *Life and Fate* – the Director and History

Around the time of the premiere, the director gave many interviews in which he explained the motives behind his efforts to bring this several-hundred-page novel to the stage, while also giving an indication of his working processes on the production, as well as speaking of the initial reactions to the work in Russia and also in the West (the European premiere took place at the MC93 Theatre in Bobigny, on the outskirts of Paris). Dodin stressed that his main motivation for taking on Grossman's novel was his bitterness at the Russians' failure to grant the book sufficient recognition.

It is the great Russian and European novel of the twentieth century – in Europe it is indeed treated as a European novel. It has not been read as it ought to have been, nor has it been recognised sufficiently either with regard to its artistic or historical significance. It is simply unbelievable that we are able to remain indifferent towards such things! [Dodin 2007].

It thus seems that it was Dodin's wish to settle scores with that part of Russian society which was no longer inclined to confront its own past that drove him to select this particular work for staging.

In Poland, this work by Vasily Grossman (1905–1964) was largely unknown until recently.<sup>10</sup> It has, however, often been compared (in exaggerated terms) to Lev Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, written one hundred years earlier. Grossman's work takes on the subject of the individual confronted with the dual totalitarianism systems of Nazism and Stalinism. Grossman was a war reporter (embedded with the Red Army when, for example, it liberated Treblinka), and draws parallels in his work between both systems, depicting them in their historical dimensions, as well as from the perspective of individual human fates. Completed in 1960, the novel was denounced and "interned" by the KGB. A surviving copy was smuggled into the West, enabling the work to be published for the first time in Switzerland [Grossman 1980]. It was first published in the Soviet Union during perestroika [Grossman 1988].

Lev Dodin created an adaptation of this novel with multiple plots by focusing his production around Viktor Shtrum and his family. His fate, as a renowned atomic physicist and employee of a prestigious institute in Leningrad, saw him initially persecuted (the theme of anti-Semitism, important to the novel and the performance, is evident here) before being pardoned by the authorities. Shtrum's experience is that of a man who is broken and comes to betray the principles that he holds dear: in the finale, Shtrum signs an open letter against a colleague accused of anti-Soviet activity. Different narrative strands lead from Shtrum to the other protagonists, who represent a broad spectrum of attitudes, ranging from communist "believers" through sceptics, to those who have lost their faith, as well as those who could never be convinced by anything (in the camp one of the protagonists claims that all the prisoners were rightly there because of their misdeeds and only he is innocent having been brought to the camp by chance). There are also zealots, as well as cautious, overwhelmed, indifferent and cowardly individuals.

The premiere of *Life and Fate* was preceded by five years of preparations involving students from the Petersburg Theatre Academy, with the final version ultimately featuring, alongside these young actors, Dodin's

---

<sup>10</sup> Excerpts from the novel, translated by Tadeusz Gosk and Anita Tyszkowska [Grossman 1989b], and Jan Gondowicz [Grossman 1989a], were first published in Polish in the monthly *Literatura na Świecie* in 1989; the first full edition of the book appeared in 2009 in Jerzy Czech's translation [Grossman 2009]. The first English translation by Robert Chandler was published in 1985 by the Harvill Press, London [Grossman 1985].



long-time collaborators, including Tatyana Shestakova and Sergey Kuryshchev. As had been the case in the past, likewise in this work the director set the young actors a series of mental and educational challenges. First, they had to read the entire nine-hundred-page novel and then familiarise themselves with other books, documents, as well as Russian and European literature on twentieth-century history. A further important stage in this work were the joint expeditions to sites of genocides in Norilsk and Auschwitz. One of the actors recalled: "We arrived in Norilsk where it was minus forty. We passed work sites where people were labouring in such temperatures in cotton clothes and without gloves. In Auschwitz, meanwhile, we were even able to conduct a rehearsal." It was the first time that these young participants of productions were able to face the issue of genocide and mass terror in such a direct manner, with some experiencing shock. During these five years, hundreds of studies were produced as work on adapting the novel continued. It is difficult to assess what portion of the actors' initiative found its way into the final piece, and in what circumstances this occurred.

In the adaptation of *Life and Fate*, all the episodes in the lead protagonist's life, and those of his nearest and dearest, as well as the collective scenes, were constructed in such a way so as to present the broadest possible image of the age when freedom was denied. Dodin was able to combine into a single whole both the space/time of historical events, as well as the theme of eternal human passions, where love intertwines with hate, fear with wickedness, and courage with betrayal. The scenes all flow into one another, entangling and overlapping: a love scene takes place, while at the same time, next to the lovers' bed, a camp scene begins with prisoners in their donkey jackets. Dodin avoided creating sharp distinctions between private and collective, social and historical spaces, although the individual episodes are presented on differing planes and with different lighting. The private scenes in Shtrum's flat took place under a warm, yellow light, whereas cold white lighting was used to illuminate the prisoners in Buchenwald and Norilsk. The director created a common space for both stories: the small-scale individual history and the grand-scale collective history. The figure linking both spheres was Shtrum's mother Anna Semyonova (played by Tatyana Shestakova), who was a slight, older woman, who read out letters addressed to her son that were essentially addressed to us, the audience. Her character introduced the theme of the ghetto and the Holocaust.

Through the device of simultaneously producing overlapping episodes and the spheres of both small-scale and grand history, Dodin managed to depict a world from which the individual is excluded and escape is impos-

sible. What appears on stage is an undoubtedly poignant image, although the audience remains on the outside. The problem was that the history shown at the level of the reality experienced by the individual, and also the collective, was depicted in a manner that imposed particular interpretations. While the protagonists are not unambiguously black and white, and do evolve, the director nevertheless strongly emphasised his message, for example, persistently repeating the scene of Shturm's euphoria after receiving a telephone call from Stalin, with this intended to represent the commonplace nature of the cult of the individual. Many of the scenes were depicted in a schematic manner in order to provide illustrations of human attitudes. Dodin also presented stereotypes of anti-Semitic behaviour. What we ultimately see, then, is the schematic equation of two totalitarian systems. The stage is cut in two by a diagonally-positioned net, with the prologue featuring a group of young people playing volleyball. It soon becomes clear, however, that the net is made of metal, with the world of Stalinist gulags and Nazi concentration camps hidden behind it. On both sides of the net is a mirror image of prisoners in Soviet and German camps, who are played by the same actors, while this similarity is reinforced by both groups singing the same serenade by Schubert during rollcalls. In the finale, Anna Semyonovna and the brass orchestra all end up in the gas chambers, with the prisoners standing behind the net completely naked while holding their instruments in front of them.

Dodin's message is clear. The Holocaust did not take place in a vacuum but was born of anti-Semitism, which was also a Russian trait. The Soviet Union created a totalitarian system involving the active participation of communist ideologues. Dodin also touches upon the issue of collective responsibility: the Stalinist epoch cannot be viewed from the perspective of a clear and unambiguous divide between victims and perpetrators; the co-creation of the oppressive system emerged either from ideological zeal or from human weakness (it took one call from Stalin for Shturm to be seduced before ultimately being broken).

The director does not hide the fact that it was his intention to ensure that spectators confronted history. He accuses Russians of not facing up to their own past, including its dark sides. However, by imposing a single perspective on such a complex and traumatic issue, Dodin probably did not achieve his goal – i.e. he was preaching to the converted, with those not already convinced remaining deaf to his message. Indeed, he confirmed this view when offering his own assessment, recalling, for example, the Norilsk premiere:

The audience was divided – on the faces of some there was emotion; on the faces of others – gloom. The latter would prefer to hear nothing and

see nothing, since in Norilsk the gulags remain a taboo subject. There were even cases of quite aggressive attacks against me, although I am a thick-skinned individual when it comes to that. By contrast, a number of former prisoners came to us behind the scenes. I remember to this day a beautiful eighty-five-year-old woman coming to us with a thick file of materials about herself.

The power of *Brothers and Sisters* and *Home* was to be found in the fact that the director did not judge the past and did not condemn human attitudes, but instead showed their full tragic complexity as people confronted both history and nature. The weaknesses of *Life and Fate* came from the director adopting an accusatory stance. In this performance, discourse clearly dominated the narrative. The sequence of events, relations between the protagonists and the entire world shown on stage, were all subordinated to a discourse that outlined the director's stance. As the creator of the stage production and interpreter of the novel, the director subordinated the performance to his version of events, which was to form an unambiguous message. Despite the actors working during the preparatory period in a system encouraging the creation of studies that should have given them freedom to determine the sequence of events, the entire production was ultimately subordinated to a strict directorial structure. In spite of being based on an epic novel, *Life and Fate* lacked epic qualities as a theatre production. "What you see before your eyes is not an epic, painter's canvas, but rather a sketch of the twentieth century drawn by a skilled hand," wrote one critic quite accurately, while stressing the fact that the adaptation of this sprawling novel was contained within a performance lasting barely three and a half hours [Sitkovsky 2007: 5]. This sketch-like dramatisation of the novel always faced the danger of falling into the trap of simplification. Dodin's theories, extracted from Grossman's novel, are admired by many Russians (as the reviews of the production showed), yet the performance itself does not arouse emotions to the same extent that *Brothers and Sisters* or *Home* once did. The path leading from those works to *Life and Fate* reveals the evolution of Dodin's ideas on theatre, shifting from his conception of it as a "home," with its references to its roots in a studio, to a theatre where the director is dominant. Within the context of art at the turn of the twenty-first century, where open-ended works that shy away from unambiguous messages prevail, Dodin's productions of the past twenty years (or most of them, at least) appear to be examples of theatrical traditionalism that harks back to the concept of the integral work, which had a strong presence in the USSR, and suggested that all the elements of a production should be subordinated to a top-down predetermined ideal.



## 6

# ANATOLY VASILEV – AN INNOVATOR IN DIALOGUE WITH TRADITION

## 1. Roots

Anatoly Vasilev, born in 1942 in the village of Danilovka of the Penza Oblast, is a trained chemist. During his studies at the university in his home town, he ran the students' theatre, and it was there he first encountered the dramatist Viktor Slavkin, who was associated with the popular Moscow studio *Nash Dom* (Our House). After graduating from university and completing his military service in the Soviet naval fleet, he began a degree in directing at Russia's most famous theatre school, GITIS in Moscow in 1968. His teachers included Maria Knebel<sup>1</sup> and Andrey Popov,<sup>2</sup> who both

---

<sup>1</sup> Maria Osipovna Knebel (1898–1985) – actress, director and teacher. She has presented her thoughts on and experiences in pedagogy in several books, the most of important of which are: *Slovo o tvorchestve aktora* (A Word About the Actor's Art [Knebel 1954, third edition: Knebel 1970]), *Vsya zhizn'* (The Whole Life [Knebel 1967]), *O tom, chto mne kazhetsya osobenno vazhnym* (On What I Consider Especially Important [Knebel 1971]) and *Poeziya pedagogiki* (The Poetry of Education [Knebel 1976]). These books contain not only extensive reflections on the subject of the analysis of drama and roles, but also portraits of the greatest actors connected to the MAT. Maria Knebel was herself an outstanding character actress and she attached great significance to the expressive potential contained in the voice, the eyes, and the actor's gestures. What is interesting is that she also listed Stanislavsky as a character actor. There are eye-catching photos in her books, featuring close-ups of the eyes and mouths of MAT actors, as well as of Stanislavsky's hands. Knebel also served as the academic editor of and provided the introduction to the first Russian edition of Mikhail Chekhov's collected writings (1986; second amended edition 1995).

<sup>2</sup> Andrey Alekseevich Popov (1918–1983) – actor, director and pedagogue. Son of Aleksey Dmitrievich Popov (renowned actor and director associated with the First Studio of the MAT and, later, with the Vakhtangov and Revolutionary Theatres, among others). He made his debut at the Red Army (from 1951 – Soviet Army) Theatre, and remained associated with it for many years as both director and actor. In 1974, he transferred to

had an MAT background and were successors to Stanislavsky. Knebel had also been trained by Mikhail Chekhov. In interviews and in his written texts, Vasilev has made regular reference to his genealogy, mentioning his teachers and stressing that the most important figure of reference in his pedagogy and experiments in acting was Stanislavsky. He does so despite, since the very outset of his journey in theatre, always having gone beyond the model of a theatre inseparably bound to the legacy of the MAT, namely psychological realism. Since at least the mid-1980s, he has stressed that, in his theatre, he is not interested in history, social obligations or psychology. When asked in 1995 about the essence of his approach, he replied:

The essence is based on a change in the subject of the experiments; what is explored is not the state of the soul but the position of the soul, so to speak. The action occurs where the word is, rather than where the psyche is. [...] Because theatre is manifested in the word [Wasiljew 1997a: 96].



**Fig. 6.1.** Anatoly Vasilev, photograph by Katarzyna Osińska

Furthermore, describing verbal actions, i.e., training actors in enunciating texts – including hexameter-based exercises, Vasilev already then (and this would become a recurring issue) stated that it was impossible to fully eliminate the methods of psychological acting.

---

the MAT while also serving as the lead director at the Stanislavsky Theatre in Moscow, which he attempted to reform. In order to realise this goal, he invited three young directors, and former students of his, to collaborate – Anatoly Vasilev, Boris Morozov and Iosif Raykhelgauz. Between 1968 and 1983 he worked as a lecturer at GITIS. He also acted in films.

What we are studying now [...] are the mutual relations between verbal and aesthetic actions.<sup>3</sup> We have thus suspended studies into psychological actions, although we recently had to return to them, since it turned out that we were lacking in techniques and craftsmanship at the level of such actions. And with this everything becomes barren. [...] We have been engaged in reviving the method of psychological experience because otherwise nothing works. The new cannot work without the old. I understood this when working on Dostoevsky – this was not the case with Moliere – when spheres appeared that demanded a connection to the practices of psychological realism [Wasiljew 1997a: 98].

**Fig. 6.2.** Anatoly Vasilev, photograph by Katarzyna Osińska



<sup>3</sup> Between 1994 and 1995 Vasilev worked with his actors on works including Dostoevsky's *Uncle's Dream* and Moliere's *Amphitryon*.

Anatoly Vasilev was not only trained by Stanislavsky's successors, but also took his first steps as a director at the MAT, where, as a trainee (supervised by Oleg Efremov), he staged Osvald Zahradnik's play *A Solo for a Striking Clock*. This production featured senior MAT actors who still remembered the age of Stanislavsky – Olga Androvskaya, Mikhail Yanshin, Mark Prudkin and Aleksey Gribov. The set design was created by Igor Popov, who continues to collaborate regularly with Vasilev.<sup>4</sup> This was followed by three more productions (one of which was prepared together with Efremov), all with set design by Popov, as well as a radio play of Oscar Wilde's *The Portrait of Dorian Gray*, which featured Innokenty Smoktunovsky, one of the most renowned Russian actors of the second half of the twentieth century, as well as Maria Babanova, Meyerhold's legendary actress who played Stella in *Le Cocu Magnifique*. Vasilev was, by this point, already placing significant emphasis on the audio aspects of performances, particularly the way actors enunciated a text.

In 1977, Vasilev began working at the Stanislavsky Theatre in Moscow, having been invited to take up a post there by his former teacher and the theatre's artistic director, Andrey Popov. The following year he staged an adaptation of Gorky, *Vassa Zheleznova. The First Version*.<sup>5</sup> This spectacle was considered a ground-breaking piece of theatre in the 1970s by many Russian spectators. Anatoly Smelyansky wrote:

In *Vassa Zheleznova. The First Version*, the voice of a director representing a new generation could be heard. Its manifesto was expressed in this performance primarily through the method of analysing the drama, which suggested that the director had abandoned his domination of the text. The explorations took place at "the level of life," looking at all those countless small details that make up the fabric of life. Two decades of struggle against generic directing [...] had eliminated such approach to the text. Directors had come to appropriate texts quickly, running the rule over them for social issues before giving them a general message. In seeking generalisations, directors lost the ability to conduct "free readings" that explored all the byways and highways of a drama. Performances were typified by a tiresome schematism. Ideas were not always taken up by actors, who had lost the initiative [Smelyansky 1981: 329].

According to this critic, the situation of yearning for "vital life" on stage led to a discussion in the late 1970s on the position of actors who

---

<sup>4</sup> Igor Popov died in 2014 [editor's note].

<sup>5</sup> Gorky wrote this first version in 1910, but it was the later version from 1936 that was performed in the USSR. It was Anatoly Vasilev who saved the first version from oblivion.



had been subjected to the pressures of directorial theatre. Vasilev was thus a man who managed to unite, on equal terms, the will of the director with the initiative of the actors.

It does seem, however, that this final remark fails to capture the essence of the breakthrough he effectuated. What seems more important is the role of those “small details” – particular elements of behaviour and particular situations.

The presence of actors was founded upon a significant number of small, lightning-fast reactions and changes in the sphere of actions and mood. As a result, an illusion of the psychologically complex life of the protagonists, filled with atmosphere, was created [Bogdanova 2007: 51].

During this period, then, Vasilev did not abandon psychological theatre, although he did turn to other methods of achieving on-stage authenticity, beyond those employed by the majority of his contemporaries. The concept of “the theatre of atmospheres,” which he developed years later, became an indicator of another important source of inspiration whose roots could be found in the work of Mikhail Chekhov.<sup>6</sup> In *Vassa Zheleznova*

the relations between the performers were so close that the actors began emanating a kind of energy, an atmosphere. Audiences had an almost physical sensation of it, although it was of course an intangible phenomenon. It is naturally understandable that this form of subtle theatre required long rehearsal periods, while also demanding that this atmosphere be maintained. It was for this reason that Vasilev continued rehearsals for *Vassa* after the premiere,

wrote Polina Bogdanova [2007: 29]. The director himself stressed that atmosphere was always connected to the concept of the bio-field, and that it could thus be created as the result of relations or tensions emerging between the actors or between the actors and the audience.

It seems to me that what we have here is a higher grade of psychological theatre; a particular form of theatre in which relations are created at the level of “radiation.” For a long time now, we have not limited relations in theatre to the textual level, but have instead spoken of action and even dialogue understood as action. It is certainly only now, however, that such a time has come that we can speak of relations in theatre at the level of atmosphere. The theatre of atmospheres – this is the most developed form of psychological theatre [Bogdanova 2007: 58].

---

<sup>6</sup> It was Mikhail Chekhov who constructed his method through an analysis of what constitutes atmosphere – both in the working process and in the performance itself. See M. Chekhov 1995: 176–185 (“Atmosfera,” a subchapter of the study *O tekhnike aktyora*).

In an interview with Polina Bogdanova, given three years after the premiere of *Vassa*, i.e. in 1981, Vasilev revealed other inspirations for his theatrical works, this time film-related. He analysed the differences between films whose structures were based on drama and those that were free of dramatic influences (such as Aleksey German's *Twenty Days without War*). It was during this period that Vasilev began to speak of "the open-loop space of reality," which was also the title under which the interview was published [Vasilev 2007], as he compared the closed dramatic structure with the open structures typical of New Wave films, for example.

Vasilev stressed his heritage at every opportunity and did not stop at what he had gained from theatre school, although he also did not undermine the authority of that institution. In declaring the need for psychological art, he distanced himself from the theatre being made in the 1970s, preferring instead to locate himself in Stanislavsky's field of influence and the MAT tradition. In contrast, however, to the previous generation of artists, who were driven by the need to overcome the ossified model of Stalinist-era theatre by turning to the tradition of the early MAT and seeking models from the past without fundamentally re-evaluating them (which was the case, for example, with Oleg Efremov), Vasilev treated the legacy of Stanislavsky as the starting point for his own experiments. He did not, however, dismiss traditional views, since he felt greater affinity to a strategy of "gradual modification of traditional norms" [Shils 1971: 151]. A further stage on this journey was his search for open structures, with Viktor Slavkin bringing him succour with two dramas, *The Adult Daughter of a Young Man* (*Vzroslaya doch' molodogo cheloveka*) and *Cerceau*. The first of these works premiered 1979 at the Stanislavsky Theatre, while the second was staged in 1985 at the Taganka Theatre, with Vasilev invited to work there by Yury Lyubimov, having been driven out of his own theatre, together with two other young directors.

A clarification is crucial at this juncture. Vasilev belongs to a generation of Russian artists lacking their own generational experience. Artists born in the early 1940s, such as Lev Dodin, Kama Ginkas, Valery Fokin and Vasilev himself, functioned from the outset within their own theatrical micro-worlds. In the 1970s, as they made their directorial debuts with the Soviet model of culture heading towards collapse, each of them searched for their own way of escaping the impasse of ossified forms and structures. In the case of Lev Dodin, the novels of Fyodor Abramov brought a sense of revival and stimulated the search for inspiration in pure sources located far from urban civilisation, i.e., in villages. Vasilev's production of *The Adult Daughter* signalled a return to the thaw

**Figs. 6.3. – 6.4.** *Vassa Zheleznova. The First Version*, directed by Anatoly Vasilev, set design by Igor Popov, Stanislavsky Theatre, 1978, photograph by Viktor Bazhenov



of the 1950s, although not to the atmosphere of “thaw-era” enthusiasm; instead, it was the climate of the artistic underground of that period with *stilyagi* and jazz, which was semi-prohibited at the time, that prevailed.

This cultural moment has been described in Viktor Slavkin’s book, which appeared soon after the premiere of the performance. It is a collage of fragments of the performance combined with press clippings from the 1950s, caricatures of *stilyagi*, photographs of the production, and interviews with its creators. The cover of the book, titled *Memorial to an Unknown Stilyaga (Pamyatnik neizvestnomu stilyage)*, features a typical photomontage: Ella Fitzgerald surrounded by pupils from a Soviet ten-year school [Slavkin 1996]. Whereas for Slavkin jazz was one of the subjects of the play (its original title was *A Stilyaga’s Daughter*), for Vasilev Duke

Ellington's jazz standard *Chattanooga Choo-Choo* inspired the mode of working on the spectacle, where improvisation played an important role. Vasilev did not seek a sentimental return to his own youth in Slavkin's text, which instead became a site for formal experiments. He found in this piece, which has never been staged again since, an open dramatic structure enabling explorations in the search for new relations of space and time. Igor Popov, as set designer, and Gennady Abramov, as choreographer, were also involved in creating the production.

Work on Slavkin's *Cerceau* began in 1982, with rehearsals lasting three years and involving renowned actors from various Moscow theatres, as well as film actors (some of whom had previously collaborated with the director): Lyudmila Polyakova, Boris Romanov, Albert Filozof, Yuri Grebenshchikov, Natalia Andreychenko and Aleksey Petrenko, as well as rock and jazz musicians Boris Grebenshchikov and Aleksey Kozlov. The set, comprised of a wooden suburban dacha placed on an empty stage, was created by Igor Popov, who, by this point, had become a regular collaborator of Vasilev. Two years after the premiere, the company headed off on a European tour, which resulted in international recognition for Vasilev.



**Fig. 6.5.** Viktor Slavkin's *Cerceau*, directed by Anatoly Vasilev, set design by Igor Popov, Taganka Theatre, 1985, photograph from the programme. Left to right: Natalia Andreychenko, Aleksey Petrenko (standing), Dmitry Shcherbakov, Boris Romanov, Albert Filozof, Yuri Grebenshchikov and Lyudmila Polyakova

Critics, and not only those in the West, drew associations between *Cerceau* and the dramas of Chekhov, particularly his *Cherry Orchard* (in both works the action ends with the departure of the protagonists and windows and doors being boarded shut). The protagonists, all contemporary forty-somethings (bar Nadya, who was younger), have no bonds and meet at the dacha. The chance encounter increases each person's sense of

isolation. Critics wrote that the subject of the performance was the search for some sort of common ground – the soil, the home, the past or history. In the second act, the protagonists read letters from the old days discovered at the dacha, while drinking tea from an old tea set. Nadya put on her grandmother's old dress before they all started playing a forgotten game, which symbolised the erasure of the pre-Revolutionary past from collective memory. They played *cerceau*. Another hidden theme of the performance was the transcendence of the greyness of Soviet life and poverty of everyday existence with its artificial and faked sense of social community that existed only on paper [Bogdanova 2007: 138]. However, this journey into the past, as well as the experience of the beauty hidden in this wooden house and its old objects, failed to transform the protagonists. The lack of conflict in producing a resolution to this situation was what Vasilev found most interesting in *Cerceau*, and what enabled him to develop his experiments within the framework of an open structure. However, human weakness in the face of faded beauty became the starting point of reflection upon the imperfections of the contemporary world. "Contemporary human beings lack the strength to live according to ideals. They abandon their homes, their native soil, their *cherry orchard* – they leave behind this beauty. They cannot cope with it" [Vasilev 1990a].

We should also add here that, when the play was being created in the early 1980s, the Soviet Union was experiencing a rising degree of disenchantment with reality and a growing sense of impermanence, typical of the end of an era. This perspective of "decline" underscored the sense that only the past had firm foundations. In this period Vasilev turned to the Silver Age of Russian culture, finding in it forgotten sources of the Russians' spiritual condition. In contrast to the people of that era, contemporary human beings were, in his view, characterised by division and internal conflict. It was during this period that he openly discussed the need to transcend the conflict taking place on the psychological level. During work on *Cerceau* Vasilev began to leave psychological realism behind, making the assumption that it had served its purpose. He reached the conclusion that the period of psychological realism was a relatively short epoch in the history of Russian theatre culture. "It was the 'non-psychological' artists who were a problem for Russian theatre. The lives of Mikhail Chekhov and Evgeny Vakhtangov, Aleksandr Tairov and Vsevolod Meyerhold were too short and lacked successors" [Wasiljew 1997a: 100]. He did not dismiss Stanislavsky's "system," although, from this point onwards, he did use it as a base for transcending the limits of a theatre focused on everyday concerns and psychological conflicts. He began experiments in acting methods that would enable him to lay down the foundations of a "theatre of play."

This concept was introduced by the director himself (together with Mikhail Butkevich [see Butkevich 2005]) as a way of rejecting mimetism and attempts to produce an authentic on-stage world; instead they sought to draw out what is hidden in the word, and what can be revealed by means of the autonomous language of the theatre, i.e., the language of play and performance. With time Vasilev became convinced that theatre was contained within the word. In 1996 in Sao Paulo, Brazil, during a symposium dedicated to Jerzy Grotowski, he stated:

I wish to emphasise that the spoken word and the sung word is the same thing – under one condition: that this is *the word*, and not words; that it is *the word* in the sense in which it is used in the Gospels and in all religions. *The Word*, whether spoken or sung, contains its own embodied essence. It is with this *word* that I have begun to work [Vasilev 1999a: 144].

It could thus be said that Vasilev came to believe in the superiority of the word over the image, while also believing in the transparency of linguistic signs.<sup>7</sup> From this point onwards, his attentions came to be focused primarily on the development of techniques that would make the word “transparent.” Prior to this, however, in accordance with his strategy of “gradual modification of traditional norms,” he had attempted to transcend narrative and psychological theatre while holding onto its framework.

## 2. The Method – Origins. Collaboration with Anatoly Efros

In the 1980s, Anatoly Vasilev took up employment as a teacher at the same theatre school from which he had graduated. He was invited to work at GITIS by Anatoly Efros, and together they led the cohort of trainee actors with whom Vasilev began the long period of rehearsals for Vampilov’s *Duck Hunting*. These rehearsals did not result in a finished production, but the process of working with students led Vasilev to devise the regulations for the transition from psychological theatre to the “theatre of play.” During this period, he developed concepts relating to the process of working with actors, with these becoming primary elements of his method. He began speaking of the transfer of “the fundamental event” to the position of the “opening event”:

in the psychological theatre, power lies with the “opening event” [*iskhodnoe sobytie*] whereas in what I have termed “the theatre of play” [*igrovoy teatr*], which is what I am working in now, power lies in the “fundamental event”

---

<sup>7</sup> On the subject of the philosophy of representation, see Markowski 1999: 11–17.

[*osnovnoe sobytie*] i.e., the “objective.” And this is something that contrasts completely with the psychological theatre [Wasiljew 1997a: 96].

Among those who participated in this work was Boris Yukhananov, Vasilev’s assistant at the time. Years later he explained the essence of Vasilev’s approach:

The fundamental event is the goal of play. The opening event is its source. When Vasilev spoke of transferring the events [swapping their positions], it was as if he were offering the actor the chance to begin in the future. It could thus be argued that he started working towards a theatre of play [...], where it is the case that the finale determines the beginning of actions. He had by then already begun working on the structures of play, but all this was taking place within the framework of psychological theatre [Yukhananov 2007: 200–201].

The difference of Vasilev’s approach to that of other directors who had an MAT background becomes particularly evident when he is compared to Efros.

The essence of Efros’s method could be described as a theatre of drawing. [...] It refers to dialogue. Both masters taught us primarily – and this is what linked the two of them – the art of constructing dialogue. How to turn dialogue into play. Efros did so through the methods of drawing. Here it was a case of constructing a psychophysical “line” of dialogue when each step became a precisely drafted act that could be shown and explained to an actor. [...] His method, paradoxically, constituted a synthesis of MAT traditions. The master himself did not apply the lexical apparatus stemming from this tradition, but as a student of Maria Knebel, Efros understood perfectly well the significance of such action and the analysis of drama. As someone who respected Nemirovich-Danchenko, he recognised very well what purely psychological work with an actor meant. As someone who held Stanislavsky in high regard, he maintained the method of drawing, which was the epitome of Stanislavsky’s achievements as a director. [...] Vasilev’s approach was significantly different. He invited people into the space where a method was only beginning to emerge. He developed it in our presence. We found ourselves in the laboratory of a director and theoretician who revealed to us the potentials of a different methodology, which he discovered intuitively. [...] If, in the case of Efros, we were dealing with actors’ behaviour born of dialogue, with these actions subordinate to drawing, then Vasilev abandoned the sphere of behaviour to actors, opening up an opportunity for development and making them co-authors of a production, alongside the director. At the same time, Vasilev explored the theatre of structures with us, whereas Efros was concerned with the theatre of drawing [Yukhananov 2007: 201–203].

The consequences of taking such an approach went beyond actor training. It resulted in a change in the way the material of a dramatic work was

perceived. Shifting focus from the plot to the structure of a play changed the position of the dramatic conflict and in the way protagonists were constructed. In Efros's interpretation of *Duck Hunting*, the conflict was between the central protagonist Zilov (who, according to Yukhananov, was an integrated personality in Efros's work) and the people around him. In Vasilev's interpretation, the same protagonist experienced internal division, meaning that the conflict was within him. This change manifested itself on stage not only thanks to the analysis of the text, but also because of the change in perspective in the work with actors. If actors began working on a role aware of the finale (using knowledge of what would happen and how their protagonists would be transformed by the end), this resulted in them abandoning efforts to consistently construct the line of the role in accordance with a deterministic approach. In effect, this effaced any dramatic tension that aided the formation of the atmosphere. This change epitomised the difference between Anatoly Efros and Anatoly Vasilev. The former belonged to a generation of Russian artists holding the view that the perspective a dramatic work had on the world was a logical and intentional whole based on the cause-and-effect principle. Vasilev was already searching on this level for a way to escape this understanding of realism, with Vampilov's drama assisting him in this. Later on, however, the director abandoned broadly-conceived psychological drama and shifted his interests to nineteenth-century Russian classics, and to the canon of world literature (such as Plato, Mann and Pirandello). It was during this period that he developed his experiments in the field of the "structures" of play, while also applying the category of "given conditions" to the structure of a drama rather than to the plot. By abandoning the linear perspective, where the course of events was determined by the starting point, he instead began to speak of "an inverted perspective," using this concept drawn from icon painting as a metaphor precisely expressing the essence of his experiments in theatre.

Already by the mid-1980s, Anatoly Vasilev had begun critiquing the Soviet conception of theatrical productions as integral works, whose particular elements are subordinated to a dominant ideal. In accordance with this view, reality appears exclusively on the horizontal level, and forms a coherent whole. During this period, the artist began to speak of the need to abandon narrative theatre – one based on events – in favour of shifting the focus to the internal aspects of human beings before going on to transcend the perception of human beings on the psychological or social planes. In 1994, prior to staging *Amphitryon* in Taormina, where, four years previously, he had been awarded the Europe Prize New Theatrical Realities, he said:

More or less at the point when I received the New Realities prize, we changed our approach to reading dramatic texts in our School of Dramatic Arts. Con-



sequently, the method of rehearsals and preparing actors also changed. I do not believe that we had discovered something that was still unknown at this point. Perhaps, however, in Russia we were the first to abandon the practices of psychological realism, so we did not change Stanislavsky's "system," but rather the focus of investigation: we are not interested in the human but what is beyond the human being; not the body, not even the soul, but the spirit; and, in narrative, not what is represented and specific, but the abstract and conceptual [Wasiljew 1997a: 100].

### 3. School

In 1987, Anatoly Vasilev abandoned the repertory theatre in order to establish his studio, which he called the School of Dramatic Arts, in the basement of a tenement block at 20 Povarskaya Street in Moscow [Osińska 1995]. During this period the street still bore the name given to it in the 1920s, Vorovskogo, although the old name that was soon restored pointed to the early twentieth century and the era of the pioneers of theatre experiments. The first Russian theatre laboratory was opened in 1905 on Stanislavsky's initiative, close to the tenement in which Vasilev and his school were based. The pioneering institution became known as the Studio on Povarskaya, and was run by Meyerhold, although it lasted for only a few months. Yet its significance for Meyerhold's subsequent experiments, and for Russian theatre in general, cannot be overstated.

The name Vasilev gave his studio reflected his intentions as an artist to abandon the baggage of his existing experiences and begin his experiments anew. Upon opening the School of Dramatic Arts, he noted in his diary: "For a long time now I have wanted to re-evaluate, erase and forget everything I know. Art begins at the point where we abandon our habits" [Jończyk 1991: 75]. The idea of a school also signifies the appropriation of knowledge. Vasilev had long since been motivated by the desire to oppose everything that was spontaneous and could thus lead to errors, hence his attraction to pedagogy, the idea of permanent education, and the idea of a school. In later years, during a period when part of his activities had been transferred to the new headquarters of the School of Dramatic Arts on Sretenka Street, he started to put into effect his project for establishing a Theatre Academy where, alongside subjects directly connected to the professions of acting, singing (his project included an Opera Studio) and directing, he also envisaged the inclusion of a broad humanities curriculum. The ideal behind his school implied not only abandoning old habits but also adopting the stance that acting

cannot constitute a sphere of personal expression or authenticity, but that it is necessarily a field based on strict rules. This meant that the work he undertook at his school was guided by the task of developing a method (always emerging through practice), while also attempting to create his own theatrical convention. Vasilev shared the view that it is possible to create a theatre based on conventions – namely, a new European manifestation of the idea of *nō* theatre [see Karaś 2001]. Of course, this was envisioned as an equivalent of the oriental model of theatre, since it was impossible to transplant to Europe the entire cultural heritage attached to *nō*, namely the religious traditions of the Far East. Furthermore, it is probably impossible to create a convention in the course of a single lifetime, since the creation of such, within traditional cultures, requires the experience of several generations. In any case, Vasilev's ambition was to create his own performance techniques and his own models of directing. What was also no less important was his endeavour to open up new perspectives in Russia for thinking about theatre that were new yet rooted in the old.

A transitional spectacle marking the end of the first stage of his work in theatre as a director and opening up a new period, was his version of Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1987). Developed in collaboration with graduates from the extramural department of directing at GITIS, this production became one of the biggest sensations in the theatre of the late 1980s. Vasilev's company toured most of Europe and both North and South America with the spectacle, receiving many favourable reviews and international prizes. The final performance took place in Wrocław, Poland, at the Grotowski Centre in April 1990, with Vasilev stating during a related press conference that

a legendary reputation is better than a bad performance. That is why I believe productions should not be allowed to reach old age. They should die off when they are beautiful since theatre is a form of myth that radiates on people in order to maintain life [Jończyk 1991: 73].

In staging Pirandello, a dramatist to whom Vasilev would again turn in subsequent years,<sup>8</sup> the director focused on exploring the potential for building new bonds within the drama, as well as between the audience and the stage. It was in *Six Characters* that Vasilev first severed the bond between actor and protagonist, with several actors playing the same

---

<sup>8</sup> Pirandello's dramas formed the foundation of Vasilev's work not only at his Moscow School, but also during the apprenticeships he led in Italy featuring actors from various countries. *Tonight We Improvise* (1990, a project conceived as part of the Parma 90 festival);

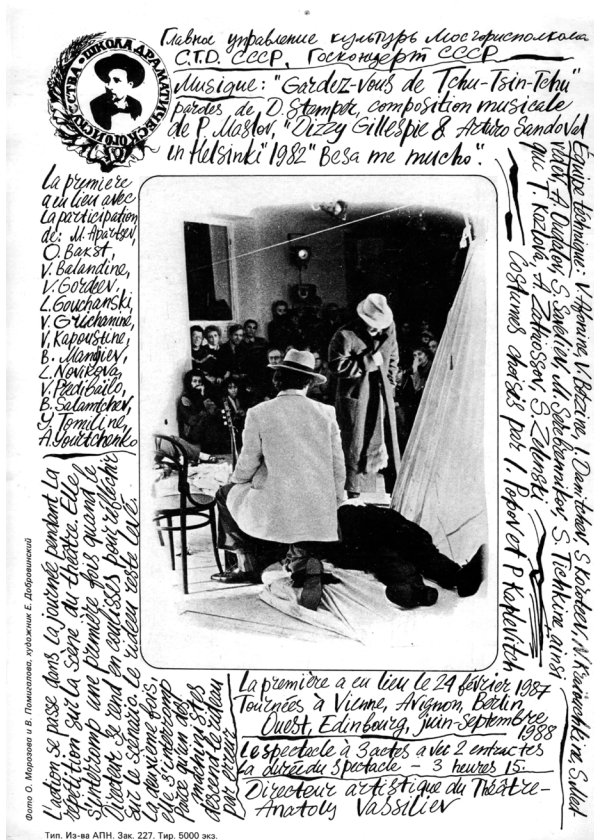
role, including Grigory Gladys (who soon emigrated to Canada), Natalia Kolyakanova, Nikolay Chindyaykin and Yury Alshits. These actors, alongside Lyudmila Drebnayova, Aleksandr Anurov, Igor Yatsko, Vladimir Lavrov, Maria Zaykova and others, formed the core of the company that the director went on to work with over many years, while also training subsequent cohorts of GITIS students. In this production, Vasilev extended the scope of improvisation by also incorporating the audience into it, as actors interacted with spectators. This resulted in going beyond the stage space and appropriating the auditorium. Vasilev focused on depicting the elusiveness of the transitions between the reality of the theatre (with all of its artificiality) and real life. Croatian theatre philosopher Petar Brečić has provided an apt description of the essence of this performance:

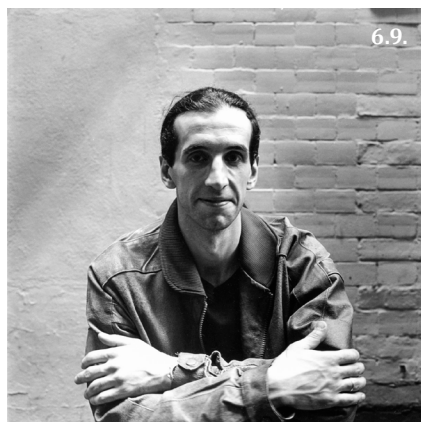
In the production of *Six Characters* there is constant fluctuation and transformation of material; the stream of events flows in the manner best described by Yeats' line of poetry: "How can we know the dancer from the dance?" What we see is the game of a world, which from time to time forms the image of a face, of a human. To capture this moment is to touch the essence of theatre [Brečić 1997a: 92].<sup>9</sup>

**Fig. 6.6.** Programme for *Six Characters in Search of an Author* by Luigi Pirandello, directed by Anatoly Vasilev, set design by Igor Popov, School of Dramatic Arts, 1987

*Giants of the Mountain* (1990, Panatée Pompeiane, Agrigento in Sicily; never staged); *Tonight We Improvise* (a new version, 1991 in Gibellina in Sicily; performance never staged); *Each in His Own Way* (1993, Rome, project in collaboration with Centro Ateneo of La Sapienza University in Roma and Teatro di Roma).

<sup>9</sup> This was the text of a speech given in Taormina on 25 May 1990 on the occasion of Anatoly Vasilev receiving the “New Realities of Theatre” prize; the title of the article came from the editors of *Didaskalia*.





**Figs. 6.7. – 6.12.** Actors of the School of Dramatic Arts: Aleksandr Anurov, Larisa Belogurova, Vladimir Lavrov, Natalia Kalyakanova, Lyudmila Drebnayova, Igor Yatsko, all photographs by Jakub Kos

For *Six Characters* Igor Popov created a partition of classic proportions, featuring columns and two arcades at the sides. This invention (bringing an element of a façade inside) became a fixed unit and permanent element of the performances created during the laboratory period of work. Another element that would become a regular feature of subsequent performances was the white sliding curtain that constituted a pure, dynamic element stripped of functionality. The performance space in Vasilev's productions was filled with architectural forms, chairs, and a minimal number of props.

The transition to the laboratory period meant limiting the extent of contact with audiences. Until the mid-1990s, if audiences were invited at all, it was for exhibition pieces, open rehearsals and readings, but never for premieres. The experiments began with work on Plato's *Dialogues*, which became a compulsory element for all the actors who joined the company (with time, *The Dialogues* were also performed before audiences, although the form of the piece would change).

During this period Vasilev rarely worked with dramatic texts at the School of Dramatic Arts. He preferred taking on works of philosophy (such as Plato and Erasmus), aesthetic manifestos (such as Oscar Wilde's *The Critic as Artist*), and the novels and short stories of Thomas Mann and Fyodor Dostoevsky. The director set himself the challenge of overcoming traditional dramatic structures, adopting various strategies during this process, ranging from an improvised staging of *The Demons* in a ruined flat on the top floor of a block of flats on Povarskaya Street (the action took place simultaneously in various rooms), to the complete elimination of on-stage movement while also minimising the staging in Dostoevsky's *Uncle's Dream* (1994). During this laboratory phase of work, Vasilev created several spectacles that ultimately never found fixed form. A handful of spectators were able to see them during demonstrations and open rehearsals in Moscow or abroad at the Teatro Ateneo in Rome, the Grotowski Centre in Wrocław, and the Künstlerhaus Bethanien in Berlin, as well as at the Toga Theatre Festival in Japan, organised by Tadashi Suzuki, with whom both Vasilev and Grotowski collaborated. The company of the School of Dramatic Arts twice visited the Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski in Pontedera (in 1989 and 1990), while the group from Pontedera was hosted in Moscow on several occasions (without Jerzy Grotowski), working under the guidance of Thomas Richards in the school's space (in almost conspiratorial circumstances, since this fact was not made public). Demonstrations of *Action* were held for specially-selected guests in this period [for more detail see Osiński 2000, 2001a; Osiński, Chojak 2001].



**Fig. 6.13.** Scene from Luigi Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, directed by Anatoly Vasilev, set design by Igor Popov, School of Dramatic Art, 1987, photograph by Andrey Bezukladnikov

The period of laboratory work in Moscow involving actors from the School of Dramatic Arts or students from GITIS (Vasilev was assisted in his work with students by Evgeny Kamenkovich and Vasily Skorik, among others, who acted as pedagogues) resulted in the following productions: *Dumas*, based on motifs drawn from the works of Alexandre Dumas (1987; annual examination piece of fourth-year extramural students at GITIS; stage design by Igor Popov); *Vis-à-vis*, based on motifs from Dostoevsky's novels (1988; annual examination piece of the same year group; stage design by Igor Popov and Pavel Kaplevich); *Fiorenza*, based on the works of Thomas Mann (1991; diploma piece of students of the extramural directing department at GITIS; stage design by Vladimir Kovalchuk and Igor Popov); *Versailles impromptu* (*Versalsky eksprompt*), based on the works of Moliere, Chekhov and Pirandello (1991; presented to an audience as an open rehearsal; stage design by Popov); *Joseph and his Brothers*, based on motifs drawn from Thomas Mann's novel (in 1993 this piece was presented at the Toga Theatre Festival in Japan and at the Grotowski Centre under the title *Anatoly Vasilev's Lessons*). There were also demonstrations of Plato's *Dialogues*, Dostoevsky's *Uncle's Dream*, and other pieces held in the school's space on Povarskaya Street. At the same time, the director led various international projects that saw presentations of Pirandello's drama in Italy,<sup>10</sup> Wedekind's *Spring Awakening* (1990, Lucerne) and *I, Seagull*, based on motifs taken from Chekhov (1991, Volterra).

<sup>10</sup> See footnote 8 above.

## 4. The Performance Space

### – Collaboration with Igor Popov

International projects and those conducted abroad involving actors from the School of Dramatic Arts took the form of workshops. If a full-scale production happened to emerge from such work, it was shown only a few times, sometimes only once and, in some cases, never performed at all. The disinterested nature of such work (in the sense that full-scale productions were not necessarily the aim), the focus on the process and the acceptance of transience and ephemerality, were key traits of this period of experimentation led by Vasilev. The projects he led abroad were recorded by eyewitnesses and collaborators. Igor Popov recalled years later one of the most unusual attempts to incorporate Pirandello's drama into the natural environment of the Sicilian landscape:

At one point we were invited to participate in a festival in the Italian town of Gibellina where we were supposed to stage a work in this small mountain town that had been destroyed by an earthquake in the 1960s. Unfortunately, for financial reasons we were unable to carry out the project, although we had already put much effort into preparations.

The town barely exists, just a few ruins remain and a memorial – a kind of concrete sarcophagus on the hill. At the edge of the town, a wooden stage was erected and open-air performances took place there. We were supposed to perform Pirandello's *Tonight We Improvise* – we had performed it before but always indoors. We made a model: the action of Pirandello's drama takes place in Sicily, which is where we were. We suggested partially "reconstructing" the town; I looked at surviving town plans and photographs and selected the most typical buildings. I built some pavilions in the model whose façades imitated those of the destroyed buildings, while the interiors were empty – they were to host an exhibition. Vasilev wanted the Leningrad art group Mit'ki to be involved – its members painted buses, houses, and did graffiti. They were supposed to paint the interior of the walls of the pavilions and put on the exhibition.

The auditorium was separated from the stage and the walls of the houses by a huge, twenty-metre-long curtain. From the audience's side the curtain was purple, while from the side of the set it was sky blue. It was supposed to have looked like this: the audience approaches from the direction of the pavilions, they view the exhibition and then descend narrow stairs before climbing onto the stage and then, by moving the curtain aside, they enter the other side, the auditorium. At this point, the curtain slides open and the town is revealed to them against the backdrop of the sunset – for this was the time of day the work was to have been performed. The whole effect relied on the audience having no idea, as they took their seats in

the amphitheatre, of the true scale of the set, and only once the curtain opened would they see, against a backdrop of the mountains, the panorama of the town that they may perhaps remember, since I had chosen the most characteristic buildings. It should also be noted that the set was not supposed to have played a role in the performance, the town was not to have been “played” – since the entire story played out on the boards.

Unfortunately, the Gulf War broke out and there was not enough money to complete the project.

Our *Tonight We Improvise* was presented for the first and only time in Padua – it was not the whole drama. It was pure improvisation, lasting five hours, long into the night. We found a tiny theatre (the action takes place in a small provincial theatre in Pirandello’s play) with an Italian stage that we completely made over. We then presented fragments of this work in the form of an open rehearsal in Austria, in the tower of a castle outside of Salzburg, and also in Yugoslavia, in a small and very old heritage theatre with its own stage. Each time the entire set and stage architecture had to be fundamentally reworked and adapted to the specific space. In Austria, for example, we performed in the loft of the castle although we also claimed some outdoor space, which was illuminated by stage lights positioned on a neighbouring tower [Popow 1997a: 93].



**Fig. 6.14.** Igor Popov in his workshop, 1990s, photograph by Katarzyna Osińska

In Igor Popov, a trained architect, Anatoly Vasilev found his ideal collaborator – someone who was sensitive to the significance of the performance space. In the projects described above there is not only an attempt to transcend the traditional theatre building but also an effort to appropriate non-theatrical space, including neighbouring buildings and even a mountainous landscape. This was a realisation of the old ideas of Nietzsche and Wagner, as well as of Meyerhold’s dream of leading the the-



atre out of the building. In 1919, Meyerhold expressed his belief that not only did natural conditions dictate stage architecture in the past (for example in ancient Greece), but also that “open-air performances should certainly adapt to the landscape of a given space” [Vendrovskaya, Fevralsky (eds.) 1978: 38].

The adaptation of the staging to a specific space became the central principle of Vasilev’s theatre, even when working on outdoor productions. The decision as to where to perform still involves preparatory trips to explore potential sites even today. Each space that stages a performance by Vasilev must be measured precisely and satisfy a clearly-defined set of criteria. This attitude to the performance space is neatly illustrated by a story from Petar Brečić, which the Croatian philosopher told in 1990 when awarding a prize to the director in Taormina:

Recently I was taking Vasilev and his set designer, Igor Popov, our mutual friend, to the town of Hvar on the island of Hvar. There is a small theatre building there, which historians of Croatian culture claim is the first urban theatre in Europe. This small and exceptionally beautiful theatre stands out because of its almost mystical simplicity. However, neither Vasilev nor Popov showed any hint, either in word or deed, of awe or wonder. As soon as they had entered the building they began taking measurements and photographs: tape measure, notebook, pencils, camera, and a very detailed marking of all the parameters, all the directions. This lasted – please note – three full hours. And that was it. They familiarised themselves with this historical theatre for the sake of some kind of **precision** [Brečić 1997: 92].

Precision, regularity, geometry – these were the foundations of their conception of space and indeed of Vasilev and Popov’s very idea of art itself. Platonic inspiration is evident in such approach. The beauty of form, as Socrates noted in Plato’s *Philebus*, is “straight lines and circles, and the plane solid figures which are formed out of them by turning-lathes and rulers and measurers of angles” [Plato n.d.]. But the impulses that stimulated the imaginations of both artists originated in various realms of the art of the past. In the 1980s and 1990s they were interested in surrealism, Giorgio De Chirico and René Magritte. It seems that the director Vasilev and the architect Popov, similarly to De Chirico, perceived the relations between perspective and metaphysics. The sense of “estrangement” and metaphysicality of space was enhanced by placing various architectural elements on stage that served no practical function, with arcades a particularly good example. Regularity, geometry, and the elimination of superfluous objects and props were to serve finding and transporting onto the stage hidden meanings that could not be subjected to rational description.

## 5. Rigours. Theatre as an Icon

In 1994, a selected audience in Moscow saw a version of Moliere's *Amphitryon* at the First Studio on Povarskaya Street. This laboratory piece went on to become a full-scale production staged in many countries around the world (including Poland, where it was shown at the Grotowski Centre, with open rehearsals held on 23–25 May 1995, and the full production performed on 27–29 May, before the company subsequently staged it at the Kontakt Theatre Festival in Toruń).<sup>11</sup> Beginning with *The Lamentations of Jeremiah* in 1996, which adapted a piece by contemporary composer Vladimir Martynov for the stage that was intended for a cappella choir (the work was performed by the Sirin Old Russian Sacral Music Choir led by Andrey Kotov, while Nikolay Chindyaykin worked on the choreography and Igor Popov was responsible for set design) [see Osińska 1996], Vasilev again staged performances at the Povarskaya Studio while also continuing his pedagogical activities.



**Fig. 6.15.** *The Lamentations of Jeremiah*, music by Vladimir Martynov, directed by Anatoly Vasilev, set design by Igor Popov, School of Dramatic Arts, 1996

<sup>11</sup> For more on this subject, see the materials published in *Didaskalia*, vol. 7 (1995): Niziołek 1995; Drzycimska, Jakubowa, Karaś, Niziołek, Zielińska 1995; Jakubowa 1995.

During the laboratory stage, which concentrated primarily on working with actors, the director was guided by the principle of reduction. He was attracted to the idea of art that was subordinated to strict rules. He thus worked towards minimising the resources employed on stage while engaging the imagination, which, as Grzegorz Niziołek accurately noted, was partly a result of his reluctance to make the right to subjectivity into a norm that dominated art [see Niziołek 1995: 3].

Vasilev's activities during this period were characterised by minimalism and an ascetic spirit. In all of the spaces used by the School of Dramatic Arts (both on Povarskaya as well as in the rehearsal space of the former Uran Cinema on Sretenka Street), what was striking was the flawless cleanliness and the whiteness of the walls. Symmetry and repeatability became a guiding principle, with this expressed both in the work of the actors, as well as in the spatial composition, which was dominated by lines and right angles. If there were any gaps, these were regular in form. Additional architectural elements were introduced into some performances, notably the aforementioned walls with classical arcades. In *The Lamentations of Jeremiah*, a double wall with regular arched openings reminiscent of an iconostas – albeit one lacking icons – was used.

Identical Viennese chairs provided one permanent mobile feature filling the performance space. In Plato's *Dialogues*, Dostoevsky's *Uncle's Dream*, and in the first phase of work on *Amphitryon*, on-stage movement was reduced to a minimum. The actors were seated as they delivered the text. They wore neutral, ahistorical costumes, such as elegant dresses and suits, frockcoats and tailcoats (in *The Dialogues* the actors wore bowler hats, thus resembling figures from Magritte's paintings). Subsequently, oriental elements began to appear unexpectedly, such as eastern kimonos that seemed unrelated to the action.

Vasilev's work with the actors was also based on the principle of reduction. As a result of this approach, the actors were to find liberation on-stage from their own "Self," freeing themselves from their own psychic nature and even gender (which is why Vasilev's actors played both male and female roles regardless of their sex). The director began applying the concept of "transparency" to the art of acting. In one of his manifesto pieces, "Menon's Slave," he returned several times to the same question. "How can we ensure that there is less of the human on stage? [...] What can we do to ensure that the human comes to resemble grass and starts engaging with more essential problems than himself?" [Vasilev 1993: 13]. The actor was to disappear on stage as an individual with his own individual expression and become something resembling a screen through which the reality of the drama emanates.

For Vasilev, abandoning psychology meant shifting the centre away from the internal aspect of the actor (as typified by working on the psychic level) beyond the actor (which is a trait of working on the verbal level).<sup>12</sup> As important as the position of the centre that formed the core of the actor's deeds, was selecting the starting point of work on a role. Vasilev began employing the concept of "inversion" to describe his strategy.

The actor should thus be conscious of his role from beginning to end and then from end to beginning. In order for the actor to be able to perform and for him to create tension in this performance, then that which is at the end of the performance must be transferred to the beginning – i.e., an inversion is carried out [Vasilev 1999a: 144].<sup>13</sup>

The rigours also incorporated the sphere of physical activities. Although the system of educating the actors of the School of Dramatic Arts incorporated intensive physical training based on the Chinese martial art *wushu* from the outset, there was in fact very little on-stage movement in the plays performed during this period. The actors spoke while seated. A similar method was applied by Vakhtangov in his work on *The Dybbuk*, where the actors were seated and remained motionless for extended periods, as they were expected to concentrate on delivering the text (without any mimicry, gesticulation or gestures with their eyes, etc.). The aim of this was to avoid clichéd reactions [see Osińska (ed.) 2008: 77]. While this method was applied by Vakhtangov in the early phase of work on the performance, in Vasilev's work the actors' motionlessness became a regular feature in this period. This does not mean, of course, that work on physical action had been abandoned, since it continued even when the actors were seated. Vasilev dedicated significant efforts to developing precise gestures that did not serve as illustrations of the text. At the same time, however, since he worked on the assumption that the essence of the theatre is in the word, he also began working on verbal actions, i.e., how to deliver the text.

---

<sup>12</sup> Vasilev returned to these very issues not only in his own texts, but also in his spoken statements – such as during a meeting with the audience as part of the *Świat miejscem prawdy* (*The World as a Site of Truth*) Theatre Festival in Wrocław on 23 June 2009. At the city's Puppet Theatre, he again presented the essence of his method.

<sup>13</sup> Quote from Vasilev's speech delivered in Sao Paulo, Brazil, on 16 October 1996, during a symposium there on Grotowski. The text was then read in its Polish and Italian translations at the Grotowski Centre in Wrocław during a symposium on "Laboratory Theatres and Studio Theatres in Twentieth-Century Europe: Techniques and Values – a Reconnaissance," which was held on 26 April 1997. This speech was then published in Russian with minor changes as "Apologiya odnoy aktsii," as part of a block of essays on Grotowski in the monthly journal *Iskusstvo kino* [Vasilev 1999a].

The basis of this verbal training was the hexameter, which the actors practiced using excerpts of Homer's *Iliad*<sup>14</sup> (a hexameter was, in antique versification, a metrical line of six feet featuring typical Adonic cadence in the final two feet). This mode of enunciation was transferred with time to other forms of texts. In effect, how Vasilev's actors spoke created a contrast with the sound to which Russian ears had become accustomed. Vasilev abandoned intonation that served to draw out and underscore meaning. This "artificial" and chanted delivery, based on strict rigours, was to take the word away from commonplace associations and cleanse it of emotional content.

As an aside, Meyerhold's experiments in his work at the Borodinskaya Studio headed in a similar direction [for more information, see Osińska 2003: 193–229]. Meyerhold was interested not only in developing corporeal but also vocal techniques. At the Borodinskaya Studio lessons in poetry and prose reading techniques were led from 1914 by Konstantin Vogak, who used both antique lyrical poetry and Russian works [for more on this subject see Feldman (ed.) 2000: 402–403]. Vasilev himself never referred to Meyerhold in this context (the materials outlining the details of the work of the Borodinskaya Studio were first published in 2000). This makes the parallel all the more interesting. It is based on the artists' shared understanding of theatre as a space separated from the reality it depicts, a space instead guided by its own principles based on an autonomous language – hence the need to develop a way of speaking that would not merely be an imitation of everyday speech. Meyerhold did not develop his experiments, initiated in the pre-Revolutionary period, further in the verbal sphere, which was the reason for him attaching such great significance to physical techniques. Vasilev, however, concentrated on speech techniques by applying the above-mentioned principle of reduction and narrowing scope.

Whereas the basic unit was a single line during work on Plato's *Dialogues*, in the exercises based on *The Iliad*, it was the single word that was split into syllables and subsequently into particular sounds. In Vasilev's method of working on the word, the articulation of particular sounds, as well as the establishment of new expressive stresses, was allied to his belief that communication takes place on the level of phonemes. This way of thinking about language made reference to the experiments of avant-garde poetry, particularly Velimir Khlebnikov's concept of "transrational language," where it was not the word but indeed phonemes that were

---

<sup>14</sup> The performance of *The Iliad: Book XXIII* emerged from a combination of physical and verbal training focusing on Homer. It was developed between 1997 and 2004, taking on various forms.

considered the smallest units capable of evoking meaning or psychic states. Similarly to Khlebnikov, Vasilev aimed at “emptying” the word of traditionally-ascribed meaning. For him, the word became sound. In describing his approach to the word, the director often made reference (and still does) to the example of a glass filled with water, with the sides of the glass forming the phonic aspects of the word and the water its content. In pouring the water out of the glass, Vasilev deprived the word of emotional and narrative information [Vasilev 1999a: 145].

As Vasilev himself put it, his aim was to produce an artificial realisation of the word. It was ritual that was his central point of reference – ritual with its repeatability at the level of both verballity and movement. When asked what determined the nature of ritual in his theatre, he answered:

Absolutely precise physical presence. That means the presence of the physical gesture in macrocosmic space precise to, let’s say, a cosmic millimetre. And nothing more. And this must be trained. For an entire lifetime. For an entire monastic lifetime. [...] This is how Chinese Shaolin monks behave and it is what Greek monks did on the holy mountain of Athos – the physical gesture of the word was enacted in sound by them. After all, they spend entire days learning the precision of ancient Byzantine song [Vasilev 1999a: 145].

In this understanding of theatre we find not only very old and ritual origins but also religious, Orthodox sources (which Vasilev acknowledges openly). His theatre could be described as a dramatised icon. Pavel Florensky stated that art, particularly icons, is a revelation and embodiment “in that which is sensual and by means of that which is sensual of true reality, of something that is of absolute value and eternal” [Florensky 1984: 382]. This is the principle of Platonic reminiscence. In other words, “art constitutes a revelation of an archetype in the ontological rather than psychological sense.” Creativity is thus based in the act of lifting a veil.

In revealing to us a new and previously unknown reality, art indeed ascends *a realibus ad realiora, et a realioribus ad realissimum*. The artist does not create an image alone but removes the veil from an existing and eternally existing image. He does not paint the canvas but it is as if he instead cleanses the canvas of alien impurities, “revealing” a record of spiritual reality. And thanks to his activities, based on the revelation of that which is absolute, the artist is absolute in his art – the absolute, unconditional human being in his deed [Florensky 1984: 382–383].

According to Florensky, art is testimony and the ideal witness is the transparent witness: the witness as a window. Icons serve as such windows. Vasilev seeks to make theatre into a window. It is for this reason that all that is superfluous must be removed.

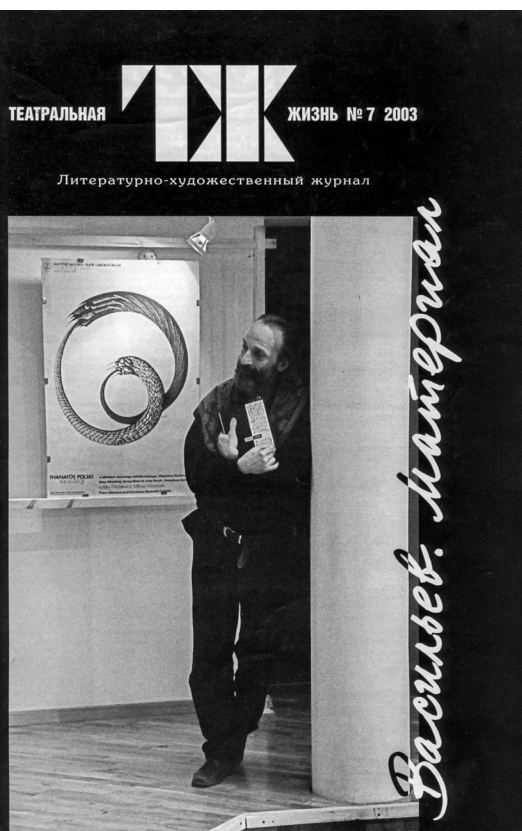
## 6. The Art of Contradictions

It would be a mistake to interpret what has been written above about Anatoly Vasilev as a depiction of someone who was solely a theatre reformer focused on developing methods in a closed laboratory. During this period of laboratory-based experiments, he was also presenting productions in European theatres, whose staging contradicted his minimalist principle. His version of Lermontov's *Masquerade* (1992, Comédie-Française, Paris; set design by Igor Popov; costumes: Boris Zaborov), *Uncle's Dream*, based on Dostoevsky (1994, Budapest Art Theatre; set design and costumes by Igor Popov), and his version of Tchaikovsky's opera *Queen of Spades* (1996, Deutsches Nationaltheatre Weimar, conducted by Mikhail Yurovsky; set design by Igor Popov; costumes by Wally Lindner) were all typified by their rich sets, decorations and costumes. However, this richness did not contradict the principle of applying rigours. In transferring methods that had been developed to work with foreign theatre companies, Vasilev created precise scaffolding for each piece that enabled the construction of a rich staging. In the abovementioned works, Vasilev's tendency towards elaborate approaches and solutions that sought to create a certain aura of oddness and the supernatural, became evident. Petar Brečić already noted this tendency in earlier stages of his work. Writing about *Cerceau* and *Six Characters*, Brečić drew attention to the role of "nonsenses" in his performances:

In *Cerceau*, the lead protagonist performs the entire act with his hand covering one eye. The acting in *Cerceau* is already emphasised to such an extent, in terms of technique, that it could not be performed even in the circus in a more artificial manner. Either one and the same person plays the same melody on two pianos, shifting in panic between the two. In *Six Characters* someone does not participate in the action and looks in from the side through a door. [...] The dramatic role of nonsense in Anatoly Vasilev's works is huge – and with the focus on it, reality fades away and moves into the background, gradually reaching the point of non-existence and then fails to recognise familiar images [Brečić 1997: 91].

In analysing the tendency for Vasilev's work to apply this form of non-functional devices, to create a sense of "alienation" and theatricalisation, Brečić explains this by means of a desire to "liberate the image" and remove it from history and reality, thus immortalising it. His analyses, despite concerning productions made before 1987, remain relevant in relation to Vasilev's later works, particularly those created outside of the laboratory. Both the abovementioned

foreign productions,<sup>15</sup> as well as those created from the mid-1990s onwards at the School of Dramatic Arts – from *Amphitryon*, through the cycle of Pushkin's works (*Don Juan or the Stone Guest and Other Poems*, 1998; *Mozart and Salieri*, 2000; *From Onegin's Journey*, 2003), to Heiner Müller's *Medeamaterial* (2001) and *Don Juan is Dead*, based on motifs from Aleksandr Dargomyzhsky's opera *The Stone Guest* (2006; this piece comprised an operatic and balletic part inspired by Goya's *Los Caprichos* and Manuel de Falla and Ramona Delgado Palacios' romantic works) [see Wasiljew 2007] – are typified by refined staging and aesthetics. It seems that, in this case, the opposite desire took precedence in relation to the idea of the theatre-as-an-icon, as described above. In these works, the need to create an autonomous on-stage reality became evident. They become manifestations of the view that the beauty of an image stems from abandoning any pretence to naturalism and from the reversal of accepted logic according to the principle of *dicendo ogni cosa al contrario* [Baldassare Castiglione, cited in Hocke 1957: 22]. It was not by chance that Vasilev studied (and even staged) Oscar Wilde's essay *The Critic as Artist*. It was Wilde who claimed that, when art turned to nature, it always became vulgar.



**Fig. 6.16.** Anatoly Vasilev (at Povarskaya Studio); hanging in the background is Krzysztof Bednarski's poster for the final production of the Laboratory Theatre, *Polish Thanatos*. Cover photograph for an issue of *Teatralnaya zhizn'*

<sup>15</sup> Beyond the abovementioned productions, Vasilev also staged productions abroad: Ostrovsky's *Innocent as Charged* (1998; Szigligeti Theatre in Szolnok, Hungary); Moliere's *Amphitryon* (2002, Comédie-Française, Paris); Jean-Baptiste Boyer d'Argens *Thérèse Philosophe* (2007, Odeon Theatre, Paris). Furthermore, he has realised a host of international projects, including Euripides' *Medea* in Epidaurus, Greece (2008).



Already at the level of textual work, Vasilev abandoned linearity. He fragmented the texts he worked with, reassembling and encrusting them with poetic works from other genres (with Pushkin's poetry, for example, woven into dramas) or with musical pieces (*Requiem* by contemporary composer Vladimir Martynov incorporated in its entirety into the production of *Mozart and Salieri*). Vasilev also made use of repetitions (one common device was for various actors to speak the same part), while he also often diverged from the original work in allocating roles on the basis of the text, thus severing the connection between actor and protagonist (since the same character could be played by various actors). The manner in which Vasilev's actors delivered the text (including Pushkin's poetry) became artificial, with the words spoken with "hard" intonation ensuring that "the pulsating sound that attacks the word" (to use Vasilev's own terms) destroyed the melody of a poem, disrupted the flow of a phrase, and a new form of intonation emerged, one that is harsher, *staccato* and lacking the melodic nature to which Russian ears had become accustomed. The spatial composition of the work, the set design, costumes and props, revealed the artists' affinity for artificiality, eccentric objects, and for placing objects in unexpected contexts. If we were to create an inventory for this cabinet of curiosities, then it would contain, among other things, fragments of façades and other architectural elements; an antique bust on wheels (from *Don Juan*); still life compositions made of artificial fruit and crockery; goblets filled with unnaturally red wine (these already made an appearance in *Cerceau* before returning in *Mozart and Salieri*); birds – mechanical and living varieties (mechanical peacocks featured in *Masquerade*, a mechanical bird in a cage repeating the words "Mozart and Salieri" in Pushkin's "minor tragedy," while live white doves appeared in *The Lamentations of Jeremiah* and also in *The Iliad*); alchemical apparatus (in *Mozart and Salieri*); an old theatre machine (in *The Lamentations of Jeremiah*); oriental carpets and costumes (in *The Amphitryon* and *Don Juan*); odd objects such as a cross made of cardboard boxes carried by Leporello on his back in *Don Juan*; surprising human-mechanical hybrids such as a knight manacled in his armour in *Uncle's Dream* (who then returned in *Mozart and Salieri*) in a form that resembled an insect, something like a dragonfly; a choir that changed costumes – in *Mozart and Salieri*, as well as the oddly-dressed colourful figures of the musical band in the same play that served as an equivalent to the blind violinist who played *Voi che sapete*; and, finally, actresses dressed as mannequins in the ball scene in *Masquerade* (mannequins are a favourite object of all mannerists, according to Gustav René Hocke [1957: 32]; the mannequins from *Masquerade* resemble those from the paintings of De Chirico and Oskar Schlemmer).



**Fig. 6.17.** Aleksandr Pushkin's *Don Juan, or the Stone Guest and Other Poems*, directed by Anatoly Vasilev, set design by Igor Popov, School of Dramatic Art, 1998, photograph by Anatoly Vasilev

Right angles are interrupted by diagonal lines, while on-stage movement often takes place diagonally across the stage. Circles contrast with ellipses. The stage space is subjected to artificial “extension” (by using flat lighting) or narrowing (some episodes are played out in tight spaces or on the proscenium). Various deformations entered his works that also affected the casting, with men playing women’s roles and vice versa (in *Medeamaterial*), thus effacing gender characteristics (Medea has both male and female traits, with an artificial penis secured to her hips). This androgyny must not necessarily entail a love for oddities since, as Hocke reminds us in making reference to Leonardo da Vinci, it can also be the realisation of a cosmic symbol that is expressed “in the coming together of male and female – of all polarities – in God” [Hocke 1957: 191].

Any attempt at gauging Anatoly Vasilev’s work leads to contradictions. On the one hand, we encounter his efforts to make art into an instrument of presence (as expressed by the icon), while on the other we see his attempts to construct autonomous realities (i.e., art in the role of the idol). However, as Michał Paweł Markowski notes in his book on the philosophy of representation, “conceiving representation as an instrument of making presence and conceiving representation as an autonomous form cannot be reconciled,” before immediately adding that “this duality cannot be escaped” [Markowski 1999a: 23]. Vasilev’s work is born of the confrontation of these two contradictions. This is possible because the first strategy signals an attempt to reach something

essentially unattainable: the Platonic ideal is a model that cannot be represented (“When we are faced with the ontological asymmetry of the model and the copy,” writes Markowski, “representation becomes the annulment of presence and a depiction of the valued substance of the model” [Markowski 1999a: 23].) On the other hand, the second strategy does not necessarily mean having to celebrate the autonomy of the representation (the victory of the idol). There is, after all, a third possibility, one that is closest to Vasilev: “If, however, harmony ensues between the model and the depiction – which was made possible in Western culture by the coming of the Incarnate Word – then the representation binds the two orders and sanctifies the effort involved in representation” [Markowski 1999a: 23].

## 7. Pushkin and the Tradition of Baroque Theatre

Pushkin has been present for years in the work of Vasilev. From the moment the School was founded until he left it and moved abroad,<sup>16</sup> he considered Pushkin’s poetry (alongside Homer’s *Iliad*) fundamental to verbal training. Each actor had to be schooled in reading Pushkin’s poetry according to the method developed by the director. The results of these workshops were presented in various demonstrations including *A. S. Pushkin – Conversations with the poet* (1994); *Pushkin Night* (1995) – which was based on his poetry combined with music by Petr Tchaikovsky, and *Pushkin Morning* (2001). Pushkin’s poetry became a theatre for Vasilev in the literal sense. It was not an illustration but a true deed expressed in the multiplicity of actors’ voices. “The word became flesh” – Vasilev seems to have a literal understanding of this phrase: words are embodied by the actors and, thanks to them, acquire materiality. It is not, however, a question of celebrating the word but rather a matter of making it move and giving it life.

The director attempted to prove that it was possible to stage Pushkin’s dramas (from his “Minor Tragedy” cycle), although many, indeed almost all, who had previously attempted to do so, had failed. Vasilev openly stated, after all, that his intention was to meet the challenge that had defeated Stanislavsky. He was interested in the lyrical material in Pushkin’s works – the pure poetry. He felt an affinity with the pithiness

---

<sup>16</sup> As a result of a conflict with the Moscow authorities, who accused the artist of inefficient utilisation of the spaces of the School of Dramatic Arts, before removing him from his position as the general head of the theatre, Vasilev gave up working in Moscow and moved to France. For more on this subject, see Wasiljew 2007 and Osińska 2007.



**Fig. 6.18.** Aleksandr Pushkin's *Mozart and Salieri*, directed by Anatoly Vasilev, set design by Igor Popov, School of Dramatic Art, 1998, photograph by Anatoly Vasilev. In the centre: Igor Yatsko (left, Mozart) and Vladimir Lavrov (Salieri)

of the poetry, its “concision that can make your head spin,” to quote Anna Akhmatova. She described *The Stone Guest* as a work in which “the efforts towards succinctness were revealed with particular force” [Akhmatova 1958: 186].

In *Don Juan or The Stone Guest and Other Poems*, Vasilev changed the order of the text, removing its plot and instead extending it by incorporating the poems into it. The performance began with fragments from Pushkin's epic *The Gabrieliad*, which came before the second scene (the supper at Laura's) that then faded into the first scene (Don Juan and Leporello at the cemetery), before eventually being followed by the fourth and third – the departure of Don Juan and Leporello. What we witness is an inversion, which was intended to eliminate the tension at the level of the plot. Vasilev gladly reaches for recognisable literary motifs, thus making it easier to treat texts more liberally. He is not interested in telling a story, but rather in extracting its universal motifs from a work, as is evident in the motif of tempting fate that recurs in his works.

At the outset of the spectacle, five actors entered a uniformly-illuminated stage space. Their extravagant costumes were striking: the women were dressed in colourful oriental dresses, one wearing bells on her ankles, which she used in some scenes to emphasise the rhythm of the movement. The men's clothes made reference to European historical dress although they were not always connected in a literal way to Pushkin's text, while sometimes being a playful paraphrase or even a joke (Leporello in wooden clogs and a cross made of cardboard boxes tied to his back).

None of the protagonists was played by a single actor. Each actor (Aleksandr Anurov, Igor Yatsko and Vladimir Lavrov) could become Don Juan, Don Carlos or Leporello. In the first scene, Laura was played by two actresses (Natalia Kolyakanova<sup>17</sup> and Lyudmila Drebniova), who shared the text in a surprising manner that sometimes contradicted the logic of a particular line. The actors performed on a specially-constructed platform made of wooden planks and covered in a patterned oriental carpet. At the back of the stage was a classical wall. There were few props in the production – a still life in the foreground (a goblet, a bunch of grapes and a drape), a plaster-cast bust of Cicerone, and also a smaller one of the soldier of fortune Colleoni. Both busts were mobile, as they were fitted with wheels (the first became a sculpture of the Commander). There were also three chairs. Later a kind of lantern, a hurdy-gurdy, castanets and some bells also appeared.

This spectacle featured clear references to the baroque through its contrasting connections of diverse elements, with diagonal lines dominating the compositions of scenes and the director indicating his affection for allegory. In many episodes Vasilev employed a two-level construction: the first level featured direct translations of the text into images, with these making allusions to meanings hidden at a deeper level. When Igor Yatsko uttered the words "The day-star has been extinguished" (*Pogaslo dnevnoe svetilo*) with the lyrical subject returning to memories from bygone years, the actor was accompanied on stage by a hanging lantern, with the light emanating from it bouncing back off mirrors. Half of his face and body was shrouded in darkness, while the other half was illuminated. This is just one example of the use of theatrical allegory.

The final scene, Don Juan's meeting with Donna Anna, during which the hero reveals himself to be the Commander's killer, was filled with drama further emphasised by its repetition in a second rendition. Repetition constitutes one of the fundamental principles of Vasilev's theatre,

---

<sup>17</sup> Following Natalia Kolyakanova's departure from the company, she was replaced by guest performer Alla Demidova.

although, in the repetitions, he changes particular elements and details which, as might have been expected, results from the conviction that all that is unique and eternal returns in new and constantly changing forms. Four actors featured in this scene. Two of them (Donna Anna and Don Juan) posed their questions simultaneously and their voices overlapped, while these were further overlaid by the romantic poetry of Manuel de Falla, which was initially sung in a low and sensual voice by Lyudmila Drebnayova, with this rendition followed by another (when Drebnayova plays Donna Anna) in a soprano who, in this case, appeared alongside two other figures (she had elegant company: two ladies and one gent) on the balcony. The three figures on the balcony remained present throughout the scene in Donna Anna's room, whose presence (she remained silent after singing the romantic poem) provided a counterpoint to the emotional saturation of the dialogue between Don Juan and Donna Anna.

In the programme accompanying the production, Vasilev suggested his own reading of the key scene in the drama: the encounter between Don Juan and Donna Anna. Vasilev argued that he was a demon, a great sinner, while she was an angel (since only an angel is capable of accepting a killer). Their encounter can be considered a mystical supplement to the two contrasting elements. "The demon must capture the angel. Beauty must capture the spirit," wrote Vasilev. He added: "It is in this intimacy, in this end to the story of Don Juan and Donna Anna, that the entire law of life, which is the opposite of death, as personified in the figure of the statue of the Commander, can be found."

The law of life is for Vasilev both the unresolvable collision of sin and holiness, the desire for satisfaction and self-denial, passion and asceticism. It was not by chance that the performance began with fragments of *The Gabrieliad*, an epic work filled with eroticism that was accused of representing a blasphemous image of the Annunciation. The juxtaposition of sensuality and pure spirituality generates the entire tension in Vasilev's work, while at the same time resonating with his own personal motif. For many years he had explored the issue of how to reconcile things that preclude one another – for example, theatre and religiosity, the secular life of the theatre, and the need for spiritual asceticism.

*Mozart and Salieri* was an example of the art of paradoxes and antitheses. The performance space was designed around the principle of contrasts: on the left-hand side were stairs that resembled an open ladder (this image could be seen as a reference to Jacob's ladder, which was a motif that Vasilev often referred to in his statements). On the right-hand side of the stage was a cylindrical shape featuring transparent walls

representing the “separate room at the inn” from Pushkin’s drama. This would be the location of the final encounter between Mozart and Salieri, with the interlocutors separated by a transparent glass table. The ladder, meanwhile, was intended for the angels, i.e., the choir performing Vladimir Martynov’s *Requiem*. It was made of “thick” material, while the “room at the inn” was transparent, immaterial; thus what we had here was a literal realisation of the idea of the reality of the invisible world and the unreality of the visible world. Additionally, to the right of the stage and closer to the audience, was a small table with the “alchemical” apparatus that served Salieri in preparing the poison for Mozart.

The principle of contrasts also determined what costumes the lead protagonists would wear. Mozart had a black costume that resembled a frock coat, as well as a large black top hat (as an aside – with Mozart dressed this way, visually separated from the white of the walls, he evoked associations with Pushkin’s own characters, as well as Onegin as depicted in Aleksandr Notbek’s famous illustrations), while Salieri wore an elegant, courtly and entirely white suit. Black and white were used here inversely. The genius in black and the villain in white (or as Pushkin put it: “And genius and crime / Are two things that don’t combine. Isn’t that true?” [Pushkin 2000: 63]) constitute an oxymoron, something so typical of baroque poetry, thus creating a paradoxical effect. Let us recall, however, that, in Pushkin too, the protagonists contain internal oppositions: Mozart is genial yet irresponsible, “not worthy of himself” in the words of Salieri [Pushkin 2000: 59], while Salieri, who treats art and his calling with the greatest of seriousness, envies Mozart his talent and kills him, explaining away his deed by declaring the necessity of restoring humanity to its appropriate dimensions:

What is the use if Mozart lives  
And even achieves still greater heights?  
What he does – will he elevate Art? No,  
It will fall again when he has vanished;  
No heir of his will remain among us.  
What use is he? Appearing like an angel,  
He brings us a few of Heaven’s songs,  
And then, once he’s roused a wingless desire  
In us, children of dust, he flies away!  
Fly away then! And the sooner, the better!

[Pushkin 2000: 60].

It was in the scene in which the genius is poisoned by Salieri, the adherent of his talent, that Vasilev found its archetype – the story of Jesus and Judas. The preparation of the poison was a paraphrase of Golgotha:

Salieri performed ritual gestures, bringing out the cross, whose ends were sharpened like a dagger, before snapping the cross and pouring the poison from inside it into the goblet of wine, after which he wiped the cross with a sponge soaked in vinegar. This was an inverted ritual, a “black mass” during which wine was converted into poison. Mozart’s sublimation and granting him the status of a sacred victim is indicative of the deep-rooted Russian tradition of perceiving artists as prophets. It is not by chance that Vasilev’s performance also features Pushkin’s poem, “The Poet and the Crowd”:

On his inspired lyre  
With a careless hand the poet strummed.  
He sang – but cold and insistent,  
The uninitiated crowd around him  
Listened to him listlessly

[Pushkin 2008: 211].

Were we to read the scene in which the poison is prepared through the prism of baroque theatre, then its meaning is revealed to us all the more fully. The school drama combined sacred and profane elements within a single text, with this alloy enabling odd forms to emerge that were antithetical in their internal structure, thus better able to reflect the complexity of the matter at hand than forms that were subordinate to the discipline of logic. Lyudmila Sofronova has described the finale of the baroque drama *An Image of the Torment of This World* (*Obraz strastey mira sego*), where angels carry tools including string, nails, a hammer and a cross, while discussing the Passion and, simultaneously, constructing a panegyric. “The panegyric comes together forming the culmination of each Easter play – the scene of the Passion of the Christ” [Sofronova 1996: 43–44]. In killing genius, Salieri simultaneously renders it immortal and creates its glory.

The performance also featured further hidden biblical references.<sup>18</sup> The scene in which Salieri drove away the blind violinist, who Salieri considered to be degrading art through his performance, made reference to the biblical motif of driving out the money lenders from the temple. The image of Salieri himself could also be considered a variant on the biblical parable of the vineyard workers (the greatest rewards are not always received by the person who makes the greatest effort) or the parable of the wedding feast (“For many are called, but few are

---

<sup>18</sup> Attention was drawn to these quotes by Natalia Borisova in her analysis of the performance; see Borisova 2001.



chosen,” Matthew, 22:14). Vasilev thus extracts its hidden contextual background from Pushkin’s masterpiece that then gives universal meaning to the entire piece.

The performance was constructed around multi-storey parallels, repetitions and antithetical juxtapositions of images. Situations were doubled, tripled and multiplied, including the motif of the death of the genius – Mozart (with the overlaid image of Pushkin), or the motif of the knight, who appeared in one of the intermedia of the performance as Prince K., with this being a citation of Dostoevsky’s *Uncle’s Dream*, which Vasilev staged in Budapest in 1994. This knight, manacled in his armour, evoked associations both with Pushkin’s “poor knight” and the idiot-prince, the “Christ prince.” The motif of the kiss, containing the antithesis of betrayal and friendship, was manifested not only visually in the performance (Salieri placed a kiss on Mozart’s cheek), but allusions were also made to it in materials presented to the audience, with the programme containing a related image and fragment of Dostoevsky’s “Grand Inquisitor” (bearing the quotation: “The kiss burns his heart, but the old man remains firm in his own ideas and unbelief” [Dostoevsky n.d.]). Furthermore, the blind violinist from Pushkin’s work multiplied, becoming an entire band of musicians (the excellent band Opus Posth led by Tatyana Grindenko) who wore gaudy jesters’ costumes. The musicians sat opposite the “ladder” that was filled with “angels” – the choir of the Sirin group who performed Martynov’s *Requiem*.

This piece, specially composed at the request of Anatoly Vasilev, was in no way a dirge, since, as Martynov wrote in his programme notes, such an interpretation of the text *Missae pro defunctis* results from accepting the Western Enlightenment worldview. According to Eastern Christianity, death is primarily identified with the hope of eternal peace and glory. In the course of performing the *Requiem*, a transformation of Earthly reality occurs. Having been torn between contrasting aspirations, it transforms into an angelic reality, expressed visually in the transformation of colours – contrasting colours (black and white, the bright colours of the musicians) were replaced by monochrome colours, with pastel, lilac, green and gold tones prevailing in the choir’s costumes.

Martynov’s piece lasted around twenty minutes, which is a very long time for an autonomous part of a production. Vasilev followed the baroque masters at this point, who found highlighting the stitches of a production a most valid device, as they used various apparently incompatible materials in building their whole. The citations (and self-references), rhetorical figures, allegories and images originating from various sources – all of this referred back to baroque theatre, particularly school theatre.

Let us remind ourselves of their background: Byzantine mystery plays entered the Ruthenian lands where, together with local folk performances, they laid the foundations for the school theatre of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that was popular in Russia and Ukraine (also in Poland, in particular in Jesuit colleges). This type of theatre as an art form (with its own playwrights, actors and audiences) was also part of the curriculum, since it served didactic ends. On the textual level, it made reference to the Bible and other religious ritual motifs (for example to the lives of saints and hagiography), while at the level of staging it was clearly a child of the baroque, hence the role of allegorical elements and the use of expressively theatrical effects, etc. The school theatre was a phenomenon that was at the limits of the sacred and profane: "it consistently disrupted the limits of sacred space, penetrating the realm of secular culture, only to then return to the religious sphere richer for all of the secular elements" [Sofronova 1998: 98].

It would seem that the tradition of school theatre, whose aesthetic objectives were subordinate to didactic tasks, was a long-since forgotten page in history. After all, what value could this tradition have for an artist like Vasilev, all the more so given that he positioned himself as an artist in the realm of Christian culture? As it happens, its value could be found, for example, in the poetics of citation – "school theatre is one large citation with a complex construction" [Sofronova 1998: 100]. Furthermore, a citation is always, whether at the verbal level or at the level of action, an allusion to the Bible or other religious motifs. The principle of the citation, whether overt or hidden, is thus paradoxically close to contemporary creative strategies based on postmodernism. Different to postmodernism, however, Vasilev's art represents the desire to unify that which has been fragmented and broken up, rather than depicting the world's collapse into pieces, with each piece living its own, isolated life. Vasilev uses citations not only as a textual device, but primarily as a means of referencing and summoning reality, which, in his view, provides the background to the secular themes explored in classical literary works, such as Moliere or Pushkin. The background to everything is the Holy Bible. Thus it is not for the first time (nor certainly the last) that we find confirmation in there being no traditions that can be killed off forever; instead, what appears to be new turns out to be a reference (and reworking) of something old and long-forgotten. It was in these old traditions (the medieval mystery play or the school theatre) that Vasilev sought a means of realising the idea that everything that is human and sensual acquires meaning only when it makes reference to that which is divine and beyond the sensual.

## 8. Self-Referentiality in the Architecture of the Theatre on Sretenka Street

Certain categories and concepts consistently present in Anatoly Vasilev's statements are manifested at various levels of his theatrical practice. One example is the concept of transparency, which he applies in reference to the art of acting. This concept was also realised in the architecture of Vasilev's new theatre building, which took the place of the former Uran Cinema on Sretenka Street. The new theatre opened in 2001 and was designed by a group of architects led by Ivan Popov, while the design itself can be seen as a realisation of Anatoly Vasilev's principles.

Upon entering this building on a summer evening, one is struck by the prevailing brightness. The theatre is filled with light: it enters through the glass roof that makes the sky visible; it comes in through huge windows positioned up high and reflects off the white walls. In one of the rehearsal rooms named Tau (which can also be used for demonstrations and performances) two walls are made entirely of glass, thus opening up a view onto nearby trees. The high, soaring Globe space, which is a miniature version of Shakespeare's original, is topped off by

**Fig. 6.19.** The School of Dramatic Art on Sretenka Street. Foyer



a glass roof that can be opened, if required. And there is more. Many of the internal walls are also made of glass. As we walk the corridors of this complex architectural labyrinth, we pass by various administrative and working spaces. Almost all of them are separated from the corridor by glass, while the walls between them are also transparent. We get a sense of the strange unreality of these borders. The walls seem to exist yet they are transparent and thus do not fulfil the function of division; furthermore, they are material yet allow light to pass through them.



**Fig. 6.20.** The School of Dramatic Art on Sretenka Street. The Manège

Returning to the concept of transparency, we should recall how the director applied it to working with actors.

As you know, the best actors are transparent. Yet transparency is the hardest thing to achieve. Generally speaking, an actor's body is dense and cannot be penetrated. But there are various methods for ensuring that a body becomes transparent, just as there are methods for filtering the psyche [Vasilev 1999a: 144],

he wrote, before adding:

Having focused over the last few years on this subject [internal life – K.O.], I have reached the conclusion that the actor should be expected to become essentially completely transparent. *Light will pass through him, the joy of light will pass through him as if he were glass* [emphasis – K.O.]. The situation whereby the actor appears as a mediator between heaven and earth seems to be exceptional. I am of the impression that it is in this very moment that the theatre begins to fulfil its basic destiny [Vasilev 1999a: 144].

Without delving into the issue of the techniques that were to serve the actor in “achieving transparency” (to describe this would require inside knowledge of the training that the actors of the School of Dramatic Arts undergo), let us instead recall the tradition that Vasilev’s statements evoke. It is of course a Platonic tradition, according to which everything that exists on Earth also has an equivalent in the realm of ideas, in the world of the mind, which prevails over the physical world. The human being is thus divided in two: the human “ideal” and the physical human being, whereby the ideal is that which is real. Light, which comes from the realm of ideas, is to pass through the actor in the same way that sunlight passes through the windows and roof of the theatre. Perhaps to some this equation of the two realities will appear naïve. But it does appear justified in the context of Vasilev’s programme (since he set out to be a reformer), with his vision of the theatre precluding the division of the theatre into various realms: the theatre is to be unified; all of its elements are to coexist harmoniously, although this is a harmony that emerges as a result of oppositions being effaced. (As Heraclitus wrote, “The unlike is joined together, and from differences results the most beautiful harmony, and all things take place” [Heraclitus 1889: 96].) Thus, the theatre building and its entire space, not only the stage, becomes an embodiment of the ideas that Vasilev had previously formulated in respect of acting or the art of staging. It is therefore possible to speak of the self-referentiality of this unusual design.

Another characteristic element of the building on Sretenka Street are its stairs. There are many of them – beyond the central staircase there are also many small, internal passageways, sets of stairs and small steps, some of which are spirals, with these being the clearest expression of the attachment to some of the design solutions applied at the theatre’s previous base on Povarskaya Street. There, too, the lowest level of the theatre – where the First Studio space was located, which hosted the majority of performances – was connected with other spaces located one floor above by means of an internal, impractical spiral staircase (recalling

the type that can be found in medieval towers). In the main foyer, opposite the main entrance, was a wall that could be read as a reference to *The Lamentations of Jeremiah* – it was divided rhythmically, topped off by blind arcades. While, in the performance on Povarskaya, these were part of the set, in the new theatre building they became a permanent decorative feature. Let us recall that a similar idea appeared in Meyerhold's design for a new theatre. According to his design, the mosaics on the external walls of the tower (which was part of the building) were to depict scenes from his most important productions.

Diagonally from behind the wall rises a cylindrical object (resembling a crooked tower), covering the spiral stairs. The presence of so many stairs is obviously connected to the processes of descending and ascending them, with these processes then entering into relations with the metaphor of the ladder (sometimes specified as Jacob's ladder) evident in Vasilev's statements. Thus, in this case too, metaphors become concrete and are embodied in practice, with this occurring on various rungs of theatrical experience.

Outlining the essence of experiments in his own method of actor training, Vasilev, on several occasions, used phrases referring to the act of descending and ascending.

When an actor speaks with hard intonation it is as if his words fall downwards – a hard, pulsating sound attacking the words almost physically “bores” a channel, making it transparent and directed towards the earth. When an actor applies the principle of inversion – Stanislavsky calls this “perspective” while, in game theory, it is called “inverse perspective” – so, in the case of an inverted projection of the depiction of an event, what we have is an upward opening of the channel – the inversion is, in this case, identical to verticality, and serves the function of Jacob's ladder. In this way an entire channel is opened up from top to bottom. I have always worked with these two techniques: I tried to achieve transparency and bored upwards into the realm of metaphysics [Vasilev 1999a: 143].

In Vasilev's description of the process intended to lead towards a metaphysical theatre, the influence of Grotowski is evident. Vasilev, who considered Grotowski his master, reappropriated the idea of “art as vehicle” in his own way. According to Grotowski, “Art as vehicle is like some kind of primitive elevator: it's some kind of basket pulled by a cord with which the doer lifts himself toward a more subtle energy, *to descend with this* to the instinctual body.” He then adds,

One can compare this all to Jacob's ladder. The Bible speaks of the story of Jacob who fell asleep with his head on a stone and had a vision; he saw, upright upon the earth, a great ladder, and perceived the forces, or – if you prefer – the angels, who descended and ascended [Grotowski 1995: 124–125].

It should be noted, at this point, that the image of the processes of descending and ascending draws on an archetype developed in Plotinus's idea of the human being as someone occupying a distant position in the hierarchy of beings (for Plotinus, the process of beings emerging from the Absolute takes place in the course of emanation, which takes on the following form: each of the beings that emerges is less perfect than the being that produced it), although it has a chance of returning to the totality by taking the same steps, but in the opposite direction, i.e., upwards: from material to existence, from multiplicity to One.

## 9. The Old as a Source of the New

Another trope in Vasilev's thoughts on theatre emerges from his attitude towards the past. As an artist, he possesses a strong sense of connection to certain realms of the culture of the past, something he has expressed on several occasions, both in his manifesto statements as well as in practice (his references to the traditions of Italian theatre, to *nō* theatre, to Baroque school theatre, and other forms). For Vasilev, art is a realm in which it is not progress but rather the timelessness in human experience that is important. Thus, the designs for the theatre on Sretenka Street feature, on the one hand, a reduced-scale replica of Shakespeare's Globe Theatre (which is also, whether intentionally or not, a reference to Meyerhold's idea), while, on the other, they also feature the *Manège*, a space whose construction recalls a temple. In the semi-circular apsis there are boxes, while the side aisles contain galleries with internal windows, and the central nave features the stage space. The stage and auditorium can be configured in any combination. The audience (with a capacity for up to 400 people) can be positioned frontally in relation to the stage, it can surround the stage, or watch from up high in the galleries. The stage (as in the Globe) is equipped with a trapdoor. The western wall features hidden doors behind which another space is concealed, which itself leads into an internal courtyard.

While linking his vision of the theatre to particular traditions, Vasilev nevertheless did not lose sight of a functional approach to space. In the building on Sretenka Street, each specific design solution has a highly practical justification, while current technologies have been employed in putting them into effect when necessary, with older methods also being used as required. The fantastic acoustics of the *Manège* are said to have been achieved thanks to thousands of clay vessels being placed under the floor, serving as resonators.

The building itself seems highly contemporary and is equipped to the highest modern standards. The fact that it is so contemporary, however, does not conflict with tradition, since, as Paul Evdokimov writes on the subject of the temple (this quote would surely appeal to Vasilev), “[i]t is perfectly legitimate to search for new forms, but these forms must express a symbolic content that remains the same throughout the centuries because it has a heavenly origin” [Evdokimov 1990: 143].

Vasilev seeks an all-encompassing theatre, one that would offer an image of the universe. Hence the multiplicity of cultural tropes to which he makes reference. His art emerges (and comes into existence) as the result of a conflict of oppositions, since “in the synthesis of opposites lies the principle that explains the whole of reality” [Reale 1987: 51].

\* \* \*

Anatoly Vasilev belongs to a group of artists convinced of the need to create a strong theoretical foundation for their on-stage practices. Hence the large number of publications he has been responsible for, with the most important of these appearing regularly in Russian artistic journals and almanacs, while a cycle of his lectures was published in France a few years ago [Vassiliev 1999]. In outlining his artistic manifesto, Vasilev speaks of “metaphysical realism” and a contemporary version of liturgical drama, while also making reference to such diverse aspects of earlier artistic forms including the school theatre, the *nō* theatre, Greek antiquity, the Italian Renaissance, Baroque opera, and also surrealism and various avant-garde trends. His artistic strategy encompasses many points of connection to his native Russian avant-garde tradition, primarily Meyerhold. Paradoxically, the past is never as visible as it is in the works of the avant-garde. It is the avant-garde that makes constant reference to tradition, albeit with the intention of transcending it. However, in contrast to the early twentieth-century avant-garde, which rejected the recent past (the naturalistic theatre of the turn of the twentieth century) and instead sought its roots in a more distant past, Vasilev never took a confrontational approach to the forms of theatre from which he has emerged. His path is rather one of evolution: “this is not a theatre that has emerged as a result of catastrophe, or sudden and violent revolution; it is also not a novelty of the kind that the impatient avant-gardists dreamed,” as Petar Brečić has insightfully noted.

This is a theatre of deep transformations, which take place according to the same principles that apply to an anchored ship that changes direction



during the night – at dawn it turns out that it has been turned imperceptibly by strong underwater currents [Brečić 1997: 89].

Anatoly Vasilev began his journey with Stanislavsky's school of theatre. Over time, it emerged that his thinking on theatre (as an autonomous reality) is closer to Meyerhold. It could be argued that Vasilev's entire oeuvre is born of a dialogue with his predecessors in Russian theatre; that it is thus a response to Konstantin Stanislavsky, Mikhail Chekhov, Evgeny Vakhtangov, Vsevolod Meyerhold and Aleksandr Tairov.



## CONCLUSION

In Russian theatre from the late 1930s until at least the 1980s, tradition had always been a permanent and irrefutable feature of almost all aspects of the local culture of performance. While the theatre of the first three decades of the twentieth century originated from efforts to undermine and criticise existing norms, the following decades in the history of the dramatic arts can seem rather traditionalistic. Soviet-era theatre avoided the wave of events connected to what has become known as the second theatrical reform, as it remained outside the influences of counter-culture and the Western avant-garde of the 1960s and 1970s. Its imperviousness to other cultural models meant that traditional models remained intact and were consequently not reflected upon, let alone critiqued. It could be argued that, even though Soviet theatre was traditionalist, the issue of tradition was, paradoxically enough, never up for discussion. This meant that problems related to tensions between that which was already occurrent and that which was novel, between traditionalism and innovation (while always bearing in mind the relative significance of these terms), were more visible in the decades at either end of the twentieth century.

This does not mean that only idealisation of the past was evident during the second half of the century. Valuable cultural phenomena – even those claiming to be examples of innovation – always emerge from modified appropriations of heritage. This is why this book has primarily explored the evolution of selected ideas or techniques that appeared regularly throughout the history of twentieth-century theatre, in various forms, and consistently re-shaped artists' imaginations.

Not only Anatoly Vasilev, but many other directors, actors and set designers, all created their work with reference to the legacy of Konstantin Stanislavsky, Vsevolod Meyerhold, Evgeny Vakhtangov, Aleksandr Tairov, Mikhail Chekhov, and other artists from the early part of the previous century. These references took on various forms. Sometimes this was

evident in the realisation of desired ideals, whose roots could be found in the model of realist-psychological theatre originating from the Moscow Art Theatre. In other cases, the search for inspiration led into realms that had been effaced from the Soviet cultural landscape between the late 1930s and the mid-1950s. In tracing this second genealogical line, this book made Vsevolod Meyerhold its central protagonist.

It is beyond doubt today that Meyerhold was a genuine precursor who laid the foundations of twentieth-century theatre, ensuring that theatre productions became an autonomous art form, guided by their own laws. It should not be forgotten, however, that there were also forerunners of Meyerhold, not only in the realm of ideas but also in terms of technique and craftsmanship. The Moscow Art Theatre provided the infrastructure for this. Having been trained by Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko, Meyerhold held an apprenticeship under Stanislavsky's supervision before leaving the Art Theatre and going on to found his own centre that was critical of his master's programme. He evolved through battles with his direct predecessors. At the same time, he sought inspiration in past traditions and distant cultures. No one before him had been able to make creative use of so many elements of the art of the past, combining them according to new principles, and transforming them into a new quality. Would subsequent generations emerging from this forerunner be able to meet the challenges that Meyerhold had laid down for the theatre of the future? Did the programmes and ideas that evolved throughout the artist's lifetime find worthy inheritors capable of appropriating and reworking his legacy?

An unequivocal answer to these questions is difficult to find. While Stanislavsky's achievements became an evident and accepted tradition, Meyerhold's legacy remained in the shadows for many years. This was not only the result of censorship (which gradually eased after the mid-1950s). We should also remember that the transmission of a legacy through art usually takes place in concealed and unclear ways. Of course, examples challenging this claim can be found. Valery Fokin, for example, recently created an entire programme called the New Life for Tradition, which primarily explored Meyerhold's achievements. However, artists usually do not make public their most important sources of inspiration. What is hidden is of greater significance to them than what they admit to openly. Consequently, any exploration of Russian theatre of the second part of the twentieth century cannot overlook Meyerhold, even if artists themselves never referred to him explicitly. His ideas, even those at the extremes of theatre and the artistic avant-garde, set the tone for almost all of the ideas on the performance space in the twentieth century. Meyerhold's legacy

is also evident in other realms – in staging and sets, in work with actors, and even the architecture of theatre buildings. The memory of his achievements undoubtedly helped overcome the Stalinist-era paradigm.

The rejection of traditional, old-fashioned norms was aided not only by the return to Meyerhold but also by the rediscovery of other early twentieth-century artists, including Aleksandr Tairov, as well as by the turn towards the origins of the Stanislavskian tradition. While recalling Stanislavsky, it should be stressed that identical elements of past culture can have varied effects. The results depend not on the content of the legacy (fragments of which are taken into account), but also, of course, on the influence of those who in fact make use of this legacy. We can thus speak of the multiple aspects of the tradition of Stanislavsky and the Art Theatre, as well as of various modes of appropriating these traditions. Stanislavsky, particularly early Stanislavsky, meant something different to those following him when he was imagined as a personal inspiration and something different again when he was perceived through the working methods he had developed, which ensured that subsequent generations of Russian actors possessed an extraordinary level of mastery of techniques of internal work on a role (which was undoubtedly a strength of the Soviet theatre). His “system” also meant something different again, since it encompassed not only the process of working on an actor, but indeed the entirety of activities preceding the creation of a theatre production. This system was subsequently transformed into a general norm under Stalinism. The memory and legacy of the most important productions by Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko also meant something different. The above differentiation becomes necessary when we pose the following questions in relation to the appropriation of his legacy: which elements of it are refreshing and inspiring, and which are a barrier to innovative approaches? When it comes to the impact of the tradition on staging (as was explored here in relation to productions of Chekhov), then we can speak of an “overwhelming” legacy that made new readings of the dramas difficult. However, the return to the sources associated with Stanislavsky’s studio-based explorations in the period after 1956 was intended by his followers to cleanse the true legacy of the artist of Stalinist deformations. A paradox resulted, however, with the ossified oeuvre of the Stalinist-era MAT being rejected along with Stanislavsky’s later work. The method of physical actions that he developed later in life was associated by subsequent generations of Russian artists with socialist realism, with the method perceived primarily through the prism of the MAT performances of this period. It was Jerzy Grotowski who first noted the inspiring potential of Stanislavsky’s late period discoveries.

While writing this book, several further issues emerged, which could inspire further research. In tracing the evolution of twentieth-century theatres, I consistently encountered a multifariously manifested clash between theatre understood as the domain of the director and theatre that largely stresses the subjectivity of the actor. Tensions relating to the place of the actor in a director's theatre were evident throughout the twentieth century. Each director faced this same issue, with his or her response to it capable of evolution. The complex of questions relating to this problem, however, did not affect only the relations between actor and director, but also the attitude of the director to the text being staged. This second issue has proven controversial for over a hundred years now, and is sometimes framed in unexpected ways. The figure of the director was particularly mistrusted in highly ideological periods, such as the post-Revolutionary period or the Stalinist era. Directors were suspected of attempting to manipulate texts in order to project their own ideas onto them. This conflict was already evident in the 1920s, when the Proletkult ideology confronted Meyerhold's model of a director's theatre (and who, with time, abandoned his instrumental approach to texts).

Another issue that emerged at the margins of my deliberations concerning many spheres of theatre across a broad period concerned periodisation and the problematisation of so-called cultural caesurae. It was evident until at least the mid-1930s that Soviet theatre featured not only a variety of phenomena, but also a movement of ideas and competing concepts, meaning that, to take 1929 (or, as others argue, 1932) as the date marking the beginning of processes of homogenisation in art and its subordination to ideological aims, seems to be a mistake. On the other hand, the mid-1950s did not signal a reappraisal of the dominant theatrical paradigm, merely a correction of it. Only in the late 1960s and 1970s were there evident attempts to break with notions of the performance as an integral work of art in which all elements stressed an unambiguous message permitting no alternative interpretations.

The history of theatre as a necessarily ephemeral form of art evades definitive conclusions. It is for this reason that I have left open many of the issues explored in this book.

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS ALONG WITH THEIR SOURCES

|      |                                                                                                                                                     |    |
|------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| 1.1. | Meyerhold circa 1923 .....                                                                                                                          | 17 |
|      | V. E. Meyerhold, <i>Stayi, pis'ma, rechi, besedy</i> , vol. 2, Moskva: Iskusstvo 1968                                                               |    |
| 1.2. | Exercises in biomechanics, sketch by Vladimir Lyutse .....                                                                                          | 21 |
|      | <i>Ermitazh</i> 1922, no. 8; reprinted in: <i>Vstrechi s Meyerholdom. Sbornik vospominany</i> , ed. Lyubov Davydovna Vendrovskaya, Moskva: VTO 1967 |    |
| 1.3. | Sergey Eistenstein in the First Workers' Studio of the Proletkult, 1923 .....                                                                       | 23 |
|      | <i>Eisenstein – artysta myśliciel</i> , ed. Wiesław Godzic, Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe 1982                                        |    |
| 1.4. | The First Studio of the MAT .....                                                                                                                   | 35 |
|      | <i>Moskovsky khudozhestvenny teatr vtoroy</i> , ed. Aleksandr Brodsky, Moskva: Gos. tip. im. Ivana Fedorova 1925                                    |    |
| 1.5. | Queuing in front of the Sovremennik Theatre, 1960s .....                                                                                            | 41 |
|      | <i>Teatr "Sovremennik,"</i> ed. Aleksandr Svobodin, Moskva: Iskusstvo 1973                                                                          |    |
| 1.6. | Oleg Efremov as Boris in Viktor Rozov's <i>The Eternally Alive</i> .....                                                                            | 41 |
|      | <i>Teatr "Sovremennik,"</i> ed. Aleksandr Svobodin, Moskva: Iskusstvo 1973                                                                          |    |
| 1.7. | Poster for Viktor Rozov's <i>The Eternally Alive</i> , directed by Oleg Efremov, MAT Young Actors' Studio, 1956 .....                               | 42 |
|      | <i>Teatr "Sovremennik,"</i> ed. Aleksandr Svobodin, Moskva: Iskusstvo 1973                                                                          |    |
| 1.8. | <i>Nomination</i> by Aleksandr Volodin, directed by Oleg Efremov, Sovremennik Theatre, 1963 .....                                                   | 44 |
|      | Anatoly Smelyansky, <i>Predlagaemye obshchitelstva. Iz zhizni russkogo teatra vtoroy poloviny XX veka</i> , Moskva: Artist. Rezhissyor. Teatr 1999  |    |
| 1.9. | Elena Khodunova, Zbigniew Osiński, Valery Fokin and Konstantin Raykin. Moscow, 1980 .....                                                           | 50 |
|      | Photograph courtesy of Zbigniew Osiński                                                                                                             |    |

|       |                                                                                                                                                                                                             |    |
|-------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| 1.10. | Petr Fomenko .....                                                                                                                                                                                          | 54 |
|       | Photograph by Katarzyna Osińska                                                                                                                                                                             |    |
| 1.11. | Sergey Zhenovach at the Malaya Bronnaya .....                                                                                                                                                               | 59 |
|       | Photograph by Katarzyna Osińska                                                                                                                                                                             |    |
| 1.12. | <i>A Decayed Family</i> according to Nikolay Leskov, directed by Sergey Zhenovach, Theatre Art Studio, 2007 .....                                                                                           | 61 |
|       | Catalogue for the 2007 Golden Mask Festival                                                                                                                                                                 |    |
| 1.13. | Yury Kharikov and Vladimir Klimenko (Klim) .....                                                                                                                                                            | 66 |
|       | Photograph by Katarzyna Osińska                                                                                                                                                                             |    |
| 1.14. | Boris Yukhananov, Individual Directing Workshop .....                                                                                                                                                       | 69 |
|       | Photograph by Katarzyna Osińska                                                                                                                                                                             |    |
| 2.1.  | Vsevolod Meyerhold, drawing by an unknown author .....                                                                                                                                                      | 75 |
|       | <i>Meyerholdovsky sbornik</i> , series 1, vol. 2, ed. Aleksandr Sherel, Moskva: Tvorcheskyy tsentr Meyerholda 1992                                                                                          |    |
| 2.2.  | Poster for Vladimir Mayakovsky's <i>Mystery-Bouffe</i> , directed by Vsevolod Meyerhold, set design by Kazimir Malevich .....                                                                               | 75 |
|       | <i>Istoriya sovetskogo teatra</i> , vol. 1: <i>Petrogradskie teatry na poroge Oktyabrya i v epokhu voennogo kommunizma, 1917–1921</i> , ed. Vasily Rafalovich, Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaya literatura 1933 |    |
| 2.3.  | Kazimir Malevich, sketches of costume for Aleksey Kruchenykh and Mikhail Matyushin's opera <i>Victory over the Sun</i> , 1913 .....                                                                         | 77 |
|       | Public domain                                                                                                                                                                                               |    |
| 2.4.  | Scene from <i>Les Aubes</i> based on Émile Verhaeren's novel, directed by Vsevolod Meyerhold, set design by Vladimir Dmitriev, RSFSR-1 Theatre, 1920 .....                                                  | 83 |
|       | <i>Meyerhold i khudozhniki</i> , ed. Alla Mikhaylova, Moskva: GALART 1995                                                                                                                                   |    |
| 2.5.  | Lyubov Popova, construction for <i>Le Cocu magnifique</i> by Fernand Crommelynck, directed by Vsevolod Meyerhold, RSFSR-1 Theatre, 1922 .....                                                               | 85 |
|       | <i>Meyerhold i khudozhniki</i> , ed. Alla Mikhaylova, Moskva: GALART 1995                                                                                                                                   |    |
| 2.6.  | Aleksandra Ekster, sketch of costume for Innokenty Annensky's <i>Famira Kifared</i> , directed by Aleksandr Tairov, Kamerny Theatre, 1916 .....                                                             | 87 |
|       | <i>Kamerny teatr i ego khudozhniki 1914–1934</i> , Moskva: Izdanie Vserossiyskogo teatralnogo obshchestva 1934                                                                                              |    |
| 2.7.  | Aleksandr Vesnin, costume design for Paul Claudel's <i>L'Annonce faite à Marie</i> , 1920 .....                                                                                                             | 89 |
|       | <i>Kamerny teatr i ego khudozhniki 1914–1934</i> , Moskva: Izdanie Vserossiyskogo teatralnogo obshchestva 1934                                                                                              |    |



- 2.8. Scene from Paul Claudel's *L'Annonce faite à Marie*, directed by Aleksandr Tairov, set design by Aleksandr Vesnin, 1920 ..... 89  
*Kamerny teatr i ego khudozhniki 1914–1934*, Moskva: Izdanie Vserossiyskogo teatralnogo obshchestva 1934
- 2.9. Aleksandra Ekster, design for the costume of Phaedra, 1922 ..... 90  
*Kamerny teatr i ego khudozhniki 1914–1934*, Moskva: Izdanie Vserossiyskogo teatralnogo obshchestva 1934
- 2.10. The final scene from Jean Racine's *Phaedra*, directed by Aleksandr Tairov, set design by Aleksandra Ekster, Kamerny Theatre, 1922 ..... 90  
*Kamerny teatr i ego khudozhniki 1914–1934*, Moskva: Izdanie Vserossiyskogo teatralnogo obshchestva 1934
- 2.11. Viktor Shestakov, model of construction for Aleksey Fayko's *Lake Lull*, directed by Vsevolod Meyerhold, Moscow Revolutionary Theatre, 1923 ..... 91  
*Vstrechi s Meyerholdom. Sbornik vospominany*, ed. Lyubov Davydovna Vendrovskaya, Moskva: VTO 1967
- 2.12. Aleksandr Vesnin, construction for G. K. Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday*, directed by Aleksandr Tairov, Kamerny Theatre, 1923 ..... 93  
*Kamerny teatr i ego khudozhniki 1914–1934*, Moskva: Izdanie Vserossiyskogo teatralnogo obshchestva 1934
- 2.13. – 2.14. Aleksandr Vesnin, costume design for G. K. Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday*, directed by Aleksandr Tairov, Kamerny Theatre, 1923 ..... 94  
*Kamerny teatr i ego khudozhniki 1914–1934*, Moskva: Izdanie Vserossiyskogo teatralnogo obshchestva 1934
- 2.15. Nikolay Gogol's *The Government Inspector*, directed by Vsevolod Meyerhold, set design by Vsevolod Meyerhold et al., Meyerhold Theatre, 1926, scene from episode nine ..... 96  
*Vstrechi s Meyerholdom. Sbornik vospominany*, ed. Lyubov Davydovna Vendrovskaya, Moskva: VTO 1967
- 2.16. Scene from Nikolay Gogol's *The Government Inspector*, Meyerhold Theatre, 1926, photograph by Aleksey Temerin ..... 97  
 Postcard issued by Vs. Meyerhold Apartment Museum in Moscow
- 2.17. *The Poem of the Axe* by Nikolay Pogodin, directed by Aleksey Popov, set design by Ilya Shlepyanov, Moscow Revolutionary Theatre, 1931, photograph by Ilya Shlepyanov ..... 101  
*Ilya Shlepyanov. Statyi, zametki, vyskazyvaniya. Sovremenniki o Shlepyanove*, ed. Berta Graeva, Moskva: Iskusstvo 1969
- 2.18. Maria Babanova as Anka in Nikolay Pogodin's *The Poem of the Axe* .... 103  
 Maya Turovskaya, Babanova. *Legenda i biografiya*, Moskva: Iskusstvo 1981

- 2.19. Isaak Rabinovich, set design for Peretz Markish's *Earth*, State Jewish Theatre (GOSET), 1930 ..... 105  
Elena Kostina, *Khudozhniki stseny russkogo teatra XX veka*, Moskva: Russkoe slovo 2002
- 2.20. Aleksandr Tischler, model of the set design for Shakespeare's *King Lear*, dir. S. Radlov, State Jewish Theatre (GOSET), 1935 ..... 106  
Elena Kostina, *Khudozhniki stseny russkogo teatra XX veka*, Moskva: Russkoe slovo 2002
- 2.21. Nikolay Okhlopkov ..... 109  
*Moskovsky akademichesky teatr imeni Vl. Mayakovskogo 1922–1982*, ed. Viktor Dubrovsky, Nina Velekhova, Moskva: Iskusstvo 1983
- 2.22. Book cover for Rimma Krechetova's *Troe*. David Borovsky, Vladimir Vysotsky, Yuri Lyubimov ..... 117  
Rimma Krechetova, *Troe. Lyubimov. Borovsky. Vysotsky*, Moskva: AST-PRESS SKD 2005
- 2.23. Konstantin Stanislavsky, Evgeny Vakhtangov, Vsevolod Meyerhold, Bertold Brecht – portraits still hanging today in the foyer of the Taganka Theatre ..... 118  
Rimma Krechetova, *Troe. Lyubimov. Borovsky. Vysotsky*, Moskva: AST-PRESS SKD 2005
- 2.24. *Ten Days that Shook the World* based on the book by John Reed, directed by Yuri Lyubimov, set design by David Borovsky, Taganka Theatre, 1965, scene performed outside the theatre ..... 120  
Olga Maltseva, *Poeticheskiy teatr Yuriya Lyubimova. Spektakli Moskovskogo teatra dramy i komedii na Taganke 1964–1998*, St Peterburg: Rossiyskiy institut istorii iskusstv 1999
- 2.25. David Borovsky photographed against the backdrop of the set design for *Vysotsky*, directed by Yuri Lyubimov, Taganka Theatre, 1981 ..... 122  
Rimma Krechetova, *Troe. Lyubimov. Borovsky. Vysotsky*, Moskva: AST-PRESS SKD 2005
- 2.26. David Borovsky, sketch for the set design for *House on the Embankment*, based on the novel by Yuri Trifonov, directed by Yuri Lyubimov, Taganka Theatre, 1989 ..... 129  
Alla Mikhaylova, Rimma Krechetova, *David Borovsky*, Moskva: Aktyor. Rezhissyor. Teatr 2002
- 2.27. David Borovsky, sketch for a set design element for *The Wooden Horses*, based on the novel by Fyodor Abramov, directed by Yuri Lyubimov, Taganka Theatre, 1974 ..... 130  
Alla Mikhaylova, Rimma Krechetova, *David Borovsky*, Moskva: Aktyor. Rezhissyor. Teatr 2002
- 2.28. Scene from *Vladimir Vysotsky* ..... 132  
Rimma Krechetova, *Troe. Lyubimov. Borovsky. Vysotsky*, Moskva: AST-PRESS SKD 2005

|       |                                                                                                                                           |     |
|-------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 2.29. | Vladimir Vysotsky as Hamlet, Taganka Theatre, 1971 .....                                                                                  | 136 |
|       | Rimma Krechetova, <i>Troe. Lyubimov. Borovsky. Vysotsky</i> , Moskva: AST-PRESS<br>SKD 2005                                               |     |
| 2.30. | Scene from <i>Listen!</i> , based on works by Mayakovsky, directed by Yury<br>Lyubimov, Taganka Theatre, 1967 .....                       | 138 |
|       | Rimma Krechetova, <i>Troe. Lyubimov. Borovsky. Vysotsky</i> , Moskva: AST-PRESS<br>SKD 2005                                               |     |
| 2.31. | Vsevolod Meyerhold, drawing by an unknown artist .....                                                                                    | 139 |
|       | <i>Meyerholdovsky sbornik</i> , series 1, vol. 2, ed. Aleksandr Sherel, Moskva: Tvorcheskyy<br>tsentr Meyerholda 1992                     |     |
| 2.32. | Isaak Makhlis, a caricature of Meyerhold .....                                                                                            | 141 |
|       | <i>Meyerholdovsky sbornik</i> , series 1, vol. 2, ed. Aleksandr Sherel, Moskva: Tvorcheskyy<br>tsentr Meyerholda 1992                     |     |
| 2.33. | David Borovsky, design for the <i>Bell Tower for Martyrs</i> .....                                                                        | 143 |
|       | Rimma Krechetova, <i>Troe. Lyubimov. Borovsky. Vysotsky</i> , Moskva: AST-PRESS<br>SKD 2005                                               |     |
| 2.34. | Maria Valentey in the Museum and Home of Vsevolod Meyerhold .....                                                                         | 144 |
|       | Photograph by Katarzyna Osińska                                                                                                           |     |
| 2.35. | Vsevolod Meyerhold, Mikhail Barkhin, Sergey Vakhtangov, concept design<br>for the Meyerhold Theatre's new building, 1932 (overview) ..... | 145 |
|       | <i>Meyerhold i khudozhniki</i> , ed. Alla Mikhaylova, Moskva: GALART 1995                                                                 |     |
| 2.36. | Vsevolod Meyerhold at the construction site of the new theatre, 1937 ...                                                                  | 147 |
|       | <i>Meyerhold i khudozhniki</i> , ed. Alla Mikhaylova, Moskva: GALART 1995                                                                 |     |
| 2.37. | Aleksey Shchusev, concept design for the State Meyerhold Theatre,<br>1934 (overview) .....                                                | 148 |
|       | <i>Meyerhold i khudozhniki</i> , ed. Alla Mikhaylova, Moskva: GALART 1995                                                                 |     |
| 2.38. | Valery Fokin in his office at the Meyerhold Centre, 2004 .....                                                                            | 152 |
|       | Photograph by Katarzyna Osińska                                                                                                           |     |
| 3.1.  | Caricatures of Sergey Eisenstein and Sergey Yutkevich by Ivan Chu-<br>velev .....                                                         | 156 |
|       | Aleksandr Chepalov, <i>Sud'ba peresmeshnika, ili Novye stanstviya Frakassa. Teatralny roman-issledovanie</i> , Kharkov 2001               |     |
| 3.2.  | Nikolay Foregger's <i>Mechanical Dances</i> (sequence <i>Stroll, Passion, Death</i> ),<br>1923, drawing Sergey Yutkevich .....            | 157 |
|       | Sergey Yutkevich, <i>Sobranie sochineny v 3 tomakh</i> , vol. 1: <i>Molodost'</i> , ed. Mikhail<br>Dolinsky, Moskva: Iskusstvo 1990       |     |

- 3.3. Mikhail Eskin – clown. *The Wise Man* according to Aleksandr Ostrovsky, directed by Sergey Eisenstein, First Workers' Theatre of the Proletkult, 1923 ..... 158  
Sergey Eisenstein, *Izbrannye proizvedeniya v 6 tomakh*, vol. 5, ed. Sergey Yutkevich, Moskva: Iskusstvo 1967
- 3.4. Scene from an adaptation of Aleksandr Ostrovsky's *The Wise Man*, directed by Sergey Eisenstein, First Workers' Theatre of the Proletkult, 1923 ..... 159  
Sergey Eisenstein, *Izbrannye proizvedeniya v 6 tomakh*, vol. 5, ed. Sergey Yutkevich, Moskva: Iskusstvo 1967
- 3.5. Scene from an adaptation of Aleksandr Ostrovsky's *The Wise Man*, directed by Sergey Eisenstein, First Workers' Theatre of the Proletkult, 1923 ..... 161  
Sergey Eisenstein, *Izbrannye proizvedeniya v 6 tomakh*, vol. 5, ed. Sergey Yutkevich, Moskva: Iskusstvo 1967
- 3.6. Scene from Sergey Tretyakov's *Are You Listening, Moscow?*, directed by Sergey Eisenstein, First Studio of the Proletkult, 1923 ..... 162  
Sergey Eisenstein, *Izbrannye proizvedeniya v 6 tomakh*, vol. 5, ed. Sergey Yutkevich, Moskva: Iskusstvo 1967
- 3.7. Lyubov Popova, sketch of *prozodezhda* (workers' clothes) ..... 165  
*Vstrechi s Meyerholdom. Sbornik vospominany*, ed. Lyubov Davydovna Vendrovskaya, Moskva: VTO 1967
- 3.8. Yudif Glizer in Sergey Tretyakov's *Are You Listening, Moscow?*, directed by Sergey Eisenstein, First Studio of the Proletkult, 1923, drawing by Sergey Eisenstein ..... 169  
Sergey Yutkevich, *Sobranie sochineny v 3 tomakh*, vol. 1: *Molodost'*, ed. Mikhail Dolinsky, Moskva: Iskusstvo 1990
- 3.9. Yudif Glizer as Glafira in Anatoly Glebov's *Inga*, 1928; Césarine in Eugène Scribe's *La Camaraderie*, 1936; Elizabeth in Friedrich Schiller's *Mary Stuart*, 1945; Constance in Leonid Leonov's *An Ordinary Man*, 1945 ..... 170  
Sergey Eisenstein, *Izbrannye proizvedeniya v 6 tomakh*, vol. 5, ed. Sergey Yutkevich, Moskva: Iskusstvo 1967
- 3.10. Yudif Glizer as Madame Scobleau in Anatoly Glebov's *Power*, directed by Naum Loyter ..... 171  
Sergey Eisenstein, *Izbrannye proizvedeniya v 6 tomakh*, vol. 5, ed. Sergey Yutkevich, Moskva: Iskusstvo 1967
- 3.11. Scene from Fernand Crommelynck's *Le Cocu magnifique*, directed by Vsevolod Meyerhold, RSFSR-1 Theatre, 1922 ..... 174  
Konstantin Rudnitsky, *Rezhissyor Meyerhold*, Moskva: Nauka 1969
- 3.12. Erast Garin as Khlestakov in Nikolay Gogol's *The Government Inspector*, directed by Vsevolod Meyerhold, Meyerhold Theatre, 1926 ..... 176  
Erast Garin, *S Meyerholdom*, Moskva: Iskusstvo 1974

- 3.13. Igor Ilyinsky as Arkashka Schastlivtsev in Aleksandr Ostrovsky's *The Forest*, directed by Vsevolod Meyerhold, Meyerhold Theatre, 1924, photograph by Aleksey Temerin ..... 177  
Postcard issued by Vs. Meyerhold Apartment Museum in Moscow
- 3.14. Erast Garin as Gulyachkin in Nikolay Erdman's *The Mandate*, directed by Vsevolod Meyerhold, Meyerhold Theatre, 1925 ..... 178  
Erast Garin, *S Meyerholdom*, Moskva: Iskusstvo 1974
- 3.15. Igor Ilyinsky as Prisyppkin in Mayakovsky's *The Bedbug*, directed by Vsevolod Meyerhold, Meyerhold Theatre, 1929 ..... 180  
*Vstrechi s Meyerholdom. Sbornik vospominany*, ed. Lyubov Davydovna Vetrovskaya, Moskva: VTO 1967
- 3.16. Andrey Droznin ..... 181  
Photograph by Katarzyna Osińska
- 3.17. Biomechanics exercise: "stabbing with a dagger" ..... 184  
*Vstrechi s Meyerholdom. Sbornik vospominany*, ed. Lyubov Davydovna Vetrovskaya, Moskva: VTO 1967
- 3.18. Biomechanics exercise: "shooting a bow" ..... 184  
*Vstrechi s Meyerholdom. Sbornik vospominany*, ed. Lyubov Davydovna Vetrovskaya, Moskva: VTO 1967
- 3.19. Photograph of Vsevolod Meyerhold with his dedication to Sergey Eisenstein ..... 187  
Sergey Eisenstein, *Izbrannye proizvedeniya v 6 tomakh*, vol. 5, ed. Sergey Yutkevich, Moskva: Iskusstvo 1967
- 3.20. Charles Lecocq's *Day and Night*, the final scene, directed by Aleksandr Tairov, set design by Vladimir and Georgy Stenberg, Kamerny Theatre, 1926 ..... 190  
*Kamerny teatr i ego khudozhniki 1914–1934*, Moskva: Izdanie Vserossiyskogo teatralnogo obshchestva 1934
- 3.21. Vadim Ryndin, portrait of Aleksandr Tairov ..... 192  
*Kamerny teatr i ego khudozhniki 1914–1934*, Moskva: Izdanie Vserossiyskogo teatralnogo obshchestva 1934
- 3.22. Aleksandr Rumnev as Maraskin in Charles Lecocq's operetta *Giroflé-Girofla*, directed by Aleksandr Tairov, set design and costumes by Georgy Yakulov, Kamerny Theatre, 1922 ..... 193  
*Kamerny teatr i ego khudozhniki 1914–1934*, Moskva: Izdanie Vserossiyskogo teatralnogo obshchestva 1934
- 3.23. Alisa Koonen and Nikolay Tseretelli in Charles Lecocq's *Giroflé-Girofla*, directed by Aleksandr Tairov, set design and costumes by Georgy Yakulov, Kamerny Theatre, 1922 ..... 195  
*Kamerny teatr i ego khudozhniki 1914–1934*, Moskva: Izdanie Vserossiyskogo teatralnogo obshchestva 1934

|       |                                                                                                                                                      |     |
|-------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 3.24. | Vyacheslav Polunin as Asisayay .....                                                                                                                 | 198 |
|       | <i>Sovetsky teatr</i> 1986, no. 3–4                                                                                                                  |     |
| 3.25. | Litsedey actors: Nikolay Terentyev, Valery Keft and Robert Gorodetsky, 1980s .....                                                                   | 199 |
|       | <i>Sovetsky teatr</i> 1986, no. 3–4                                                                                                                  |     |
| 3.26. | Anton Adasinsky .....                                                                                                                                | 202 |
|       | Catalogue for the 2003 Golden Mask Festival                                                                                                          |     |
| 3.27. | An adaptation of A. Ostrovsky's <i>The Wise Man</i> , directed by Sergey Eisenstein, First Workers' Theatre of the Proletkult, 1923 .....            | 203 |
|       | Sergey Eisenstein, <i>Izbrannye proizvedeniya v 6 tomakh</i> , vol. 5, ed. Sergey Yutkevich, Moskva: Iskusstvo 1967                                  |     |
| 3.28. | <i>Islands (Ostrova v okeane)</i> , Derevo, 2002 .....                                                                                               | 204 |
|       | Catalogue for the 2003 Golden Mask Festival                                                                                                          |     |
| 4.1.  | Anton Chekhov, Yalta, 1898 .....                                                                                                                     | 206 |
|       | <i>A. P. Chekhov. Dokumenty. Fotografii</i> , ed. Irina Varentsova, Galina Shcheboleva, Moskva: Sovetskaya Rossiya 1984                              |     |
| 4.2.  | Poster for <i>The Seagull</i> , MAT, 1898 .....                                                                                                      | 207 |
|       | <i>A. P. Chekhov. Dokumenty. Fotografii</i> , ed. Irina Varentsova, Galina Shcheboleva, Moskva: Sovetskaya Rossiya 1984                              |     |
| 4.3.  | Anton Chekhov with members of Moscow Art Theatre, 1899 .....                                                                                         | 209 |
|       | <i>A. P. Chekhov. Dokumenty. Fotografii</i> , ed. Irina Varentsova, Galina Shcheboleva, Moskva: Sovetskaya Rossiya 1984                              |     |
| 4.4.  | Konstantin Stanislavsky as Vershinin in <i>Three Sisters</i> , MAT, 1901 ....                                                                        | 212 |
|       | <i>A. P. Chekhov. Dokumenty. Fotografii</i> , ed. Irina Varentsova, Galina Shcheboleva, Moskva: Sovetskaya Rossiya 1984                              |     |
| 4.5.  | <i>Uncle Vanya</i> , Act 2, MAT, 1899 .....                                                                                                          | 215 |
|       | <i>A. P. Chekhov. Dokumenty. Fotografii</i> , ed. Irina Varentsova, Galina Shcheboleva, Moskva: Sovetskaya Rossiya 1984                              |     |
| 4.6.  | <i>Three Sisters</i> , directed by Yury Lyubimov, set design by David Borovsky, Taganka Theatre, 1981 .....                                          | 224 |
|       | Anatoly Smelyansky, <i>Predlagaemye obshchayatelstva. Iz zhizni russkogo teatra vtoroy poloviny XX veka</i> , Moskva: Artist. Rezhissyor. Teatr 1999 |     |
| 4.7.  | Scene from <i>Three Sisters</i> , directed by Anatoly Efros, Theatre on Malaya Bronnaya, 1967 .....                                                  | 225 |
|       | Anatoly Smelyansky, <i>Predlagaemye obshchayatelstva. Iz zhizni russkogo teatra vtoroy poloviny XX veka</i> , Moskva: Artist. Rezhissyor. Teatr 1999 |     |

|             |                                                                                                                                                                     |     |
|-------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 4.8.        | <i>Ivanov</i> , directed by Oleg Efremov, MAT, 1976 .....                                                                                                           | 226 |
|             | Anatoly Smelyansky, <i>Predlagaemye obstoyatelstva. Iz zhizni russkogo teatra vtoroy poloviny XX veka</i> , Moskva: Artist. Rezhissyor. Teatr 1999                  |     |
| 4.9.        | Mass scene from <i>Ivanov</i> , directed by Mark Zakharov, Leninist Komsomol Theatre, 1976 .....                                                                    | 227 |
|             | Anatoly Smelyansky, <i>Predlagaemye obstoyatelstva. Iz zhizni russkogo teatra vtoroy poloviny XX veka</i> , Moskva: Artist. Rezhissyor. Teatr 1999                  |     |
| 4.10.       | Mass scene from <i>The Cherry Orchard</i> , directed by Anatoly Efros, set design by Valery Levental, Taganka Theatre, 1975 .....                                   | 229 |
|             | Anatoly Smelyansky, <i>Predlagaemye obstoyatelstva. Iz zhizni russkogo teatra vtoroy poloviny XX veka</i> , Moskva: Artist. Rezhissyor. Teatr 1999                  |     |
| 5.1.        | Scene from an adaptation of Fyodor Abramov's <i>Brothers and Sisters</i> ....                                                                                       | 248 |
|             | Anatoly Smelyansky, <i>Predlagaemye obstoyatelstva. Iz zhizni russkogo teatra vtoroy poloviny XX veka</i> , Moskva: Artist. Rezhissyor. Teatr 1999                  |     |
| 5.2.        | Eduard Kochergin .....                                                                                                                                              | 251 |
|             | Photograph by Katarzyna Osińska                                                                                                                                     |     |
| 5.3.        | An adaptation of Fyodor Abramov's <i>Home</i> , directed by Lev Dodin, set design by Eduard Kochergin, Maly Drama Theatre, 1980 .....                               | 252 |
|             | Anatoly Smelyansky, <i>Predlagaemye obstoyatelstva. Iz zhizni russkogo teatra vtoroy poloviny XX veka</i> , Moskva: Artist. Rezhissyor. Teatr 1999                  |     |
| 5.4.        | Scene from an adaptation of Sergey Kaledin's <i>Gaudeamus</i> , directed by Lev Dodin, Maly Drama Theatre, 1990 .....                                               | 259 |
|             | Anatoly Smelyansky, <i>Predlagaemye obstoyatelstva. Iz zhizni russkogo teatra vtoroy poloviny XX veka</i> , Moskva: Artist. Rezhissyor. Teatr 1999                  |     |
| 6.1.        | Anatoly Vasilev .....                                                                                                                                               | 270 |
|             | Photograph by Katarzyna Osińska                                                                                                                                     |     |
| 6.2.        | Anatoly Vasilev .....                                                                                                                                               | 271 |
|             | Photograph by Katarzyna Osińska                                                                                                                                     |     |
| 6.3. – 6.4. | <i>Vassa Zheleznova. The First Version</i> , directed by Anatoly Vasilev, set design by Igor Popov, Stanislavsky Theatre, 1978, photograph by Viktor Bazhenov ..... | 275 |
|             | <i>Puteshestvie v teatralnom prostranstve. Anatoly Vasilev i Igor Popov. Stsenografiya i teatr</i> , part 2, Moskva: Shkola dramaticheskogo iskusstva 2003          |     |
| 6.5.        | Viktor Slavkin's <i>Cerceau</i> , directed by Anatoly Vasilev, set design by Igor Popov, Taganka Theatre, 1985 .....                                                | 276 |
|             | Photograph from the programme                                                                                                                                       |     |

|              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |     |
|--------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 6.6.         | Programme for <i>Six Characters in Search of an Author</i> by Luigi Pirandello, directed by Anatoly Vasilev, set design by Igor Popov, School of Dramatic Arts, 1987 .....                                                                      | 283 |
|              | Photograph from the programme                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |     |
| 6.7. – 6.12. | Actors of the School of Dramatic Arts: Aleksandr Anurov, Larisa Belogurova, Vladimir Lavrov, Natalia Kalyakanova, Lyudmila Drebnayova, Igor Yatsko, all photographs by Jakub Kos .....                                                          | 284 |
|              | Photographs courtesy of Jakub Kos                                                                                                                                                                                                               |     |
| 6.13.        | Scene from Luigi Pirandello's <i>Six Characters in Search of an Author</i> , directed by Anatoly Vasilev, set design by Igor Popov, School of Dramatic Art, 1987, photograph by Andrey Bezukladnikov .....                                      | 286 |
|              | <i>Puteshestvie v teatralnom prostranstve. Anatoly Vasilev i Igor Popov. Stsenografiya i teatr</i> , part 2, Moskva: Shkola dramaticheskogo iskusstva 2003                                                                                      |     |
| 6.14.        | Igor Popov in his workshop, 1990s .....                                                                                                                                                                                                         | 288 |
|              | Photograph by Katarzyna Osińska                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |     |
| 6.15.        | <i>The Lamentations of Jeremiah</i> , music by Vladimir Martynov, directed by Anatoly Vasilev, set design by Igor Popov, School of Dramatic Arts, 1996 .....                                                                                    | 290 |
|              | <i>Puteshestvie v teatralnom prostranstve. Anatoly Vasilev i Igor Popov. Stsenografiya i teatr</i> , part 2, Moskva: Shkola dramaticheskogo iskusstva 2003                                                                                      |     |
| 6.16.        | Anatoly Vasilev (at Povarskaya Studio); hanging in the background is Krzysztof Bednarski's poster for the final production of the Laboratory Theatre, <i>Polish Thanatos</i> . Cover photograph for an issue of <i>Teatralnaya zhizn'</i> ..... | 296 |
|              | <i>Teatralnaya zhizn'</i> 2003, no. 7; photograph by Vladimir Lupovskoy                                                                                                                                                                         |     |
| 6.17.        | Aleksandr Pushkin's <i>Don Juan, or the Stone Guest and Other Poems</i> , directed by Anatoly Vasilev, set design by Igor Popov, School of Dramatic Art, 1998, photograph by Anatoly Vasilev .....                                              | 298 |
|              | Photograph courtesy of Anatoly Vasilev                                                                                                                                                                                                          |     |
| 6.18.        | Aleksandr Pushkin's <i>Mozart and Salieri</i> , directed by Anatoly Vasilyev, set design by Igor Popov, School of Dramatic Art, 1998, photograph by Anatoly Vasilev .....                                                                       | 300 |
|              | Photograph courtesy of Anatoly Vasilev                                                                                                                                                                                                          |     |
| 6.19.        | The School of Dramatic Art on Sretenka Street. Foyer .....                                                                                                                                                                                      | 307 |
|              | <i>Puteshestvie v teatralnom prostranstve. Anatoly Vasilev i Igor Popov. Stsenografiya i teatr</i> , part 2, Moskva: Shkola dramaticheskogo iskusstva 2003                                                                                      |     |
| 6.20.        | The School of Dramatic Art on Sretenka Street. The Manège .....                                                                                                                                                                                 | 308 |
|              | <i>Puteshestvie v teatralnom prostranstve. Anatoly Vasilev i Igor Popov. Stsenografiya i teatr</i> , part 2, Moskva: Shkola dramaticheskogo iskusstva 2003                                                                                      |     |



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adasinsky Anton Aleksandrovich, 2007, Anton Adasinsky: "My, krutye!," *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 6 April, [http://www.ng.ru/culture/2007-04-06/12\\_anton.html](http://www.ng.ru/culture/2007-04-06/12_anton.html) (accessed 1.04.2017).
- Agranovich Leonid Danilovich, 2004, *Stop-kadr. Meyerhold, Vorkuta i drugoe kino...*, Moskva: Sovpadenie.
- Akhmatova Anna Andreevna, 1958, "Kamenny gost" Pushkina, in: *Pushkin. Issledovaniya i materialy*, vol. 2, ed. Mikhail Pavlovich Alekseev, Moskva-Leningrad: Izdatelstvo AN SSSR, pp. 185–195.
- Alpers Boris Vladimirovich, 1977a, *Teatralnye ocherki*, vol. 1, Moskva: Iskusstvo.
- Alpers Boris Vladimirovich, 1977b, *Teatralnye ocherki*, vol. 2, Moskva: Iskusstvo.
- Alpers Boris Vladimirovich, 1985, *Iskaniya novoy stseny*, Moskva: Iskusstvo.
- Anastasev Arkady Nikolaevich (ed.), 1966–1971, *Istoriya sovetskogo dramaticheskogo teatra*, vol. 1–6, Moskva: Nauka.
- Anastasev Arkady Nikolaevich (ed.), 1971, *Istoriya sovetskogo dramaticheskogo teatra*, vol. 6: 1953–1967, Moskva: Nauka.
- Andreev Mikhail I., Zvenigorodskaya Natalia Eduardovna, Martynova Aleksandra V., Beglyarova Evgeniya Yurevna (eds.), 2001, *Russky dramaticheskyy teatr. Entsiklopediya*, Moskva: Bolshaya rossiyskaya entsiklopediya.
- Anisimov Aleksandr Viktorovich, 1984, *Teatry Moskvyy. Vremya i arkhitektura*, Moskva: Moskovsky rabochy.
- Annensky Innokenty Fyodorovich, 1979, Drama nastroyeniya, in: Innokenty Fyodorovich Annensky, *Kniga otrazheny*, Moskva: Nauka, pp. 82–92.
- Autant-Mathieu Marie-Christine, 1993, *Le théâtre soviétique durant le dégel, 1953–1964*, Paris: CNRS Éditions.
- Autant-Mathieu Marie-Christine (ed.), 2005, *Le Théâtre d'Art de Moscou. Ramifications, voyages*, Paris: CNRS Éditions.
- Bachelis Tatyana Izrailevna, 2007, *Gamlet i Arlekin. Sbornik statey*, Moskva: AGRAF.
- Bakhtin Mikhail, 1981, Epic and Novel, in: Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination. Four Essays*, trans. Caryl Emerson, Michael Holquist, Austin: University of Texas Press, pp. 3–40.

- Balicki Stanisław Witold, Borysow Wiktor, Frołow Władimir, 1977, *Na scenach polskich i radzieckich*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe.
- Baltiyskie sezony 2004 – *Baltiyskie sezony. Almanakh*, no. 11.
- Barba Eugenio, 2003a, Dziadkowie i sieroty, trans. Monika Gurguł, *Didaskalia* 54–56, pp. 17–21.
- Barba Eugenio, 2003b, Grandfathers, Orphans, and the Family Saga of European Theatre, *New Theatre Quarterly*, no. 2, pp. 108–117.
- Barba Eugenio, Savarese Nicola, 2006, *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology. The Secret Art of the Performer*, trans. Richard Fowler, Abingdon–New York: Routledge.
- Barkhin Mikhail Grigorevich, Vakhtangov Sergey Evgenevich, 1967, Nezavershyonny zamysel, in: *Vstrechi s Meyerholdom. Sbornik vospominany*, ed. Lyubov Davydovna Vendrovskaya, Moskva: VTO, p. 570–578.
- Barthes Roland, 1977, The Death of the Author, in: Roland Barthes, *Image. Music. Text*, ed. & trans. Stephen Heath, Michigan: University of Michigan, pp. 142–148.
- Bartoshevich Aleksey Vadimovich (ed.), 2003, *Teatr XX veka. Zakonomernosti razvitiya*, Moskva: Indrik.
- Bazhenova Violetta Georgievna, 1991, Trening voobrazheniya aktyora v protsesse raboty nad spektaklem (iz opyta stsenicheskoy pedagogiki L. A. Dodina), in: *Iz istorii stsenicheskoy pedagogiki Leningrada*, ed. Yury Andreevich Vasilev, Leningrad: LGITMiK, pp. 110–120.
- Bazhenova Violetta Georgievna, 1993, Repertiruet Lev Dodin, *Voprosy teatra* 13, pp. 33–53.
- Bentley Eric, 1953, Craftsmanship in “Uncle Vanya” (1946), in: Eric Bentley, *In Search of Theater*, New York: Knopf, pp. 342–364.
- Berezark Ilya Borisovich, 1934, Teatr-studiya Yu. Zavadskogo, *Rabochy i teatr* 35, December.
- Beumers Birgit, 1997, *Yuri Lyubimov. Thirty Years at the Taganka Theatre, 1964–1994*, London–New York: Routledge.
- Beumers Birgit, Lipovetsky Mark, 2009, *Performing Violence. Literary and Theatrical Experiments of New Russian Drama*, Bristol–Chicago: Intellect.
- Blyum Oskar Veniaminovich, 1922, Aktyor i rezhissyor, in: *O teatre*, ed. Oskar Veniaminovich Blyum, Tver: Vtoraya gostipografiya, pp. 123–133.
- Bochow Jörg, 1997, *Das Theatre Meyerholds und die Biomechanik*, Berlin: Alexander Verlag.
- Bogdanov Gennady Nikolaevich, 2003, Biomekhanika – yazyk stsenicheskogo deystviya. Masterklass Gennadiya Bogdanova v Toronto, *Toronto Slavic Quarterly* 4, <http://sites.utoronto.ca/tsq/04/bogdanov04.shtml> (accessed 1.04.2017).
- Bogdanova Polina Borisovna, 2007, *Logika peremen. Vasilev: mezhdru proshlym i budushchim*, Moskva: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie.
- Bogemskaya Kseniya Georgievna, Solntseva Larisa Pavlovna (eds.), 2000, *Samo-deyatelnoe khudozhestvennoe tvorchestvo v SSSR, 1917–1932*, Sankt-Peterburg: Gosudarstvennyy institut iskusstvoznaniya.
- Bogomolov Yury Aleksandrovich, Kushnirov Mark Aronovich, 1965, Obyknoenny volshebnyk, *Iskusstvo kino*, no. 3, pp. 75–79.

- Borisova Natalia, 2001, Spektakl Anatoliya Vasileva. A. S. Pushkin "Motsart i Salieri." V. Martynov "Requiem." Kontseptsiya i stsienografiya, in: *Teoriya teatra* (Akademicheskoe tetrad 7), ed. Abram Grigorevich Raskin, Moskva: Shkola dramaticheskogo iskusstva, pp. 28–48.
- Borovsky David Lvovich, 1999, Nichto ne propadaet naprasno, interview by Olga Vladimirovna Egoshina, in: *Rezhissyorskyy teatr. Razgovory pod zhanesveka*, ed. Anatoly Mironovich Smelyansky, Olga Vladimirovna Egoshina, vol. 1, Moskva: MKhT, pp. 23–30.
- Borovsky David Lvovich, 2001, *Est tri epokhi u vospominanyj...*, Kiev: Alterpress.
- Borovsky David Lvovich, 2006, *Ubegayushchee prostranstvo*, Moskva: Eksmo.
- Borowski Dawid, 2005, Wazna jest rozmowa..., interview by Marina Dawydowa, Katarzyna Osińska, *Didaskalia* 67–68, pp. 122–123.
- Boykova Irina Ivanovna, 1992, Poteryanny ray. Estetika teatra Lva Dodina 80-kh godov, *Peterburgskyy teatralny zhurnal*, no. 0, pp. 26–31.
- Bourdieu Pierre, 1995, *The Rules of Art. Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, trans. Susan Emanuel, Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Bowl John E. (ed.), 1976, *The Russian Art of the Avant-Garde Theory and Criticism, 1902–1934*, trans. John E. Bowl, New York: Viking Press.
- Braun Edward, 1998, *Meyerhold. A Revolution in Theatre*, Iowa City: University of Iowa Press.
- Brečić Petar, 1997, Nowa rzeczywistość teatralna, trans. Natalia Lasoń, *Didaskalia* 19–20, pp. 89–92.
- Brook Peter, 1987, *The Shifting Point, 1946–1987*, London: Harper & Row.
- Brook Peter, 1997, Piter Bruk o Chekhove, trans. Maria Aleksandrovna Zonina, in: *Literaturnoe nasledstvo*, vol. 100: *Chekhov i mirovaya kultura*, vol. 1, ed. Zinovy Samoylovich Paperny, Emma Artemevna Polotskaya, Moskva: Nauka, pp. 118–120.
- Bulgakov Mikhail Afanasevich, 1995, Biomekhanicheskaya glava, in: Mikhail Afanasevich Bulgakov, *Sobranie sochineny v 10 tomakh*, vol. 1: *Dyavolyada. Povesti, rasskazy, felietony, ocherki 1919–1924*, Moskva: Golos, pp. 218–220.
- Bulgakov Mikhail, 2010, *The Fatal Eggs*, trans. Michael Karpelson, Thornhill: Translit Publishing.
- Bułhakow Michaił, 1928, *Fatalne jaja*, trans. Alicja Sternowa, Warszawa: Rój.
- Bushueva Svetlana Konstantinovna (ed.), 1992, *Russkoe aktorskoe iskusstvo XX veka*, vol. 1, Sankt-Peterburg: Rossiyskiy institut istorii iskusstv.
- Bushueva Svetlana Konstantinovna (ed.), 2002, *Russkoe aktorskoe iskusstvo XX veka*, vol. 2–3, Sankt-Peterburg: Rossiyskiy institut istorii iskusstv.
- Bushueva Svetlana Konstantinovna, Varlamova Alina Petrovna, Tarshis Nadezhda Aleksandrovna (eds.), 2005, *Teatralnye terminy i ponyatiya. Materialy k slovaryu*, vol. 1, Sankt-Peterburg: Rossiyskiy institut istorii iskusstv.
- Butkevich Mikhail Mikhaylovich, 2005, *K igrovomu teatru. Lirichesky traktat*, Moskva: GITIS.
- Chekhov Anton, 2005, *Plays by Anton Chekhov. Second Series*, trans. Julius West, [http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/7986?msg=welcome\\_stranger#link2H\\_4\\_0008](http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/7986?msg=welcome_stranger#link2H_4_0008) (accessed 1.04.2017).

- Chekhov Mikhail Aleksandrovich, 1995, O tekhnike aktyora, in: Mihail Aleksandrovich Chekhov, *Literaturnoe nasledie*, vol. 2: *Ob iskusstve aktyora*, Moskva: Iskustvo, pp. 166–287.
- Chepalov Aleksandr Ivanovich, 2001, *Sudba peresmeshnika ili novye stranstviya Frakassa*, Kharkiv: ABEK.
- Chiaromonte Nicola, 1960, Čechov e la messinscena, *Il Mondo*, 9 August.
- Chiaromonte Nicola, 1996, Czechow. Jak go wystawiać?, in: Nicola Chiaromonte, *Granice duszy*, trans. Stanisław Kasprzysiak, Warszawa: Czytelnik, pp. 324–328.
- Chodunowa Jelena, 1989, Recepja Jerzego Grotowskiego w ZSRR, *Teatr* 10, pp. 18–19.
- Chojka Joanna, 2004, Odkłamywanie. Młoda dramaturgia rosyjska, *Dialog*, no. 4, s. 150–161.
- Czindiajkin Nikołaj, 1997, Czym jest laboratorium?, interview by Katarzyna Osińska, in: Katarzyna Osińska, *Studio w rosyjskiej kulturze teatralnej XX wieku. Wybrane zagadnienia*, Warszawa: Semper, pp. 101–107.
- Davydova Marina Yurevna, 2005a, *Konets teatralnoy epokhi*, Moskva: OGI Zolotaya Maska.
- Davydova Marina Yurevna, 2005b, Petr Fomenko. Teatralnyj Luka, in: Marina Yurevna Davydova, *Konets teatralnoy epokhi*, Moskva: OGI Zolotaya Maska, pp. 163–175.
- Derzhavin Konstantin Nikolaevich, 1934, *Kniga o Kamernom teatre, 1914–1934*, Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaya literatura.
- Diky Aleksey Denisovich, 1957, *Povest o teatralnoy yunosti*, Moskva: Iskustvo.
- Diky Aleksey Denisovich, 1967, *Statyi. Perepiska. Vospominaniya*, ed. Natalia Georgievna Litvinenko, A. G. Guliev, Moskva: Iskustvo.
- Dmitrevskaya Marina Yurevna, 1986, Ishchem my sol, ishchem my sol nashey zemli, *Teatr*, no. 4, pp. 89–101.
- Dmitrevskaya Marina Yurevna, 1989, Puti-pereputya Malogo dramaticheskogo, *Sovetsky teatr*, no. 1, pp. 2–7.
- Dmitrevskaya Marina Yurevna, 1992, Dlya veselya nam dany molodye gody..., *Peterburgsky teatralny zhurnal*, no. 0, pp. 6–11.
- Dobrenko Evgeny Aleksandrovich, 1994, Iskustvo prinadlezhat narodu, *Novy mir*, no. 12, pp. 193–213.
- Dodin Lev Abramovich, 1999, Logika svobodnogo poiska, interview by Olga Vladimirovna Egoshina, in: *Rezhissyorsky teatr. Razgovory pod zaves veka*, ed. Anatoly Mironovich Smelyansky, Olga Vladimirovna Egoshina, vol. 1, Moskva: MKhT, pp. 105–127.
- Dodin Lev Abramovich, 2004a, *Kniga otrazheny*, Sankt-Peterburg: Akademicheskyy maly dramaticheskyy teatr.
- Dodin Lev Abramovich, 2004b, *Repetitsii pesy bez nazvaniya*, Sankt-Peterburg: Baltiyskie sezony.
- Dodin Lev Abramovich, 2007, Glavnoe otkrytie – vseгда chelovek, *Trud*, 2 October.
- Dostoevsky Feodor, n.d., *The Grand Inquisitor*, trans. Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, <https://ia601408.us.archive.org/31/items/thegrandinquisit08578gut/inqus10.txt> (accessed 1.04.2017).

- Drawicz Andrzej (ed.), 1997, *Historia literatury rosyjskiej XX wieku*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Droznin Andriej, 1995, Aktor musi być uniwersalny, interview by Katarzyna Osińska, *Didaskalia* 7, pp. 34–35.
- Droznin Andriej, 1997, Ten, który daje natchnienie, interview by Maryna Zielińska, *Didaskalia* 17, pp. 48–49.
- Drzycimska Tatiana, Jakubowa Natalia, Karaś Alona, Niziołek Grzegorz, Zielińska Maryla, 1995, O czym jest “Amfitrion” Wasiljewa?, *Didaskalia* 7, pp. 5–7.
- Dubin Boris Vladimirovich, 2004, *Intellektualnye grupy i simvolicheskie formy. Ocherki sotsiologii sovremennoy kultury*, Moskva: Novoe izdatelstvo.
- Dubin Boris Vladimirovich, 2010, *Klassika posle i ryadom. Sotsiologicheskie ocherki o literature i kulture*, Moskva: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie.
- Dubrovsky Viktor Yakovlevich (ed.), 1983, *Moskovsky akademichesky teatr imeni Vl. Mayakovskogo, 1922–1982*, Moskva: Iskusstvo.
- Dymov Osip [Iosif Isidorovich Perelman], 1902, Polslova o yaponskoy drame, *Birzhevye vedomosti*, no. 69, 12 March.
- Dzhurova Tatyana Sergeevna, Dmitrevskaya Marina Yurevna (eds.), 2016, *Bez tsenzury. Molodaya teatralnaya rezhissura XXI veka*, Sankt-Peterburg: Peterburgsky teatralny zhurnal.
- Dziewulska Małgorzata, 1993, Efekt toruński, *Res Publica* 10.
- Efremov Oleg Nikolaevich, 1992, *Vsyo neprosto*, Moskva: Artist. Rezhissyor. Teatr.
- Efremov Oleg Nikolaevich, 2007, *Prostranstvo dla odinokogo cheloveka*, ed. Tatyana Lvovna Zhdanova, Moskva: Eksmo.
- Efros Abram Markovich, 1930, *Profili*, Moskva: Federatsiya.
- Efros Abram Markovich, 1934, Predislovie, in: *Kamernyj teatr i ego khudozhniki, 1914–1934*, Moskva: VTO, pp. IX–XLVIII.
- Efros Anatoly Vasilevich, 1993a, *Sochineniya v 4 knigakh*, vol. 1: *Repetitsiya – lyubov moya*, ed. Vilena Evgenevna Shats, Moskva: Panas.
- Efros Anatoly Vasilevich, 1993b, *Sochineniya v 4 knigakh*, vol. 2: *Professiya rezhissyor*, ed. Vilena Evgenevna Shats, Moskva: Panas.
- Efros Anatoly Vasilevich, 1993c, *Sochineniya v 4 knigakh*, vol. 3: *Prodolzhenie teatralnogo romana*, ed. Vilena Evgenevna Shats, Moskva: Panas.
- Efros Anatoly Vasilevich, 1993d, *Sochineniya v 4 knigakh*, vol. 4: *Kniga chetvyortaya*, ed. Vilena Evgenevna Shats, Moskva: Panas.
- Efros Nikolay Efrimovich, 1918, *Sverchok na pechi. Studiya Moskovskogo khudozhestvennogo teatra*, Sankt-Petersburg: A. E. Kogan.
- Eisenstein Sergey Mikhaylovich, 1964, Montazh attraktsionov, in: Sergey Mikhaylovich Eisenstein, *Izbrannye proizvedeniya v 6 tomakh*, vol. 2, Moscow: Iskusstvo, pp. 269–273.
- Eisenstein Sergey Mikhaylovich, 1968, Yudif, in: Sergey Mikhaylovich Eisenstein, *Izbrannye proizvedeniya v 6 tomakh*, vol. 5, Moscow: Iskusstvo, pp. 364–396.
- Eisenstein Sergey Mikhaylovich, 2005, *Eisenstein o Meyerholde, 1919–1948*, ed. Vladimir Vsevolodovich Zabrodin, Moskva: Novoe izdatelstvo.
- Elagin Yuri Borisovich, 1955, *Tyomny geny*, New York: Chekhov Publishers.

- Elagin Yury Borisovich, 1998, *Vsevolod Meyerhold. Tyomny geny*, Moskva: Vagrius.
- Epshteyn Mikhail Naumovich, 2000, *Postmodern w Rossii. Literatura i teoriya*, Moskva: R. Elinin.
- Evdokimov Paul, 1990, *The Art of the Icon. A Theology of Beauty*, Oakwood: Rodondo Beach.
- Fast Piotr, 1981, *Poetyka rosyjskiej powieści produkcyjnej lat 1929–1941*, Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego.
- Fast Piotr, 2003, *Realizm socjalistyczny w literaturze rosyjskiej (doktryna, poetyka, konteksty)*, Kraków: Universitas.
- Feldman Oleg Maksimovich (ed.), 2000, *Meyerholdovsky sbornik*, series 2: *Meyerhold i drugie. Dokumenty i materialy*, Moskva: OGI.
- Ferretti Maria, 2003, Memory Disorder: Russia and Stalinism, *Russian Politics and Law*, no. 6, pp. 38–82.
- Fevralsky Aleksandr Vilyamovich, 1940, Misteriya-buff, in: *Mayakovsky. Materialy i issledovaniya*, ed. Viktor Osipovich Pertsov, Mark Isaakovich Serebryansky, Moskva: Goslitizdat, pp. 178–268.
- Fevralsky Aleksandr Vilyamovich, 1971, *Pervaya sovetskaya pesa "Misteriya-buff" V. V. Mayakovskogo*, Moskva: Sovetsky pisatel.
- Fevralsky Aleksandr Vilyamovich, 1976, *Zapiski rovesnika veka*, Moskva: Sovetsky pisatel.
- Fevralsky Aleksandr Vilyamovich, 1978, *Puti k sintezu. Meyerhold i kino*, Moskva: Iskusstvo.
- Florensky Pavel Aleksandrovich, 1984, Molennye ikony Prepodobnogo Sergiya, in: Pavel Aleksandrovich Florensky, *Sochineniya*, vol. 2: *Raboty Pavla Florenskogo 1909–1933 gg. po filosofii, matematike, grammatike, astronomii, iskusstvovedeniyu, bogosloviyu*, Moskva: Mysl, pp. 382–407.
- Fokin Valery Vladimirovich, 1990, Uroki Grotovskogo, *Teatr*, no. 7, pp. 135–146.
- Fokin Valery Vladimirovich, 2006, *Besedy o professii. Repetytsii*, ed. Aleksandr Anatolevich Chepurov, Sankt-Peterburg: Baltiyskie sezony.
- Fokin Walery, 1992, Nauki Grotowskiego, trans. Bruno Chojak, *Notatnik Teatralny*, no. 4, pp. 97–117.
- Fomenko Petr Naumovich, 1996, W chelovecheskikh igrakh est gran..., *Obshchaya gazeta*, no. 6, 15–21 February, p. 4.
- Fomenko Petr Naumovich, 1998, Tsena svodoby, interview by Marina Murzina, *Argumenty i fakty*, no. 26, 24 June.
- Fomenko Petr Naumovich, 1999a, Dierzhat udar, interview by Olga Vladimirovna Egoshina, in: *Rezhissyorskyy teatr. Razgovory pod zhanaves veka*, ed. Anatoly Mironovich Smelyansky, Olga Vladimirovna Egoshina, vol. 1, Moskva: MKhT, pp. 433–444.
- Fomenko Petr Naumovich, 1999b, "Sbilis my, chto delat nam...", interview by Tamara Sergeeva, *Iskusstvo kino*, no. 6, pp. 109–119.
- Foregger Nikolay Mikhaylovich, 1996, Pesa. Syuzhet. Tryuk. Aksioma, in: *Mne-mozina. Dokumenty i fakty iz istorii russkogo teatra XX veka*, ed. Vladislav Vasilevich Ivanov, Moskva: GITIS, pp. 64–74.

- Freedman John, 1997, *Moscow Performances. The New Russian Theater, 1991–1996*, Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers.
- Fridshteyn Yury Germanovich, 1993, *Anatoly Efros – poet teatra*, Moskva: Teatr Antona Chekhova.
- Gaevsky Vadim Moiseevich, 1990, *Fleyta Gamleta. Obrazy sovremennogo teatra*, Moskva: V/O “Soyuzteatr” STD SSSR.
- Garin Erast Pavlovich, 1974, *S Meyerholdom*, Moskva: Iskusstvo.
- Gershkovich Aleksandr Abramovich, 1993, *Teatr na Taganke (1964–1984)*, Moskva: Solaris.
- Gogol Nikolai, 1969, *The Marriage. An Absolutely Incredible Incident in Two Acts*, trans. Bella Costello, Manchester–New York: Manchester University Press.
- Golub Spencer Jay, 1994, *The Recurrence of Fate. Theatre and Memory in Twentieth-Century Russia*, Iowa City: University of Iowa Press.
- Gorfunkel Elena Iosifovna (ed.), 1994, *Premery Tovstonogova*, Moskva: Artist. Rezhissyor. Teatr, Russky teatr.
- Graeva Berta Markovna (ed.), 1969, *Ilya Yulevich Shlepanov. Statyi, zametki, vyzkazyvaniya. Sovremenniki o Shlepyanove*, Moskva: Iskusstvo.
- Gripich Aleksey Lvovich, 1967, Uchitel stseny, in: *Vstrechi s Meyerholdom. Sbornik vospominany*, ed. Lyubov Davydovna Vendrovskaya, Moskva: VTO, pp. 114–145.
- Gromov Pavel Petrovich, 1994, *Napisannoe i nenapisannoe*, Moskva: Artist. Rezhissyor. Teatr.
- Grossman Vasily Semyonovich, 1980, *Zhizn i sudba*, Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme.
- Grossman Vasily, 1985, *Life and Fate*, trans. Robert Chandler, London: Harvill.
- Grossman Vasily Semyonovich, 1988, *Zhizn i sudba*, Moskva: Knizhnaya palata.
- Grossman Wasilij, 1989a, Odzew, trans. Jan Gondowicz, *Literatura na Świecie*, no. 5–6, pp. 393–397.
- Grossman Wasilij, 1989b, Życie i los (fragmenty), trans. Tadeusz Gosk, Anita Tyszkowska, *Literatura na Świecie*, no. 5–6, pp. 367–392.
- Grossman Wasilij, 2009, *Życie i los*, trans. Jerzy Czech, Warszawa: WAB.
- Grotovsky Ezhi, 2003, *Od Bednogo teatra k Iskusstvu-provodniku*, ed. & trans. Natella Zakharievna Bashindzhagyan, Moskva: Artist. Rezhysyor. Teatr.
- Grotowski Jerzy, 1995, From the Theatre Company to Art As Theatre, in: Richards Thomas, *At Work with Grotowski on Physical Actions*, London–New York: Routledge, pp. 115–135.
- Groys Boris, 1992, *The Total Art of Stalinism. Avant-garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship and Beyond*, trans. Charles Rougle, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Groys Boris Efimovich, 2001, Rossiya i proekt postmoderna, *Khudozhestvenny zhurnal* 36, pp. 29–33.
- Gudkov Lev Dmitrievich, 1988, Ponyate i metafory istorii u Tynyanova i opoyazovtsev, in: *Tynyanovsky sbornik. Tretiy Tynyanovskie chteniya*, ed. Marietta Omarovna Chudakova, Riga: Zinatne, pp. 91–108.
- Gudkova Violetta Vladimirovna, 2002, *Yu. Olesha i V. Meyerhold v rabote nad spektaklem “Spisok blagodeyany”*, Moskva: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie.

- Gudkova Violetta Vladimirovna, 2008, *Rozhdenie sovetskikh syuzhetov*, Moskva: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie.
- Gulchenko Viktor Vladimirovich, 2002, "Dalnie sobesedniki." "Tri sestry" w teatrze i kino, in: *Chekhoviana. "Tri sestry." 100 let*, ed. Aleksandr Pavlovich Chudakov, Moskva: Nauka, pp. 217–258.
- Guseva G., 1986, Bezmolvny mir strastey. Moskovsky ansambl plasticheskoy dramy, *Sovetsky teatr*, no. 1, pp. 12–17.
- Gvozdev Aleksey Aleksandrovich, 1927, *Teatr imeni Vs. Meyerholda (1920–1926)*, Leningrad: Academia.
- Gvozdev Aleksey Aleksandrovich, 1969, Ilya Shlepanov, in: *Ilya Yulevich Shlepanov. Statyi, zametki, vyskazyvaniya. Sovremenniki o Shlepyanove*, ed. Berta Markovna Graeva, Moskva: Iskustvo, pp. 62–64.
- Gvozdev Aleksey Aleksandrovich, Piotrovsky Adrian Ivanovich, 1933, Petrogradskie teatry i prazdnstva v epokhu voennogo kommunizma, in: *Istoriya sovetskogo teatra*, vol. 1: *Petrogradskie teatry na poroge Oktyabrya i v epokhu voennogo kommunizma, 1917–1921*, ed. Vasily Evgenevich Rafalovich, Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaya literatura, pp. 81–290.
- Heraclitus, 1889, *The Fragments of the Work of Heraclitus of Ephesus on Nature*, trans. G. T. W. Patrick, Baltimore: N. Murray.
- Hocke Gustav René, 1957, *Die Welt als Labyrinth. Manier und Manie in der europäischen Kunst*, Hamburg: Rowohlt.
- Hoover Marjorie L., 1974, *Meyerhold. The Art of Conscious Theater*, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.
- Iczin Korneliya [Ičin Kornelija], 2016, *Avangardny vzryv. 22 statyi o ruskom avangarde*, Sankt-Peterburg: Izdatelstvo Evropejskogo universiteta.
- Iljinski Igor, 1962, *Pamiętnik aktora*, trans. Seweryn Pollak, Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe.
- Ilyin Ilya Petrovich (ed.), 1998, *Religiya i iskustvo. Materialy nauchnoy konferentsii, sostayavsheysya v Gosudarstvennom institute iskusstvoznaniya 19–21 maya 1997 goda*, Moscow: GITIS.
- Inyakhin Aleksandr Borisovich, 1990, Tsveta oblakov. O teatre-studii "Chelovek," *Teatr*, no. 7, p. 71–79.
- Jakubowa Natalia, 1995, Anatolija Wasiljewa sny o sztuce, trans. Jolanta Darczewska, *Didaskalia* 7, pp. 8–9.
- Jakubowa Natalia, 1996, I coś jeszcze o "Fomienkach," trans. Natalia Lasoń, *Didaskalia* 13–14, pp. 29–32.
- Jakubowa Natalia, 2009, "Golem" – tworzyć czy nie tworzyć – oto jest pytanie, *Didaskalia* 90, pp. 97–99.
- Jamułowicz Małgorzata, 2004, Verbatim nad Motławą, *Dialog*, no. 7, pp. 69–74.
- Jończyk [Osińska] Katarzyna, 1991, Anatolij Wasiljew i jego Szkoła Sztuki Dramatycznej, *Odra*, no. 5, pp. 73–76.
- Juchananow Boris, 1997, Regeneracje "Sadu," interview by Natalia Jakubowa, *Didaskalia* 17, pp. 52–55.
- Juchananow Boris, Charikow Jurij, 1998, Z sadu do pałacu, interview by Katarzyna Osińska, *Didaskalia* 25–26, pp. 111–114.



- Jung Karl Gustav, 1974, *Psychological Types* (Collected Works 6), trans. Gerhard Adler, Richard Francis Carrington Hull, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Kagarlitsky Boris Yurevich, 2003, 2000-e. 60-e versus 90-e, interview by Ekaterina Andreevna Lazareva, Viktor Aleksandrovich Miziano, *Khudozhestvenny zhurnal* 51–52, pp. 9–11.
- Kamerny teatr 1934 – Kamerny teatr i ego khudozhniki, 1914–1934*, introd. Abram Markovich Efros, Moskva: VTO.
- Kantor Tadeusz, 1999, Interwencje, in: *Hommage á Tadeusz Kantor*, ed. Krzysztof Pleśniarowicz, Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka, pp. 113–135.
- Kantor Tadeusz, 2009, 1944. Krakow. Clandestine Theatre. The Return of Odysseus from the Siege of Stalingrad, in: Michal Kobialka, *Further On, Nothing: Tadeusz Kantor's Theatre*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, p. 44.
- Karaś Alona, 2001, Synkopowana akcja z trzema dygresjami, *Didaskalia* 46, pp. 62–64.
- Karas Y., 1994, V okruzhnost vpisanny kvadrat. Nepreryvny teatr Klima, *Moskovsky nablyudatel*, no. 11–12, pp. 41–43.
- Kazmina Natalia Yurevna, 2003, Anatoly Vasilev kak zerkalo samego sebya, *Teatralnaya zhizn*, no. 7, pp. 20–27.
- Kerzhentsev [Lebedev] Platon Mikhaylovich, 1937, Chuzhoy teatr, *Pravda*, 17 December.
- Kerzhentsev V. [Lebedev Platon Mikhaylovich], 1918, Upryok khudozhnikam, *Iskusstvo*, no. 6.
- Kerzhentsev V. [Lebedev Platon Mikhaylovich], 1919, Metody raboty Proletkulta, *Proletarskaya Kultura* 6, pp. 18–26.
- Khan-Magomedov Selim Omarovich, 1987, *Pioneers of Soviet Architecture. The Search for New Solutions in the 1920s and 1930s*, London: Thames and Hudson.
- Khan-Magomedov Selim Omarovich, 1996, *Arkhitektura sovetskogo avangarda*, vol. 1: *Problemy formoobrazovaniya. Mastera i techeniya*, Moskva: Stroyizdat.
- Khardzhiev Nikolay Ivanovich, 1997, *Statyi ob avangarde*, vol. 1, Moskva: RA.
- Kharitonov Evgeny Vladimirovich, 1993a, Pantomima v obuchenii kinoaktyora, in: Evgeny Vladimirovich Kharitonov, *Slyozy na tsvetach*, vol. 2, ed. Yaroslav Yurevich Mogutin, Moskva: Glagol, pp. 60–78.
- Kharitonov Evgeny Vladimirovich, 1993b, *Slyozy na tsvetach*, vol. 1, ed. Yaroslav Yurevich Mogutin, Moskva: Glagol.
- Kharitonov Evgeny Vladimirovich, 1993c, *Slyozy na tsvetach*, vol. 2, ed. Yaroslav Yurevich Mogutin, Moskva: Glagol.
- Kharitonov Evgeny Vladimirovich, 1993d, Stenogramma vstupitelnoy rechi Evginiya Kharitinova, proiznesennoy 11 fevralya 1980 g. v TsDRI, na vechere posvyashchennom pamyati Aleksandra Aleksandrovicha Rumneva, in: Evgeny Vladimirovich Kharitonov, *Slyozy na tsvetach*, vol. 2, ed. Yaroslav Yurevich Mogutin, Moskva: Glagol, pp. 189–194.
- Khmeleva Nadezhda Petrovna, 2006, *Khudozhniki BDT*, Sankt-Peterburg: Bolshoy dramaticheskyy teatr im. G. A. Tovstonogova.
- Khodunova Elena Mikhaylovna (ed.), 1992, *Teatr Grotovskogo. Teatr, laboratoriya, opyty, vstrechi*, Moskva: GITIS.

- Kholodov [Meerovich] Efim Grigorevich (ed.), 1977–1987, *Istoriya russkogo dramaticheskogo teatra*, vol. 1–7, Moskva: Vsesoyuzny nauchno-issledovatel'skiy institut iskusstvovedeniya Ministerstva kultury SSSR.
- Khrenov Nikolay Andreevich, 2009, *Teatr kak sotsiologicheskiy fenomen*, Sankt-Peterburg: Aleteya.
- Khrzhanovsky Andrey Yurevich (ed.), 2004, *Uchenik charodeya. Kniga ob Eraste Garine*, Moskva: Iskusstvo.
- Klimowicz Tadeusz, 1996, *Przewodnik po współczesnej literaturze rosyjskiej i jej okolicach (1917–1996)*, Wrocław: Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Polonistyki Wrocławskiej.
- Knebel Maria Osipovna, 1954, *Slovo o tvorchestve aktyora*, Moskva: Iskusstvo.
- Knebel Maria Osipovna, 1966, *Moy bolshoy drug*, in: *Rezhysior, uchitel, drug. Sovremenniki o tvorchestve A. D. Popova*, ed. Yury Sergeevich Kalashnikov, Moskva: VTO, p. 31–100.
- Knebel Maria Osipovna, 1967, *Vsya zhizn*, Moskva: VTO.
- Knebel Maria Osipovna, 1970, *Slovo o tvorchestve aktyora*, Moskva: VTO.
- Knebel Maria Osipovna, 1971, *O tom, chto mne kazhetsya osobenno vazhnym*, Moskva: Iskusstvo.
- Knebel Maria Osipovna, 1976, *Poeziya pedagogiki*, Moskva: VTO.
- Koczergin Eduard, 2004, *Od małego byłem pomysłowy*, interview by Katarzyna Osińska, *Teatr*, no. 9, pp. 46–51.
- Koenig Jerzy, 1961 *Teatr radziecki: Tairow*, *Dialog*, no. 3, pp. 113–123.
- Koenig Jerzy, 1982a, *Meyerholda "Październik teatralny"*, *Dialog*, no. 6, pp. 58–64.
- Koenig Jerzy, 1982b, *Z teatralnych doświadczeń Eisensteina*, in: *Eisenstein – artysta myśliciel*, ed. Wiesław Godzic, Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, pp. 45–65.
- Kołąkowski Tadeusz, 1989, *Meyerhold i Czechow*, *Studia z Filologii Polskiej i Słowiańskiej* 16, pp. 73–87.
- Kolankiewicz Leszek, 1991, *Teatr zarażony etnologią*, *Polska Sztuka Ludowa. Konteksty*, no. 3–4, pp. 13–22.
- Kolyazin Vladimir Fyodorovich, 1998, *Tairov, Meyerhold i Germaniya. Piscator, Brecht i Rossiya. Ocherki istorii russko-nemetskikh svyazey*, Moskva: GITIS.
- Koonen Alisa Georgievna, 1975, *Stranitsy zhizni*, Moskva: Iskusstvo.
- Kopka Krzysztof, 2003, *Dramaty generacji "P"*, in: *Lepsi! I cztery inne kawałki dramatyczne w dzisiejszej Rosji*, ed. Krzysztof Kopka, Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria, pp. 5–16.
- Kostin Vladimir Ivanovich, 1976, *OST (Obshchestvo stankovistov)*, Leningrad: Khudozhnik RSFSR.
- Kostina Elena Mikhaylovna, 2002, *Khudozhniki stseny russkogo teatra XX veka*, Moskva: Russkoe slovo.
- Kovalenko Georgy Fyodorovich, 1993, *Aleksandra Ekster. Put khudozhnika. Khudozhnik i vremya*, Moskva: GALART.
- Kovalenko Georgy Fyodorovich (ed.), 2000, *Russky avangard 1910–1920-kh godov i teatr*, Sankt-Peterburg: Bulanin.

- Kovalenko Georgy Fyodorovich (ed.), 2003, *Russky avangard 1910–1920-kh godov i problemy ekspressionizma*, Moskva: Nauka.
- Kovalenko Georgy Fyodorovich (ed.), 2004, *Amazonki avangarda*, Moskva: Nauka.
- Kovalenko Georgy Fyodorovich (ed.), 2008, *Avangard i teatr*, Moskva: Nauka.
- Kozintsev Grigori, 2002, AB: The Parade of the Eccentric, in: *Twentieth-Century Theatre. A Sourcebook*, ed. Richard Drain, London: Routledge, pp. 178–179.
- Krechetova Rimma Pavlovna, 2005, *Troe. Lyubimov. Borovsky. Vysotsky*, Moskva: AST-PRESS SKD.
- Krupskaia Nadezhda Konstantinovna, 1959, Proletarskaya ideologiya i Prolektult, in: Nadezhda Konstantinovna Krupskaia, *Pedagogicheskie sochineniya v 10 tomakh*, vol. 7, Moskva: Akademiya pedagogicheskikh nauk, pp. 139–144.
- Krymova Natalia Anatolevna, 1971, *Imena. Rasskazy o lyudyakh teatra*, Moskva: Iskusstvo.
- Kukulin Ilya Vladimirovich, 2016, *Mashiny zashumevshego vremeni. Kak sovetsky montazh stal metodom neofitsialnoy kultury*, Moskva: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie.
- Kulik Irina Anatolevna, 1992, Blue box, *Teatr*, no. 8, p. 62–65.
- Kuritsyn Boris Aleksandrovich, 2003, *Nevydumannye istorii iz zhizni Leonida Vakhtangova*, Moskva: Teatr i tsentr im. Meyerholda.
- Kuzicheva Alevtina Pavlovna, 2002, Repetiruet A. V. Efros. “Tri sestry.” 1982, in: *Chekhoviana. “Tri sestry.” 100 let*, ed. Margarita Oktobrovna Goryacheva, Moskva: Nauka, pp. 259–293.
- Law Alma H., Gordon Mel, 1995, *Meyerhold, Eisenstein and Biomechanics. Actor Training in Revolutionary Russia*, Jefferson: McFarland & Co.
- Leach Robert, 1994, *Revolutionary Theatre*, London: Routledge.
- Leach Robert, 2003, *Stanislavsky and Meyerhold* (Stage and Screen Studies 3), Frankfurt etc.: Peter Lang Publishing.
- Leach Robert, Borovsky Victor (eds.), 1999, *A History of Russian Theatre*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lenin Vladimir, 2002, *First All-Russia Congress on Adult Education, May 6–19, 1919*, trans. George Hanna, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1919/may/06.htm> (accessed 5.04.2017).
- Levinson Andrey Yakovlevich, 1997, Misteriya-buff Mayakovskogo, in: *Meyerhold v russkoy teatralnoy kritike, 1882–1918*, ed. Nikolay Viktorovich Pesochinsky, Elena Aleksandrovna Kukhta, Nadezhda Aleksandrovna Tarshis, Moskva: Artist. Rezhissyor. Teatr, pp. 384–385.
- Lodder Christina, 1992, The Transition to Constructivism, in: *The Great Utopia. Russian and Soviet Avant-Guard 1915–1932*, New York: Guggenheim Museum, pp. 266–281.
- Lotman Jurij M., 1984, The Theatre and Theatricality as Components of Early Nineteenth-Century Culture, in: Jurij M. Lotman and Boris A. Uspenskij, *The Semiotics of Russian Culture*, ed. Ann Shukman, trans. Gerald S. Smith, Ann Arbor: Michigan Slavic Contributions, pp. 141–164.
- Lvov Nikolay Ivanovich, 1920, Pesa ili stsenary, *Vestnik rabotnikov iskusstv*, no. 2–3 (November–December).

- Lyubimov Yury Petrovich, 1999, *Artisty – tovar skoroportyashchiysya*, interview by Olga Vladimirovna Egoshina, in: *Rezhissyorskyy teatr. Razgovory pod zhanaves veka*, ed. Anatoly Mironovich Smelyansky, Olga Vladimirovna Egoshina, vol. 1, Moskva: MKhT, pp. 270–292.
- Makerova Natalia Fyodorovna (ed.), 2009, *Vnuchka Meyerholda. Kniga o zhizni Marii Alekseevny Valentey*, Moskva: Tsentr im. Meyerholda.
- Maltseva Olga Nikolaevna, 1999, *Poetichesky teatr Yuriya Lyubimova. Spektakli Moskovskogo teatra dramy i komedii na Taganke, 1964–1998*, Sankt-Peterburg: Rossiyskiy institut istorii iskusstv.
- Maltseva Olga Nikolaevna, 2002, *Aktyor teatra Yuriya Lyubimova*, in: *Russkoe aktyorskoe iskusstvo XX veka*, vol. 2–3, ed. Svetlana Konstantinovna Bushueva, Sankt-Peterburg: Rossiyskiy institut istorii iskusstv, pp. 105–143.
- Malevich Kazimir Severinovich, 1995–2004, *Sobranie sochineny v 5 tomakh*, vol. 1–5, Moskva: Gileya.
- Markov Pavel Aleksandrovich, 1932, *Aktyor epokhi revolyutsii, Sovetskiy Teatr*, no. 10–11, pp. 6–12.
- Markov Pavel Aleksandrovich, 1965a, *Pervaya Studiia MKhT (Sulerzhitskiy – Vakhtangov – Chekhov)*, in: Pavel Aleksandrovich Markov, *Pravda teatra. Statyi*, Moskva: Iskusstvo, pp. 249–322.
- Markov Pavel Aleksandrovich, 1965b, *Pravda teatra. Statyi*, Moskva: Iskusstvo.
- Markov Pavel Aleksandrovich, 1974a, *O teatre*, vol. 1: *Iz istorii russkogo i sovetskogo teatra*, Moskva: Iskusstvo.
- Markov Pavel Aleksandrovich, 1974b, *O teatre*, vol. 2: *Teatralnye portrety*, Moskva: Iskusstvo.
- Markov Pavel Aleksandrovich, 1976, *O teatre*, vol. 3: *Dnevnik teatralnogo kritika*, Moskva: Iskusstvo.
- Markov Pavel Aleksandrovich, 1977, *O teatre*, vol. 4: *Dnevnik teatralnogo kritika, 1930–1976*, Moskva: Iskusstvo.
- Markov Pavel, 2008, *The actor and the revolution*, in: *Theatre Arts on Acting*, ed. Laurence Senelick, Abingdon–New York: Routledge, pp. 188–196.
- Markowski Michał Paweł, 1999, *Pragnienie obecności. Filozofie reprezentacji od Platona do Kartezjusza*, Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria.
- Matskin Alesandr Petrovich, 1973, *Portrety i nablyudeniya*, Moskva: Iskusstvo.
- Matskin Alesandr Petrovich, 1987, *Teatr moikh sovremennikov. Iz starykh i novykh tetradey*, Moskva: Iskusstvo.
- Matskyavichyus Gedryus [Mackevičius Giedrius], 1993, *Ne mogu stavit traditsionnye pesy, Teatr*, no. 11, pp. 39–45.
- Meyerhold Vsevolod Emilevich, 1913a, *O teatre*, Sankt-Peterburg: Prosveshchenie.
- Meyerhold Vsevolod Emilevich, 1913b, *Russkie dramaturgi*, in: *O teatre*, Sankt-Peterburg: Prosveshchenie, pp. 107–116.
- Meyerhold Vsevolod Emilevich, 1968a, *Statyi. Pisma. Rechi. Besedy*, ed. Aleksandr Vilyamovich Fevral'skiy, vol. 1, Moskva: Iskusstvo.
- Meyerhold Vsevolod Emilevich, 1968b, *Statyi. Pisma. Rechi. Besedy*, ed. Aleksandr Vilyamovich Fevral'skiy, vol. 2, Moskva: Iskusstvo.

- Meyerhold Vsevolod Emilevich, 1978a, *Perepiska, 1896–1939*, ed. Valentina Pavlovna Korshunova, Maya Mikhaylovna Sitkovetskaya, Moskva: Iskustvo.
- Meyerhold Vsevolod Emilevich, 1978b, Vozrozhdenie tsirka. Vystuplenie 17 fevralya 1919 goda, in: *Tvorcheskoe nasledie V. E. Meyerholda*, ed. Lyubov Davydovna Vendrovskaya, Aleksandr Vilyamovich Fevral'sky, Moskva: VTO, pp. 33–34.
- Meyerhold Vsevolod Emilevich, 1998, *Nasledie*, vol. 1: *Avtobiograficheskie materialy, dokumenty 1891–1903*, Moskva: OGI.
- Meyerhold Vsevolod Emilevich, 2001, *Lektsii, 1918–1919*, ed. Oleg Maksimovich Feldman, Moskva: OGI.
- Meyerhold Vsevolod Emilevich, 2006, *Nasledie*, vol. 2: *Tovarishchestvo novoy dramy. Sozdanie Studii na Povarskoy, leto 1903–vesna 1905*, ed. Oleg Maksimovich Feldman, Moskva: Novoe izdatel'stvo.
- Meyerhold Vsevolod Emilevich, 2010, *Nasledie*, vol. 3: *Studiya na Povarskoy, may–dekabr 1905*, ed. Oleg Maksimovich Feldman, Moskva: Novoe izdatel'stvo.
- Meyerhold Vsevolod, 2016a, Chaplin and Chaplinism, in: *Vsevolod Meyerhold, Meyerhold on Theatre*, trans. Edward Braun, London: Bloomsbury, pp. 389–402.
- Meyerhold Vsevolod, 2016b, *Meyerhold on Theatre*, trans. Edward Braun, London: Bloomsbury.
- Mikhaylova Alla Aleksandrovna, 1993, Teatr Meyerholda, in: *Velikaya utopiya. Russky i sovetsky avangard 1915–1932*, Bern–Moskva: Bentelli, GALART, pp. 721–722.
- Mikhaylova Alla Aleksandrovna (ed.), 2015, *Meyerhold i khudozhniki. Evolyutsiya prostranstva*, Moskva: Gosudarstvenny tsentralny teatralny muzey im. A. A. Bakhrushina.
- Mikhaylova Alla Aleksandrovna, Davydova Marina Yurevna et al., 1995, *Meyerhold i khudozhniki*, Moskva: GALART.
- Mikhaylova Alla Aleksandrovna, Krechetova Rimma Pavlovna, 2002, *David Borovskiy*, Moskva: Artist. Rezhissyor. Teatr.
- Mikhaylova Maria Viktorovna, 2004, Anna Karenina epokhi modern, *Sovremennaya dramaturgiya*, no. 3, pp. 186–196.
- Mironova Valentina Mikhaylovna, 1983, Puti studiynoy rezhissury, in: *Studiynye techeniya v sovetskoj rezhissure, 1920–1930-kh godov*, ed. Valentina Mikhaylovna Mironova, David Iosifovich Zolotnitsky, Leningrad: Leningradsky gosudarstvenny institut teatra, muzyki i kinematografii, pp. 5–26.
- Mironova Valentina Mikhaylovna, 2005, Tipazh, in: *Teatralnye terminy i ponyatiya. Materialy k slovaryu*, vol. 1, ed. Svetlana Konstantinovna Bushueva, Alina Petrovna Varlamova, Nadezhda Aleksandrovna Tarshis, Sankt-Peterburg: Rossiyskiy institut istorii iskusstv, pp. 228–229.
- Mironova Valentina Mikhaylovna, Zolotnitsky David Iosifovich (eds.), 1983, *Studiynye techeniya v sovetskoj rezhissure, 1920–1930-kh godov*, Leningrad: Leningradsky gosudarstvenny institut teatra, muzyki i kinematografii.
- Miziano Viktor Aleksandrovich, 2004a, *“Drugoy” i raznye*, Moskva: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie.
- Miziano Viktor Aleksandrovich, 2004b, Kulturnye protivorechya tusovki, in: Viktor Aleksandrovich Miziano, *“Drugoy” i raznye*, Moskva: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, pp. 15–24.

*Moskovsky gosudarstvenny teatr 1926 – Moskovsky gosudarstvenny teatr “Chetvertaya Studiia.” Byvshaya studiia MKhAT*, Moskva: Chetvertaya Studiia.

*Moskva–Berlin 1995 – Moskva–Berlin/Berlin–Moskau 1900–1950*, exhibition catalogue, ed. Irina Aleksandrovna Antonova, Yorn [Jörn] Merkert, München–New York–Moskva: Prestel, GALART.

*Moskva–Berlin 2004a – Moskva–Berlin/Berlin–Moskau 1950–2000*, exhibition catalogue, pt. 1: *Khronika*, ed. Andrey Leonidovich Zorin, Nike Bettsner [Bätzner], Moskva–Berlin: Trilistnik, Nikolai.

*Moskva–Berlin 2004b – Moskva–Berlin/Berlin–Moskau 1950–2000*, exhibition catalogue, pt. 2: *Iskusstvo. Sovremenny vzglyad*, ed. Ekaterina Yurevna Degot, Viktor Aleksandrovich Miziano, Moskva–Berlin: Trilistnik, Nikolai.

Nakov Andrei, 1986, *Avant-garde Russe*, trans. Jacques Gourgue, Shobha Raghuram, New York: Universe Books.

Nemirovich-Danchenko Vladimir Ivanovich, 1952, *Statyi, rechi, besedy, pisma*, vol. 1, ed. Vitaly Yakovlevich Vilenkin, Moskva: Iskusstvo.

Nemirovich-Danchenko Vladimir Ivanovich, 2003, *Tvorcheskoe nasledie v 4 tomakh*, vol. 1–4, ed. Inna Natanovna Solovyova, Moskva: MKhT.

Niemirówicz-Danczenko Władimir, 1957, *O teatrze*, trans. Kazimierz Piotrowski, Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy.

Nikiforova Viktoriya Vitalevna, 2001, *Mezhdū mirom i voynoy*, *Izvestiya*, 20 February, p. 6.

Nikolskaya Svetlana Timofeevna, 1995, *Zhivoy teatr A. Efrosa*, Moskva: Filologichesky fakultet MGU.

Nikulin S. (ed.), 1988, *Vysotsky na Taganke*, Moskva: V/O “Soyuzteatr” STD SSSR.

Niziołek Grzegorz, 1995, *Nowe sytuacje teatralne*, *Didaskalia* 7, pp. 2–4.

Osińska Katarzyna, 1995, *Powarska 20*, *Teatr*, no. 5, p. 42.

Osińska Katarzyna, 1996, *W stronę ikony*, *Didaskalia* 12, pp. 38–41.

Osińska Katarzyna, 1997a, *Leksykon teatru rosyjskiego XX wieku*, Warszawa: Semper.

Osińska Katarzyna, 1997b, *Studio w rosyjskiej kulturze teatralnej XX wieku. Wybrane zagadnienia*, Warszawa: Semper.

Osińska Katarzyna, 1997c, *Tradycje Grecji antycznej w radzieckiej praktyce i teorii teatralnej lat dwudziestych*. Adrian Piotrowski i Siergiej Radłow, in: *Siew Dionizosa. Inspiracje Grecji antycznej w teatrze i dramacie w Europie Środkowej i Wschodniej. Rekonesans*, ed. Jerzy Axer, Zbigniew Osiński, Warszawa: DiG, pp. 55–72.

Osińska Katarzyna, 1997d, *Wasiljew. Przekraczanie granic*, *Didaskalia* 19–20, pp. 87–88.

Osińska Katarzyna, 1998, *Ekspansja teatru poza teatr w Rosji Radzieckiej (1918–1924)*, in: *Teatr w miejscach nieteatralnych*, ed. Juliusz Tyszka, Poznań: Wydawnictwo Fundacji Humaniora.

Osińska Katarzyna, 1999, *Chistota prostranstva v teatre Anatoliya Vasileva*, *Studia Litteraria Polono-Slavica* 4, pp. 461–466.

Osińska Katarzyna, 2000, *Rosjanie na toruńskim festiwalu KONTAKT*, in: *80 lat teatru w Toruniu 1920–2000*, ed. Janusz Skuczyński, Toruń: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, pp. 485–492.

- Osińska Katarzyna, 2001, Świadkowie i świadectwa. Polska recepcja Meyerholda do roku 1939, *Pamiętnik Teatralny*, no. 3–4, pp. 49–77.
- Osińska Katarzyna, 2003, *Klasztory i laboratoria. Rosyjskie studia teatralne: Stanisławski, Meyerhold, Sulerżycki, Wachtangow*, Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria.
- Osińska Katarzyna, 2004a, Eduard Koczergin, *Teatr* 9, pp. 44–45.
- Osińska Katarzyna, 2004b, Gry z przeszłością, *Dialog*, no. 7, pp. 176–185.
- Osińska Katarzyna, 2005a, Dawida Borowskiego sztuka transformacji, *Didaskalia* 67–68, pp. 119–121.
- Osińska Katarzyna, 2005b, Proszczynnoe telo i telo-material (Richard Czelyak [Ryszard Cieślak] – Stoyky prints v spektakle Ezhi Grotovskogo i Valeri Drevil [Valérie Dréville] – Medea v spektakle Anatoliya Vasileva), in: *Telesny kod v slavyanskikh kulturakh (Istoriya, yazyki i literatura slavyanskikh narodov v mirovom sotsiokulturnom kontekste)*, ed. Natalia Vitaleva Zlydneva, Moskwa: Institut slavyanovedeniya RAN, pp. 185–198.
- Osińska Katarzyna, 2006a, Ciało Medei i Puszkin. Wasiljew wobec Grotowskiego. Szkic do tematu, *Didaskalia* 71, pp. 72–75.
- Osińska Katarzyna, 2006b, Od studia do “małego” teatru, in: *Teatr małych form – konwencje i zjawiska*, ed. Jan Ciechowicz, Szczecin: Teatr Lalek “Pleciuga.”
- Osińska Katarzyna, 2007, “Półtoraoki strzelec” z ulicy Srietienka, *Didaskalia* 78, pp. 7–8.
- Osińska Katarzyna (ed.), 2008, *Jewgienij Wachtangow – co zostaje po artyście teatru*, Wrocław: Instytut im. J. Grotowskiego.
- Osińska Katarzyna, 2011, Ewolucja radzieckich widowisk masowych, in: *Teatr masowy – teatr dla mas*, ed. Małgorzata Leyko, Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, pp. 207–240.
- Osińska Katarzyna, 2013, Leopold Sulerjitski et l’utopie des studios russes, in: *Créer, ensemble. Points de vue sur les communautés artistiques (fin du XIXe – XXe siècles)*, ed. Marie-Christine Autant-Matthieu, Montpellier: Éditions de l’Entretemps, pp. 243–257.
- Katarzyna Osińska, 2015, Siergiej Trietjakow. Od dokumentu do faktografii, in: *Faktomontaże Leona Schillera. Polityka społeczna R. P., Cjankali, Krzyczcie, Chiny!*, ed. Anna Kuligowska-Korzeniewska, Warszawa: Instytut Teatralny im. Zbigniewa Raszewskiego, pp. 299–330.
- Osińska Katarzyna, 2016a, Kantor – Tatlin – Meyerhold. Konstruktywizm w pierwszej i drugiej awangardzie, *Didaskalia* 132, pp. 58–67.
- Osińska Katarzyna, 2016b, Walerij Fokin. Przeszłość teatru dla jego przyszłości, *Didaskalia* 135, pp. 44–49.
- Osiński Zbigniew, 2000, Jerzego Grotowskiego doświadczenie Rosji. Rekonesans, *Pamiętnik Teatralny*, no. 1–4, pp. 284–317.
- Osiński Zbigniew, 2001a, Dwa spotkania moskiewskiej Szkoły Sztuk Dramatycznej pod kierunkiem Anatolija Wasiljewa z Jerzym Grotowskim, *Pamiętnik Teatralny*, no. 1–2, pp. 257–264.
- Osiński Zbigniew, 2001b, Tradycja Meyerholda w Polsce (po roku 1945). Jerzy Grotowski, Jerzy Jarocki, Tadeusz Kantor, *Pamiętnik Teatralny*, no. 3–4, pp. 78–118.

- Osiński Zbigniew, Chojak Bruno, 2001, Zapis spotkań Jerzego Grotowskiego ze Szkołą Sztuki Dramatycznej z Moskwy, kierowaną przez Anatolija Wasiljewa, *Pamiętnik Teatralny*, no. 1–2, pp. 265–294.
- Ostrovsky Arkady Mikhaylovich, 1991, Fomenki. Sentimentalny ocherk v dvukh popytkakh, *Teatr*, no. 12, pp. 16–23.
- Paperny Vladimir Zinovevich, 1996, *Kultura Dva*, Moskva: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie.
- Pavis Patrice, 1998, Discourse, in: Patrice Pavis, *Dictionary of Theater. Terms, Concepts and Analysis*, trans. Christine Schantz, Toronto–Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, pp. 105–108.
- Pesochinsky Nikolay Viktorovich (ed.), 1998, *Meyerhold. K istorii tvorcheskogo metoda*, Sankt-Peterburg: KultInformPress.
- Pesochinsky Nikolay Viktorovich, 2002, Aktyor teatra-studii, in: *Russkoe akterskoe iskusstvo XX veka*, vol. 2–3, ed. Svetlana Konstantinovna Bushueva, Sankt-Peterburg: Rossiyskiy institut istorii iskusstv, pp. 216–248.
- Pesochinsky Nikolay Viktorovich, Kukhta Elena Aleksandrovna, Tarshis Nadezhda Aleksandrovna (eds.), 1997, *Meyerhold v russkoy teatralnoy kritike, 1892–1918*, Moskva: Artist. Rezhissyor. Teatr.
- Picon-Vallin Béatrice, 1990, *Meyerhold* (Les voies de la création théâtrale 17), Paris: CNRS Éditions.
- Picon-Vallin Béatrice (ed.), 1997, *Lioubimov. La Taganka*, Paris: CNRS Éditions.
- Picon-Vallin Béatrice, 2008, Teatralność u Fomienki i Wachtangowa, trans. Agnieszka Cieślak, in: *Jewgienij Wachtangow – co zostaje po artyście teatru?*, ed. Katarzyna Osińska, Wrocław: Instytut im. Jerzego Grotowskiego, pp. 229–244.
- Picon-Vallin Béatrice, Shcherbakov Vadim Anatolevich (eds.), 2001, *Meyerhold, rezhissura v perspektive veka / Meyerhold, la mise en scène dans le siècle. Matériaux d'un colloque de critiques et d'historiens du théâtre, Paris (Paris), 6–12 novembre 2000*, Moskva: OGI.
- Piesoczynskij Nikołaj, 2001, Wsiewołod Meyerhold. Teoria względności, trans. Agnieszka Lubomira Piotrowska, *Pamiętnik Teatralny*, no. 3–4, pp. 5–48.
- Piotrovsky Adrian Ivanovich, 1925, *Za sovetskiy teatr!*, Leningrad: Academia.
- Piotrovsky Adrian Ivanovich, 1926, K teorii “samodeyatelnogo teatra,” in: *Problemy sotsiologii iskusstva*, Leningrad: Academia, pp. 120–129.
- Piotrovsky Adrian Ivanovich, 1969, *Teatr. Kino. Zhizn*, ed. Alisa Akimovna Akimova, Leningrad: Iskusstvo.
- Pivovarova Natalia Sergeevna (ed.), 2005, *Istoriya russkogo dramaticheskogo teatra ot ego istokov do kontsa XX veka*, Moskva: GITIS.
- Plato, n.d., *Philebus*, trans. Benjamin Jowett, <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/philebus.html>. 1b.txt (accessed 1.04.2017).
- Po napravleniyu* 1998 – *Po napravleniyu k shkole*, Moskva: Masterskaya individualnoy rezhissury.
- Podgórzec Zbigniew, 1979, *Życie teatralne Moskwy*, Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna.
- Politicheskije otkliki 1924 – Politicheskije otkliki zapadnoy pressy na gastroli Moskovskogo gosudarstvennogo Kamernego Teatra*, Moskva: Mospoligraf.



- Polotskaya Emma Artemevna, 1960, Chekhov i Meyerhold, in: *Literaturnoe nasledstvo*, vol. 68: *Chekhov*, ed. Viktor Vladimirovich Vinogradov et al., Moskva: AN SSSR, pp. 417–448.
- Polunin Slava (Vyacheslav Ivanovich), 2007, Znamenity mim otprazdnoval den rozhdeniya, interview by Valentina Ivanovna Serikova, *Fakty i kommentarii*, Kyiv, 13 June, <http://fakty.ua/37640-vyacheslav-polunin-quot-kogda-v-shkole-na-uroke-nachinalis-pryskanya-ot-smeha-uchitel-dazhe-stoya-spinoj-ko-mne-govoril-quot-polunin-vyjdi-iz-klassa-quot> (accessed 1.04.2017).
- Popow Igor, 1997, Czysta przestrzeń duchowa, interview by Katarzyna Osińska, *Didaskalia* 19–20, pp. 93–94.
- Porębina Gabriela, 1989, *Od Proletkultu do realizmu socjalistycznego. Węzłowe problemy literatury radzieckiej okresu międzywojennego*, Katowice: Śląsk.
- Porębski Mieczysław, 1997, *Deska. Tadeusz Kantor. Świadectwa. Rozmowy. Komentarze*, Warszawa: Murator.
- Proza 1987 – Proza Fyodora Abramova na stsene. Iz stenogrammy zasedaniya Diskusyonnogo kluba, *Voprosy teatra* 11, pp. 306–318.
- Przebinda Grzegorz, Smaga Józef, 2000, *Kto jest kim w Rosji po 1917 roku*, Kraków: Znak.
- Pushkin Alexander, 1981, On National-Popular Drama and the Play Martha the Seneschal's Wife, in: *Russian Dramatic Theory from Pushkin to the Symbolists. An Anthology*, ed. & trans. Laurence Senelick, Austin: University of Texas Press, pp. 8–15.
- Pushkin Alexander, 2000, Mozart and Salieri, in: Alexander Pushkin, *The Little Tragedies*, trans. Nancy K. Anderson, New Haven–London: Yale University Press, pp. 55–65.
- Pushkin Alexander, 2008, The Poet and the Crowd, trans. Andrew Kahn, in: Andrew Kahn, *Pushkin's Lyric Intelligence*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 210–211.
- Puteshestvie* 2003a – *Puteshestvie v teatralnom prostranstve. Anatoly Vasilev i Igor Popov. Stsenografiya i teatr*, pt. 1: Natalia Borisova, *Khronologiya*, Moskva: Shkola dramaticheskogo iskusstva.
- Puteshestvie* 2003b – *Puteshestvie v teatralnom prostranstve. Anatoly Vasilev i Igor Popov. Stsenografiya i teatr*, pt. 2: *Albom*, Moskva: Shkola dramaticheskogo iskusstva.
- Puzyna Konstanty, 1960a, Portret aktora: Iljiński, in: Konstanty Puzyna, *To, co teatralne. Szkice*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, pp. 147–155.
- Puzyna Konstanty, 1960b, *To, co teatralne. Szkice*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe.
- Puzyna-Chojka Joanna, 2006, Verbatim – najmniej teatru, in: *Teatr małych form – konwencje i zjawiska*, ed. Jan Ciechowicz, Szczecin: Teatr Lalek “Pleciuga,” pp. 273–285.
- Radishcheva Olga Aleksandrovna, 1997–1999, *Stanislavsky i Nemirovich-Danchenko. Istoriya teatralnykh otnosheny*, vol. 1–3, Moskva: Artist. Rezhissyor. Teatr.
- Rakitin Elena, 1992, How Meierkol'd Never Worked With Tatlin and What Happened as a Result, trans. Todd Bludeau, in: *The Great Utopia. The Russian and Soviet Avant-Garde, 1915–1932*, New York: Guggenheim Museum, pp. 649–663.

- Reale Giovanni, 1987, *A History of Ancient Philosophy*, vol. 1: *From the Ancients to Socrates*, trans. John R. Catan, Albany: SUNY Press.
- Rozovsky Mark Grigorevich, 1989, *Teatr iz nichego*, Moskva: Sovetskaya Rossiya.
- Rudnitsky Konstantin Lazarevich, 1965, *Vremya, Chekhov i rezhissory*, in: *Voprosy teatra. 1965. Sbornik statyey i materialov*, Moskva: VTO, pp. 135–159.
- Rudnitsky Konstantin Lazarevich, 1969, *Rezhissyor Meyerhold*, Moskva: Nauka.
- Rudnitsky Konstantin, 1981, *Meyerhold the Director*, trans. George Petrov, Ann Arbor: Ardis.
- Rudnitsky Konstantin Lazarevich (ed.), 1987, *Rezhissyorskoe iskusstvo A. Ya. Tairova. K 100-letiyu so dnya rozhdeniya*, Moskva: VTO.
- Rudnitsky Konstantin Lazarevich, 1990a, *Teatr futuristov*, in: Konstantin Lazarevich Rudnitsky, *Russkoe rezhissyorskoe iskusstvo, 1908–1917*, Moskva: Nauka, pp. 239–263.
- Rudnitsky Konstantin Lazarevich, 1990b, *Teatralnye syuzhety*, Moskva: Iskusstvo.
- Rudnitsky Konstantin, 2000, *Russian and Soviet Theatre. Tradition and the Avant-Garde*, trans. Roxane Permar, ed. Lesley Milne, New York: Thames and Hudson.
- Rumyantsev Sergey Yurevich, Shulpin Aleksey Petrovich, 2000, *Nekotorye teoreticheskie problemy i khudozhestvenno-esteticheskie osobennosti samodeyatelnogo tvorchestva 1920-kh godov*, in: *Samodeyatelnoe khudozhestvennoe tvorchestvo v SSSR, 1917–1932*, ed. Kseniya Georgievna Bogemskaya, Larisa Pavlovna Solntseva, Sankt-Peterburg: Gosudarstvenny institut iskusstvovznaniya, pp. 24–63.
- Rybakov Yuri Sergeevich, 1977, *G. A. Tovstonogov. Problemy rezhissury*, Leningrad: Iskusstvo.
- Samuels Andrew, Shorter Bani, Plau Fred, 1986, *A Critical Dictionary of Jungian Analysis*, Hove–New York: Routledge.
- Sarabyanov Andrey Dmitrievich (ed.), 1992, *Neizvestny russky avangard v muzeyakh i chastnykh sobraniyakh*, Moskva: Sovetsky khudozhnik.
- Sasim Elena Donovna, 1993, *Nostalgia, Teatr*, no. 11.
- Sboeva Svetlana Georgievna, 2010, *Tairov. Evropa i Amerika, 1923–1930. Zarubezhnye gastroli Moskovskogo kamernogo teatra*, Moskva: Artist. Rezhissyor. Teatr.
- Semenovsky Valery Oskarovich, 1994, *Na derevnyu Lyovushke, Moskovsky nablyudatel*, no. 7–8, pp. 19–30.
- Senelick Laurence, 1997, *The Chekhov Theatre. A Century of the Plays in Performance*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Senelick Laurence, Ostrovsky Sergei (eds.), 2014, *The Soviet Theatre. A Documentary History*, London: Yale University Press.
- Sherel Aleksandr Arkadevich (ed.), 1992, *Meyerholdovsky sbornik*, series 1, vol. 1–2, Moskva: Tvorcheskyy tsentr im. Meyeholda.
- Shevtsova Maria, 1978, *The Theatre Practice of Anatoly Efros, A Contemporary Soviet Director* (Theatre Papers 6), Devon: Dartington College of the Arts.
- Shevtsova Maria, 2004, *Dodin and the Maly Drama Theatre. Process to Performance*, London–New York: Routledge.
- Shevtsova Maria, 2009, *Lev Dodin Directs Grossman, O'Neill, and Shakespeare, New Theatre Quarterly*, no. 2, pp. 137–147.

- Shilov Yury Timofeevich (ed.), 2004, *Russkaya teatralnaya shkola*, Moskva: PaInter.
- Shils Edward, 1971, Tradition, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, no. 2, pp. 122–159.
- Shklovsky Viktor Borisovich, 1928, O rozhdenii i zhizni “FEKSov,” in: Viktor Borisovich Shklovsky, *Gamburgskiy shchyot*, Leningrad: Tekhnika i proizvodstvo.
- Shklovsky Viktor Borisovich, 1973, *Eisenstein*, Moskva: Iskusstvo.
- Shklovsky Victor, 1997, Art as Technique, in: *The Critical Tradition. Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*, ed. David H. Richter, Boston–New York: Bedford, St. Martin’s, pp. 774–784.
- Shtok Isidor Vladimirovich, 1992, “Net, ne sginela, zhivyyot!,” in: *Teatr Grotovskogo. Teatr, laboratoriya, opyty, vstrechi*, ed. Elena Mikhaylovna Khodunova, Moskva: GITIS, pp. 243–245.
- Shulpin Aleksey Petrovich, 2000, Krasnoarmeyskiy i raboche-krestyanskiy teatr perioda grazhdanskoy voyny i voennogo kommunizma, in: *Samodeyatelnoe khudozhestvennoe tvorchestvo v SSSR, 1917–1932*, ed. Kseniya Georgievna Bogemskaya, Larisa Pavlovna Solntseva, Sankt-Peterburg: Gosudarstvennyy institut iskusstvovedeniya, pp. 64–97.
- Simonov Ruben Nikolaevich, 1959, *S Vakhtangovym*, Moskva: Iskusstvo.
- Sirotkina Irina Evgenievna, 2012, *Svobodnoye dvizheniye i plasticheskiy tanets v Rossii*, Moskva: Novoe literaturnoe obozreniye.
- Sitkovetskaya Maya Mikhaylovna (ed.), 1993, *Meyerhold repetiruet*, vol. 1–2, Moskva: Artist. Rezhissyor. Teatr.
- Sitkovskiy Gleb Semyonovich, 2007, On Shuberta naverchival, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 28 March.
- Slavkin Viktor Iosifovich, 1996, *Pamyatnik neizvestnomu stilage*, Moskva: Artist. Rezhissyor. Teatr.
- Śliwowski René (ed.), 1971, *Czechow w oczach krytyki światowej*, Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy.
- Śliwowski René, 1986, *Antoni Czechow*, Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy.
- Slonimsky Aleksandr Leonidovich, 1923, *Tekhnika komicheskogo u Gogolya*, Praga: Institut istorii iskusstv, Academia.
- Slonimsky Yury Iosifovich, 1964, *Chudesnoye bylo ryadom s nami. Zametki o Petrogradskom balete 20-kh godov*, Leningrad: Sovetskiy kompozitor.
- Smelianskiy Anatoly, 1999, *The Russian Theatre after Stalin* (Cambridge Studies in Modern Theatre), trans. Patrick Miles, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Smelyanskiy Anatoly Mironovich, 1981, *Nashi sobesedniki. Russkaya klassicheskaya dramaturgiya na stsene sovetskogo teatra 70-kh*, Moskva: Iskusstvo.
- Smelyanskiy Anatoly Mironovich, 1999a, *Predlagaemye obstoyatelstva. Iz zhizni russkogo teatra vtoroy poloviny XX veka*, Moskva: Artist. Rezhissyor. Teatr.
- Smelyanskiy Anatoly Mironovich, 1999b, Tri karty, in: Anatoly Mironovich Smelyanskiy, *Predlagaemye obstoyatelstva. Iz zhizni russkogo teatra vtoroy poloviny XX veka*, Moskva: Artist. Rezhissyor. Teatr, pp. 284–298.
- Smelyanskiy Anatoly Mironovich, 2000, Sovetskaya Makhabkharata, *Moskovskie novosti*, 21 March.

- Smelyansky Anatoly Mironovich, 2002a, *Izbrannye trudy*, vol. 1: *Mezhdometiya vremeni*, Moskva: Iskusstvo.
- Smelyansky Anatoly Mironovich, 2002b, *Izbrannye trudy*, vol. 2: *Ukhodyashchaya natura*, Moskva: Iskusstvo.
- Smelyansky Anatoly Mironovich, 2002c, Sovetskaya Makhabkharata, in: Anatoly Mironovich Smelyansky, *Izbrannye trudy*, vol. 1: *Mezhdometiya vremeni*, Moskva: Iskusstvo, pp. 334–339.
- Smelyansky Anatoly Mironovich, Egoshina Olga Vladimirovna (eds.), 1999, *Rezhissorsky teatr. Razgovory pod zaves veka*, vol. 1, Moskva: MKhT.
- Smelyansky Anatoly Mironovich, Egoshina Olga Vladimirovna (eds.), 2001, *Rezhissorsky teatr. Razgovory pod zaves veka*, vol. 2, Moskva: MKhT.
- Smelyansky Anatoly Mironovich, Egoshina Olga Vladimirovna (eds.), 2004, *Rezhissorsky teatr. Razgovory pod zaves veka*, vol. 3, Moskva: MKhT.
- Smirnov-Nesvitsky Yuri Aleksandrovich (ed.), 1972, *Portrety rezhissorov*, vol. 1: *Kedrov, Akimov, Tovstonogov, Pluchek, Efremov*, Leningrad: Iskusstvo.
- Smirnov-Nesvitsky Yuri Aleksandrovich (ed.), 1977, *Portrety rezhissorov*, vol. 2: *Zavadsy, Miltinis, Ravenskikh, Lyubimov*, Leningrad: Iskusstvo.
- Smolyakov Aleksandr Yurevich, 2005, Teatr 1950–1990-kh godov, in: *Istoriya russkogo dramaticheskogo teatra ot ego istokov do kontsa XX veka*, ed. Natalia Sergeevna Pivovarova, Moskva: GITIS, pp. 677–734.
- Smużniak Karol, 2002, *Pantomima XX wieku. Kierunki i tendencje*, Zielona Góra: Uniwersytet Zielonogórski.
- Snezhnitsky Lev Dmitrievich, 1972, *Na repetitsiyakh u masterov rezhissury*, Moskva: Iskusstvo.
- Sofronova Lyudmila Aleksandrovna, 1996, *Starinny ukrainsky teatr*, Moskva: ROSSPEN.
- Sofronova Lyudmila Aleksandrovna, 1998, Evangel'skie tsitaty v ukrainskom i russkom shkolnom teatre, in: *Religiya i iskusstvo. Materialy nauchnoy konferentsii, sostoyavsheysya v Gosudarstvennom institute iskusstvoznaniya 19–21 maya 1997 goda*, ed. Ilya Petrovich Ilyin, Moscow: GITIS, pp. 98–118.
- Sokolyansky Aleksandr Yurevich, 1994, Posle kontsa kontsov, *Moskovsky nablyudatel*, no. 11–12, pp. 5–11.
- Solovyov Sergey Aleksandrovich, 1993, Ot zhesta – k Slovu, in: Evgeny Vladimirovich Kharitonov, *Slyozy na tsvetakh*, vol. 2, ed. Yaroslav Yurevich Mogutin, Moskva: Glagol, pp. 152–155.
- Solovyova Inna Natanovna, 2007, *Khudozhestvennyy teatr. Zhizn i pryklyucheniya idey*, Moskva: MKhT.
- Solovyova Inna Natanovna, 2016, *Pervaya Studiya. Vtoroy MKhAT. Iz praktyki teatralnykh idey XX veka*, Moskva: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie.
- Solovyova Inna Natanovna, Smelyansky Anatoly Mironovich, Egoshina Olga Vladimirovna (eds.), 2010, *MKhAT vtoroy. Opyt vosstanovleniya biografii*, Moskva: MKhT.
- Stakhorsky Sergey Vsevolodovich (ed.), 1988, *Iz istorii sovetskoy nauki o teatre. 20-e gody*, Moskva: GITIS.
- Stanislavsky Konstantin, 1952, *My Life in Art*, New York: Routledge.

- Stanislavsky Konstantin Sergeevich, 1988–1998, *Sobranie sochineny v 9 tomakh*, vol. 1–9, ed. Anatoly Mironovich Smelyansky et al., Moskva: Iskusstvo.
- Stanislavsky Konstantin Sergeevich, 1994, *Rezhissyorskije ekzemplary K. S. Stanislavskogo, 1898–1930. "Dyadya Vanya" A. P. Chekhova, 1899*, ed. Inna Natanovna Solovyova, Moskva–Sankt-Peterburg: Atheneum, Feniks.
- Strigalev Anatoly Anatolevich, 1993–1994, Retrospektivnaya vystavka Vladimira Tatlina, in: *Vladimir Tatlin. Retrospektiva*, exhibition catalogue, ed. Anatoly Anatolevich Strigalev, Yurgen Kharten [Jürgen Harten], Köln: DuMont, pp. 8–52.
- Strigalev Anatoly Anatolevich, Kharten Yurgen [Harten Jürgen] (eds.), 1993–1994, *Vladimir Tatlin. Retrospektiva*, exhibition catalogue, Köln: DuMont.
- Stroeva Marianna Nikolaevna, 1955, *Chekhov i Khudozhestvenny teatr. Rabota K. S. Stanislavskogo i V. I. Nemirovicha-Danchenko nad pesami A. P. Chekhova*, Moskva: Iskusstvo.
- Sulerzhitsky Leopold Antonovich, 1970, *Povesti i rasskazy. Statyi i zametki o teatre. Perepiska. Vospominaniya*, Moskva: Iskusstvo.
- Svobodin Aleksandr Petrovich (ed.), 1973, *Teatr "Sovremennik"*, Moskva: Iskusstvo.
- Svobodin Aleksandr Petrovich, 1997, *Teatr v litsakh*, Moskva: Znanie.
- Syrkina Flora Yakovlennvna, 1972, *I. Rabinovich*, Moskva: Sovetsky khudozhnik.
- Szacki Jerzy, 1971, *Tradycja. Przegląd problematyki*, Warszawa: PWN.
- Szacki Jerzy, 1991, *Dylematy historiografii idei oraz inne szkice i studia*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Szczukin Wasilij, Kosiński Dariusz, 2005, *Czechow 100 lat później*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego.
- Tairov Aleksandr Yakovlevich, 1920, *Zapiski rezhissyora*, Moskva: Izdatelstvo Kamernogo teatra.
- Tairov Alexander, 1969, *Notes of a Director*, trans. William Kuhlke, Miami: University of Miami Press.
- Tairow Aleksandr, 1978, *Notatki reżysera i proklamacje artysty*, trans. Janina Ludawska, Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe.
- Tamashin Lev Grigorevich, 1961, *Sovetskaya dramaturgiya v gody grazhdanskoy voyny*, Moskva: Iskusstvo.
- Tarabukin Nikolay Mikhaylovich, 1998, *O V. E. Meyerholde*, ed. Oleg Maksimovich Feldman, Moskva: OGI.
- Tasarski Jerzy, 1970, Teatr Proletkultu – ideologia i praktyka, *Dialog*, no. 11, pp. 105–124.
- The Great Utopia 1992 – The Great Utopia. Russian and Soviet Avant-Guard 1915–1932*, New York: Guggenheim Museum.
- Tikhonovich Valentin Vladimirovich, 1922, Proletarsky teatr, in: *O teatre*, ed. Oskar Veniamovich Blyum, Tver: Vtoraya gostipografiya, pp. 88–101.
- Tolstoy Vladimir Pavlovich (ed.), 1984, *Agitatsionno-massovoe iskusstvo. Tablitsy. Sovetskoe dekorativnoe iskusstvo. Materialy i dokumenty, 1917–1932*, Moskva: Iskusstvo.
- Tolstoy Vladimir Pavlovich (ed.), 2010, *Khudozhestvennaya zhizn Sovetskoy Rossii, 1917–1932. Sobytiya, fakty, kommentarii. Sbornik materialov i dokumentov*, Moskva: GALART.

- Tovstonogov Georgy Aleksandrovich, 1980, *Zerkalo stseny. O professii rezhissyora*, Moskva: Iskusstvo.
- Towstonogow Georgij, 1966, Reżyseria jest zawodem, trans. Jerzy Koenig, *Dialog*, no. 11, pp. 122–127.
- Trabsky Anatoly Yakovlevich (ed.), 1975a, *Sovetsky teatr. Dokumenty i materialy, 1921–1926*, Leningrad: Iskusstvo.
- Trabsky Anatoly Yakovlevich (ed.), 1975b, *Sovetsky teatr. Dokumenty i materialy, 1926–1932*, pt. 1, Leningrad: Iskusstvo.
- Tugendkhold Yakov Aleksandrovich, 1922, *Aleksandra Ekster kak zhivopisets i khudozhnik stseny*, Berlin: Zarya.
- Turovskaya Maya Iosifovna, 1981, *Babanova. Legenda i biografiya*, Moskva: Iskusstvo.
- Turovskaya Maya Iosifovna, 1987, *Pamyati tekushchogo mgnoveniya. Ocherki, portrety, zametki*, Moskva: Sovetsky pisatel.
- Turowska Maja, 1994, Czy CAMP potrzebny jest ubogim? O teatrze Romana Wikiuka, trans. Katarzyna Osińska, *Literatura na Świecie*, no. 12, pp. 311–325.
- Turowski Andrzej, 1998, *Między sztuką a komuną. Teksty awangardy rosyjskiej, 1910–1932*, Kraków: Universitas.
- Tyszką Juliusz, 1995, *Metamorfozy "systemu Stanisławskiego"*, Poznań: ARS NOVA.
- Tyszką Juliusz, 2001, *Między prawdą a doktryną. "System" Stanisławskiego w Polsce*, Poznań: Wydawnictwo Fundacji Humaniora.
- Vakar Irina Anatolevna, 2000, Mezhdū samoopredeleniem i samootritsaniem. Teatr i zhvyopis v peredveri avangarda, in: *Russky avangard 1910–1920-kh godov i teatr*, ed. Georgy Fyodorovich Kovalenko, Sankt-Peterburg: Bulanin, pp. 3–15.
- Vakhtangov Evgeny Bagriatonovich, 1939, *Zapiski. Pisma. Statyi*, Moskva: Iskusstvo.
- Vakhtangov Evgeny Bagriatonovich, 1959, *Materialy i statyi*, ed. Lyubov Davydovna Vendrovskaya, Moskva: VTO.
- Vakhtangov Evgeny, 2011a, On Alexander Tairov and His Kamerny Theatre, in: *The Vakhtangov Sourcebook*, ed. & trans. Andrei Malaev-Babel, London–New York: Routledge, p. 130–131.
- Vakhtangov Evgeny, 2011b, On the Feeling of the Author, in: *The Vakhtangov Sourcebook*, ed. & trans. Andrei Malaev-Babel, London–New York: Routledge, pp. 132–133.
- Vasilev Anatoly Aleksandrovich, 1982, Razomknutoe prostanstvo deystvitelnosti, interview by Polina Borisovna Bogdanova, *Iskusstvo kino*, no. 4, pp. 124–141.
- Vasilev Anatoly Aleksandrovich, 1983, "Davno khotelos peremeshat, unichtozhit i zabyt vsyo, chto umeyu," *Teatr*, no. 4, pp. 102–113.
- Vasilev Anatoly Aleksandrovich, 1990a, Serebryanny vek, *Teatralnaya zhizn*, no. 6, p. 20.
- Vasilev Anatoly Aleksandrovich, 1990b, Udina, *Teatralnaya zhizn*, no. 6, pp. 18–20.
- Vasilev Anatoly Aleksandrovich, 1993, Rab Menona, *Moskovsky nablyudatel*, no. 8–9, pp. 9–14.
- Vasilev Anatoly Aleksandrovich, 1999a, Khronika 14-ogo chisla, *Isskustvo kino*, no. 6, pp. 130–147.

- Vasilev Anatoly Aleksandrovich, 1999b, O fizicheskom deystvii i drugikh sekretakh, in: *Rezhissyorskyy teatr. Razgovory pod zhanaves veka*, vol. 1, ed. Anatoly Mironovich Smelyansky, Olga Vladimirovna Egoshina, Moskva: MKhT, pp. 69–80.
- Vasilev Anatoly Aleksandrovich, 2003a, Marsianskie khroniki, *Teatralnaya zhizn*, no. 7, pp. 5–7.
- Vasilev Anatoly Aleksandrovich, 2003b, V zashchitu “Amfitriona,” *Teatralnaya zhizn*, no. 7, pp. 30–32.
- Vasilev Anatoly Aleksandrovich, 2007, Razomknutoe prostranstvo deystvitelnosti, interview by Polina Borisovna Bogdanova, in: Polina Borisovna Bogdanova, *Logika peremen. Vasilev: mezhdu proshlym i budushchim*, Moskva: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, pp. 49–75.
- Vasilev Anatoly Aleksandrovich, Abdullaeva Zara Kemalovna, 2016, *Parautopiya*, Moskva: ABCdesign.
- Vassiliev Anatoli, 1999, *Sept ou huit leçons de théâtre*, trans. Martine Néron, Paris: Académie Expérimentale des Théâtres.
- Vendrovskaya Lyubov Davydovna (ed.), 1967, *Vstrechi s Meyerholdom. Sbornik vospominany*, Moskva: VTO.
- Vendrovskaya Lyubov Davydovna, Fevralsky Aleksandr Vilyamovich (eds.), 1978, *Tvorcheskoe naledie Vs. E. Meyerholda*, Moskva: VTO.
- Vendrovskaya Lyubov Davydovna, Kaptereva Galina (eds.), 1984, *Evgeny Vakhtangov, 1883–1922*, Moskva: Vserossiyskoe teatralnoe obshchestvo.
- Vislov S. [Aleksandr Aleksandrovich], 1990, Odisseya kapitana Tabakova, ili Teatr-studiya v kontekste menyayushchegosya vremeni, *Teatr*, no. 7, pp. 59–70.
- Vitvitskaya Bozhena Iosifovna, 1918, Otkrytie “dvortsya proletarskoy kultury,” *Petrogradsky golos*, no. 59, 4 May, p. 4.
- Wachtangow Jewgienij, *Poszukiwania*, trans. Henryk Bieniewski, Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe.
- Walicki Andrzej, 1995, *Marxism and the Leap to the Kingdom of Freedom. The Rise and Fall of the Communist Utopia*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Wasiljew Anatolij, 1995, Odpowiedź Stanisławskiemu, interview by Katarzyna Osińska, *Teatr*, no. 5, pp. 43–47.
- Wasiljew Anatolij, 1991, Modena 1989, trans. Katarzyna Jońska [Osińska], *Odra*, no. 5, p. 72.
- Wasiljew Anatolij, 1997a, Odpowiedź Stanisławskiemu, interview by Katarzyna Osińska, in: Katarzyna Osińska, *Studio w rosyjskiej kulturze teatralnej XX wieku. Wybrane zagadnienia*, Warszawa: Semper, p. 89–100.
- Wasiljew Anatolij, 1997b, Rivoli 12 – Powarska 20, trans. Natalia Lasoń, *Didaskalia* 19–20, pp. 95–96.
- Wasiljew Anatolij, 2007, Nie żałuję, że zbudowałem ten teatr, interview by Katarzyna Osińska, *Didaskalia* 78, pp. 8–11.
- Wawrzyńczyk Jan, Małek Eliza, 2001, *Kultura rosyjska. Postacie. Wydarzenia. Symbole. Daty*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego.
- Wojnicka Joanna, 2008, Awangarda i tradycja czyli jak rosyjscy filmowcy stworzyli rewolucję, *Didaskalia* 85–86, pp. 30–39.

- Yablonovsky Sergey Viktorovich, 1913, *Studia Khudozhestvennogo teatra*. "Prazdnik mira," *Russkoe slovo*, no. 265, 16 November, p. 7.
- Yakubova Natalia Olegovna, 2006, Zhenovach. Otnosheniya s prozoy, *Teatr*, no. 2, pp. 41–49.
- Yakubova Natalia Olegovna, 2014, *Teatr epokhi peremen v Polshe, Vengrii i Rossii, 1990–2010-e gody*, Moskva: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie.
- Yufit Anatoly Zinovevich (ed.), 1968, *Sovetsky teatr. Dokumenty i materialy, 1917–1921*, Leningrad: Iskustvo.
- Yukhananov Boris Yurevich, 1990, Eskiz "Vishneвого sada," *Teatralnaya zhizn*, no. 24, pp. 11–14.
- Yukhananov Boris Yurevich, 2000, *Moskovsky dnevnik. Stikhi*, Moskva.
- Yukhananov Boris Yurevich, 2007, Boris Yukhananov: "Eto byl printsipialno drugoy podkhod ne tolko k rezhissure, no i k pedagogike," in: Polina Borisovna Bogdanova, *Logika peremen. Vasilev: mezhdru proshlym i budushchim*, Moskva: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, pp. 200–209.
- Yukhananov Boris Yurevich, Shevchenko Natalia Andreevna, 2004, *Teatr i ego dnevnik. Fragmenty zhizni, rechi, teksty*, Moskva.
- Yuzovsky Yuzef [Józef Juzowski], 1935, Korol Lir, *Literaturny kritik*, no. 8, pp. 152–153.
- Yuzovsky Iosif Ilyich [Józef Juzowski], 1982a, *O teatre i drame*, vol. 1, Moskva: Iskustvo.
- Yuzovsky Iosif Ilyich [Józef Juzowski], 1982b, *O teatre i drame*, vol. 2, Moskva: Iskustvo.
- Zayonts Marina Grigorevna (ed.), 2000, *Teatr Anatoliya Efrosa. Vospominaniya. Statyi*, Moskva: Artist. Rezhissyor. Teatr.
- Żenowacz Siergiej, 1997, Teatr wspólnoty, interview by Katarzyna Osińska, in: Katarzyna Osińska, *Studio w rosyjskiej kulturze teatralnej XX wieku. Wybrane zagadnienia*, Warszawa: Semper, pp. 108–117.
- Zhdanov Andrey Aleksandrovich, 1946, Ulutshit rabotu tvorcheskikh soyuzov, *Iskustvo*, no. 6, p. 6–9.
- Zhidkov Vladimir Sergeevich, 1991, *Teatr i vremya. Ot Oktyabrya do perestroyki*, pt. 1–2, Moskva: STD RSFSR.
- Zhidkov Vladimir Sergeevich, 1995, *Kulturanaya politika i teatr*, Moskva: IzdAT.
- Zhidkov Vladimir Sergeevich, 2003, *Teatr i vlast, 1917–1927. Ot svobody k "osoznannoy neobkhodimosti"*, Moskva: Aleteya.
- Zielińska Maryla, 1996, Moskwa, jej teatry, jej performerzy, seks, zło i kasety wideo, *Didaskalia* 13–14, pp. 24–28.
- Zielińska Maryla, 1997, My, artyści, Słowianie, *Didaskalia* 19–20, pp. 83–85.
- Zingerman Boris Isaakovich, 2001, *Teatr Chekhova i ego mirovye znachenie*, Moskva: VTO.
- Zingerman Boris Isaakovich, 2002, *Svyazuyushchaya nit. Pisateli i rezhissory*, Moskva: OGI.
- Ziółkowski Grzegorz, 2000, *Teatr bezpośredni Petera Brooka*, Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria.
- Zobek Teresa, 1995, Proletkult. Historia i program grupy, in: *Czas wielkiej przemiany*, ed. Piotr Fast, Anna Skotnicka-Maj, Katowice: Śląsk.



- Zołotnicki Dawid, 1980, *Jutrznie teatralnego Października*, trans. Ewa Rojewska-Olejarczuk, Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy.
- Zolotnitsky David Iosifovich, 1976, *Zori teatralnogo Oktyabrya*, Leningrad: Iskusstvo.
- Zolotnitsky David Iosifovich, 1978, *Budni i prazdniki teatralnogo Oktyabrya*, Leningrad: Iskusstvo.
- Zolotnitsky David Iosifovich, 1982, *Akademicheskie teatry na putyakh teatralnogo Oktyabrya*, Leningrad: Iskusstvo.
- Zolotnitsky David Iosifovich, 1999, *Roman s sovetskoy vlastyu*, Moskva: Agraf.
- Zolotnitsky David Iosifovich, 2004, Nikolay Gumilev i teatr marionetok, *Petersburgsky teatralny zhurnal* 36, pp. 156–158.
- Zorkaya Neya Markovna, 2002, Sudby ekstsentrizma. Ot “Zhenitby” do “Gogolyady” Grigoriya Kozintseva, in: *Russky avangard 1910–1920-kh godov i teatr*, ed. Georgy Fyodorovich Kovalenko, Sankt-Peterburg: Bulanin, pp. 393–405.
- Zvenigorodskaya Natalia Eduardovna, 2004, *Provintsionalnye sezony Vsevoloda Meyerholda, 1902–1905*, Moskva: URSS.

