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**The English Theatre Studios
of Michael Chekhov and
Michel Saint-Denis,
1935-1965**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in English Literature

Thomas Cornford, University of Warwick,
Department of English and
Comparative Literary Studies

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Contents

List of illustrations.....	4
Declaration.....	8
Abstract.....	9
Preface.....	10
Introduction 1 The Theatre Studio in Context.....	12
Introduction 2 Chekhov and Saint-Denis in Parallel.....	28
Section 1 The Chekhov Theatre Studio at Dartington, 1936- 1938.....	33
1.1 Context: The Evolution of Chekhov’s Technique before 1936.....	45
1.2 Practice: Training at the Chekhov Theatre Studio at Dartington.....	60
1.3 Legacy: Chekhov’s Technique in Practice and Theory.....	105
Appendix to Section 1.....	122
Section 2 The Theatre Centres of Michel Saint-Denis, 1936-1952.....	124
2.1 Context: Backgrounds of the London Theatre Studio.....	127
2.2 Practice: Training and Performance at the London Theatre Studio and the Old Vic Theatre Centre.....	160

	2.3 Legacy: The Closure of the Old Vic Theatre Centre and Saint-Denis' Artistic Influence.....	211
	Appendix to Section 2.....	249
Section 3	Saint-Denis and Chekhov at the Royal Shakespeare Company, 1961-1965.....	263
	3.1 The After-Lives of the Chekhov and Saint-Denis Studios, An Overview.....	265
	3.2 Saint-Denis at the RSC Studio, 1962-1965.....	274
	3.3 Saint-Denis in Rehearsal: <i>The Cherry Orchard</i>	298
	3.4 Chekhov at the RSC: Paul Rogers in <i>The Homecoming</i>	317
	3.5 After 1965: The Legacy of Saint-Denis' RSC Studio...	330
Conclusion	The Studio into the Future: Towards a Manifesto.....	347
	Bibliography.....	361

List of Illustrations

Fig. 1	Michael Chekhov as Dr Brulov in <i>Spellbound</i> (dir. Alfred Hitchcock, 1945)	28
Fig. 2	Michel Saint-Denis as the coachman in <i>The Secret Agent</i> (dir. Alfred Hitchcock, 1936)	28
Fig. 3	Michel Saint-Denis as the coachman in <i>The Secret Agent</i>	29
Fig. 4	Michael Chekhov as Dr Brulov in <i>Spellbound</i>	29
Fig. 5	Peter Ustinov and Paul Rogers in <i>Billy Budd</i> (dir. Ustinov, 1962)	30
Fig. 6	Leonard and Dorothy Elmhirst at Dartington Hall (c. 1925)	33
Fig. 7	Beatrice Straight and Michael Chekhov at Dartington Hall (c. 1936)	33
Fig. 8	Elmhirst and Rabindranath Tagore at Dartington	35
Fig. 9	Students in the School of Dance-Mime at Dartington	38
Fig. 10	Dorothy Carter, Beatrice Straight and Leslie Burrowes in <i>Comus</i> (1929)	38
Fig. 11	The Chekhov Theatre Studio's promotional booklet (1936) ...	40
Fig. 12	Group photograph of the Chekhov Theatre Studio at Dartington	60
Fig. 13	Chekhov directing at Dartington	67
Fig. 14	The opening of the Chekhov Theatre Studio (5 October 1936)	78
Figs. 15-17	Students from the Chekhov Theatre Studio in a movement exercise at Dartington	78-79
Fig. 17a	Altered version of Fig. 17	81

Fig. 18	The outdoor theatre at Dartington	81
Fig. 19	The Monterey Pine at Dartington	81
Fig. 20	Rex Gardner's design for the Dartington Hall News of the Day (1934)	95
Fig. 21	Michael Chekhov's Chart for Inspired Acting (1949)	95
Fig. 22	Kurt Jooss and Rudolf Laban studying a script in Labanotation	96
Fig. 23	Kurt Jooss working with dancers in the outdoor theatre at Dartington	96
Fig. 24	Mark Tobey's painting 'Broadway Norm' (1935)	98
Fig. 25	Bernard Leach observing the Japanese Hamada Shoji	100
Fig. 26	Leach working in his studio at St. Ives (1963)	100
Fig. 27	Willi Soukop with his sculptures	100
Fig. 28	Willi Soukop 'Two Seated Figures' (1941)	100
Fig. 29	Chekhov and his students in the grounds of Dartington Hall	105
Figs. 30-40	Beatrice Straight and William Holden in <i>Network</i> (dir. Sidney Lumet)	108-111
Fig. 41	Saint-Denis speaking to students at the London Theatre Studio	124
Fig. 42	Staff and students of the Old Vic School	124
Fig. 43	Rupert Doone's manifesto for the Group Theatre (1935)	147
Fig. 44	Programme for <i>The Sowers of the Hills</i> (Westminster Theatre, 1935)	151
Fig. 45	The Motleys in their Studio	152

Fig. 46	The entrance to the London Theatre Studio building in Providence Place	160
Fig. 47	<i>The Three Sisters</i> (1938)	170
Fig. 48	Michael Redgrave as Tusenbach and George Devine as Andrey dancing in <i>The Three Sisters</i> (1938)	172
Fig. 49	Laurence Olivier as Macbeth (Old Vic, 1937)	176
Fig. 50	Laurence Olivier as Macbeth (Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, 1955)	176
Fig. 51	Martita Hunt as Miss Havisham in <i>Great Expectations</i> (dir. George Devine, 1940)	179
Fig. 52	Martita Hunt as Miss Havisham in <i>Great Expectations</i> (dir. David Lean, 1947)	179
Fig. 53	Michel Saint-Denis, George Devine and the directors of the Old Vic Theatre Company: Ralph Richardson, Laurence Olivier and John Burrell	183
Fig. 54	The directors of the Old Vic Centre: Glen Byam Shaw, Michel Saint-Denis and George Devine	189
Fig. 55	Jed Harris	236
Fig. 56	Disney's Big Bad Wolf	236
Fig. 57	Laurence Olivier as <i>Richard III</i> (1955)	236
Fig. 58	Michael Redgrave as Shylock and Yvonne Mitchell as Jessica (Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, 1953)	238
Fig. 59	Laurence Olivier as Oedipus with Nicholas Hannen as the Chorus Leader (Old Vic, 1945)	243

Fig. 60	Laurence Olivier as Oedipus with the Chorus (Old Vic, 1945)	243
Fig. 61	George Devine teaching at a Royal Court Studio	267
Fig. 62	Eric Porter as Dr. Faustus with the Seven Deadly Sins (dir. Clifford Williams, RSC, 1968)	284
Figs. 63-97	Images from the televised version of Michel Saint-Denis' <i>The Cherry Orchard</i> (dir. Michael Elliott, BBC, 1962)	298-315
Fig. 98	<i>The Homecoming</i> (dir. Peter Hall, Broadway, 1967)	317
Figs. 99- 120	Images from <i>The Homecoming</i> (dir. Peter Hall, American Film Theatre, 1973)	317-328

Declaration

This thesis is my own work; no part of it has been submitted for a degree at another university. No part of the thesis has been published elsewhere.

Thesis Abstract

This thesis charts the brief history of the theatre studios run in England between 1935 and 1965 by Michel Saint-Denis (1897-1971) and Michael Chekhov (1891-1955). They were the London Theatre Studio (1936-1939), run by Saint-Denis; The Chekhov Theatre Studio at Dartington Hall (1936-1938); The Old Vic Theatre School (1947-1952), initially part of the proposed Old Vic Theatre Centre, whose directors were Michel Saint-Denis, George Devine and Glen Byam Shaw; and the RSC Studio (1962-1965), run by Saint-Denis. All of these studios were dedicated to combining training and experimentation in the development of ensemble companies and were therefore liminal spaces combining elements of a theatre and a theatre school.

An introductory section briefly situates the practice of theatre studios in the context of wider narratives of work, craftsmanship and artistry in the period and traces their development from the Moscow Art Theatre Studio of 1905, as well as sketching some significant parallels between Saint-Denis and Chekhov. The first two sections of the thesis then explore the period from 1936 until 1952, looking first at Chekhov's and then at Saint-Denis' studios, placing them in the context of the traditions of training and exploration from which they emerged, and examining their practice and their legacies. The final section of the thesis explores the direct impact of their practice on the Post War British Theatre, focusing particularly on the Royal Shakespeare Company whose Studio was run by Saint-Denis, and where Paul Rogers (one of Chekhov's students) was a leading actor. A short concluding section applies the principles of Chekhov's and Saint-Denis' work to the practice of training and experimentation in 2012 and looks to the future, to ask whether the studios whose work is explored in the main body of the thesis have a role to play in the future development of the art of the theatre.

Preface

The research upon which this work is based was conducted using archival records held, primarily, in the Michel Saint-Denis Archive at the British Library and in the Michael Chekhov Theatre Studio Deirdre Hurst du Prey Archive (held on behalf of the Dartington Hall Trust at the Devon Records Office in Exeter). The archival work at the heart of this study has been supplemented by the published writings of Chekhov and Saint-Denis and other biographical and anecdotal records relating to the actors with whom they worked, and, where possible, read against records of performances by those actors. Most importantly, however, I have used my work teaching and directing actors as a constant resource, and I have therefore been able to conduct my research by moving back and forth between the archive and the rehearsal room, testing and exploring in practice the techniques and ideas uncovered in my research.¹

The archive and the rehearsal room might be considered unlikely partners, but their interaction represents not only the method but the purpose of this study. Derrida wrote that ‘the question of the archive is not . . . a question of the past . . . it is a question of the future, the question of the future itself, the question of a response or a promise and of the responsibility for tomorrow’.² Both Chekhov and Saint-Denis took their ‘responsibility for tomorrow’ extremely seriously, and in order to live up to it, both looked to the questions of practice: what should the theatre do, and how should it do it? Both found the ideal environment for the exploration of these questions in the theatre studio and I will argue that despite their limited success within their own times, the work of Chekhov and Saint-Denis’ studios offers essential insights for practitioners and scholars asking questions about the nature and purpose of theatre today. This study therefore aims to be a theatre history of the future theatre.

¹ My thanks go to all my students from the BFA in Acting at the Guthrie Theater/University of Minnesota, the MA in Classical and Contemporary Text (Acting and Directing) at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and the MA (International) in Acting at East 15.

² *Derrida*, 1998, pp. 14-15.

The nineteen-thirties, when the history of theatre studios in England began, are currently a common reference-point for political discourse. They represent a bottom-line against which western economies have, as I have been researching and writing, been measuring their recession. Economists have argued over the most effective strategy for preventing a depression, and the decline of manufacturing industry, growing unemployment, instances of social unrest and the rise of right-wing political extremism have all served as reminders of the iconic images of that decade. Images of the Great Depression also haunted the nineteen-seventies, whose consumerist expansion (fuelled by the rise of personal debt) and the subsequent collapse of over-stretched economies have both resurfaced in the last decade. Consequently, the economic backdrop to this study is a constant trend of increasingly insecure employment and accelerating social inequality, both of which have been masked, superficially, by the wider availability of cheap, consumer goods and a culture which is, as a result, defined ever more by what it consumes as opposed to what it makes.

The sculptor Eric Gill, writing in 1934, saw this tendency as a product not of the twentieth century, or even of nineteenth century industrialization, but of the Renaissance, which initiated a cultural shift resulting in what he called ‘a division never before attempted’:

A division not of rich from poor, not of free from unfree, not of good from bad, but unique marvel! a division of artist from workman.¹

Gill saw the evidence of this division in his culture’s tendency to ‘forget the skill of the workman’, to conceive of art as ‘the act of the creative mind’, and its consequent belief

that 'physical skill, the will and ability to use tools and the very material itself are inessential to the thing called art'.² Gill was not alone in this observation. Also in 1934 Herbert Read wrote *Art and Industry*, an attempt to overcome the 'complete distinction' which had emerged, as he put it, 'between the artist who made things to satisfy a practical purpose . . . and the artist who made things . . . for the delectation of individuals'.³ The former, as Read observed, was in danger of being supplanted by mechanization. But whereas Gill argued that the inevitable result of the new industrial model of production would be that 'the only fully responsible workman would be the designer and all the rest of the workers would, as regards their work, be no more than obedient tools, ants rather than men',⁴ Read's analysis was more optimistic, and attempted to find an accommodation between the artist and mechanical processes:

every machine is a tool. The real distinction is between one man using a tool with his hands and producing an object which shows at every stage the direction of his will and the impression of his personality; and a machine which is producing, without the intervention of a particular man, objects of a uniformity and precision which show no individual variation and personal charm.⁵

For Read, therefore, the distinction between tool and machine was insignificant by comparison to the distinction between the 'subdivision of labour' in craft workshops (which gave each maker control over – and therefore responsibility for – a part of the process of production) and the 'one-man control from start to finish' which characterized machine production.⁶

Social histories of work in the twentieth century have repeatedly focused on this distinction. In the introduction to *Working*, a compilation of interviews subtitled *People Talk About What They Do All Day and How They Feel About What They Do* (1972), Studs

Terkel described those 'happy few' for whom work has a 'meaning . . . over and beyond the reward of the pay-check'.⁷ One of these 'few' interviewed by Terkel was a Stonemason, Carl Murray Bates, then aged fifty-seven, who had 'pursued his craft' since the early nineteen-thirties. Bates emphasized both the freedom and the responsibility involved in his work:

The architect draws the picture and the plans, and the draftsman and the engineer, they help him. They figure the strength and so on. But when it actually comes to makin' the curves and doin' the work, you've got to do it with your hands. It comes right back to your hands.⁸

Through the work of his hands, Bates made a lasting impression on the world, which functioned, for him, as a guarantee of quality:

If there's one stone in there crooked, I know where it's at and I'll never forget it. Maybe thirty years, I'll know a place where I should have took that stone out and re-done it and I didn't. I still notice it. The people who live there might not notice it, but I notice it. I never pass that house but I don't think of it . . . That's the work of my hands . . . It's there, just like I left it forty years ago.⁹

Bates' work was not only a means for him to leave his mark on the world, but also the medium in which the world left its mark on him. It even imprinted itself on his unconscious:

Stone's my life. I daydream all the time, most times it's on stone . . . All my dreams, it seems like it's got to have a piece of rock mixed up in it.¹⁰

This intimate and embodied connection with his work meant that, for Bates, there was no separation between life and work.

Bates' story reflects that of an Englishman, Len Greenham, a leatherworker from Northampton, who began his working life in 1928. Greenham was an interviewee in Trevor Blackwell and Jeremy Seabrook's *Talking Work: An Oral History*. He was a morocco-grainer, finishing the leather of Morocco goats for luxury goods, but by the nineteen-seventies, his job was done mechanically.¹¹ Greenham 'hated standing on the end of a machine' because he wasn't required to participate in its work:

I'd spent my life in a rhythm which I had had to learn, and which was a rhythm of the body: you went one shank, two shank, across the belly of the skin, from the neck to the butt and from the butt to the neck. Then you hooked these things up, and after you'd done it, you looked at it and you thought, Well, isn't that lovely.¹²

Greenham observed regretfully that as automation increased, the quality of leather goods deteriorated sharply. In retirement, he was 'drawn to leather shops', but reported that 'it's degrading to feel these things after the quality stuff over the years'.¹³

But it was not only quality that was lost. Stanley Bullock, a steelworker from Workington, born in 1913 (the year before Greenham), recalled learning the art of blowing in the steelworks. The blower had to watch the flame in the furnace to judge the temperature of the metal, and this tacit knowledge was tacitly communicated.

A blower will not tell you what you're looking for. He can't tell you. You've got to learn it yourself. You've got to look at that flame, know what you're looking for and find it. Once you start finding it, it's a piece of cake. But you've got to know what you're looking for.¹⁴

Bullock went on to work in the labs, where, again, an informed eye was the worker's essential tool: 'I was able eventually to put a grinding-wheel on a piece of metal and to read the sparks, to judge the manganese or carbon content of that metal', he recalled.

But these jobs were also taken over by instruments, and the workers' knowledge was no longer needed.

It was therefore inevitable that skilled workers themselves would become superfluous. One interviewee, Bob Clark (born in 1944), an engineer, described the consequences:

The whole way management thinks of workers has changed. I suppose our firm has been one of the last bastions of the old shopfloor practices and comradeship. People aren't regarded as important any more. Previously, the management tried to keep workers happy, but now everything is based on fear. What you hear now, if you do complain about anything, is 'You're lucky to have a job.' Whereas only five years ago you were told you could always knock on the door of a manager's office, now the manager wouldn't know who you were, and he wouldn't be interested in knowing. It makes you feel alone, it makes you feel that you can't make any contribution to the way the firm's being run. You just have to do what you're told.¹⁵

This pattern would extend beyond the work-place. In *No Logo*, written at the end of the twentieth century, Naomi Klein wrote of the experience of being both superfluous and powerless becoming increasingly characteristic of culture as a whole:

The underlying message is that culture is something that happens to you. You buy it at the Virgin Megastore or Toys 'R' Us and rent it at the Blockbuster Video. It is not something in which you participate, or to which you have the right to respond.¹⁶

Klein's analysis blamed what she called the 'now-ubiquitous Nike model: close your factories, produce your products through an intricate web of contractors and subcontractors and pour your resources into the design and marketing required to fully project your big idea'.¹⁷ Because, in this model, value is added by branding, companies

are no longer the producers of what they sell. Therefore there is no need for such companies to maintain a relationship with the workers who produce the goods that it sells, which it simply buys from a subcontractor. If the goods are not needed, the order is cancelled and the responsibility to make workers redundant is devolved upon a third-party contractor. The result has been a workforce consisting, increasingly, of 'a fluid reserve of part-timers, temps and free-lancers'.¹⁸ As Klein observed, 'if anything, the multinationals have more power over production by not owning the factories': more power, because less responsibility.

The theatre studio opposes this trend. The term 'studio' was coined by the Russian director Vsevolod Meyerhold to mean, as he put it, 'not a proper theatre, certainly not a school, but . . . a laboratory for new ideas'.¹⁹ Such a laboratory would contain elements of both theatre and school in that it would use both training and production as means, but, unlike the theatre and the school, neither of these would be its end-product. That product would be its 'new ideas'. Meyerhold was offered the opportunity to start such an institution by Stanislavsky in 1905, who had found himself, in the words of his biographer Jean Benedetti, in an 'artistic impasse'.²⁰ Stanislavsky was certain that the actor could and should be a creative artist. In 1902 he had evoked the mutually creative relationship between writer and performer, writing in his notebook that 'the author writes on paper. The actor writes with his body on the stage'.²¹ But how the actor's creativity could be harnessed, and to what ends, was still unclear to him, and he recognised that he needed the input of someone with more radical ideas about theatrical form. Meyerhold's Studio began its work in a converted barn in Pushkino in the summer of 1905 and returned to Moscow that autumn to perform in a theatre hired for it by Stanislavsky. But the studio was forced to close very soon after its transfer, partly because of the chaotic atmosphere generated by the 1905 revolution and partly

because it was simply not ready. Its work was caught between the poles of Meyerhold's stylization, to which the studio aspired but for which the actors lacked the training, and the Moscow Art Theatre's realism, from which the studio attempted to escape, but to which the actors were too accustomed. Meyerhold recognised this and wrote to his wife, Olga, in January 1906 that it had been a 'fortunate . . . failure', and part of a year in which something new was born in my soul, something that will put out branches and bear fruit; the fruit will ripen, and my life is certain to flourish abundantly'. And so it did. Meyerhold would soon be recognised as the Russian director of his age with the most singular vision, a vision which he developed concurrently with a particular training known as biomechanics.

The failure of the 1905 studio also fuelled Stanislavsky's search for a means of developing his vision of artistic training for the actor which gave rise to the First Studio of the Moscow Art Theatre, which he opened in 1912. After that, Stanislavsky would dedicate himself more and more to studio-work, preparing his last new role as an actor (in *The Village of Stepanchikovo*) only five years later, in 1917.²² It was a role that he would never play in public, since he was replaced after the dress rehearsal by the production's director and his partner in the Art Theatre, Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko.²³ In response to his removal, Stanislavsky wrote to Nemirovich that 'there is nothing more I can do, not in the Art Theatre, at least . . . Maybe I could be reborn in another sphere, another place. I am not talking about other theatres, but about the Studios'.²⁴ Nemirovich cannot have been entirely surprised by this, since he had written to Vladimir Gribunin in March 1916 that he feared 'he had lost [Stanislavsky] to the Studio'.²⁵ While it would be an injustice to overlook the time and effort which Stanislavsky continued to devote to the Art Theatre, Nemirovich was right: his heart wasn't in it.

After Stanislavsky had retired from the professional stage in 1928, he maintained his commitment to studio practice, stating publicly in 1935 that 'our major task is to create a laboratory theatre . . . a theatre that is the model of the actor's technique',²⁶ shortly before opening such a laboratory, the Opera-Dramatic Studio (for which he had 3,500 applications), in his own house.²⁷ The following year, Stanislavsky said that after thirty-five years, he was 'still revising' his system, and the revising continued right up until his death in 1938, when he was working on *Rigoletto* and *Tartuffe* in his studio and still writing the second part of the novelisation of his system, *An Actor's Work*.²⁸ The unfinished nature of Stanislavsky's system was not an accident of history but a direct consequence of its continual revision. In this respect, Stanislavsky was a pupil of his system as much as he was its teacher. There is a strong hint in his book to that effect, as Stanislavsky gave the name 'Kostya', the diminutive form of his own first name, to his fictional student. He gave the name 'Tortsov' (a derivation of 'creator') to his fictional teacher of acting and in his draft preface to the book, insisted that 'all creative initiative be given to nature, the only true creator'.²⁹

Read in this way, the account offered by Stanislavsky of an actor's work is not only a guide to his particular techniques, but a guide to what the Polish director, teacher and theorist Jerzy Grotowski called 'the technique of creating your own technique'. Grotowski argued that simply to reiterate Stanislavsky's terminology was therefore an act of false witness, and, paradoxically, in order to be a 'true disciple' of Stanislavsky it was necessary to betray him:

a true disciple betrays his master on a high level. A low betrayal is spitting at someone with whom we were close. A low betrayal is also a return to what is untruthful and unfaithful to our nature, what is more in agreement with what others (our

environment, for example) expect of us than with ourselves . . . But there exists a high betrayal – in action, not in words. When it emerges from faithfulness to one’s own path. No one can prescribe this path for someone else; no one can calculate it. One can only discover it through enormous effort . . . When I used to say that the technique I follow is the technique of creating one’s own personal techniques, there was in this, as a matter of fact, a postulate of the ‘high betrayal.’ I think that only the technique of creating your own technique is important. Any other technique or method is barren.³⁰

Amongst Stanislavsky’s first non-Russian disciples were the French director Jacques Copeau and the English actor, director and playwright Harley Granville Barker. Barker wrote to William Archer that ‘it was when I saw the Moscow people interpreting Chekhov that I fully realized what I had been struggling towards and that I saw how much actors could add to a play’.³¹ His encounter with Stanislavsky’s work also taught him ‘that there are rules . . . in this creative process of collaboration’.³² Copeau also used Stanislavsky’s studio as a model in creating a parallel school and theatre at his base, the *Théâtre du Vieux Colombier* in Paris.³³ However, neither Barker nor Copeau was intimately acquainted with Stanislavsky’s system, and each was, to borrow Grotowski’s phrase, equally faithful to his own path.

The three men all met on the night of 21/22 December 1922, when Stanislavsky (who was in Paris with the Moscow Art Theatre Company *en route* to New York) was given a reception at the *Vieux-Colombier*. After the reception, over dinner in a nearby restaurant, the three men discussed the possibility of creating an international theatre studio, an idea which received ‘unanimous approval’.³⁴ Stanislavsky and Copeau had already corresponded on the subject, and Stanislavsky had hoped (in a letter of 30 December 1916) that it ‘would unite all the most interesting workers in the world of theatre’.³⁵ He had discussed a similar idea with Granville Barker when the Englishman

had visited Moscow in February 1913 and Barker had agreed with Stanislavsky during their conversation that he would 'send over two pupils' to join the work of the First Studio, which had been founded the previous year.³⁶ That initiative had been prevented, of course, by the outbreak of war the following year, and the idea of an international studio was also the victim of geopolitics: the Treaty on the Creation of the USSR was signed a few hours before Stanislavsky, Barker and Copeau met.

The shared enthusiasm of Stanislavsky, Barker and Copeau for an international studio rested upon a recognition, shared by them all, that theatre (in Copeau's words) 'cannot exist without a subtle and strong craft, like all arts which rest on a mutual confidence between the spiritual and the material',³⁷ and that, in Barker's words, 'the art of the theatre is the art of acting, first, last and all the time'.³⁸ Their methods for the development of this art were, in many ways, distinct, and yet they all hinged on the relationship between craft training and artistic experimentation. Of the three men, only Barker had not committed his practice to the exploration of this relationship by establishing a permanent ensemble connected to a studio. In the 1904-1907 Barker-Vedrenne seasons at the Court Theatre, however, he had come close, working with a single company over a series of plays with considerable success. The critic Desmond MacCarthy recalled that the acting was of a uniquely high standard:

At the Court the acting pleased from the first. People began to say that the English could act after all, and that London must be full of intelligent actors, of whom nobody had ever heard. Yet, strange to say, these actors, when they appeared in other plays on other boards, seemed to sink back to normal insignificance.³⁹

MacCarthy concluded that 'the Court Theatre has been practically the only theatre where it has been worth the actor's while to play a small part, and where the

playwright's intentions have been absolutely respected'.⁴⁰ But the Court experiment was not repeated, though Barker had articulated the ideal of a form of studio practice in his book *The Exemplary Theatre*, published shortly before his meeting with Stanislavsky and Copeau.

Barker's ideal theatre was conceived both as a playhouse and a school:

Let us imagine, to begin with, a playhouse company for whom performances will not be the one and only goal. For our playhouse is still part of a theatre as school, part of an institution intended for the study of dramatic art and only incidentally for its exhibition – an exemplary theatre.

In such a theatre, the acting-company would, Barker wrote, 'remain students, fellow-students with their juniors . . . but students also in their own occupation of the theatre as playhouse'.⁴¹ Barker believed that this approach was the surest means by which the art of the theatre could be developed: 'the matured actor's best chance of developing his art and observing its progress,' he wrote, 'lies less in the performances he gives than in his opportunities for study, and especially for the co-operative study . . . involved in the rehearsing of a play'.⁴² Such study depended upon collaboration, Barker wrote, because the material of performance is, in itself, collaborative: 'the text of a play is a score awaiting performance, and the performance and its preparation are, almost from the beginning, a work of collaboration'.⁴³ The material of performance was also, and remains, mysterious. It has psychological, physical, emotional and spiritual aspects and, as such, involves both conscious and sub-conscious faculties. Stanislavsky's system therefore uses the conscious mind as a means of stimulating the subconscious, and Copeau used movement-based exercises to the same end. Despite their differences, though, they and Barker all considered that it was primarily in activities like those of

rehearsal, where theory and practice are intertwined (but with the pressure of an imminent production removed), that their ability to manipulate the palpable yet ineffable medium of acting could be developed.

The studios of Stanislavsky and Copeau and the theoretical 'exemplary theatre' proposed by Barker were therefore places for the investigation, in practice, of what the American Pragmatist philosopher John Dewey called 'possibilities not yet given', whose realisation required, said Dewey, an embodied intelligence, 'not the faculty of intellect honored in text-books and neglected elsewhere, but . . . the sum-total of impulses, habits, emotions, records, and discoveries'.⁴⁴ This intelligence proceeded, for Dewey, through a process of collaboration between the modes of action and perception, which were exemplified for him by the artist:

the artist embodies in himself the attitude of the perceiver while he works . . . As we manipulate, we touch and feel, as we look, we see; as we listen, we hear. The hand moves with etching needle or with brush. The eye attends and reports the consequence of what is done. Because of this intimate connection, subsequent doing is cumulative and not a matter of caprice, nor yet of routine. In an emphatic artistic-esthetic experience, the relation is so close that it controls simultaneously both the doing and the perception.⁴⁵

The artist's form of intelligence, rooted in this interaction between assertive action and evaluative perception, characterized, for Dewey, a form of intelligence which could liberate thought from the notion that 'the office of knowledge is to uncover the antecedently real', and therefore liberate society from the separation of scientific from practical knowledge.⁴⁶

Dewey saw this dualistic conception of knowledge as merely representative of the interests of a ruling (intellectual) class, who were served, he wrote, by the attachment of 'prestige' to 'those who use their minds without participation of their body and who act vicariously through control of the bodies and labor of others'.⁴⁷ Such intelligence was, for Dewey, not only socially conservative, but fundamentally limited in its scope. He advocated instead a form of 'pragmatic intelligence':

Not the use of thought to accomplish purposes already given either in the mechanism of the body or in that of the existent state of society, but the use of intelligence to liberate and liberalize action, is the pragmatic lesson. Action restricted to given and fixed ends may attain great technical efficiency; but efficiency is the only quality to which it can lay claim. Such action is mechanical, or becomes so, no matter what the scope of the pre-formed end . . . But the doctrine that intelligence develops within the sphere of action for the sake of possibilities not yet given is the opposite of a doctrine of mechanical efficiency . . . A pragmatic intelligence is a creative intelligence, not a routine mechanic.⁴⁸

The notion that 'intelligence develops within the sphere of action for the sake of possibilities not yet given' is precisely the philosophy of studio exploration followed by Stanislavsky, Barker, and Copeau. It is also the basis for the cyclical progress of creative work described by the sociologist Hans Joas in his book *The Creativity of Action*. Joas proposes that we perceive and act as we do according to given facts and successful habits, but that these are 'repeatedly shattered' at moments where we encounter a problem. At these points 'our habitual actions meet with resistance from the world and rebound back on us', with two consequences. First, we must 'come to terms with new or different aspects of reality' and second, action must be applied to different points of the world or must restructure itself'. If such a restructuring is achieved, says Joas, then 'a new mode of acting . . . can gradually take root'.⁴⁹

Joas' adaptive and reconstructive model of creativity clarifies the requirement for the theatre studio to combine the activities of training and experimentation. Training is the process of acquiring and honing successful habits, while experimentation is the restructuring of those habits to cope with new problems. Without training, it would be impossible to distinguish between 'resistance from the world' and mere incompetence, and therefore impossible to situate a problem exactly. Without experimentation, it would be impossible to develop or grow because habits could not be adapted to new conditions or challenges. The studio, and by extension the art of the theatre, therefore depends for its survival upon precisely the intimate connections between creativity and practice, intuition and analysis, action and perception and body and mind which were systematically separated during the twentieth century. And while the practices charted by this thesis were therefore avowedly counter-cultural, they also provide model for the development, in both practice and theory, of the art of the theatre and our understanding of it.

This study is not, however, an exhaustive study of theatre studios in England since Harley Granville Barker. It concentrates instead on those run by two men, both of them originally actors, then directors and finally also teachers of acting and directing technique. One – Chekhov – was a student of Stanislavsky and the other – Saint-Denis – a student of Copeau, and there are deep and instructive similarities between their careers and their approaches despite the fact that they seem never to have met. Nonetheless the parallels between them, when coupled with their simultaneous arrival in England and the very different courses which they took thereafter, create a compelling case for their juxtaposition to tell a story about the evolution of English acting, and of the understanding of performance more widely, which, with some notable exceptions, has been hitherto neglected by theatre history.⁵⁰

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- ¹ Gill, 1934, p. viii
- ² Gill, 1934, p. 4
- ³ Read, 1934, p. 22
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 95
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 12
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 54
- ⁷ Terkel, 1972, xi
- ⁸ Terkel, 1972, p. xlviii
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, p. xlix
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. xlvii
- ¹¹ Gill, 1934, p. 116
- ¹² Blackwell & Seabrook, 1996, p. 29
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 28
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 38
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 77-78
- ¹⁶ Klein, 2010, p. 178
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. xvii
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 231
- ¹⁹ Leach, 2003, p. 51
- ²⁰ Benedetti, 1988, p. 155
- ²¹ Quoted in Benedetti, 1988, p. 124
- ²² *Ibid.*, pp. 387-388
- ²³ *Ibid.*, p. 238
- ²⁴ Quoted in Benedetti, 1988, p. 240
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 211
- ²⁶ This call was made in his article 'The October Revolution and the Theatre', quoted in Benedetti, 1988, p. 361.
- ²⁷ Benedetti, 1988, p. 362
- ²⁸ Quoted in Benedetti, 1988, p. 376
- ²⁹ Stanislavski & Benedetti, 2008, p. xxvi; Benedetti makes the same observation about the naming of these characters but draws slightly different conclusions, identifying Kostya as a combination of the young Stanislavsky and his student Vakhtangov, and Tortsov as a combination of the older Stanislavsky and his mentor, the tenor Fyodor Kommissarzhevsky (p. xxi).
- ³⁰ Grotowski, 2008, pp. 38-39
- ³¹ Miles, 1993, p. 41
- ³² Cole & Chinoy, 1976, p. 199
- ³³ See Rudlin & Paul, 1990, pp. 3-4, and the account of Copeau's work in Section 2.1.
- ³⁴ Benedetti, 1988, p. 282, see also Evans, 2006, pp. 29-30
- ³⁵ Rudlin & Paul, 1990, p. 216
- ³⁶ Benedetti, 1988, p. 220
- ³⁷ Rudlin & Paul, 1990, p. 118
- ³⁸ Quoted in Redgrave, 1995, p. 120
- ³⁹ MacCarthy, 1907, p. 2
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 5
- ⁴¹ Barker, 1922, pp. 144-145
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 149
- ⁴³ Kennedy, 1985, p. 37
- ⁴⁴ Dewey, 1917, pp. 67-68
- ⁴⁵ Dewey, 2005, pp. 50-51
- ⁴⁶ Dewey, 1929, p. 20
- ⁴⁷ Dewey, 2005, p. 21
- ⁴⁸ Dewey, 1917, pp. 63-64
- ⁴⁹ Joas, 1996, pp. 128-129

⁵⁰ The parallel between Chekhov and Saint-Denis is noted in Jerri Daboo's account of Chekhov's work in England, 'Michael Chekhov and the Studio at Dartington: the re-membering of a tradition' (in Pitches 2012, pp. 62-85), though her remit does not allow for a detailed comparison. Saint-Denis' influence on the English is discussed in Jane Baldwin's biography (*Michel Saint-Denis and the Shaping of the Modern Actor*, 2003).



Figs. 1 and 2, Chekhov as Dr Brulov in *Spellbound* (dir. Alfred Hitchcock, 1945) and Saint-Denis as the coachman in *The Secret Agent* (dir. Alfred Hitchcock, 1936)

In 1935, Michael Chekhov (1891-1955) and Michel Saint-Denis (1897-1971) both arrived in England. Both men were actors, directors and teachers and both would establish studios the following year: Saint-Denis' London Theatre Studio opened in January 1936 and the Chekhov Theatre Studio at Dartington opened its doors that October. Both of these institutions based their training and experimentation on the study and practice of movement in particular, and aimed to develop the imaginative, creative and transformative abilities of their students as much as their bodies and voices and, furthermore, were intent upon generating new forms within the theatre, which would leave the conventions of the naturalistic stage behind, and create a theatre capable of adapting its form to any content.

But the parallels between Chekhov and Saint-Denis do not end there. Both men were also nephews of famous men of the theatre: Chekhov's uncle was the writer Anton Pavlovich Chekhov and Saint-Denis' uncle, the French critic, director and teacher Jacques Copeau. Saint-Denis was also his uncle's student, and went on to take over his troupe of actors, altering and adapting his mentor's work in the process. That pattern reflected

Chekhov's relationship to Stanislavsky (whose work was seen by Copeau as a forerunner of his own in many respects). Chekhov had been one of the original members of Stanislavsky's First Studio of the Moscow Art Theatre, and he went on to become its Artistic Director, after it had become the Second Moscow Art Theatre, and here, Chekhov developed his own techniques. Finally, both Saint-Denis and Chekhov appeared in films directed by Alfred Hitchcock, and both played non-English characters who smoked pipes: Saint-Denis in *The Secret Agent* (1936) and Chekhov in *Spellbound* (1945) (see figs. 1 and 2).



Figs. 3 and 4, Saint-Denis' coachman blows a kiss to Peter Lorre and Chekhov as Alex Brulov lights his pipe (note the flying matches)

This final parallel is not merely an insignificant coincidence. Both Chekhov and Saint-Denis were closely connected, through their teaching, to the stars of these films (Gregory Peck and Ingrid Bergman in *Spellbound* and John Gielgud in *The Secret Agent*), but the characters they play required a different approach from their more well-known colleagues. Chekhov and Saint-Denis play characters whose theatricality stands out against otherwise rather understated, naturalistic performances which are in tune with the dominant style of their time. *The Secret Agent* centres on Gielgud (in a rare early screen appearance) who plays his role lightly and relies almost entirely upon his

recognisably 'English' verbal dexterity. In *Spellbound*, Ingrid Bergman and Gregory Peck give pitch-perfect performances of subtext-oriented American psychological naturalism, which is communicated predominantly through facial expression. Saint-Denis and Chekhov, by contrast, give performances in which physical expressiveness and dexterity is much more significant than verbal clarity or facial expression alone. The hand props given to them by Hitchcock emphasize this contrast. In both performances, the pipes draw the eye to the hands and therefore to the gestures and movements of the body as an expressive medium. Both performances also use the body to create an image of the character. Saint-Denis' good-naturedly uncomprehending coachman is captured in the image of blowing a kiss to Peter Lorre's character in a light scene of comic misunderstanding in which he twice misinterprets Lorre's mime of a cigarette (fig. 3). Chekhov's Dr Brulov manages to drop an entire boxful of matches while lighting his pipe, but holds onto the one he needs (fig. 4): here is a man who, in the Holmes tradition of 'detective' characters, misses everything except what is significant.



Fig. 5, Peter Ustinov and Paul Rogers in Ustinov's film of *Billy Budd* (1962)

The most celebrated graduate of Saint-Denis' London Theatre Studio was Peter Ustinov, and in 1962 Ustinov's film of *Billy Budd* also featured the most successful English actor to emerge from the Chekhov Theatre Studio, Paul Rogers. Ustinov later described Rogers as 'the prototype of that extraordinary tradition of British character

actors who have made a contribution to the reputation of drama and cinema in Britain out of all proportion to their fame'. He praised Rogers' willingness 'to discuss an artistic matter with you in moments of perplexity' and 'to give younger members of the cast the benefit of his experience', as well as the fact that he was 'always learning', even, Ustinov recalled, when he met him in New York while Rogers was giving a Tony Award-winning performance of Max in Pinter's *The Homecoming* (see Section 3.4):

A man who had every right to be blasé as an undoubted master of his craft was, on the contrary, bubbling with youthful enthusiasm as he submitted himself to new sensations and new techniques.

I was privileged to work with Paul in both *Photo-Finish* and *Billy Budd*, and he enriched my consciousness of my profession as no one else has done, before or since.¹

Again, the connections between Chekhov and Saint-Denis assert themselves suggestively in this anecdote, and its subject – the actor's consciousness of his profession – is the main subject of this study, since it was also the central thrust of both Chekhov and Saint-Denis' work.

In the early nineteen-thirties, the English actor's consciousness of his profession was (particularly by comparison to the experiences of Chekhov and Saint-Denis) significantly hampered by training which was limited both in its availability and ambition. There were two main institutions dedicated to the training of actors, both of which had been established at the turn of the century. The first was Sir Herbert Tree's Academy of Dramatic Art which moved from His Majesty's Theatre to Gower Street in 1905 and became RADA in 1920. The second was Elsie Fogerty's Central School, based at the Albert Hall, which was founded in 1906. Both institutions were characterised by relatively well-off and industrious students, seriously intent on a career on the stage.

Despite the inclusion of lectures from significant figures such as George Bernard Shaw and Harley Granville Barker, the curricula of these schools were firmly technical and vocational. There was an emphasis on voice production, elocution, dancing and fencing, all of which were intended to equip actors to handle the demands of repertories which included the verbal complexities of Shakespeare and Shaw and the physical stylisation of melodrama, and to master the declamatory style necessitated by the building of larger theatres. During the nineteen-twenties, however, declamation gave way to a new style of more naturalistic acting, better suited to contemporary realistic plays, and the training at the Royal Academy and the Central School adapted to incorporate more of these in rehearsal classes. There was also a profusion of new schools, opened by well-known performers or significant companies.

Among these were the schools run by the Liverpool Rep and the Old Vic, whose students also walked-on in productions; the Dramatic School of Lady Constance Benson (established in 1919), where John Gielgud was trained before going on to RADA, and Fay Compton's Studio (established in 1927), where Alec Guinness was first taught.² In retrospect, however, both Gielgud and Guinness were dissatisfied with the teaching of acting in these institutions. It was taught mainly by imitation, and Gielgud recalled of his attempts to impersonate the actor Claude Rains while at RADA, that 'I strained every fibre in my efforts to appear violent and emotional and succeeded only in straining my voice and striking strange attitudes with my body'.³ Guinness was taught, in turn, by Gielgud, who sent him to private classes with the actress Martita Hunt, and employed him as Osric in his 1934 *Hamlet* (New Theatre). Guinness watched Gielgud from the wings every night, and learned gradually, by experience. After the production had closed, he wrote to Gielgud that 'knowing how badly I was playing [Osric] by the end of

the run and how much I had improved, I shudder to think what I must have been like at the beginning'.⁴

That letter was dated May 1935, and, only a matter of weeks later, Guinness would be acting alongside Gielgud again, this time in Michel Saint-Denis' production of André Obey's *Noah*, which, when performed by Saint-Denis' company *Les Quinze* as *Noé*, had thrilled London audiences in 1931. This marked the beginning of Saint-Denis' significant, even transformative, influence on the two men. Gielgud recalled that, despite being mis-cast both as Noah and Vershinin (in Saint-Denis' *Three Sisters* three years later), 'I learnt more from acting in these two plays than from others in which I have made a greater personal success'.⁵ The tradition of training from which Guinness, Gielgud, and their colleagues had emerged, which combined technical rigour in speech and formalised movement on the one hand with somewhat *ad hoc* apprenticeship in acting on the other, was also transformed by the work of Chekhov and Saint-Denis. They were instrumental in the development of the practice of actor training in which, during the last century, the technique of acting has risen from a marginal position in the curricula of the first drama schools to the centre of a growing area both of practical and theoretical activity in today's higher education.

Chekhov not only anticipated this development, but saw beyond it, not only placing the actor at the centre of the theatre, but equating the two: his assistant, Deirdre Hurst du Prey, called her collection of transcripts of Chekhov's classes in his studio *The Actor is the Theatre*. While Saint-Denis might not have put it quite so absolutely as that, he too saw the actor as the theatre's essential element. It was therefore axiomatic of both Chekhov and Saint-Denis' work, that the actor's mastery of his craft would provide the means by which the theatre could expand. This study

explores the claim that the language of theatre is the language of acting and, by using the work of Chekhov and Saint-Denis to interpret this language, seeks to point towards an art of the theatre for the future.

¹ Ustinov, 1998, p. 311

² See Sanderson, 1984, pp. 39-50, 189-193

³ Quoted by David Shirley in *Pitches*, 2012, p. 40

⁴ Read, 2003, p. 42

⁵ Gielgud, 1990, p. 158

Section 1 The Chekhov Theatre Studio at Dartington, 1936-1938



Figs. 6 and 7, Leonard and Dorothy Elmhirst at Dartington (c. 1925) and Beatrice Straight and Michael Chekhov at Dartington (c. 1936)

NB: In this section, some key terms used by Chekhov appear in bold in the main body of the text to indicate that they are deliberate allusions to the principles of his technique.

Introduction

The Chekhov Theatre Studio at Dartington opened its doors in October 1936. It was the initiative of the American actress Beatrice Straight, the daughter of Dorothy Whitney Straight. As a member of the famous land-owning Whitney family, Dorothy was a wealthy heiress in her own right, and she had the added revenue and independence of a widow as her first husband, the investment banker, reporter and diplomat Willard Straight, had died in Paris in the Spanish influenza epidemic of 1918. She subsequently met and married Leonard Elmhirst, and together, in 1925, they established Dartington Hall as an experiment in regenerating rural industry and craftsmanship in which the arts would play a vital role. Ten years later, Dartington had a community of agricultural workers, artisans and craftsmen and a co-educational school. Dartington also supported

a range of artists. It was the home of the prominent modern dance company the Ballets Jooss, whose directors Kurt Jooss and Sigurd Leeder also created the Jooss-Leeder School of Dance, which fed the company. There was also a music school under Hans Oppenheim (who had been deputy director at Glyndebourne) and other artists taught at the school and were given studios in the grounds, including the painters Mark Tobey and Cecil Collins and the sculptor Willi Soukop.

The inclusion of these professional artists in the Elmhirsts' experimental community alongside the community working on the estate was partly the initiative of Dorothy, who was an enthusiastic supporter of the arts. She had been taught at university by the philosopher John Dewey, who was a strong advocate of both the arts and crafts in the education and development of society. But the Elmhirsts were more directly and deeply influenced by the Indian poet and philosopher Rabindranath Tagore. In 1921, Leonard Elmhirst had met Tagore in New York while he was studying agriculture at Cornell University. Elmhirst told Tagore that he had visited India in 1917 and witnessed the struggle of rural villages to survive, so Tagore invited him to travel to India and live on the farm he had established near his school at the *Santiniketan* in West Bengal. Elmhirst replied that he would be of more use after he had completed his studies and duly travelled to India in 1922, establishing what he called an 'Institute of Rural Reconstruction' at Tagore's farm, which was renamed the *Sriniketan* (The Abode of Grace).¹



Fig. 8, Elmhirst and Tagore at Dartington

Elmhirst's success in creating this Institute was built upon two factors which were crucial from the outset. The first was money. On Elmhirst's completion of his studies, he was told that there were no funds available for his journey to India, and immediately responded with a telegram: 'FUNDS AVAILABLE. CAN I COME?'² It should be noted, however, that although he was happy to work for nothing, Elmhirst was not a wealthy man. He had paid his way at Cornell by 'kitchen work, by teaching English and by working as a farm-hand'.³ A diary entry of 29 November 1921, shortly after his arrival in India, records that 'I shall have to cable Dorothy tomorrow for \$25,000 to start us on our way'.⁴ Without her money neither *Sriniketan* nor Dartington would have been possible. But money alone was not enough. The second factor in Elmhirst's success was his willingness to blur traditional class boundaries. In the process of setting up camp at the farm, he had to pretend to the Brahmin boys from Tagore's school, who were assisting him, that there would be a 'sweeper' to come and empty the latrines. When, the next day, they saw Elmhirst emptying the buckets himself, some joined in, and a few days later, Elmhirst recorded in his diary 'two red letter days because two students

yesterday and two today, including one Brahmin boy . . . cleaned out the offending latrine buckets. What a victory it is! For them especially!’⁵

Tagore, who was born into a land-owning family, had already described to Elmhirst the destructive effect of hierarchical divisions in Indian society:

In India the real cause of the weakness that cripples our spirit of freedom arises from the impregnable social walls we raise between the different castes. These check the natural flow of fellow-feeling among the people who live in our country. The law of love and mutual respect has been ignored for the sake of retaining an artificial order . . . The people of India in this way have built their own cage; but by trying to secure their freedom from one another, they only succeed in keeping themselves eternally captive.⁶

For Tagore these ‘impregnable . . . walls’ were characteristic of the modern city and its brand of civilisation, which sustained the ‘artificial order’ by which the ruling class maintained their control of the means of production. He did not see any freedom in this, not even for the rich, who were equally condemned to live in isolation.

Tagore’s approach to education was likewise holistic rather than analytical. For the boys in his school, he wrote, ‘vacation has no meaning . . . because their class-work has not been wrenched away and walled-in from their normal vocation . . . it has been made a part of their daily current of life’.⁷ Tagore and Elmhirst’s educational projects therefore prioritised embodied and purposeful experience rather than intellectual abstractions. So that their education would not be ‘detached from life’, they taught crafts, which had to be ‘learned at the beginning by trial and error and the bitterness of failure’.⁸ Much of their teaching and learning was also done outside, where, Elmhirst wrote, ‘under skilled stimulation and guidance there is . . . an unlimited field for

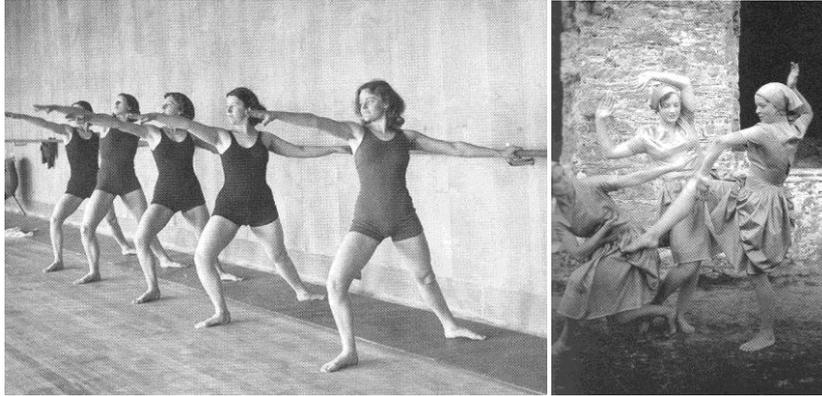
experiencing and for experimenting with life'.⁹ Such experience of and experimentation with life was not all explicitly practical. It was also undertaken in order to give students access to what Tagore called 'the world . . . which consists of an endless series of movements, has an inner truth of its own which is one, and which gives reality to the innumerable facts we know about the universe'.

One of Tagore's principal means of 'giving reality' to this 'world' in education was through movement. He wrote that 'in children the whole body is expressive' and he deprecated the educational practice of enforcing stillness on 'those lines of movement that would parallel and accompany our thoughts' and therefore of making the mind do its work 'unaided by the collaboration of the body'.¹⁰ For Tagore, the repressing of physical expression was another of the barriers erected by culture, and therefore the dancer and actor ('who have been trained to use the whole body as a tool for the expression of thought, of emotion, or of sentiment') were figures of great educational significance for him.¹¹

When Elmhirst began to develop his own school at Dartington, Tagore therefore advised him to 'make the practice of drama and of the histrionic arts compulsory for all children', and to extend their practice to the whole estate:¹²

There must be avenues of self-expression by which you cultivate the feeling side, and not only the intellect . . . if you leave that out, you leave what for me is a very important aspect of every individual, and of life. So don't forget that, and work it into your whole programme in the village.¹³

In 1927, Dorothy recorded dance classes involving the Elmhirst family, staff and pupils from the school and domestic and estate staff, in which, in other words, social hierarchy was suspended (although of course it was always resumed).¹⁴



Figs. 9 and 10, early explorations of dance at Dartington; Deirdre Hurst is the second from right of the students at the barre in the School of Dance-Mime, and Beatrice Straight is the central shepherdess in *Comus* (1929). The shepherdess on the right is Leslie Burrowes, who went on to train with Mary Wigman in Germany.¹⁵ The left-hand shepherdess is Dorothy Carter/Paula Morel.

Early performances at Dartington also involved participants from across the community. When the director Ellen Van Volkenburg directed *Comus* at Dartington in 1929, for instance, the three shepherdesses were played by Beatrice Straight, Leslie Burrowes (who taught dance in the school) and a housekeeper named Dorothy Carter.¹⁶ This production was put on by the drama club at Dartington, but it also marked the beginning of the professionalization of the arts at Dartington. The Elmhursts were in partnership with Van Volkenburg's husband, the actor and producer Maurice Browne (whose London production of *Journey's End* they had underwritten), and he and Van Volkenburg (who had taught at the Cornish School in Seattle) helped them to extend their plans for Dartington's artistic activities. Browne and Van Volkenburg invited the Anglo-American dancer Margaret Barr (who had trained with them and with Martha Graham in New York) and Louise Soelberg (a German dancer who had taught at the Cornish School) to teach alongside Van Volkenburg at the School of Dance-Mime, which was established at Dartington in 1930.¹⁷ Subsequently it expanded, and the painter

Mark Tobey (also from the Cornish School) joined the staff in 1931. A purpose-built dance studio was constructed for it, which opened in 1932. During this time, dramatic performances continued through the Dance-Drama group. In 1934, Ellen Van Volkenburg directed Beatrice Straight and Deirdre Hurst (both students in the School of Dance Mime) in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*.

It is clear, however, that, for Beatrice Straight, the acting training available at Dartington during this period was not good enough. In 1935, she was in New York with Deirdre Hurst as her companion studying with Maria Ouspenskaya and Tamara Daykaharnova (both of whom had emigrated from Russia to the United States after training and performing with the Moscow Art Theatre). While they were there, Hurst and Straight saw Chekhov on Broadway, playing Khlestakov in *The Inspector General* with Solomon Hurok's Moscow Art Theatre Players (a company of Russian émigrés). They were both astonished by his performance and Beatrice Straight sent a telegram to her mother in Devon telling her to come to New York to see him. Dorothy did so, and after he had demonstrated his acting exercises to the two young women in some sample classes (for which Tamara Daykaharnova acted as translator), it was put to Chekhov that he might lead a theatre school at Dartington.¹⁸ Chekhov agreed and, despite the fact that he had not made a permanent base for himself in New York, both Straight and Hurst stressed the audacity of that decision since he spoke no English.¹⁹

The idea of a drama school run by Chekhov was put to the Dartington Trustees in March 1935. Dorothy Elmhirst wired Beatrice in New York immediately after the meeting to say that they 'entirely approve' and are 'prepared to find necessary quarters and give control theatre'.²⁰ The 'quarters' for the Studio would be purpose-built and were described by the student Eleanor Faison as 'a long, low building which could be

divided for rehearsals' with sprung floors made from sycamore.²¹ Chekhov travelled to Devon in October 1935 in order to make preparations for the Studio's opening the following year and to improve his English. He and his wife Xenia were given a house called Yarnier Barn in the village of Dartington. During this time the 'drama school' which had been agreed upon became the 'Chekhov Theatre Studio' and Chekhov was given the freedom to mould the organisation to fit his vision. Between April and June 1936, Chekhov taught further lessons to Beatrice Straight and Deirdre Hurst so that they could become his assistants in the Studio, and students were sought and auditioned at Dartington and in New York.



Fig. 11, The Chekhov Theatre Studio's promotional booklet (1936)

In the Chekhov Theatre Studio's archive there are a few copies of the small hardback booklet which was the Studio's principal means of advertisement (fig. 11), which laid out its organisation's purpose and practice. This booklet began by contextualising Chekhov's undertaking within what it called a 'new movement' of the theatre: a tradition dating back to 'Gordon Craig and Stanislavsky' and perpetuated by the 'Moscow First Studio Theatre which later became the Second Moscow Art Theatre'. That tradition – and by extension the Chekhov Theatre Studio – aimed

to strengthen and deepen the appeal of Theatre so that by more vigorous training of the individual actor, of the group, as well as of the producer himself, something comparable to a great orchestra in music might be evolved. . .²²

The booklet further developed this musical simile by describing the Studio's mission as the 'attempt to weld into one harmony all the elements of a theatrical expression' so that 'a production will be composed like a symphony following certain fundamental laws of construction, and its power to affect the public should be equal to that of musical composition'. These 'fundamental laws' governed what the booklet described as 'the forces of the new theatre': 'composition, harmony and rhythm'. By understanding and learning to manipulate these 'forces', it would be possible, the booklet argued, for the Studio to create productions which would be 'intelligible to a spectator regardless of language or of intellectual content'.²³ In other words, it was the Studio's goal to explore and master a language of performance which would be purely theatrical and not an amalgam of means by which other art forms communicate (spoken language, music, and so on).

This undertaking was necessarily esoteric, but it was not exclusively so. The booklet was also practical about the means by which this 'new theatre' would be brought into existence.

It has been one of the tragedies of theatrical endeavour that it was of necessity ephemeral; actors, producer, scene designers and musicians, have come together for a season and have separated to other ventures and other plays. Students in the Chekhov Theatre Studio, as well as receiving an all round training in the theatre, will be given an opportunity to pass into a group which will take the work of the Studio to the outside world. Members of the Group will work on a salary basis as in any company, but they will enjoy the additional advantage in having security over a long period. From time to

time the Group will return to prepare new tours; from the Studio it will recruit new talent and new ideas; and it will thus be assured of a constant stream of inspiration to revivify its qualities and maintain its vitality.²⁴

The actor Paul Rogers (who joined the Studio in 1936 at the age of 19 and left at the end of 1938) confirmed that 'there was only one destiny, then, and that was a company, which was the aim and object of the whole enterprise'.²⁵ That aim was reflected in the booklet's depiction of the progression of Chekhov's career from actor to director to teacher, which began with his realisation, while an actor at the Moscow Art Theatre, 'that, owing to the concentration of the actors on their own parts, a production was often without unity or cohesion'.

There gradually developed in him a desire to find some means of bringing harmony to the whole production. The necessity for harmony forced him to search for new methods in production, and that he should become a director therefore was no more than a logical outcome. In the second of the periods he gradually developed his method for harmonizing a production; but as a director he found that his scope was limited . . . It was not easy for actors who had been trained in the old ways to follow new ideas and to assume a new technique. Therefore his mind moved naturally to the next step: new actors must be trained for his purpose, and it was incumbent upon him therefore to become a teacher. . . from actor to director, from director to teacher was a logical sequence; each change was impelled by the necessity of grappling with problems inherent in the period preceding.²⁶

Section 1.1 will therefore chart the process by which Chekhov's technique evolved from his training with Stanislavsky in the Moscow Art Theatre's First Studio through his friendship and collaboration with Vakhtangov and his encounter with the works of Rudolf Steiner and the Anthroposophists. Section 1.2 will continue by exploring

the practice of that technique at Dartington by following the training as recorded in shorthand on the spot by Deirdre Hurst du Prey and subsequently transcribed in the unpublished collection *The Actor is the Theatre*.²⁷ Section 1.3 will investigate the legacy of the Dartington Studio both in practice (by analysing a glimpse of the later work of Beatrice Straight) and in theory, by asking what lessons Chekhov's work at Dartington has for the study of theatre practice today.

¹ Tagore, 1961, pp. 10-11, 20-21

² *Ibid.*, p. 21

³ *Ibid.*, p. 11

⁴ Elmhirst, 2008, p. 41

⁵ Diary entries for 21, 22 and 25 February 1922 (Elmhirst, 2008, pp. 99, 100, 109)

⁶ Tagore, 1961, p. 23

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 60

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 71

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 102-103

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 105

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 106

¹³ Archive footage of interview in Sharp, 2002

¹⁴ See Nicholas, 2007, p. 5

¹⁵ See Nicholas, 2007, p. 56

¹⁶ She also seems to have attended the Chekhov Studio under the name Paula Morel.

¹⁷ For more information on the Barr and Louise Soelberg, who taught with her at the School of Dance-Mime and the intersection, through them, of Graham's work and the German movement initiated by Laban and Mary Wigman, see Nicholas, 2007, pp. 59-65.

¹⁸ See footage of Beatrice Straight speaking about the Chekhov Theatre Studio in (Sharp, 2002) and the Introduction to Deirdre Hurst du Prey's *The Actor is the Theatre* (1977).

¹⁹ Straight said that he even said 'yes' in Russian (Sharp, 2002).

²⁰ MC/S4/14/A; the 'theatre' was the Barn Theatre at Dartington, which had been converted in 1934.

²¹ Sharp, 2002

²² *The Chekhov Theatre Studio*, 1936, p. 3. A document providing 'Publicity Copy' for the Studio in the administrative files is dated July 1936, and the list of 'Suggestions for distributing booklet' dated 'Spring 1936', so it seems that the Studio's publicity was circulated relatively close to its opening.

²³ Chekhov & Merlin, 2005, p. 136

²⁴ *The Chekhov Theatre Studio*, 1936, p. 13

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 27

²⁶ Interview with Martin Sharp, 2002

²⁷ *The Chekhov Theatre Studio*, 1936, pp. 32-33

²⁷ These notes are held in The Michael Chekhov Theatre Studio Deirdre Hurst du Prey Archive (MC/S1/7/A-B and MC/S1/8/A-B). The notes are arranged chronologically in the files, so references give the date only.

1.1 Context: The Evolution of Chekhov's Technique before 1936

Chekhov's technique began, as he wrote, with 'prying behind the curtain of the Creative Process . . . at the Moscow Art Theater',¹ and his work is still often considered as a branch of – or a reaction to – Stanislavsky's system:² Robert Gordon calls it a 'variation' of Stanislavsky, whereas Mel Gordon and Rose Whyman describe it as, respectively, a 'rebellion' against and a 'challenge' to Stanislavsky.³ For the purposes of this study, however, one aspect of Stanislavsky's influence on Chekhov is indisputable: his dedication to the studio as a working environment. Chekhov wrote that the Moscow Art Theatre's First Studio was 'the theatre-and-school which has made such a lasting impression on the world and has yet to be rivalled'.⁴

Stanislavsky's Model

Chekhov and his friend and colleague Evgeny Vakhtangov put their names at the top of the list pinned up by Stanislavsky in 1912 when he was seeking actors to join his studio, and they both went on to run studios of their own. Chekhov's first was in Moscow in 1918, when, according to Deirdre Hurst du Prey, he was teaching a version of Stanislavsky's System.⁵ By 1924, however, when Chekhov became the Director of the Second Moscow Art Theatre (as the First Studio had become), he was already moving away from Stanislavsky: at the Second Moscow Art Theatre, he wrote, 'I was able to develop my methods of acting and directing and formulate them into a definite technique'.⁶ After he was exiled from Russia in 1928, he continued to try to create his own studio, which he did briefly in 1931, when he formed, with Georgette Boner, *Le Théâtre Tchekoff* and an associated school of acting in Paris. Deirdre Hurst du Prey

recorded that ‘it was during this period that he first began to work on a book concerning his method for an acting technique’, a book that Chekhov would begin again at Dartington.⁷ The Paris initiative collapsed due to a lack of funds, and Chekhov travelled to Riga, Latvia, where he performed with the Russian Drama Theatre and taught in ‘the theatre school organised by the Latvian Government’,⁸ which he also unofficially led, until a fascist coup forced him to leave the country.⁹ All of these initiatives, like the Chekhov Theatre Studio at Dartington, were focused on the creation of a new theatre – both literally and figuratively – by means of a technique developed through training and experimentation.

Thus Stanislavsky provided Chekhov with an example of Studio practice which remained his ideal. He also gave him a model for the evolution of an artistic technique. Stanislavsky urged Chekhov to do his ‘duty’ to the future and ‘organize and write down your thoughts concerning the technique of acting’.¹⁰ In so doing, Chekhov also observed the pattern of the development of Stanislavsky’s system, alternating between the stability of technique and the intuitive instability of practice. While Chekhov and his students recorded his exercises in painstaking detail, he also criticised Beatrice Straight and Deirdre Hurst for ‘following the suggestions I gave you too pedantically’ and encouraged them to exercise their right ‘to re-create the exercises’ and to ‘be spontaneous and original instead of slavish’ in their practice of his technique.¹¹ Therefore Chekhov was referring implicitly to Stanislavsky’s example when he told his students that ‘when we say discard the intellect, we mean discard it for the creative work, but not for the human ability to understand’.¹² For both men, creation was an intuitive process, which should later be formulated, with the help of the intellect, into a technique which could be practised and developed.

The Evolution of Chekhov's Technique

Chekhov's now-famous technique of **Psychological Gesture** was defined by his literary executrix Mala Powers as 'a movement that embodies the psychology and Objective of a character'.¹³ Its purpose was, according to Chekhov, 'to influence, stir, mould and attune your whole inner life to its artistic aims and purposes'.¹⁴ He seems to have first named such movements **Psychological Gestures** in a class at Dartington on 21 November 1936, but the technique dated back at least as far as 1921, when Chekhov encountered its intuitive use by both Stanislavsky and Vakhtangov. This particular technique therefore offers an opportunity to trace almost the full length of Chekhov's exploration of acting before his arrival at Dartington.

In 1921, Chekhov rehearsed both the role of Khlestakov in Stanislavsky's Art Theatre production of Gogol's *The Inspector General* and the title role in Vakhtangov's production of Strindberg's *Erik XIV* at the First Studio. Vakhtangov and Stanislavsky used what Chekhov referred to as a 'special kind of gesture' during rehearsals for those productions. These gestures were 'special' because they were being used in an unconventional way: not as a means of expression in performance, but as a means of exploration in rehearsal.

Both Stanislavsky and Vakhtangov used these gestures while directing because words failed them. Chekhov remembered that, while trying to define 'the whole psychology' of the role of Khlestakov in *The Government Inspector*, Stanislavsky

suddenly made a lightning-quick movement with his arms and hands, as if throwing them up and at the same time vibrating with his fingers, elbows and even his shoulders. "That is the whole psychology of Khlestakov", said he, laughingly.

From that moment, Chekhov understood ‘the whole part . . . how Khlestakov moved, spoke, felt, what he thought, how and what he desired, and so on’.¹⁵ The observations of critics support that assertion as Laurence Senelick notes: ‘again and again the critics pointed out Chekhov’s lightness of being, his incredible weightlessness, the rapidity of his transitions’, and his spiritual vacuity. The critic Dodonov observed that ‘nothingness is essential to this Khlestakov’, as it had been to Stanislavsky’s gestural depiction of him.¹⁶

Vakhtangov used gesture in a similar way to define Erik XIV. Chekhov had been asking Vakhtangov ‘many questions, trying to penetrate the very heart of the character’, when

Vakhtangov suddenly jumped up, exclaiming, “That is your Erik. Look! I am now within a magic circle and cannot break through it!” With his whole body he made one strong, painfully passionate movement, as though trying to break an invisible wall before him or to pierce a magic circle. The destiny, the endless suffering, the obstinacy, and the weakness of Erik XIV’s character became clear to me.¹⁷

Vakhtangov’s inspiration to use gesture in this way was connected to a revelation he had at about this time while studying Hebrew, which he had begun to learn after directing the Jewish actors of the Habima Theatre in 1918,¹⁸ but gave up after realizing that understanding the language was less important than reading the actors’ gestures.¹⁹ Since the vast majority of the Habima’s audience would not speak Hebrew, he decided to concentrate his directing on the articulation of feelings through gesture.

Stanislavsky was also aware of this communicative power of gesture in performance. In a 1933 opera rehearsal, he asked one of the singers to ‘Reach your

hand out to Olga . . . So that your hand calls to her, so that it radiates the call'.²⁰ The source for Stanislavsky's notion of 'radiation' was yoga and what Sharon Carnicke describes as its 'palpable but invisible rays of *prana*'.²¹ The study of yoga and *prana* was common at the First Studio of the Moscow Art Theatre, although the materialistic ethos of the Soviet state led to the suppression of this practice until relatively recently. Sharon Carnicke reveals that Stanislavsky 'saturates his rehearsal notes from 1919 and 1920 with references to [*prana*]', which he defined (borrowing from Ramacharaka's 1904 book *Hatha Yoga*) as 'vital energy' which, 'in a successful performance', will 'pass between actors and their partners and between actors and their audiences, thus becoming a vehicle for infecting others with the emotional content'.²²

Stanislavsky related *prana* to movement, but his understanding of it was crucially limited to 'inner movement', as we can see from his notes:

e) Pay attention to the movement of *prana*.

f) *Prana* moves, and is experienced like mercury, like a snake, from your hands to your fingertips, from your thighs to your toes.

g) The movement of *prana* creates, in my opinion, inner rhythm.²³

The emphasis on inner movement and 'inner rhythm' is also typical of Stanislavsky's published writing. In *An Actor's Work on Himself* Tortsov tells his students that the 'dynamic quality of the imagination . . . must incite first inner then outer action'.²⁴ The tendency to prioritise 'inner action' is characteristic of what Sharon Carnicke concedes is Stanislavsky's failed 'effort to escape Western dualism'.²⁵ Despite writing that 'in every physical action there is something psychological, and in the psychological something physical',²⁶ he repeatedly lapsed into a hierarchical attitude to the psycho-physical

which prioritized the 'internal' processes of thought and feeling over their physical 'expressions' or 'manifestations'.²⁷

When Chekhov found himself 'infected by the emotional content' of the gestures given to him by Stanislavsky and Vakhtangov, he saw that Stanislavsky's hierarchy of 'inner' and 'outer' was arbitrary and could simply be reversed. Vakhtangov was evidently aware of this too. Andrei Malaev-Babel writes that, for Vakhtangov, gesture could 'permeate an actor's entire being and affect their psychology, body and speech'.²⁸ In Vakhtangov's production of *The Dybbuk*, for instance, he gave some characters a 'gestural "*leitmotif*", a repeated gesture that expressed their psychological and social essence'.²⁹ These were not **Psychological Gestures**, since they were designed to be seen on the stage, but, by defining a character gesturally, they pointed in the direction of Chekhov's technique.³⁰ However, Vakhtangov's *The Dybbuk* was also inspired by a gesture that he saw.³¹ This was, in effect, a **Psychological Gesture**.

Vakhtangov's two uses of gesture (to capture the psychological essence of a character on the one hand and the aesthetic essence of an artistic entity on the other) exemplify Chekhov's description of his friend sitting 'just in the middle' between 'Stanislavsky's reality and Meyerhold's fantasy'.³² Vakhtangov's 'All Saints' Notes', written while he was convalescing in 1921 at the All Saints Rehabilitation Resort show him in the process of negotiating his relationship to these more established directors. He praised Meyerhold as 'a genius director' whose 'every production is a new theatre' while observing that, by contrast, Stanislavsky 'does not have any individuality'. But he added that 'Meyerhold does not know [the actor] at all', whereas Stanislavsky 'knows him down to his intestines, can see through his skin, foresees his thoughts and his spirit'.³³

Gesture and movement allowed Vakhtangov to take the best of both approaches, to get under the actor/character's skin and to find a unique form for every play.

In Vakhtangov's second version of Maeterlink's *The Miracle of St Anthony* at the Third Studio, he used the cartoons of Honoré Daumier to give form to the play's content. Its content was, for Vakhtangov, a 'sharply expressed clash' between the spiritual purity of St Anthony and the maid Virginia and the greed of the bourgeois relatives and guests who seek to prevent the 'miracle' of the play's title: the resurrection of Mlle. Hortensia (from whose death they stand to gain). Daumier's drawings served, according to Ruben Simonov, as a guide in the production for the 'molding of figures, characters, portraits, make-ups, and expressive hands'.³⁴ But Vakhtangov also used gesture to conjure the 'inner power' of an outwardly still image, as in a moment in which the entire cast must be stunned which Vakhtangov described to his actors through movement:

Everyone looks, but no-one understands anything. During this moment, you must sense your neckties coming undone, swelling colours etc. You must loosen your muscles and wish to ask something, but your tongue does not obey you.³⁵

The actor Pavel Markov also praised Chekhov's acting as 'a synthesis of Stanislavskian psychological realism and Meyerholdian technique'.³⁶ This approach, which generates psychological qualities by stressing the body's sensory experience, is distinctive of that synthesis.

Chekhov and Vakhtangov had recognised the power of gesture to connect spiritual experience and physical form, as the playwright Karel Capek's review of *Erik XIV*, and Chekhov's performance in particular, demonstrated:

Two words: 'physical' and 'spiritual' are the mystery behind this astonishing performance. The body may 'represent' that mystery, may 'symbolize' it and 'express' it. But then comes Chekhov and proves to you . . . that the body *is* the soul. For Chekhov, there is no 'inside', everything is laid bare, nothing is hidden, everything is impulsively and sharply expressed in each movement, in the play of the entire body, of this most delicate and trembling tangle of nerves.³⁷

Chekhov recalled that he started reading widely 'in search of the laws that might govern' gesture, in order to convert this intuitive discovery into a technique. This was, he said, 'a task that lasted for several years. The more I read, the more confused I became by the wealth of material'.³⁸ He could be certain, however, of his distinction from Stanislavsky, which he recalled in his description of their last meeting, when they discussed 'two issues that divided us': the use of affective memory and the means of creating a character. Stanislavsky argued, according to Chekhov, that the actor must draw on 'his personal, intimate life' in both cases: to call up emotions and to discover the character by imaginatively placing himself in the character's situation. For Chekhov, however, the actor must forget himself and use 'creative feelings' and an image of the character 'cleansed of the personal element'. Chekhov observed that these two disagreements 'are in essence one', which he defined with a question: '*do the personal, untransformed feelings of the actor need to be eliminated from, or engaged in, the creative process?*'³⁹

For Chekhov, 'personal untransformed feelings' were irrelevant to the creative process, which he saw as an interaction between an artist and images which had their own autonomous life, he was influenced in this by the novelist, poet, playwright and theorist Andrei Bely:⁴⁰

His creative process was an interesting one. He would conceive the general outline of a novel and then patiently observe the characters he had brought to life. They would surround him day after day, evolving and trying to establish relationships among themselves, altering the plot and uncovering deeper meaning until they had finally become symbols . . . An artistic imagination of such dimensions as his was capable of combining two processes that are mutually exclusive. It allowed the images it created to have an autonomous existence, while at the same time subordinating them to the will of the artist. While Bely observed the objective interplay of those images, his ‘insight’ endowed them with his own subjective element. The contradiction turned into co-operation between the images and the author.⁴¹

Chekhov was also struck by Bely’s performances at his lectures:

His entire agile body was a reflection of the spirit that lived in him . . . Whether he was talking about art, the laws of historical development, biology, physics or chemistry, he *would be the immediate, living embodiment* of gravity, weight, impact, stimulus or the hidden forces of the seed, of fading, growth and flowering. He strove upward with the gothic style, curved with the baroque, embodied the forms and colours of plants and flowers, erupted with volcanoes, rumbled, raged and flashed with thunderstorms . . .⁴²

Therefore Bely was not only able to interact with his creative images, but to **incorporate** them, a process which would become central to Chekhov’s approach and is crucial to the technique of **Psychological Gesture**. Indeed, while Chekhov watched Bely lecturing about ‘the gothic style’ he was also watching his own Hamlet: the director John Berry recalled that Chekhov showed him his psychological gesture for the part which rose upwards, to a point, ‘like a gothic cathedral’.⁴³

Chekhov eventually found a model for the creation and incorporation of images in the work of Rudolf Steiner, who influenced Bely as well. Steiner (born in 1861) was

strongly influenced by Goethe and was a polymath: a philosopher, a teacher and educationalist, a painter, a playwright, an architect and an author on a wider range of subjects still. He developed the 'spiritual science' of Anthroposophy, and out of that movement, an art form known as Eurythmy, which takes what Steiner called 'the forms and gestures of the air' which are created by sound and by speech and converts them into 'movements of the whole human being' to create 'visible speech, visible music'.⁴⁴ For instance, Chekhov described the Eurythmy's gesture for the sound 'ah' (as in 'father'):

Imagine we open our arms widely and stand with our legs apart and follow with our feelings this Gesture, trying to experience it strongly. What do we experience? A kind of astonishment, awe, admiration, and similar feelings.⁴⁵

In 1924, Steiner lectured on Speech and Drama and frequently focused on 'how to bring gesture into speech', because, he said, in gesture 'the force, the dynamic of the human being himself is present'.⁴⁶

Chekhov's habit of quoting from Steiner in rehearsals and classes was a significant justification for the decision of the Soviet authorities to have him arrested, leading to his hurried departure from Russia in 1928,⁴⁷ but he studied Steiner in greater detail after he left Russia, when he realised that 'my 'gestures' and their compositions were random creations'.⁴⁸ He practised, for instance, meditation exercises from Steiner's book *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds, And Its Attainment*, which offers a guide to spiritual training, through a process which begins with what Steiner calls 'Preparation'.⁴⁹ This begins with 'directing the attention of the soul to certain happenings around us': 'on the one hand, life that is growing, budding, thriving, and on

the other, all phenomena of fading, decay, withering'.⁵⁰ Chekhov did this while 'lying in the garden on bright sunny days':

I observed the harmonious forms of the plants, I imagined the process of the rotation of the Earth and the planets, I searched for harmonious compositions in space and gradually came to the experience of *movement, invisible to the external eye*, that was present in all natural phenomena. There even seemed to me to be such movement in motionless, solidified forms. It was movement that had created form and still maintained it . . . I called this invisible movement, this play of forces, 'gesture' . . . It seemed to me that through them I could penetrate into the very essence of phenomena . . . When I then performed 'gestures' that I myself had created, they invariably called forth feelings and impulses of the will inside me and gave rise to creative images.⁵¹

Chekhov converted this experience into an exercise where he asked the actor to 'look at, or imagine, forms of different plants and flowers' and 'ask yourself, "What Gestures do these forms conjure before me?"' He gave examples.

For instance, a cypress streams upward (Gesture), and has a quiet, positive concentrated character (Quality); whereas, the old many-branched oak, rising upward and sideways (Gesture), will speak to us of a violent, uncontrolled, broad character (Quality).⁵²

According to William Elmhirst, Chekhov used this exercise at Dartington: 'he would take students out into the garden and say "feel the gesture of the trees: what gesture are they making, and try and express it through your body. Enter into the spirit of the tree"'.⁵³

Elmhirst's anecdote is corroborated by Deirdre Hurst du Prey's class-notes, which record Chekhov telling his students that **Psychological Gesture** was not limited to the exploration of human characters.

We have spoken about psychological gesture as something which is organic, bound together with the human body and human psychology, but is to be found everywhere, not only in the human body. In nature, and in living things, and in dead things. In everything, and everywhere an artist can find or create psychological gestures which are not in immediate connection to the human body.

For instance, this stick has a gesture. The length, thickness and colour of this stick make a certain impression on the human soul and this soul, if it is an actor's or artist's, reacts on all these impressions and this reaction can be made or molded as-if it is psychological gesture.⁵⁴

This realization that by attending to the impression made by anything and expressing it in the form of a gesture, the actor can bring its essence into her experience, clarified, for Chekhov, the reason that Stanislavsky and Vakhtangov's gestures in rehearsal had been so effective. The gestures had enabled the direct transfer of their interpretation into Chekhov's experience. His development of those accidental inspirations into a systematic technique demonstrated not only Chekhov's insight and imagination, but the reflective nature of his practice, which would go on to characterize the studio he created at Dartington.

That studio very nearly didn't happen. During the decade of Chekhov's exile before the Dartington Studio opened he tried numerous times to establish an institution where he could generate a permanent ensemble of actors and expand not only his technique, but the theatre as an art-form. He failed to do so in Berlin, and then lost his

studios in Paris and Riga. But thanks to Georgette Boner, he was able to continue to develop his technique nonetheless.⁵⁵ She was ‘a listener’, with whom Chekhov could reflect on his discoveries, and she subsequently alerted Beatrice Straight and Deirdre Hurst du Prey to his appearance in America, which led directly to his employment at Dartington.⁵⁶ There, for the first time, Chekhov had the possibility of working without the fear of political enemies he had experienced in Russia and with sufficient funds to invest deeply in thorough training and experimentation, which he had never had in Europe. It is no wonder he thought nothing of learning English from scratch to take up Dartington’s offer.

¹ Chekhov, 2002, p. li

² There are sections on Chekhov’s work in, for example, Mel Gordon’s *The Stanislavsky Technique: Russia* (pp.117-184), Jonathan Pitches’ *Science and the Stanislavsky Tradition of Acting* (pp. 129-165), Robert Gordon’s *The Purpose of Playing* (pp. 61-71), and Rose Whyman’s *The Stanislavsky System of Acting* (pp.154-203), as well as frequent mentions of Chekhov’s techniques in Bella Merlin’s *Beyond Stanislavsky: The Psycho-Physical Approach to Actor-Training*.

³ Mel Gordon, 1987, p. 117; Whyman, 2008, p. 154; Robert Gordon, 2006, p. 61

⁴ Byckling, ‘Michael Chekhov as Actor, Teacher and Director in the West’

⁵ Introduction to *The Actor is Theatre* (MC/S1/7/A)

⁶ Chekhov, 2002, p. li

⁷ Introduction to *The Actor is the Theatre* (MC/S1/7/A)

⁸ Chekhov & Merlin, 2005, p. 181

⁹ Mel Gordon, ‘Michael Chekhov’s Life and Work: A Descriptive Chronology’ (Kirby 1983, p. 17)

¹⁰ Chekhov, 2002, pp. 160-161

¹¹ Chekhov & Hurst du Prey, 2000, p. 61

¹² *The Actor is the Theatre*, 9 June 1938, subsequent references to this work give the date only.

¹³ Chekhov & Gordon, 1991, p. xxxviii

¹⁴ Chekhov, 2002, p. 66

¹⁵ Chekhov & Gordon, 1991, p. 89

¹⁶ Senelick, 2009, p. 229

¹⁷ Chekhov & Gordon, 1991, p. 89

¹⁸ Habima means ‘stage’ in Hebrew, and was the name given to a Jewish company who performed in modern Hebrew as a revolutionary statement, rejecting both the Yiddish spoken by Jews from the west which carried memories of the Pale of Settlement and the violent anti-Semitism of Tsarist Russia and the assimilation of Jewish identity which would be implied if they spoke Russian, as Jews did in the east of the country. By embracing the revival of Hebrew as a spoken language (which was happening in Palestine at that time) they sought to use the momentum of the revolutionary changes brought about by Bolshevik rule to reassert and renew

their Jewish identity. Chekhov would later direct them in a production of *Twelfth Night*, seen in London in 1932.

¹⁹ Gordon, 1987, p. 92

²⁰ Cited in Carnicke, 2009, p. 99; Mel Gordon also makes the link between Vakhtangov's conception of 'Jewish gestures' and 'Suler's yogic theory of Prana rays that radiate from the palms' (Gordon, 1987, p. 92).

²¹ Carnicke, 2009, p. 178

²² Ramacharaka's book was translated into Russian in 1909. For a full description of Stanislavsky's uses of yoga, see 'Emotion and the human spirit of the role: Yoga' in Carnicke, 2009, pp. 167-184; these quotations, which paraphrase Stanislavsky, are from Carnicke, 2009, p. 178.

²³ Quoted in Carnicke, 2009, p. 178

²⁴ Stanislavski & Benedetti, 2008, p. 65

²⁵ Carnicke, 2009, p. 182; the other quotation marks are scare-quotes, used in an attempt both to highlight and to circumvent the implicit dualism of these English terms, and their political resonances.

²⁶ Carnicke, 2009, p. 168

²⁷ These are scare-quotes, used to acknowledge that this hierarchy is almost impossible to avoid in English, although, as Sharon Carnicke observes, it is not so deeply enshrined in Russian, where the noun 'chuvstva', for instance, refers to both physical sensations and emotional feelings and the verb 'chuvstvovat' can mean 'anything from feel to understand' (Carnicke, 2009, p. 168).

²⁸ Malaev-Babel, 2011, p. 338

²⁹ Malaev-Babel, 2011, p. 339

³⁰ See Chekhov & Gordon, 1991, p. 64 on the difference between Psychological Gesture and gestures performed while acting on the stage.

³¹ Malaev-Babel, 2011, p. 339; Vakhtangov and Chekhov might have called this an 'aesthetic gesture', a technique that Yana Meerzon reports Chekhov using in Russia in the 1920s, which she defines as 'the expression of the non-utilitarian or non-referential function of the artistic product' (Meerzon, 2005, p. 176). Without access to the sources, I can't add anything to Meerzon's account, but the aesthetic gesture seems to be closely linked to some applications of Psychological Gesture which focus on a scene or play, rather than its characters.

³² Leonard, 1963, p. 43; the actor Ruben Simonov made the same observation, praising Vakhtangov's 'mastery of psychological analysis . . . based on his thorough knowledge of Stanislavsky's Method' and his ability to find 'a singular scenic form to help communicate to the audience as fully as possible the content of the play' (Simonov, 1969, pp. 130, 132). Simonov was an actor in the Vakhtangov Theatre from 1920 and its artistic director between 1939 and 1968 (Malaev-Babel, 2011, p. 278).

³³ Malaev-Babel, 2011, pp. 128-129

³⁴ Simonov, 1969, p. 134

³⁵ Malaev-Babel, 2011, p. 281

³⁶ Markov is paraphrased by Laurence Senelick (Senelick, 2009, p. 228).

³⁷ Quoted in Meerzon, 2005, p. 18

³⁸ Chekhov and Merlin, 2005, p. 188

³⁹ Chekhov and Merlin, 2005, p. 39

⁴⁰ Bely was the author of the celebrated novel *Petersburg* (1916). For examples of his dramatic theory, see Senelick, 1981, pp. 89-92, 149-170.

⁴¹ Chekhov and Merlin, 2005, p. 58

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 54-55; the image of lightning recalls the trembling nerve-fibres evoked by Capek to describe Chekhov's performances. Both seem indebted to the work of scientists like Galvani and Volta in the eighteenth century, who attempted to animate the dead bodies of frogs using electricity. This led to widespread speculation thereafter that electricity held the key to the secrets of animation. This conception of electricity also unified the life-force within man and the wider forces of nature, a process which was central to the project of Romantic science in the nineteenth century. Chekhov referred implicitly to this movement in his depiction of Bely

embodying ‘the hidden forces of the seed’, and the ‘forms and colours of plants’ which were thought-experiments conducted by Goethe, whose ‘overriding project’, as Jonathan Pitches has observed, was ‘to find unity in nature, to uncover archetypal forms’, and was therefore connected to Chekhov’s (Pitches, 2006, p. 137).

⁴³ Keeve, *From Russia to Hollywood*

⁴⁴ Steiner, ‘A Lecture on Eurythmy’

⁴⁵ Chekhov and Gordon, 1991, p. 75

⁴⁶ Steiner, 1960, pp. 52, 53

⁴⁷ Chekhov & Merlin, 2005, p. 136

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 188

⁴⁹ He already owned this book, which he had bought after seeing it by chance in the window of The Writers’ Bookshop in Moscow (Chekhov and Merlin, 2005, p. 133).

⁵⁰ Steiner, 2004, p. 46

⁵¹ Chekhov and Merlin, 2005, pp. 187-188; I have used the unpublished translation’s ‘natural phenomena’ here rather than the published ‘all phenomena in the world’, since Chekhov is speaking not only of phenomena ‘in the world’, but of those beyond the world: nature for an anthroposophist extends beyond the earth’s atmosphere.

⁵² Chekhov & Gordon, 1991, p. 39

⁵³ Sharp, 2002; William is the son of Dorothy and Leonard Elmhirst and Beatrice Straight’s half-brother, and was a boy while Chekhov was at Dartington. This exercise is found in *On the Technique of Acting* (Chekhov and Gordon, 1991, p. 39).

⁵⁴ 7 February 1938

⁵⁵ Boner was a friend of Chekhov’s wife and a fellow Anthroposophist, with whom he had founded his short-lived theatre-and-school in Paris (Chekhov and Merlin, 2005, pp. 188-189).

⁵⁶ Pitches, 2006, p. 142

1.2 Practice: Training in the Chekhov Theatre Studio at Dartington



Fig. 12, Group photograph of the Chekhov Theatre Studio at Dartington

Members of Staff

- Alice Crowther (teacher of the Steiner speech method)
- Dorothy Elmhirst (co-founder of the Dartington Hall Trust with her husband Leonard, also a student in Chekhov's Studio)
- Alan Harkness (student-teacher)
- Deirdre Hurst (later Hurst du Prey, student and Chekhov's personal secretary)
- George Shdanoff (Associate Director of the Chekhov Theatre Studio)
- Beatrice Straight (co-founder of the Chekhov Theatre Studio, student-teacher, and in charge of public relations)

Overview

This section will explore the practice of the Chekhov Theatre Studio at Dartington from three perspectives. It will begin by examining the training as a whole as represented by the **curriculum**. It will then focus closely on the **classes**, looking predominantly but not exclusively at Chekhov's work with the students. It will conclude by looking briefly at the work of some of the other artists at Dartington with Chekhov's students, and thereby set the practice of Chekhov's studio in the **environment** of Dartington Hall and the wider context of artistic technique in England in the thirties.

The section's subheadings are:

- **Curriculum:** Craftsmanship: Artistry and Social Purpose
- **Classes:** Training Artists for the Future Theatre
 1. Training: Freedom and Rules
 2. Ensemble: The Individual and the Body of the Theatre
 3. Artistry: Spirit and Matter
- **Environment:** Dartington and Artistic Technique in the 'Thirties.

Curriculum: Craftsmanship, Artistry and Social Purpose

The Chekhov Theatre Studio's publicity booklet laid out its curriculum in nine sections, which can be grouped into three areas: craftsmanship, artistry and social purpose. Craftsmanship was developed through 'Exercises', 'Dramatic Studies, Improvisations and Extracts from Plays' and 'Production'. The first of these, 'exercises', focuses on four areas: the inner powers of **'concentration'** and use of the **'imagination'**; the body as 'an instrument of the dramatic artist'; and two Steiner-based areas of study: 'Eurhythmy' and 'speech-formation'. The craft developed in these disciplines would be applied to 'short extracts, improvisations and studies', and finally to 'Production', enabling students to 'learn the technique of studying whole productions with special reference to the methods necessary for a thorough approach to the main idea of the play'. Through these three phases of work, the 'method' was a constant factor to which the training would continually return. Thus its progression was not linear, but an **expansion** of the technique, from individual exercises to 'whole productions'. This expansion characterised the first year's training: material first explored by the students in October and November 1936 was developed gradually and performed at the end of the year, in July 1937.¹

The curriculum's next three areas of study shifted the focus from the training of actors to the development of complete theatre-artists. The first of these was 'Laws of Composition, Harmony and Rhythm', in which students would 'acquire a feeling for composition, harmony and rhythm, not in a specific musical sense, but in a form adaptable to the uses of the theatre'. The second was more explicitly practical: 'Stage Design, Lighting, Make-Up etc.', and the third, 'Co-ordinated Experimental Work',

offered the opportunity 'to bring together in practical form all the elements of instruction in the Studio' and 'to express original artistic ideas, whether as actors, producers, playwrights, scene painters or costume designers'.

These 'original artistic ideas' were contextualised by the final area of study, which related the training of artists to both their historical and contemporary social contexts through 'Lectures on the History and Development of the Theatre and Playwriting', and 'Appearances before a Selected Audience'. These appearances were distinguished from 'Production', and were intended to be as performances of 'studio work' for the purpose of 'developing in students a proper relationship to spectators'. Finally, each year would be completed by 'demonstrations of the year's work' which would 'include selected passages from plays' before, in the final year of the course, 'several complete plays will be presented to the public'. These presentations were intended to segue into the work of 'the Studio's professional Group' whose touring productions students would be eligible to join 'should they qualify and should they desire to do so'.

This curriculum was an extension of the guiding idea of Chekhov's studio, that it should develop the whole of the theatre, incorporating actors, producers and audiences, who, for Chekhov, constituted one single body, and therefore could not be considered separately from each other. Equally, the three strands of the curriculum identified here were continually inter-related in the curriculum and should not be considered as distinct entities.

The studio proposed, for instance, to develop theatre-craftsmanship through the exploration of material collected and sifted by Chekhov for improvisations and *études*

which he used constantly in his teaching. After a year of training, he asked students to prepare

a lot of small one-minute sketches which contain very expressive texts . . .

Each must be an exercise for awakening certain abilities in the souls of our students. I should like to have a little library of such sketches for our new students.²

As well as these 'sketches', Chekhov gathered material from fairy-tales and novels as well as play-texts, which he worked on also with an eye to future production. Deirdre Hurst du Prey's notes from spring 1936 mention Chekhov asking for an opinion on Dostoyevsky's novel *The Devils*, which, he says, 'contains some marvellous dramatic material'.³ He began to develop an adaptation of the novel at Dartington, using students' improvisations and *études* as the basis for a script written by his associate George Shdanoff. In October 1939, their devised adaptation opened on Broadway.⁴ There was, therefore, no absolute distinction between teaching and performance or between the practice of craft and the development of creativity: the same material and exercises served both ends simultaneously.

Those ends combined in the Studio's aim 'to create a new language which will be a theatre language'.⁵ This 'theatre language' would be a means of connecting the studio's training with its intended social purpose and enabling its stated goal: 'to weld into one harmony all the elements of a theatrical expression' and thereby speak to spectators 'regardless of language or of intellectual content'.⁶ Chekhov intended to achieve this harmonised theatrical expression through the imaginative study of movement in particular, but he also aimed to create a theatre which would be positive

and constructive and use humour to enable it to enter into a dialogue with spectators about contemporary social problems.⁷

An awareness of the theatre's social purpose was explicitly woven into the training, and Chekhov aimed to develop his students' awareness of themselves as members of a group. For their holiday work in the Easter break of 1937, students were asked to write on 'The Function of Theatre in Regard to the Social Life of Our Times', and the responses frequently expressed some version of the student-teacher Alan Harkness' observation that 'the first essential for theatrical co-operation is group work'. The piece of work submitted by Paul Rogers for this assignment included the sub-heading 'The Individual who can be a Member of this Group', whom he described thus:

One who has learned or is capable of learning that service to art and to fellow man is more profitable than service to self; who realizes the beauty of individualism operating in harmony with and for the benefit of the group, who realizes his supreme importance and responsibility as a member of the group.

Chekhov's training continually made reference to this ideal of ensemble co-operation, and the necessity of 'a new kind of conversation' within the theatre:

This new kind of conversation, which must be developed between actors, playwrights, costume designers, directors, etc., will be much more artistic. It is much better not to talk about the character, but to find the line and gesture of the character. By these gestures, the feeling is much more easily awakened than by describing it.⁸

Thus, the language of performance would enable theatre-artists, according to Chekhov, both to develop material for performance and to communicate the spiritual content of

that material directly to an audience. Therefore the third element of Chekhov's training, its social purpose, was as inseparable from craft and artistry as they were from each other.

These three aspects of Chekhov's curriculum combined to give his training what is known in his technique as a **sense of the whole**. Chekhov was not intending to teach the acquisition of skills for a wide variety of contexts, as many actor training programmes do today, nor was he advocating an artistry and creativity which could be divorced from ideological considerations, because his ideology was not distinct from the basic constituents of his technique. Like Rudolf Steiner's conception of the three-fold nature of man who interacts with the world through the trinity of thought, feeling and will, the three-fold nature of Chekhov's curriculum developed the artist's **will, thinking** and **feeling** through the practice of craft and artistry and developing students' awareness of the relation between these aspects of an artist's practice and its social purpose. It was characteristic of Chekhov's training temporarily to separate such elements from each other in order to study the detail of their interdependence, and ultimately to experience the inseparable fluidity of their connection.

Classes: Training Artists for the Future Theatre

This overview of classes at the Chekhov Theatre Studio is based mainly on Deirdre Hurst du Prey's unpublished collection *The Actor is the Theatre*, a verbatim record of many of Chekhov's classes, transcribed from her shorthand notes. This record is not exhaustive because Hurst du Prey was also a participant in classes, so she recorded mostly the content of Chekhov's impromptu lectures (which occupied the last half hour of most mornings and afternoons), as well as some other notes taken during classes or rehearsals when she was free to rush to her satchel (fig. 13) for one of her notebooks.

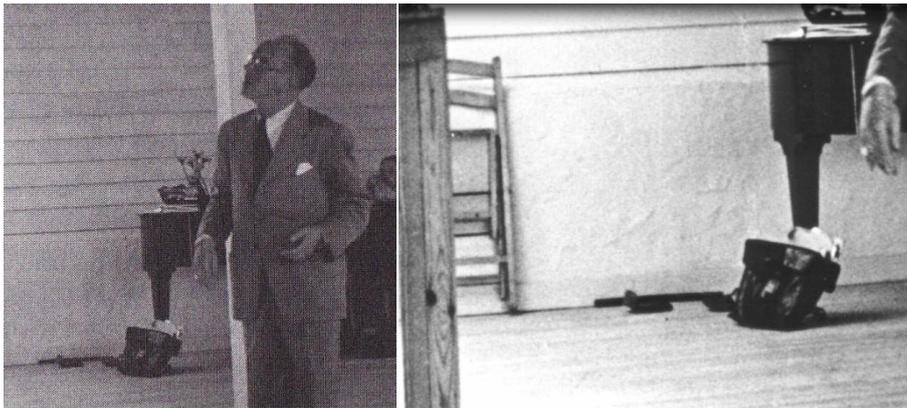


Fig. 13 (and detail), Chekhov directing at Dartington (Deirdre Hurst du Prey's bag containing her notebooks is behind him, leaning against the leg of the piano)

Despite the breaking-down of the Chekhov Theatre Studio's proposed training into constituent parts in its promotional booklet, in practice the boundaries between these parts were fairly porous. Chekhov conceived the training holistically and did not separate classes into 'acting', 'voice', 'text', 'movement' and so on (although Steiner's methods were taught separately), and because he was responsible for most of the

teaching (either directly or through his assistant teachers), he was free to adapt his lessons in response to ongoing assessment of his students' progress. Chekhov also reinvented his exercises continually, just as he encouraged others to do. What follows is therefore not a chronological account of exercises (which might only repeat descriptions already available in Chekhov's published writings and render dry and formulaic what was lively and experimental), but an overview of Chekhov's classes, arranged to clarify the principles of his training.

The development of Chekhov's technique had been crucially dependent upon two dialectical relationships: the first between technical practice and artistic intuition and the second between the realms of the material and of the spiritual. For Chekhov, these would be examples of the principle of **polarity**:

In each play of any consequence, you will find two powers interlocked in combat. Whatever form or guise, they must carry on their fight or conflict throughout the entire play, else the play stops, just as the play stops when the conflict is resolved either way at the end. Conflict, therefore, is a quintessential of good playwriting, just as it is one of the inescapable conditions of life itself.⁹

Chekhov's ensemble-based artistic training at Dartington was characterised by three such **polarities**: between freedom and rules, between the individual and the ensemble and between spirit and matter. Chekhov held each of these polarities in creative tension at Dartington and they are explored in turn in the following account.

Training: Freedom and Rules

'... rules must swim in water, which is freedom...'

(Chekhov to his students, 27 November 1936)



Fig. 14, The Opening of the Chekhov Theatre Studio, 5 October 1936 (Uday Shankar and his company, Michael Chekhov and his students)

The opening of the Chekhov Theatre Studio was marked by a performance by the Indian dance company led by Uday Shankar (fig. 14). Speaking after it, Chekhov remarked upon the 'understanding', encapsulated by Shankar's company's performance, 'that art must be based on technique'.¹⁰ He also pointed out the connection between the bodily technique exemplified by Shankar's dancers and the technique required by an actor, as well as its relationship to artistry.

We aim to be actors and more than actors – artists. What does this mean? It means that we are going to study, to learn how we can have our inspiration at our command. That is our most difficult task, but we shall have a Method which will make it possible, and the first condition is that we must be able to concentrate.

Thus, from the very start of the training, Chekhov was emphasizing the inseparability of the artist’s creativity and the craftsman’s skill.

A month later, on 10 November 1936, Chekhov reassured his struggling students that ‘when we have mastered the system it will be much easier’. He gave them the example of a ‘worker’ who ‘arrives at a mastery of his craft by taking into consideration his own power, the weight of the instrument and other things’. Initially, of course, the requirement of a craftsman to work with given materials (in the actor’s case, primarily her own body and its means of expression) requires discipline, and discipline is limiting. This tension between ease and discipline can be seen in the timetable for the studio at Dartington.

April 26 th to May 1 st	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
9.30-	Designers	Girls’	Boys’	Designers	Girls’	Boys’
10.10		Eurhythm	Eurhythm		Eurhythm	Eurhythm
10.15-	Fishing	Fairy Tale	Peer Gynt	Balladina I	Fishing	Balladina I
12.30	Scene			& II	Scene	& II
12.30-	Mr.	Mr.	Mr.	Mr.	Mr.	Mr.

1.00	Chekhov	Chekhov	Chekhov	Chekhov	Chekhov	Chekhov
3.15-4.00	Speech	Speech	Speech	Speech	Speech	
4.00-5.00	Carnival	Golden Steed		Carnival	Golden Steed	
5.00-5.15	Tea	Tea		Tea	Tea	
5.15-6.30	Carnival	Golden Steed		Carnival	Golden Steed	
6.30-7.00	Mr. Chekhov	Alan		Mr. Chekhov	Alan	

In this schedule, the activities of each morning and afternoon enacted a simple progression from exploring the form of the human body and its movements and means of expression (through Steiner’s Eurhythmy and Speech Work) to their more free and creative employment in *études* and rehearsals. This was followed by a reflection on that process led by Chekhov (although on the Tuesday and Friday shown above his student and assistant-teacher Alan Harkness was deputising for him).

The pattern is typical of the studio’s timetables which have survived.¹¹ Chekhov’s half-hour sessions sometimes involved exercises, but often they were simply an opportunity for the theoretical articulation, clarification and sometimes elaboration of what had been encountered in practice. This structure is influenced by Steiner, who, according to a comment made by Chekhov to his students, ‘says somewhere that after

simplicity there must follow a very complicated period, and then will appear a second simplicity which is higher and which includes everything in a simple form'.¹² Chekhov's class-notes suggest that this was the pattern he had in mind: the classes in Steiner's systematic and simplified movements and speech-sounds leading to the complexity of acting exercises, culminating in his half-hour sessions which aimed to bring together 'everything in a simple form'. Chekhov reassured his students that by relinquishing the apparent freedom of inexperience and embracing the discipline of work, they would reach 'a new feeling of freedom' and that this 'second feeling of freedom is right'. This 'feeling of freedom' does not, therefore, represent an escape from constraint – since any such escape can only be illusory – but a process whereby the necessary **polarity** of freedom and discipline is accepted and exploited by the artist.

Much of the discipline of the Chekhov Studio's daily practice, as the timetable above demonstrates, was based on the work of Steiner, and the training at Chekhov's studio used Steiner's conception of the form of the human body, and its speech and movement as a consistent foundation.¹³ Chekhov had written that he 'became convinced of how *practical the principles of Anthroposophy* are, how firmly this science stands on the earth', and it is therefore no surprise that his technique should frequently rely on its basic elements.¹⁴ Chekhov used, for instance, Steiner's three-fold conception of man in his exercise known as 'the actor's march', in which **will** is experienced in and around the legs and feet, **feeling** around the torso and arms and **thought** around the head. Likewise, the four **archetypal qualities** of movement in Chekhov's technique (moulding, flowing, flying and radiating) are also based on Steiner's exploration of the four elements of earth, water, air and fire.¹⁵

Chekhov used these principles from Steiner to train his actors to develop artistic bodies, each of which would, as he said, be 'like a membrane through which all the finest psychological problems must be speaking to the audience'.¹⁶ Steiner had likewise argued in a 1924 lecture that 'an actor should have a good knowledge of eurhythmy' because it provides 'a pure – let me say, a religious – understanding of what speaking really is', by which he means 'the artistic forming of inner experience'.¹⁷ This understanding was to be achieved, according to Steiner, through 'the feeling that is experienced in the muscle' during each gesture. By concentrating on this experience, Steiner said, the actor may learn to 'fill [her]self with the ghost of the eurhythmic form'.¹⁸ Therefore the study of Eurhythmy and speech formation not only offered Chekhov's students a technical framework for the development of artistic speech, it also provided a model for the creative process as envisaged by Chekhov, as he explained to the students himself.

If you will really deeply pay attention to what is given to you in Eurythmy, you will see that you have a golden key to the inspiration. But only if you will take the key and put it into the lock and turn it. Through Eurhythmy you will be able to discover the archetypal feelings. If you take our exercises with the archetype, you will see that this is another approach to the same beautiful world of the feelings.¹⁹

For Chekhov, then, 'the feelings, which we are trying to express on the stage' do not belong to the actor, but are brought into his experience through a 'door', which is opened by the intuitive and sensitive exercise of technique. Therefore Chekhov was insistent that his students should not attempt acting straight away, but should learn

instead how to use the exercises of his technique to ‘open this door into the feelings, which we are trying to express on the stage’.²⁰

This approach caused Chekhov to delay certain aspects of the training in mid-November 1936. He postponed the students’ ‘independent work’ until the start of 1937 and concentrated instead on the exercises and on the Latvian fairy-tale *The Golden Steed*, which was also a play by the Latvian poet Jan Rainis, and provided material for many of the students’ early encounters with Chekhov’s technique. Chekhov justified the narrowing of the training’s focus and restriction of the students’ creative freedom by stressing the long-term benefits of technique which he contrasted starkly with the situation of most contemporary actors.

Many actors of the present time, although they are young people, are already finished. We know exactly what they will do because they have stopped in their development. Why? Because they started with acting almost at the first rehearsal, and this kills them. They have no possibility to dig, to explore, to seek, and to wait. The more you will be able to wait with acting and do such exercises as we have been doing, the more you will reach at the last moment when you have to act; and then you will never stop in your development. You will always find new possibilities not only in the parts but in yourself.²¹

Chekhov is clear, therefore, that exercises are not intended to be practised for their own sake. They are a means of exploring a play without attempting prematurely to perform it, and therefore to force it into a form to which it is not fitted. For Chekhov, his contemporary actors were not ‘free’ of technique, but rather restricted by its absence. In explicit contrast to the mechanical ‘repetition of certain habits’ confining these actors,

Chekhov insisted that his exercises must be repeated, not only with the regularity of a musician's scales,²² but, most importantly, 'each time on a new level'.²³

At the beginning of the Studio's second year, Chekhov shifted the emphasis of the training so that where the first year of the training had stressed the repetition of technical exercises, the second stressed improvisation.

If you will look back on your past rehearsals and performances, you will realize that you have done many things – not only in the proper way, but very clear, very sharp, very clever – but almost without any improvisation. You have not added anything from yourselves to the given scaffolding. You were very honest and conscientious with the tasks you were given, very careful and attentive, but not yet creative.

When I think back, I get the impression that they (the creative forces) are sleeping – and from a certain point of view, it is a kind of sleep not to be able to improvise, because improvisation is the ability to see at the moment and hear at the moment everything which is going on around you, inside you, in the real facts. It means to be awake.²⁴

So, where the first year of the Studio's training began with exercises, the second year began with the imperative to improvise, but that did not involve dispensing with technical exercises. On the contrary, as Chekhov stressed to his students two days after focusing them on the subject of improvisation, 'you must have a real ground on which to improvise: atmosphere for instance. Don't allow yourself to improvise when you have lost the basis or ground'.²⁵

This basis or ground for improvisation was provided by technique.

When we are going to improvise . . . we always make a big mistake. We speak words without having inner life for these words . . . When creating words in improvisation, these words can be based upon the different grounds of atmosphere, psychological gesture, the objective etc. Therefore first of all before we speak our words in our improvisation, we have to have certain grounds and it is, therefore, absolutely necessary to have a method in our power, our will, and be able to manage it skillfully.²⁶

The necessity to base improvisation upon these ‘grounds’ did not diminish even when, later still in the training, the students were spending more time working on extracts from plays. When his students were about to comment on the scenes they had observed in a class at the end of January 1938, Chekhov was insistent that they ‘define the suggestions from the point of view of Method, not from the standpoint of interpretation’.²⁷ By asking his students to offer critique ‘from the point of view of Method’, he is insisting that they do not fall into the trap of offering a descriptive or theoretical analysis which must subsequently be translated into the vocabulary of practice. The students would have been accustomed to this insistence: a year earlier, he had told them: ‘do not discuss the play or the characters. Instead, discuss the Method, or rehearse. The Method’s aim is never to speak, but always to do’.²⁸ For Chekhov, then, the play and characters can only be adequately and usefully understood in their own medium: the medium of action, and specifically the action of the human body in space and time.

For this reason, most of Chekhov’s exercises began with movement. This is true of his very first encounter with the students at the studio’s opening: on an occasion usually reserved for speeches (see fig. 13, above) Chekhov was quick to introduce

activity. He made a short speech emphasizing that during classes the students ‘must be very active at all times’, and then gave them an exercise in concentration before moving quickly onto an exercise called ‘The Actor’s March’, which could be seen as the seed from which his training would grow.

March around the room following a leader. You are strong, you are healthy, your hands and arms are free and beautiful, your legs are strong. Imagine yourselves in three parts – around your head is the feeling of space and power, the power of thought. Around your chest will be the power of feeling, and around your feet the power of will. These must be in beautiful harmony as you march. Then you will be concentrated people.²⁹

This exercise was designed to give the students a sense of themselves as creative artists, whose bodies and imaginations were in a constant dialogue with their artistic nature. It aimed therefore both to free their bodies and to deepen their knowledge of the body’s objective form. But since Chekhov was not aiming to train individual actors but to develop an ensemble, this polarity of form and freedom had to expand to another dimension and explore the form and freedom of an individual within the ensemble.

Ensemble: The Individual and the Body of the Theatre

*'Because the whole belief of the Chekhov training was that you work towards ensemble, perfection of **the individual within the ensemble**, the most important thing of all, to begin with, was the group. All exercises for the first three months, in the main, were group exercises. There came a moment when one wondered when one was ever going to act at all.'*

Paul Rogers³⁰

There is a piece of archive footage of Chekhov's students in Martin Sharp's film *Michael Chekhov: The Dartington Years* which documents an exercise in compositional movement and the 'four brothers': **form, ease, beauty and the whole**.³¹ It begins with the male students at the top of one of the grass-slopes of the Outdoor Theatre in the gardens at Dartington and appears to have had three phases: first the tumbling acceleration of the male group rushing down the slope,



Fig. 15, Male students running down the slope

then the encounter of the men with the women, who appear from the left of the frame with their backs to the camera,



Fig.16, Male and female students meeting

and finally the merging and interaction of the two groups.



Fig. 17, The merging of the male and female groups

This exercise was one of many used by Chekhov to enable his students to, as he put it, 'speak with our legs, backs and everything'.³² But it was not only a movement exercise, it was a group exercise, typical of the first phase of Chekhov's training in particular. The student Eleanor Faison described the purpose of these exercises as the development of the students' capacity for 'harmonious groupings'.³³

Many of Chekhov's early exercises at Dartington emphasized, in the words of Paul Rogers, that 'the most important thing of all, to begin with, was the group', and the

students all wore identical lightweight rehearsal clothing.³⁴ Paul Rogers recalled this 'uniform' fondly:

It was blue stockinette in winter, which is extremely comfortable to move and be in, and on the feet we wore extremely sensitive simple sandals with a calf-skin sole that gave you complete contact with the floor. Because it was an essential part of the actor, as it were, to be in contact with the world . . . A uniform style of dress eliminates difference in terms of what you have and what you have not got. It does not iron out your personality at all, if anything it gives your personality – what it *really* is – a chance to shine through, unhindered by extraneous rubbish with which you might deck yourself.³⁵

By ironing out superficial differences, then, the Studio's rehearsal clothing was designed to encourage the students both to experience their inner individuality and their 'contact' with the group and 'with the world'.

This 'contact' would later form the basis of the students' work on the world of each play, so that rather than taking place in front of indicative scenery, their acting belonged to the play and existed in a dialogue with its other parts: the other actors, and scenery, lighting, music and sound, clothing and so on:

We must develop this feeling of contact not only with the other persons, but with the structures, with the space around, with the chairs, etc . . . Each setting is a special world in which we have to create our actor's activity. We walk in a special world in each play . . . The problem is to find and establish contact with each other and with the setting, and to find the moments of climax in the play.³⁶

This notion of the interconnectedness of the movement of the body with what is usually considered as the space beyond it was integral to Chekhov's training from the start. As he said: 'We must develop our feeling for space and for direction. We must be aware of the right and left, of the diagonal and horizontal, etc. the actor must be responsible for the space and for his position on the stage'.³⁷

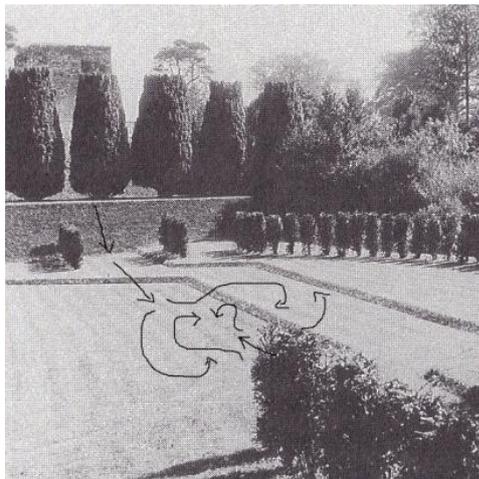


Fig. 18, The Outdoor Theatre at Dartington as Chekhov's students would have known it; the exercise shown in figs. 15-17 is roughly illustrated by my arrows.

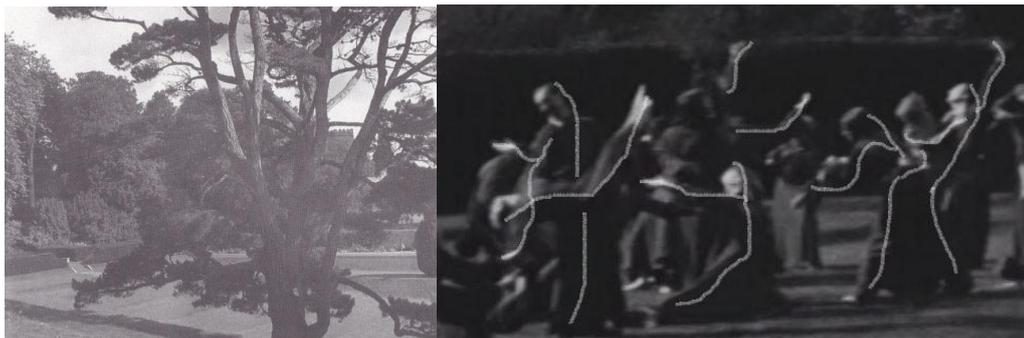


Fig. 19, The Monterey Pine next to the Outdoor Theatre at Dartington and fig. 17a, the students' movements echoing its shapes.

In the exercise illustrated above, the students' movements echoed the spatial properties of Dartington's outdoor theatre. In fig. 18, the straight arrows show the movement of the men down the steep slope at the side of the theatre and the corresponding movement of the women into the central area. The curving arrows show their combining movements, which echo the curve of the yew hedge planted as a backdrop for the 'stage' just as the straight trajectory of their arrival had followed the line of the yew hedges planted at the sides. The gestures of the students as they met (fig. 17a) also echoed the surrounding trees, particularly the Monterey pine (fig. 19), which stood next to the outdoor theatre, opposite the clipped yews.

This exercise was therefore not only a movement exercise in the conventional sense, but also an exercise in **concentration** on the forms, qualities and dynamics of the outdoor theatre and its location. **Concentration**, for Chekhov, was a 'power', which actors

must develop . . . until we are able to be with the object on which we are concentrating. We must possess it with our souls and handle it with our "invisible hands". It must enter into us and we must become one with it. This is a double process, and it is only possible if we are really concentrating.³⁸

In this sense, the students' entrance into the outdoor theatre in this exercise is therefore also *its entrance into themselves*. They are developing not only their capacity to move as a harmonious ensemble, but their shared responsiveness to the 'movement invisible to the external eye' which Chekhov had recorded observing in natural phenomena.³⁹ Therefore, this exercise, like **concentration**, was a 'double process'. Chekhov's students were acting *with* the outdoor theatre rather than merely *in* it, and

had to **expand** their conception of ensemble beyond the actors to **incorporate** their surroundings. Ensemble was for Chekhov, therefore, more a principle than an entity. For his students to become an ensemble, they had to see themselves in the context of a much greater whole.

During the first weeks of the Chekhov Studio's training, Chekhov used exercises which began at both extremes of the **polarity** of the individual working within an ensemble. Some, like 'The Actor's March' described above, began with the individual body, and these were complemented by work on **atmosphere**. Atmosphere was defined by Chekhov as 'a feeling which does not belong to anybody . . . the feeling which lives in the space in the room'.⁴⁰ He encouraged his students to explore this feeling by looking through 'colored gelatine papers' and allowing the colour to alter their behaviour. That exploration required the students to 'penetrate into the atmosphere with our hands, legs, bodies, voices, etc' and led into the students' first encounter with the *étude* known as 'The Fishers' Scene', which was a recurrent feature of the first year of their training.⁴¹

Chekhov introduced the scene very simply:

Imagine a scene of fisher folk standing on the shore. They have been waiting two days and two nights for the fishing fleet to come home. They see a light, but it fades out, then two lights appear in the darkness, and finally in the early morning the ships return, but one is missing. To help increase the atmosphere, use the colored gelatines – green and blue – two blues for night.⁴²

Atmosphere was used here to provide the basic palette for a scene, and the changes of **atmosphere** marked the transitions in the scene: from the townspeople waiting to the sighting of the ship and, finally, to the ships' return. This work on **atmosphere** required

the actors to work as an ensemble because, by definition, it could not be controlled by any individual, but was necessarily experienced by them all.

The exploration of **atmosphere** formed, for Chekhov's students, the first phase of work on a scene or *étude*. There is, for instance, a sketch in Chekhov's class-notes of a scene from *The Deluge*, which simply charts **atmospheres**, from 'Business (Staccato)' through a 'Thunderstorm' into 'Fear (legato)', rising to 'Panic (staccato)', and falling again to 'Pause (legato)'.⁴³ Exercises such as this formed the basis for discovering what Chekhov called the 'rhythmical pattern of the play':

First find the atmosphere, and then try to find the dialogues and soliloquies in the music of the atmosphere. First, very simply, try to find what is the music of the words. Each scene has its own rhythmical gesture, and this is a very very complicated thing, this rhythmical pattern of the play. The rhythm of the play is the highest spiritual movement of the play.⁴⁴

That 'rhythmical pattern' was also dependent upon the actors' ability to work as an ensemble because it created, said Chekhov 'one line, one path, for the whole group, and for the play': a score for its performance.⁴⁵

Crucially, however, this score was not intended to be imposed upon the actors but discovered by them. While praising the charts his students had created in preparation for a performance of The Fishers' Scene in 1937, Chekhov also issued a caveat as to the process of the creation of these charts.

These are very good and they help the actor to discover many things, provided they are not done with the intellect . . . You must imagine over and over again until you get

the feeling of the powers in the play, and then you try to fix these powers. Then your head can help you, but the question is whether you start with your head or your imagination. If you start with your imagination you will get a feeling of the powers. The actor sees the wind and the movement and he will react to this feeling. This feeling of the dynamic of the event will gradually give you sunshine wind and spring.⁴⁶

It was in the 'feeling of the dynamic of the event' that the individual and the ensemble met. The ability to experience and respond to such dynamics was the central purpose of the exercise in compositional movement with which this section began. There was, therefore, a direct relationship between an exercise apparently without content which made Chekhov's students 'wonder when one was ever going to act at all', and Chekhov's conception of the content of all performances.

Here, for example, is an extract from Chekhov's direction of a scene from *The Golden Steed*:

The mission of the evil group is to push Antin down, pushing him gradually slowly, but surely, until he is defeated. That is the dynamic of the scene. You must always have the picture of your gesture, and then you will be free to speak your words . . . The good group has three gestures: 1. Toward the mountain. 2. To protect the good people. 3. To gently push the evil forces away. The whole scene is a composition of these movements. This is the scaffolding. We must never do things in half gestures. First we must find the primitive elementary gesture, and out of that, we will make the ground work. Then we will find finer movements, and finally we will build the castle.⁴⁷

Everything in this scene: its events, the characters' objectives, their 'words', the setting and so on was considered as a part of the 'dynamic' of the whole, which took the form

of 'a composition of movements' or 'gestures'. Chekhov used exercises in 'gesture' at Dartington to investigate the 'dynamic' of everything: scenes, whole plays, characters, atmospheres, anything which makes an 'impression on the human soul':⁴⁸

If you will exercise this kind of movement – and we must invent such movements for every moment of our part – then you will feel some kind of dynamic; you will feel a certain dynamic of the whole scene. You have to act . . . with many nuances and details and even with the kind of speaking you are using now; but the foundation, or stream, which is going on underneath all that you will produce afterward must be found through these gestures.⁴⁹

Working on the dynamic of a play through gesture in this way integrated each individual into the ensemble, but it did not dissolve them into the ensemble as choreography can. The gestures of a play were, Chekhov said, 'dictated by the composition', and therefore established the 'dynamic of the whole scene', but they were also only its scaffolding, and Chekhov criticised his students when they had, in his words, 'not added anything from yourselves to the given scaffolding'.⁵⁰ The gestures for a play's dynamic, therefore, only traced its fundamental form. Like scaffolding, these gestures disappeared once the work was complete, and therefore they both assured the clarity of a play's form and encouraged the individual expression of that form. In the extract from *The Golden Steed* described above, for example, the 'evil group' were united by the underlying movement of pushing Antin down, but retained the individuality of their speech and 'finer movements'.

Chekhov's work with gesture at Dartington therefore spanned the gap between the individual and the ensemble, connecting them, but not uniting them. He could use

gesture in this way because of the idea, developed from Steiner, of 'invisible movement'. He told his students that 'we must train our invisible muscles'⁵¹ because, for Chekhov, movement was characteristic of both matter and spirit. He asked his students, during exercises, to concentrate on 'the life which is going on in your body when you are doing certain movements', thereby emphasized the relationship between the spiritual content of 'life' and the concrete form of 'certain movements'.⁵²

The relationship between spirit and matter was essential to Chekhov's project at Dartington, because he intended to train not only actors but artists, and the interaction of matter and spirit is fundamental to the practice of any artist. Their work must aspire to an aesthetic value which lies beyond the material but must be reached through a material form. So how did Chekhov explore this polarity?

Artistry: Spirit and Matter

The rhythmical or psychological gesture is . . . the key to open this door into the feelings, which we are trying to express on the stage.

Michael Chekhov, 16 January 1938

Even the most basic of Chekhov's movement exercises at Dartington had a psychological aspect. For instance, the 'staccato/legato' exercise of lunging in the six directions of right, left, forwards, backwards, upwards and downwards, alternating between staccato and legato movements was, he said, 'a psychological exercise as well, by trying to develop a certain kind of activity that we are trying to incorporate in these two different kinds of movement'.⁵³ For Chekhov, it was essential that all movement engage the imagination:

When you try to see the movement in your imagination, then at the moment when you try to make the movement, you will be able to incorporate something more with your imagination . . . Don't allow your images to be embodied only with the body.⁵⁴

But if it was essential that images were not embodied only with the body, it was equally essential that they were not imagined only with the imagination. Chekhov's students did not, for instance, simply imagine the atmosphere of a scene. They also explored its atmosphere with their bodies.

The same was true of the students' work on plays, as Chekhov explained to them early in their training:

We must dig deeply and penetrate to the very deepest point of the play, which is the author's idea. After this we must elaborate on this first deepest place with our gestures, our speech, and our images. Then, and only then, will we be ready to begin to act. Compare this approach with the modern stage which commences its work with the play itself. From such an approach there is no development possible, only the repetition of certain habits and so-called technical things, with which the present, immovable actor is bound.⁵⁵

So, in order fully to engage with a play as a work of art, it was not, for Chekhov, sufficient simply to rehearse it. That would lead, inevitably, to a disparity between the play's content and its theatrical form, which would be composed if not of clichés, then certainly of repeated 'habits'. To avoid this, Chekhov proposed developing a theatrical form for each play by beginning at its 'deepest point', so that in all respects, its form would express its particular content.

Chekhov developed his notion of the 'deepest point' of a play from his work with Stanislavsky's partner in the Moscow Art Theatre, Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko. Chekhov said that Nemirovich's

genius lay in going directly to the crux of the matter and immediately finding the main idea, the guiding theme. Then, the separate elements materialized before his brilliant mind and formed themselves into a sort of scaffolding or skeleton, which he slowly and painstakingly fleshed out in every minute human psychological detail.⁵⁶

Nemirovich was primarily a literary man, and the process Chekhov described here represented a distinctly writerly approach to directing. This process was, as it were,

fleshed-out by Chekhov, who used the studio as he described Nemirovich using his mind to ‘materialize’ the ‘elements’ of a play.

Chekhov’s explorations of plays in rehearsal began with a play’s ‘spine’ by which, he said, ‘we mean *the guiding idea*’.⁵⁷ But he also meant it literally. Chekhov believed that ‘movement is the language of the theatre, just as much as words are’, and therefore that ‘rehearsals with movements’ would ‘create a new language which will be a theatre language’.⁵⁸ Therefore, for Chekhov, the spine was – literally – central to the movement-language of the theatre, and the spine’s form was defined by **gesture**, as he explained.⁵⁹

We use the words “spine,” “idea” and “rhythmical gesture” because I am not sure of the English word, but the meaning is the “rhythmical idea gesture.” We have not used this term before, because we have to work together on it before it will become clear. This “rhythmical idea gesture” is the most important thing, and it can be spine, idea, rhythm and everything. Therefore it would be wrong if we try to understand these terms as different meanings, they are one thing.⁶⁰

Chekhov developed this ‘rhythmical idea gesture’ for a play by beginning with an exploration of **atmospheres**, and then of ‘images’ for the characters. He said the evil brothers in *The Golden Steed*, for instance, should have ‘the psychology of a running locomotive’.⁶¹ Chekhov also used such gesture to explore speech within the play’s **atmospheres**, asking students to

find what gesture there is in your words. First find the gesture before you speak, then you will find the right speech. Each word has a gesture, and we must find

the gesture in harmony with the atmosphere. The more instinctively we feel about the play, the more we will discover in it.⁶²

There are many examples of this exercise in Chekhov's published writings,⁶³ and he used it to direct *The Golden Steed*. Antin (the hero) is, he said, 'coming from the world of passion and trying to rise above it', while the character of the Wise Old Man 'gives to Antin always what he is lacking . . . He is always the person who gives balance – that is the rhythmical, musical way of the Wise Old Man'. One character is defined by a rising gesture, the other by giving.⁶⁴

For Chekhov it was essential that these atmospheres, images and gestures should generate a compositional dynamic for the play which would include all elements of the production. Chekhov even saw a staircase on the stage, as 'something which makes a gesture' since 'there is quite a different psychology in the staircase, and the psychology of the whole stage which surrounds the actors is always . . . one harmonious whole with the actor'.⁶⁵ This single 'harmonious whole' must also be distinct for each play, whose particular 'world' must be explored:

The next step is to study the play – its historical values, background, costumes, etc. In this study we must discover the "world" in which the play has to be acted. Each play must have a special world around and about it. Hamlet is a special world. Faust is another world. We must develop each play as a world; therefore, we need special study for each play.

Since all of these aspects of a play had their own psychology, Chekhov used **psychological gesture** to bring them into the living fabric of the performance. Gesture allowed him, he said, to 'really express what I am going to do as an actor – the idea, the

interpretation, the action, the text, everything. These gestures lie under the text, the feelings, the atmosphere, everything'.⁶⁶

In preparing their performances, Chekhov asked his students to develop what he called a 'new kind of conversation . . . between actors, playwrights, costume designers, directors, etc.', which would be 'much more artistic',⁶⁷ because it would replace verbal expression with what he later called the 'language of gestures'.⁶⁸ In this approach, the director would use gesture to communicate with his actors, and 'must have a very clear idea of what he is doing, and of the series of psychological gestures which will lead his cast the right way'.⁶⁹ The actors, for their part, had to be ready to absorb and adapt these gestures in a process of gradual discovery:

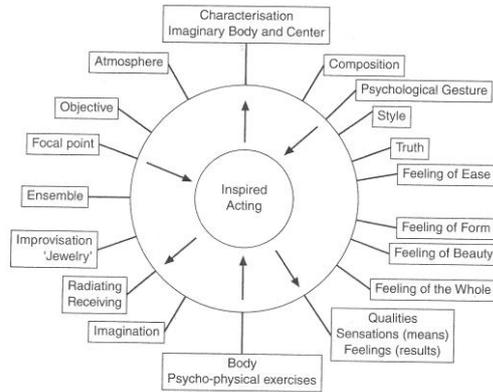
By doing a gesture, the actors will discover some psychological subtleties, and by understanding them, the actors will change the gesture. When the actor can add nuances, it means that he has discovered something, and then he will be able to add new qualities and discoveries to his gesture. Then the ball will jump from psychology to gesture and from gesture to psychology. The actor will understand you in this new language, and will be able to follow your direction without the need of speaking intellectually. The gesture will become a language between the director and the actor.⁷⁰

Chekhov proposed gesture as the basis of communication both between artists and with an audience, because it was used to express and explore atmospheres, characters, objectives, and so on, which he said an actor must know and feel, 'but the audience will feel . . . without knowing'.⁷¹

Chekhov said that the audience would be able to ‘feel without knowing’ the gestures beneath a performance because of gesture’s capacity to communicate experience. Chekhov told his students that, when making a gesture, ‘in our soul there are awakened certain desires, certain feelings, certain ideas, and so a certain spiritual content . . . This certain spiritual content must be expressed by the motions or gestures of the human body’. Chekhov demonstrated with his student Blair Cutting: ‘I have in my soul a certain doubt. I make a certain gesture. Blair receives my gesture and, through receiving the gesture, he gets the feeling of doubtfulness’. This worked, Chekhov said, because ‘the invisible content incorporates itself in this visible gesture’.⁷² When gesture is received, it is repeated (‘invisibly or visibly’), and by this process of the gesture being repeated in the body of its receiver, its ‘invisible content’ is brought into his experience.

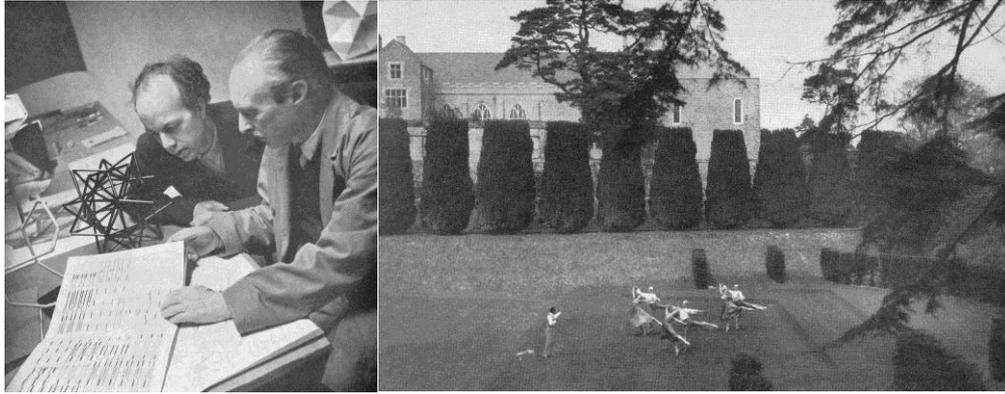
Chekhov would later draw an important distinction between the *materiality* of practice required by this technique, and the *materialistic* attitudes of a culture which fostered ‘the inevitable superficialities which intrude so ruinously upon our creative work’.⁷³ These superficialities were, Chekhov argued, a result of the blindness of materialism to the material of ‘the human being’s inner life’, and he looked forward, in a 1941 lecture, to a ‘Spiritual Theatre’ in which ‘the spirit will be concretely studied’ and actors will ‘know what it is and how to take it and use it . . . and how concrete and objective it can be for us’.⁷⁴ Chekhov’s technique therefore transcends – but does not entirely collapse – the binary distinction of Spirit and Matter, and asks us to consider a performer as an artist whose craftsmanship consists of sculpting the intangible material of performance.

Environment: Dartington and Artistic Technique in the 'Thirties



Figs. 20 and 21, Rex Gardner's Design for the Dartington Hall News of the Day (1934) and Michael Chekhov's Chart for Inspired Acting (1949)

Chekhov observed to his students that 'nowhere in the world is there such an opportunity as we have been given at Dartington',⁷⁵ and, this was not only the opportunity to work without interference. Paul Rogers recalled that Chekhov took full advantage of Dartington's resources to supplement his own teaching. Music, for instance, was a common feature of the work in Chekhov's studio, and the pianist Patrick Harvey played regularly for classes. Therefore Chekhov's common musical descriptions of **atmosphere** were not only figurative. The Studio's transfer to Ridgefield, Connecticut at the end of 1938 prevented the creation of a Music Studio in co-operation with Hans Oppenheim's Music School, whose planning had emerged from this collaboration.⁷⁶



Figs. 22 and 23, Kurt Jooss and Rudolf Laban studying a script in Labanotation and Kurt Jooss working with dancers in the Outdoor Theatre at Dartington

Music was invariably allied to exploration through movement, and the Chekhov Studio's movement work was augmented by classes from Lisa Ullmann, who had come to Dartington with the choreographers Kurt Jooss and Sigurd Leeder from the Folkwang Dance Theatre Studio in Essen to work with the Ballets Jooss and teach at the Jooss-Leeder School of Dance. Jooss had been a student of Laban and the two men and their numerous students aimed to develop a system of choreography less formal and visually-oriented than classical ballet, and founded upon the principle that the raw material of dance is the natural movement of the body.

The writer A. V. Coton paraphrased 'published and private writings' of Jooss to create this summary of his project:

The medium of dance is the living human body with the power to convey ideas inherent in its movement . . . the intention is to give an image of the various forces of life in their ever-changing interplay; that is, a manifestation of Nature . . . The process of reflecting these forces through the body consists in first experiencing and studying

them within ourselves in body, mind and soul, then in externalising by corresponding movements, all that is happening within us.⁷⁷

This overview reveals deep correspondences between Chekhov's technique and Jooss's as well as pointing towards a crucial distinction between them, which Chekhov clarified himself:

We have our own kind of movement training. We must bind together our feeling with our body. We must train ourselves to ask our body, by taking new positions, which feeling is arising in us. If we are standing in a certain way, for instance, we must ask our body what we have to feel. Each position, each movement, has something to say to us.⁷⁸

So, whereas Jooss asked his students to reflect upon the 'forces' in their bodies and externalise them in performance, Chekhov asked his students to use movement as a means of exploration which would be present, but invisibly so, in performance. Nonetheless, it is evident that Ullmann's classes would have been instrumental in developing the physical freedom and expressiveness of Chekhov's students and therefore vital to the process of 'bind[ing] together our feeling with our body' that he described.

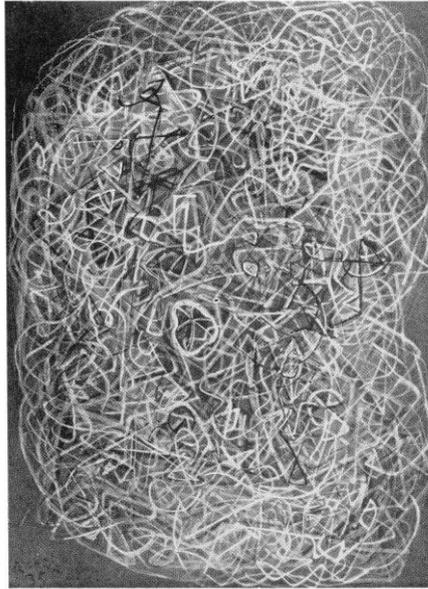


Fig. 24, Mark Tobey's painting, 'Broadway Norm' (1935), the first example of his technique of 'white writing', made at Dartington

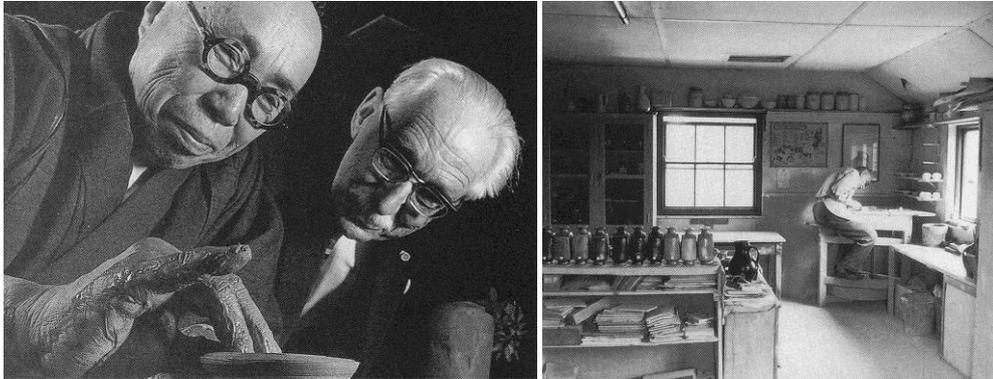
Ullmann was not the only teacher who contributed to the Chekhov Studio's movement studies. They also had classes in drawing with the artist Mark Tobey, which were requested by Chekhov in order that the students would 'develop a feeling for 'form''.⁷⁹ Tobey routinely used dance in his teaching: huge pieces of paper were pinned up in the studio and the students were taught, as Rogers recalls, 'to experience the whole being making marks with chalk to music'.⁸⁰ Chekhov reminded his students of this:

Remember when Mark Tobey tried to get you to dance before the paper, what was he aiming at? To develop the whole body for painting, and for us as actors, it is not enough to develop one part of the body only. The whole body must be made receptive for all these things. We must produce with our bodies and our spirits; and we are able to understand our spirits if our bodies are responsive.⁸¹

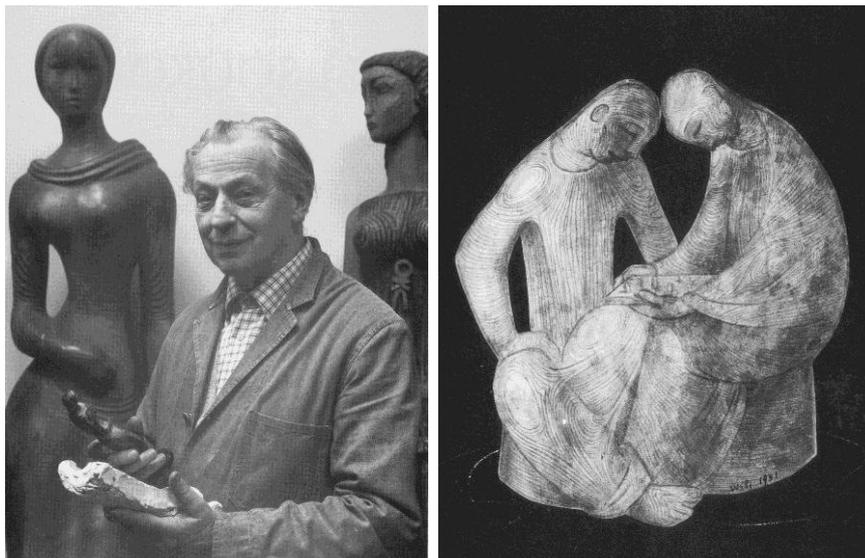
While at Dartington, Tobey had begun working with a technique he called ‘white writing’ in which, he said, ‘my way of working was a performance in that my pictures should be accomplished in one go or not at all’.⁸² The first example of Tobey’s ‘white writing’, ‘Broadway Norm’, which dates from 1935 (fig. 24), aptly illustrates the ‘dance before the paper’ that Chekhov described. This technique emerged from Tobey’s desire not merely to ‘look at’ a painting, but to ‘experience it’, and thereby to search not ‘for fine draughtsmanship, nor fine colour . . . but directness of spirit’.⁸³ Tobey was influenced in this attitude by the Chinese painter Teng Kwei, with whom Tobey studied techniques of calligraphy and wash, and saw ‘that a tree is no longer solid, but a rhythm, a growing line’, echoing both Jooss’ conception of dance as ‘an image of the various forces of life in their ever-changing interplay’ and Chekhov’s perception, in nature, of ‘movement[s], invisible to the external eye’.⁸⁴

While at Dartington, Tobey developed a close friendship with the potter Bernard Leach, with whom he travelled to the Far East, on a trip funded by the Elmhursts.⁸⁵ Leach also took drawing classes with Tobey at Dartington and must have related Tobey’s movement-based approach to what he described as the ‘series of rhythmic movements’ by which clay ‘is impressed and expressed, urged and pulled and coaxed’ by the potter, ‘which like those of a dance are all related and interdependent’.⁸⁶ These ‘rhythmic movements’ were also closely related to those of Chekhov’s technique and particularly his exercises in the **quality** of movement he called ‘moulding’.⁸⁷ **Moulding** is one of Chekhov’s four archetypal **qualities** which were closely related to the four elements of earth, water, air and fire in Steiner’s Anthroposophy. Moulding is associated with earth and to what Chekhov calls the ‘Feeling of Form’,⁸⁸ which is the quality he had wanted his

students to develop through their classes in drawing and in moulding clay, with the sculptor Willi Soukop (who was taught to work with clay by Leach).⁸⁹



Figs. 25 and 26, Rhythmic Movements: Bernard Leach observing the Japanese potter Hamada Shoji and working in his studio at St Ives (1963)



Figs. 27 and 28, Willi Soukop with his sculptures and his drawing 'Two Seated Figures' (1941)

Soukop, like Leach, was a craftsman-artist. Having begun his career in Vienna as an apprentice-engraver, he maintained a 'preference for carving rather than modelling',

because, he said, ‘the material I use plays an important part’.⁹⁰ This conviction was shared by all of these artists and performers, who combined the artist’s exploration of the spirit with the craftsman’s skill and knowledge of their material.

The practice of these artists at Dartington thus exemplified the critic and poet Herbert Read’s concept of an Artistic Education:

The perfection of art must arise from its practice – from the discipline of tools and materials, of form and function . . . and must be taught in intimate apprenticeship. I believe that the teacher must be no less active than the pupil. For art cannot be learned by precept, by any verbal instruction. It is, properly speaking, a contagion, and passes like fire from spirit to spirit.⁹¹

Read’s theory resonated closely with Chekhov’s artistic technique, which taught his students to ‘get a new feeling for your body . . . that I, as an actor, an artist, am sitting in my body and from there, from inside myself, I am able to move my body, am able to use my body, because I want to use it’.⁹² Through this ‘new feeling’ for the body as an artist’s material, Chekhov aimed to bring his students into contact with the material of performance or, in his words, ‘*a living being with an independent life*’, which ‘is very similar to a human being’ and **incorporated** the ‘very complicated rhythmical body of our theatre’, comprising ‘the stage itself, the music, my partner’s body, the lights, my partner’s speech, my speech’, and so on.⁹³ As ‘verbal instruction’ this is vague at best; Chekhov’s technique had to be taught through ‘practice’ – as it was – and communicated ‘from spirit to spirit’.

Despite its obscure location, Dartington was the perfect place for Chekhov's undertaking, thanks to the many close parallels between Chekhov's technique and the practice of his fellow artist-craftsmen, but Chekhov's work there was never completed. As the threat of war increased, parents of American students became increasingly anxious, and the Studio was forced to re-locate to an empty school building which Beatrice Straight found in Ridgefield, Connecticut.⁹⁴ It moved, therefore, before it could make any meaningful impression on an English theatre, whose 'disinterest', according to Paul Rogers, 'was overwhelming': 'they had actually got as far as accepting Michel Saint-Denis and that was revolutionary enough'.⁹⁵ So what would be the legacy of Chekhov's technique? And should it be of greater interest to the theatre today?

¹ 'The Fishers' Scene', for instance, in which the people of a fishing-village await the return of the ships after a storm, was introduced as an etude on 21 October 1936, was then directed by Deirdre Hurst du Prey during the spring term, and performed as part of the final performance in July. The fairy-tale 'The Golden Steed' was introduced at about the same time and also performed at the end of the year.

² 27 September 1937

³ MC/S4/14/A

⁴ See Chamberlain, 2004, pp. 83-104 for an analysis of the production.

⁵ 14 December 1936

⁶ *The Chekhov Theatre Studio*, 1936, op cit.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 4; see also Black, 1984, pp. 29-32.

⁸ 11 December 1936

⁹ Leonard, 1963, p. 32

¹⁰ 5 October 1936

¹¹ There are timetables in the Papers of Dorothy Elmhirst (DWE/A/15/C); see also Pitches, 2006, p. 149.

¹² 9 February 1937

¹³ The relationship between Chekhov and Steiner has been remarked upon by a number of other commentators. See, for example, Pitches, 2006, pp. 149-150, Meerzon, 2005, pp. 213-217, Ashperger, 2008, pp. 141, 289-290.

¹⁴ Chekhov & Merlin 2005, p. 134

¹⁵ Chekhov & Gordon, 1991, p. 47

¹⁶ 30 September 1937

¹⁷ Steiner, 1960, pp. 252-254

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 253

¹⁹ 16 January 1938

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ 21 November 1936

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- ²² 27 January 1938
- ²³ 24 November 1936
- ²⁴ 27 September 1937
- ²⁵ 29 September 1937
- ²⁶ 28 January 1938
- ²⁷ 31 January 1938
- ²⁸ 16 January 1937
- ²⁹ 5 October 1936
- ³⁰ Sharp, 2002
- ³¹ Sharp is unable to date this footage, having found it in a shoe box misfiled as Ballets Jooss material.
- ³² 28 January 1938
- ³³ Sharp, 2002
- ³⁴ This had been requested by Chekhov for the Studio in a meeting during the spring of 1936 (MC/S4/14/A).
- ³⁵ Interview with Martin Sharp
- ³⁶ 27 October 1937
- ³⁷ 16 November 1936
- ³⁸ 7 November 1936
- ³⁹ Chekhov & Merlin, 2005, pp. 187-188
- ⁴⁰ 16 October 1936
- ⁴¹ 20, 27 October 1936
- ⁴² 21 October 1936
- ⁴³ 12 October 1937
- ⁴⁴ 5 November 1936
- ⁴⁵ 22 October 1936
- ⁴⁶ 18 February 1937
- ⁴⁷ 8 November 1936
- ⁴⁸ 7 February 1938
- ⁴⁹ 24 November 1936
- ⁵⁰ 27 September 1937
- ⁵¹ 6 November 1936
- ⁵² 24 November 1936
- ⁵³ 29 September 1937; for more detail on staccato/legato, see Petit, 2010, pp. 38-40. Petit was taught this exercise by Blair Cutting, who had been taught it by Chekhov at Dartington.
- ⁵⁴ 5 November 1936
- ⁵⁵ 21 November, 1936
- ⁵⁶ Leonard, 1963, p. 45
- ⁵⁷ 10 May 1936 (Chekhov & du Prey, 2000, pp. 43-44)
- ⁵⁸ 14 December 1936
- ⁵⁹ See also Chekhov, 2002, p. 68: 'To assume a PG means . . . to prepare the entire part in its *essence*, after which it will become an easy task to work out all the details in actual rehearsals on the stage. You will not have to flounder and grope aimlessly, as often happens when you start dressing a part with flesh, blood and sinews without first having found its spine. The PG gives you this very spine'.
- ⁶⁰ 9 February 1937
- ⁶¹ 10 December 1936
- ⁶² 5 November 1936
- ⁶³ See, for instance, his example of gestures for Horatio's speech to the Ghost in the first scene of *Hamlet*, Chekhov, 2002, pp. 200-204.
- ⁶⁴ 8 November 1936

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- ⁶⁵ 7 February 1938
⁶⁶ 16 January 1937
⁶⁷ 11 December 1936
⁶⁸ See Chekhov, 1992, pp. 107-112
⁶⁹ 16 January 1937
⁷⁰ 23 January 1937
⁷¹ 10 December 1936
⁷² 21 January 1938
⁷³ Leonard, 1963, p. 31
⁷⁴ Chekhov, 1992, p. 141
⁷⁵ 30 October 1936
⁷⁶ MC/S4/14/A
⁷⁷ Coton, 1946, p. 29
⁷⁸ 18 November 1936
⁷⁹ MC/S4/14/A
⁸⁰ Sharp, 2002
⁸¹ 14 December 1937
⁸² Tobey, 1962, p. 11
⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 19
⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 9
⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 10
⁸⁶ Leach, 1945, pp. 21-22
⁸⁷ See Exercise 3 in Chekhov, 2002, pp. 8-10
⁸⁸ Chekhov & Gordon, 1991, p. 48
⁸⁹ These classes were recalled by Paul Rogers in his interview with Martin Sharp; information on Soukop's friendship with Leach is taken from (Soukop, 1991, p. 3).
⁹⁰ Soukop, 1991, p. 5
⁹¹ Read, 1966, pp. xxxiii-xxxiv
⁹² 28 September 1937
⁹³ Chekhov & Hurst du Prey, 2000, pp. 70-71
⁹⁴ This was the reason given by Paul Rogers for the Studio's closure (Interview with Martin Sharp)
⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

1.3 Legacy: Chekhov's Technique in Practice and Theory



Fig. 29, Chekhov and his students in the grounds of Dartington Hall

The most significant legacy of Chekhov's Dartington studio was his book on acting, the first version of which was completed at Dartington in 1937.¹ All of the versions of Chekhov's book interspersed exercises with passages of prose, following the Studio's pattern of practical explorations interspersed with Chekhov's short talks.² This structure was far from coincidental. Chekhov insisted that

questions that arise in your mind during or after the reading of each chapter can best be answered through the practical application of the exercises prescribed herein. Unfortunately, there is no other way to co-operate: the technique of acting can never be properly understood without practicing it.

Therefore Chekhov's book is itself a kind of virtual studio. As such, it is not an end in itself, but a means to an end, off-setting its clear articulation of 'objective principles and laws for furthering our professional technique' with encouragement for the reader 'to make free use' of that technique and 'and even modify it'.³ After the chapter entitled

'Concluding Notes', the book adds 'Examples for Improvisation': 'stories, plots, situations and incidents' for actors to use in their exploration of the technique.⁴ That further exploration is the books' true end, and by this point, Chekhov no longer addresses 'the reader' as he did at the outset, but a 'group'.

The book has been a success. Particularly since the inclusion of Franc Chamberlain's chapter on Chekhov in Alison Hodge's *Twentieth Century Actor-Training* (2000), knowledge of Chekhov's technique amongst acting teachers has been growing and his exercises continue to be revised and re-imagined by a growing community of practitioners around the world.⁵ Less attention has been given, however, to Chekhov as a practical theorist. Indeed, in the wider study of theatre, he is still more or less unknown. This section will address that deficit by beginning with one direct legacy of Chekhov's Studio, the work of its most successful student, Beatrice Straight.

Beatrice Straight in *Network*

Despite her considerable fame in the latter part of the twentieth century, Beatrice Straight's work is now in danger of being forgotten, and little of it remains. However, her Academy Award-winning performance in Sidney Lumet's 1976 film *Network* is a revealing example, despite its extreme brevity, of Chekhov's technique at work. Straight's only full scene in the film (we see her briefly once before it and never afterwards) is just under four and a half minutes long. She plays Louise Schumacher, the wife of William Holden's central character, Max Schumacher, a television executive forced out of his job running the news division of a major network who then has an affair with Diana Christensen, a younger and intensely ambitious executive, played by

Faye Dunaway. The film's subject is the advent of the now-common oxymoron 'reality television'. Max's news anchor Howard Beale (Peter Finch) is lured by the promise of this new genre and reborn as a kind of millenarian prophet inveighing against television (and vastly improving the network's viewing figures). He lives and ultimately dies by television, assassinated on air in a publicity stunt and becoming, in the film's final line, 'the first man to die because of bad ratings'.

Beale's absurdist story is a counterpoint to the realist narrative described by Max, who is caught between the terms of the film's guiding idea: his wife stands for reality, while his lover stands for television. Max makes the contrast explicit, telling Louise that Diana is one of the 'television generation' who 'learned life from Bugs Bunny'. Almost the entire film is set in the world of television, so the pressure on Beatrice Straight's performance is high: anything less than a powerful, sobering dose of 'reality' and the 'real feelings' of which Max suspects his lover is incapable, would leave the film unbalanced, and its central character without a crisis. That challenge was heightened by the role's brevity: Straight must give the impression of a whole character in a single, short scene. The role's challenge may have reminded Straight of an exercise on the **Feeling of the Whole** set for her and Deirdre Hurst by Chekhov in May 1936: 'try to convey this "whole" through very short movements and speeches', Chekhov had said.

For a performance to feel 'whole', it must have a clear composition, which is achieved, in Chekhov's technique, through the principles of 'polarity' and 'triplicity'. Straight's scene in *Network*, which marks the event of her separation from her husband, is composed of two polarities which we might think of as 'inner' and 'outer'. The 'outer' polarity is from marriage to separation, mapped by the scene's movement from the domestic space of the kitchen table where it begins to the more semi-public space of the

living-room, where it ends. The scene's 'inner' polarity, however, moves from division to agreement. The characters begin in silence, separated by the kitchen table (fig. 30) and end face-to-face, Louise telling her husband that 'You're in for some dreadful grief, Max' (fig. 31) and Max nodding: 'I know'.



Figs 30 and 31, William Holden and Beatrice Straight in *Network* (the polarity of the scene's beginning and end)



Figs. 31 and 32, Beatrice Straight in *Network* (note the change in centre from the face to the hips)

The progression from the scene's beginning to end falls (as Chekhov says any scene 'inevitably' will) 'into three sections: the plot generates, unfolds and concludes'.⁶ It begins with Straight's Louise having just been told of Max's affair. She has been rocked by the news and is moving very slightly from side to side with a quick inner tempo. Her outer tempo is slow, however. She is concealing or controlling her feelings. The section in which the scene's plot 'unfolds' begins when Max tells Louise that he's in love with Diana. At this point the inner tempo bursts out and she becomes openly aggressive. The

'concluding' section begins when she tells Max that 'I hurt badly' and asks him to speak to her. They reconcile themselves to the situation and to each other.

These sections in Straight's performance are also marked by a movement through three different **centres**. Chekhov's technique makes use of three archetypal centres:

We know that human beings have ideas, thoughts, and that we also have our feelings and emotions, which are quite different from what we call thought or ideas, and we also have our will impulses. Three different regions which can be separated one from the other – 1) ideas 2) feelings 3) will impulses.⁷

For Chekhov this structure is not simply theoretical, it is also physiological: 'around your head is the feeling of space and power, the power of thought. Around your chest will be the power of feeling, and around your feet the power of will'.⁸ Figs. 31 and 32 show Straight's performance of Louise moving from the thought centre (as she tries to understand Max's confession) into the will centre (as she attacks him for what he has done). The movement is marked by a sudden cut from the close-up in which we have viewed Straight's Louise to a full-length shot which allows her to stride around the table behind Max, out into the hallway, into the living-room and back into the hallway. She does so following will-impulses, berating her husband and telling him to 'get out', and her movements break both the frame of her close-up and the boundaries of the rooms in the apartment. Her gestures are also centred lower in her body and are at their most free and expansive. In the final section, she moves into the centre of her feelings, which she addresses directly for the first time, and her voice moves into the chest register, where her movements also originate (fig. 33).



Fig. 33, Beatrice Straight in *Network*: 'Oh say something, for God's sake'

As well as using these movements between **centres** to underscore the development of the scene and create the feeling of a whole character (composed of thought, will and feeling), Straight uses distinct **directions** to score the scene. In the first section, she recoils and contracts down and to her left (fig. 34), while her **action** (to make Max reveal the truth), moves forcefully towards him with her right side (fig. 35).



Figs. 34 and 35, Beatrice Straight in *Network*, recoiling downwards and to the left, challenging upwards and to the right

In the second section, the polarity of moving away from and towards Max is expanded and Straight retains the inner movement of falling when she moves away (note the downward movement of her head in fig. 36) and rising when she moves towards him (fig. 37).



Figs. 36 and 37, Beatrice Straight in *Network* (moving away from and down and then rising and moving towards William Holden as Max)

In the final section, Straight is outwardly very still. There is one slight move to the left, away from Max, which breaks their embrace (fig. 39), but otherwise the dynamic of Straight's performance is on the vertical axis: falling as she accepts the situation (fig. X), and rising as she calmly insists that Max leaves (fig. 40).



Figs. 38, 39 and 40, Beatrice Straight in *Network* (falling movement, pulling away from Max slightly to the left, and rising as she tells him he'll have to move out)

The score of gestures on which Straight builds her performance in this scene give it a very clear **form**: its progression is unmistakable. The decision to begin with the lateral movement (back and left/forward and right) dominant and to progress gradually towards the vertical axis, also gives her performance the **feeling of ease**, as its phases grow naturally out of each other. By basing the whole scene on these two axes, Straight fulfils Chekhov's instruction to his students to 'appreciate every movement . . . otherwise it would be a small picture and not part of the whole'.⁹

Chekhov insisted that his actors appreciate not only physical movement but what he called interchangeably 'inner' or 'invisible' movements, through which, he said, 'without moving physically, we must move our whole being'.¹⁰ This invisible movement was the source of the **feeling of beauty** for Chekhov. He asked his students to practice performing movements 'with the beauty which rises from within you',¹¹ connecting the **feeling of beauty** with the movement **quality of radiation**, which gives, Chekhov said, 'a sensation of the actual existence and significance of your inner being'.¹² Straight's ability to unite the movements of her 'inner being' and her physical body is the key to the wholeness of her performance of this scene. It is also the key to Chekhov's theory of performance.

The Actor's 'Invisible Body'

Sidney Lumet, Straight's director in *Network*, described actors as 'performing artists' alongside musicians and dancers, differentiating them by the different means by which each 'communicates feelings': the musician uses their instrument, and Lumet wrote that the dancer's instrument is 'body movement'. The actor's instrument, Lumet wrote, through which 'thoughts and feelings are instantly communicated to the audience . . . is himself'.¹³ But what is meant by 'himself'? Lumet's answer: '*his feelings, his physiognomy, his sexuality, his tears, his laughter, his anger, his romanticism, his tenderness, his viciousness*',¹⁴ begs a version of the same question: where are these to be found and how can they be manipulated by the artist?

The practice of the Chekhov Theatre Studio proposed a simple answer to these questions: the content of a performance should be created through 'exercises in movement . . . for sending out the soul, the feelings, through the body'.¹⁵ Such exercises were intended to develop the actor's 'visible and invisible movements'.¹⁶ He explained the distinction while critiquing a student's performance at Dartington:

The body I gave you was an invisible body, which will affect your visible body, but the mistake that you made was that you confused the two bodies. The invisible body must lead, entice and coax your visible body – not the opposite. Our visible body often wishes to serve us too quickly, and this is wrong. When the visible body takes the lead everything becomes wrong, because it has taken its task from the intellect. The invisible body must be the leader, and you must follow it with great care . . . Our physical body needs time to adjust to the invisible one, so don't force it. Your invisible body will coax the visible one if you will give it time.¹⁷

The invisible body is the body which performs **psychological gestures** for a role, which **incorporates** the actor's **images** and the play's **atmospheres**. Chekhov's training used the 'visible body' as a means of training this 'invisible body', but in performance that relationship was reversed, and it was the invisible body which 'must be the leader'.

Chekhov developed his notion of the 'invisible body' from Rudolf Steiner, who distinguished between minerals, plants, animals and humans by conceiving their bodies in a series of layers:

Man has a physical body in common with the mineral kingdom, and an etheric body in common with the plant and animal kingdoms . . . Animals can feel pleasure and pain and therefore have a further principle in common with man: the astral body . . . the seat of everything we know as desire, passion, and so forth . . . But man is distinguished from the animal in still another way . . . which comes to expression in a name different from all other names. I can say 'I' only of myself . . . In the process of becoming civilised the 'I' has worked upon the astral body and ennobled the desires . . . Whatever part of the astral body has been thus transformed by the 'I' is called *Manas*.¹⁸

Chekhov's technique simplified Steiner's division somewhat, seeing the actor as a visible body, an invisible body and a higher creative self or 'I', which uses these bodies to communicate with an audience:

To be an actor it means that I am using my body . . . My body is the instrument of my will . . . the tool, by which I can present myself to an audience. I give myself to my audience. Without me, my body is a corpse. For what purpose am I on the stage? To radiate my spiritual being.¹⁹

Therefore Chekhov would have seen the movements of Beatrice Straight's invisible body, which guide her physical body's performance in *Network* as the means by which she could 'radiate' her 'spiritual being' to the audience.

Long after Chekhov's development of his technique, the linguist George Lakoff and philosopher Mark Johnson developed a similar model for understanding cognition. They showed that basic spatial or directional concepts (which they call 'image schemas') provide the basis for our usually unconscious conceptual systems. Image schemas are drawn from 'a body-based understanding of our environment' and have a natural affinity with Chekhov's technique. Lakoff and Johnson's list of 'concepts of direct human agency – pushing, pulling, hitting, throwing, lifting, giving, taking and so on' which anchor 'our conceptual system' reflects the list of actions in the first exercise of Chekhov's *To The Actor*, which ground the practice of his technique.²⁰

Lakoff and Johnson's work demonstrates that these basic, embodied interactions with our environment provide the 'source domains' for a large number of conceptual metaphors which allow us to do almost all of our abstract thinking about 'target domains'. A key conceptual metaphor in the practice of acting is the objective, in which the 'target domain' is a character's psychological activity and which often have an explicit 'source domain' (as in the verb 'to manipulate' which is used both literally and figuratively). Chekhov insisted that whereas Stanislavsky intended the objective to be taken 'with our brain, with our thinking abilities', in his technique, it was essential 'to imagine that you are doing this' and thus to 'fill your whole being with the action'.²¹ In other words, his actors took an objective such as 'to manipulate' as a conceptual metaphor, grounded in embodied experience, and used its 'source domain' to re-activate that experience, usually by turning the concept into a gesture.

This relationship between gesture and conceptual metaphor has been observed by David McNeill, a leading figure in the field of gesture studies, who has found that 'spontaneous unconsciously performed gestures often trace out the source domains of conceptual metaphors', so that, for instance, in saying that 'prices are rising' a speaker might well unconsciously perform a rising gesture either before or simultaneously with the phrase. By doing so, McNeill argues, the speaker not only describes the perceptual basis for a concept she is using, but revives that perception within her own experience: 'By performing the gesture,' he writes, 'a core idea is brought into existence and becomes part of the speaker's own experience at that moment'.²²

This phenomenon is captured in an anecdote about a visit by the deafblind Helen Keller to Martha Graham's studio. Keller asked the question 'what is jumping?' and Graham directed her to place her hands lightly on the back of the dancer Merce Cunningham. Graham recalled that 'Her hands rose and fell as Merce did', and as they did so, 'her expression changed from curiosity to one of joy. You could see the enthusiasm rise in her face as she threw her arms in the air'. As Cunningham continued to 'perform small leaps', he felt

Keller's fingers, still touching his waist, begin to move slightly, 'as though fluttering'.

For the first time in her life, she is experiencing dance. 'Oh, how wonderful! How like thought! How like the mind it is!' she exclaims between stops.²³

Keller's insight, that jumping is 'like thought', reverses the usual conceptual metaphor expressed by idiomatic phrases such as 'my thoughts are jumping around'. Such phrases are based on the basic-level metaphorical concept that, THOUGHT is MOVEMENT which we use because our day-to-day embodied interactions with the world offer many and varied examples of movement, which can be used to ground our conception of the more

evasive experience of thought. Keller, whose day-to-day interactions with the world were necessarily much more dominated by the experience of thought, used that perceptual knowledge to ground her conception of an experience of movement which was unknown to her. In doing so, she confirmed the shared grounding of mind and body. Keller could not have experienced this revelation without the body of Merce Cunningham, which acted as what David McNeill calls a 'material carrier'. He takes this phrase from Vygotsky, using it to refer to 'the embodiment of meaning in a concrete enactment or material experience'.²⁴ For Chekhov, the actor was just such a material carrier of the spirit of a performance, but with the caveat that it is the actor's invisible rather than the physical body that is the material carrier of the life of a performance.

Chekhov reminded his students of this to demonstrate that apparently insignificant movements of the physical body can have a powerful effect if they are led by the invisible body.

When an actor is filled with an image, even the small movement of his eye is important to us. Everything that is inside him is significant and important, and everything outside him will serve him at once if he really has something to convey. If an actor has nothing inside him, he can stamp and rage but nothing will happen.²⁵

This phenomenon is common to all successful acting, and is not peculiar to those performers who are consciously using Chekhov's technique. Chekhov's description calls to mind, for instance, the famously economical performance of Alec Guinness as George Smiley.

Guinness' performance is characterised by an even, piercing gaze with an unmistakably forward movement which leads him steadily through a maze of deceit to

find the double-agent at its centre. However, the last portrait of Smiley in the series does not show this penetrating stare, but a panicked, helpless look. It comes at the end of a short scene with Smiley's wife, Ann, who had an affair with the culprit. George wants to know if she loved him. She says no. He takes off his glasses. She looks at him and says 'Poor George, life's such a puzzle to you, isn't it?', and he looks at her – a look of inner panic – and then he turns away. Ann, who has been mentioned frequently, has not been seen before this encounter. What's more, the casting of an actress as well-known and accomplished as Sian Phillips as Ann for a scene of only a few lines, signals the character's dramatic significance. She is also an astute observer of her husband: life is 'such a puzzle' to George, but it's a puzzle that we think we have just watched him solve. The puzzle of human intimacy and motivation represented by his wife, however, confounds him. Even in her name – Ann, the indefinite article – she presents a blank to Smiley. The man who saw everything and saw through it suddenly cannot see. This experience – that a mystery has been solved but a greater mystery remains – is experienced by the viewer as a lived encounter with Guinness' performance without the requirement for reflection or analysis. It is **radiated** to the audience through the movements of Guinness's invisible body, which is **falling**, the experience which grounds conceptual metaphors for a loss of control and stability: 'falling in love', 'falling from grace', being 'out of my depth'.²⁶

Chekhov argued that 'spiritual content must be expressed by the motions or gestures of the human body'.²⁷ Likewise, David McNeill reports that in his Gesture Lab he regularly observes his gesture-coders spontaneously and 'without deliberation adopting the movements they are watching'. By doing this, he says, and without thinking about it, 'the coder is able to inhabit the gesture and gain thereby her own

intuitive grasp of it'.²⁸ This process seems to mimic the action of mirror neurons in the brain, which fire not, as ordinary neurons, when the subject does or feels something, but when she observes someone else doing or feeling something. These neurons behave as though other people's experiences are our own, and the brain seems to depend upon sensory input from our own body to cancel them out. Where such input is lacking – for instance where the subject has an anaesthetised limb – it is possible directly to experience, for instance, someone else's pain in the numbed limb.²⁹ It therefore seems possible that movements of the invisible body may be experienced by an audience through the mirror neuron system, which would support Chekhov's insistence on the expression of 'spiritual content' as movement, which he demonstrated with his student Blair Cutting: 'I have in my soul a certain doubt. I make a certain gesture. Blair receives my gesture and, through receiving the gesture, he gets the feeling of doubtfulness'.³⁰

The significance of Chekhov's work, therefore, is that it provides a means both for theorizing the content of performance and for developing that content through practice. Crucially, in doing so it renders tangible those moments which are, in performance, necessarily intangible. It therefore makes this intangible content susceptible to the interventions of technique, enabling the actor to become an artist, skilled in the manipulation of the living fabric of a performance. This profound legacy of Chekhov's Dartington Studio has yet fully to take hold in the study and practice of theatre. However, the capacity of Chekhov's technique to bridge the current gulf between models of theory and practice and its correlation with discoveries in the cognitive sciences suggest that it should do so in the coming years.

Nonetheless, Chekhov's technique is not the only means to the 'right feelings', and it is certain that Alec Guinness was not using it to portray Smiley. He is much more

likely to have been thinking of Michel Saint-Denis, with whom he was working for much of the time that Chekhov's studio was active. Guinness was one of the 'young artists' mentioned by Deirdre Hurst in a note which reflected regretfully on Saint-Denis' prominence at the time:

It is felt that if young artists really knew more about Mr. Chekhov and what he has to offer any actor they would flock to him, but the fact that we are so far away from the London theatre world, buried in the heart of the country, is anything but attractive to keen young actors who feel they must be in the centre of the theatre world and cannot afford to leave it even to investigate what is going on down here. If we desire to attract this type of person perhaps it will be necessary to go to the source of the material by having a studio in London itself. Such a step would involve an entire change of policy in that our doors would have to be thrown open to young professionals who might come to work with us in between other productions or films, as they do in St. Denis's studio. Even at that we would still be faced with the strong competition of the St. Denis Studio which is already so well entrenched among the younger actors.³¹

And it is to that Studio that the next Section will turn.

¹ This is confirmed in Deirdre Hurst du Prey's introduction to *The Actor is the Theatre* (MC/S1/7/A).

² There are three editions of Chekhov's book available: the 1953 American edition, reissued by Routledge in 2002, as well as the 1991 version, edited by Mel Gordon under the title *On the Technique of Acting*. Chekhov also published a version in Russian, called *O Tekhnike Actyora*; for more information, see Chamberlain, 2004, pp. 35-37 and Chekhov & Gordon, 1991, pp. xxxi-xxxiv. On the differences between the Russian and English versions, see Andrei Malaev-Babel's 'Practical Guide to the Application of Psychological Gesture' in Chekhov, 2002, pp. 183-215.

³ Chekhov, 2002, p. 92

⁴ Ibid., p. 162

⁵ Hodge's collection was first published by Routledge in 2000 and a second edition, called simply *Actor Training*, was published in 2010.

⁶ Chekhov 2002, p. 94

⁷ Chekhov, 1992, p. 28

⁸ 5 October 1936

⁹ 27 October 1937

¹⁰ Chekhov, 1992, p. 44

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- ¹¹ Chekhov, 2002, p. 16
- ¹² Ibid., p. 12
- ¹³ Lumet, 1995, p. 59
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ 5 October 1936
- ¹⁶ Here, Chekhov was describing the conductor Otto Klemperer (30 September 1937).
- ¹⁷ 20 October 1937
- ¹⁸ Steiner, 1970, pp. 12-15
- ¹⁹ 24 November 1936
- ²⁰ Lakoff & Johnson, 1999, pp. 73, 231; Chekhov, 2002, pp. 5-6
- ²¹ 30 September 1937
- ²² McNeill, 2005, p. 99
- ²³ Brown, 2011, p. 16
- ²⁴ McNeill, 2005, p. 98
- ²⁵ 6 November 1936
- ²⁶ The technique of working with the sensations of falling, floating and balancing was apparently developed late in Chekhov's career. They are taught by Lenard Petit on the DVD *Masterclasses in the Michael Chekhov Technique*.
- ²⁷ 21 January 1938
- ²⁸ McNeill, forthcoming; I am quoting from a draft version of McNeill's next book, which he has sent me in the course of conversations since my presentation to his Gesture Lab in April 2010.
- ²⁹ See http://www.ted.com/talks/vs_ramachandran_the_neurons_that_shaped_civilization.html accessed on 10 February 2011
- ³⁰ 21 January 1938
- ³¹ 'Random thoughts which have occurred to me recently in connection with the Studio' (MC/S4/14)

Appendix to Section 1 Selected Students at the Chekhov Theatre Studio

NB: This list is not exhaustive, and I have only given nationalities where I can be certain, to indicate the range of countries represented. Joseph Gustaitis and Wilhelm Gran seem to have left after the first term. Kester Berwick/Baruch also left to go around Europe recording folk-tales for Chekhov.¹

- Kester Baruch/Berwick (Australia)
- Felicity Cumming (UK)
- Blair Cutting (Canada)
- Betty Dickinson (USA)
- Eleanor Faison (USA)
- Miriam Garthe
- Catherine Gabrielson
- Dennis Glenny (Australia)
- Wilhelm Gran
- Anna de Gocquel
- Joseph Gustaitis (Latvia)
- Hurd Hatfield (USA)
- Mary Haynsworth (USA)
- Alan Harkness (Australia)
- J. Hazelhurst
- Veronica Hewitt
- Edward Kostaunas/Kashtunov (Latvia)
- Felicity Mason (born Felicity Anne Cumming and later also known as the author Anne Cumming, UK)

- Daphne Moore (UK)
- Paula Morel (previously known as Dorothy Carter, UK)
- Terence Morgan (New Zealand)
- Paul Rogers (UK)
- John Schoepperle
- Gretel Schreiber
- Beatrice Straight (USA)
- Mary Louise Taylor (USA)
- Peter Tunnard
- Jocelyn Wynne (UK)

¹ This information is from private conversations with Graham Dixon, a leading practitioner of Chekhov's technique in the UK and a former student of Alice Crowther, who taught the Steiner Speech Method at Dartington.

Section 2 The Saint-Denis Studios, 1936-1952

. . . St. Denis – a great director, a great man – who with his founding of the London Theatre Studio before the war and of the Old Vic School and the Young Vic after the war, created our only schools of acting which were fundamentally true, imaginative and thorough. . .

Michael Redgrave¹



Figs. 41 and 42, Saint-Denis speaking to students at the London Theatre Studio (George Devine stands on L), and staff and students from the Old Vic Theatre School including (front row, L to R) Devine, Suria Magito, Saint-Denis, Glen Byam Shaw and Marion Watson watching a presentation at the Old Vic Theatre School

Introduction

This section explores the two English studios run by Michel Saint-Denis either side of the war: The London Theatre Studio, 1935-1938 (LTS), and the Old Vic Theatre School, 1947-1952, which was part of the aborted Old Vic Theatre Centre (1947-1951). It is tempting to read Saint-Denis' encounter with the English Theatre in this period as the story of a continental visionary arriving to confront an atrophying institution which had remained largely Edwardian in its formality and commercial in its tastes. That version of events is neatly encapsulated by an image from the rehearsals of Saint-Denis' first

English production, *Noah* at the New Theatre in 1935. The actors had been instructed to wear bathing suits in rehearsal to allow greater freedom of movement but, after complaints and even the threat of a strike, those playing humans were granted an exemption. Consequently, rehearsals offered the spectacle, described by Piers Paul Read, of the 'young Merula Salaman in her bathing suit, crawling on her hands and knees up to John Gielgud, who was dressed immaculately in a dark suit and trilby hat, plac[ing] a paw on his shoulder and then roar[ing] in his face'.²

This image of a bestial affront to civilised Englishness was used against Saint-Denis years later when his planned Old Vic Theatre Centre was stripped apart, effectively ousting him from his place as a Director of the organisation closest to the heart of the post-war British theatre. Saint-Denis' plans to create an 'Experimental Theatre' at the heart of the Old Vic Centre were causing alarm and he recalled a critical report from 'some high official' who 'wrote . . . that he had been witness to some exercises by which we were debasing human nature to the level of animals . . . he did not think that this was necessary to learn the interpretation of our great national poet Shakespeare'.³ But the notion of a continental radical startling a conservative English theatre was used not only by his detractors. Saint-Denis himself, in his 1961 article 'The English Theatre Through Gallic Eyes', suggests that the LTS succeeded in 'implanting in the English theatre hitherto unfamiliar notions', particularly in the area of acting, 'endowing it with varied means of expression' and allowing it 'to shake off routine'.⁴

There is a large degree of truth in this version of events, but the binaries that it suggests (English/Gallic, experimental/traditional, bestial/civilised) are too neat to account for a career that was marked by paradox. Saint-Denis also recalled that the English theatre was both shocked and thrilled by the arrival of his *Compagnie des Quinze*

in June 1931, causing a 'mad crush' back stage as 'our dressing rooms were literally invaded by a mob of people we were seeing for the first time . . . All of a sudden, a famous name would burst unannounced and informally upon us'.⁵ *Les Quinze* toured internationally between 1931 and 1935 and it was in London that they found their most enthusiastic reception. As we shall see, Saint-Denis arrived in England at least in part because the English theatre chose him, yet the English Theatre establishment also rejected him. The Old Vic Theatre Centre ended in 1951 when its three directors (Saint-Denis, George Devine and Glen Byam Shaw) saw that they had run out of support and resigned. The following year, the Old Vic School closed too, and Saint-Denis left England to become Director of the *Centre Dramatique de l'Est* in Strasbourg.⁶

This section tells the story of Saint-Denis' time in England between 1935 and 1952 in three parts. The first part examines Saint-Denis' work in France as well as the English tradition of training and experimental practice before 1935. The second part explores Saint-Denis' practice between 1935 and 1952 (paying particular attention to training and rehearsal), and the third part charts the story of the demise of the Old Vic Theatre Centre and traces the artistic legacy of Saint-Denis' work in this period.

¹ Redgrave, 1995, p. 32

² Piers Paul Read, 2003, p. 50

³ Quoted in Wardle, 1978, pp. 133-134

⁴ Saint-Denis, autumn 1961, p. 35

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30; the date of the first performances of *Les Quinze* in England is taken from Aykroyd, 1935, p. 7.

⁶ The CDE was one France's regional theatre centres, which Saint-Denis ran upon similar lines to his plans for the Old Vic Centre (albeit on a smaller scale) before handing it over to his former pupil Pierre Lefèvre in 1957.

2.1 Context: Backgrounds of The London Theatre Studio

Saint-Denis first came to England in 1928 when he was acting with *Les Copiaus* in Jacques Copeau's *l'illusion*. It was seen at the Cambridge Festival Theatre by Michael Redgrave, then an undergraduate, on whom it had a powerful effect.

It was . . . as if a great craftsman, having made the perfect crystal vase, had deliberately shattered it by letting it fall to the ground, and then, with one swoop of his hands, had reassembled the beautiful object in a new and yet more perfect form – the truth, as seen by the illusionist, becoming the truth, at that moment, for the spectator. Actors came forward inviting the audience to a game: 'We can make you believe in anything – and show you it's only an illusion'.¹

Redgrave's memory of *Les Copiaus* is corroborated by Phyllis Aykroyd's description of their *Danse de la Ville et des Champs*, 'written and produced' by Saint-Denis in Dijon also in 1928.

The whole thing was an intimate collaboration of authorship, acting and production, and no person was allowed to predominate in any way. This was emphasized by a Prologue in which the members of the company were presented to the audience, displayed their tricks and their properties, and announced that there were *no stars* among them.²

This collaborative practice was the product of ensemble training that went back beyond the company's beginnings in 1924, when Copeau had taken the decision to close the *Vieux-Colombier* and leave Paris with the group of actors who became *Les Copiaus*. In order, therefore, to build a picture of the context from which Saint-Denis' London Theatre Studio emerged, therefore, we must begin with Copeau.

Jacques Copeau

Copeau was a reformer, and his reforms began with training: 'nothing will exist', he wrote, 'as long as a school does not exist'.³ Nonetheless, Copeau's *Vieux-Colombier*, which was intended as a parallel theatre-and-school to Stanislavsky's, opened as a theatre first with a double-bill of Thomas Heywood's *A Woman Killed with Kindness* and Moliere's *L'Amour médecin*.⁴ Beginning with the theatre was, according to Copeau, 'a necessary expedient', but even without its school, the *Vieux-Colombier* was an ambitious undertaking.⁵ Between October 1913 and the theatre's closure with the outbreak of war in 1914, it premiered thirteen plays, culminating in Copeau's highly acclaimed *Twelfth Night (La Nuit des Rois)*. Copeau wrote that 'our purpose in creating the *Vieux-Colombier* was to try to give back brilliance and grandeur to this art' of the theatre,⁶ and to do so, he set about what he called 'a radical remedy, a purgation', by which the stage would be rendered 'naked and neutral'.⁷

The resulting bare stage or 'tréteau nu' was flexible, allowing the rotation of productions in a repertory which featured a wide variety of genres; it projected beyond the proscenium arch (which was not distinguished from the other arches which supported the roof along the length of the auditorium), which encouraged direct contact between the stage and auditorium, and it was a stage for *acting*. By doing away with realistic settings and props, Copeau made his theatre a place for the art of the playwright to 'join with' the art of the actor.⁸ Saint-Denis, who began work – unofficially – at the *Vieux-Colombier* at the age of sixteen,⁹ remembered

an acting area . . . designed for *physical* acting; its form, its many levels, its steps and aprons allowed for a great variety of staging . . . in contrast to that 'box of

illusions' – the proscenium arch stage. It gave equal authenticity to classical farce, poetic drama and realistic 'anti-theatrical plays'.

Saint-Denis also observed that the absence of complex scenery and lighting meant that 'the stage was often free for rehearsals', and he described a symbiotic relationship between space and performance so that 'each play seemed to leave traces of its pattern on the stage floor', by virtue of actors who were always 'poised for action, isolated, thrown into relief, detached in a free, three-dimensional space . . . constantly animated from within yet magnetized by the audience and the surrounding air . . . body and voice translating physically the poetic contents of the play'.¹⁰ Its actors were both liberated and exposed.

Such exposure, Copeau realised, made unusual demands on his actors, so, prior to the opening of the *Vieux-Colombier* in 1913, he took them to his country house, Le Limon, where they spent ten weeks training intensively.¹¹ They practised gymnastics and improvisation and read dramatic texts. Copeau's background was as a theatre critic and he had never, up to this point, acted (he would make his debut with the opening of his theatre). As a consequence, his approach leaned to the intellectual, and it was up to the actor Charles Dullin to help him to find, in John Rudlin's words, a 'synthesis of the verbal and the physical'.¹² Thus a number of themes of Copeau's work were established, which would persist throughout both his career and Saint-Denis'.

Firstly, he was concerned to bring together the study of texts with the practice of improvisation and thus to blend the consciousness of form with the ability to be spontaneous. Secondly, he aimed to develop both flexible and expressive bodies and alert and imaginative minds, as he would demonstrate in his own performance of *Scapin*, described by the critic Ramon Fernandez both as a 'very lively dance' and 'a re-

birth of the ideas of Molière'.¹³ Thirdly, his primary concern was the development of a creative ensemble, who would be capable of what he would later call 'a recasting of the means of expression corresponding to the thing which they proposed to express'. This was of much greater significance to Copeau than a popular product: looking back over his work in 1941, he wrote that 'we must not build according to hard and fast plans. We must leave a margin for evolution'. That evolution was also his own. Copeau's training was not only a handing-down or passing-on of information and techniques but a process of shared discovery. The art of acting was, for Copeau, 'always coming into knowledge' and 'never fully achieved'.¹⁴ Therefore the master had not only to teach his pupils but to learn from them.

Copeau's work caught the attention of the English in 1914, when Harley Granville Barker announced that *Twelfth Night* was better played by his company than any in England.¹⁵ But the outbreak of war halted Copeau's company in its tracks. They did perform in America in 1917 and 1918, but it was not until the company was re-established in Paris in 1920 that they could begin to develop new work again in the ways that Copeau wished. In December 1921, the organisation was completed by the opening of the *Vieux-Colombier* School. Copeau deplored the separation of teaching from apprenticeship and aimed to reunite them at the *Vieux-Colombier* School in a unified, ensemble training and apprenticeship which began with the actors' bodies, aiming to 'equip' them 'with corporeal aptitudes relative to life on the stage'.¹⁶

Copeau's programme of training at the *Vieux-Colombier* began with the practice of gymnastics and Jacques-Dalcroze's Eurythmics,¹⁷ in the interests of developing an expressive body, which was integrated with the voice as two aspects of one expression. Gradually, however, Copeau became critical of what he saw as Dalcroze's 'metronomic'

approach to text, and (despite his continued admiration for Jacques-Dalcroze), by the time the School was opened, he used instead Hébert's 'natural gymnastics' as the basis for his students' physical training.¹⁸ Hébert (1875-1957) was a teacher of physical education, who rejected what he saw as mechanical and repetitive physical exercise and drew inspiration from the ancient Greeks and from nature, basing his exercises on activities such as walking, running, jumping, climbing, throwing, swimming and self-defence.

According to Saint-Denis, this emphasis on the movements of the body and the exploration of its natural rhythms and activities was heightened when he 'temporarily withdrew the use of texts and made the study of the expressiveness of the body – Improvisation – his point of departure'.¹⁹ Improvisation was explored through a variety of means. Mime was very significant, for its capacity to enable 'intellect and poetic invention' to be 'slipped into purely physical exercise'.²⁰ In a similar vein, there were exercises in showing the physical signs of emotion and thought,²¹ and, moving away from realism, Suzanne Bing's animal exercises, part of her very significant and widely-underplayed contribution to Copeau's practice.²²

But probably Copeau's most original contribution to actor training was his work with masks.²³ Like improvisation, he considered that the mask gave the actor a double consciousness: the mask or character, takes possession – as he saw it – of the actor's body, but the actor is also free to experiment with this other consciousness and its physical expression. Like Bing's animal exercises, it also freed students from the limitations of the realistic style and began the process described by Copeau as *'trying to get out of the theatre'*: that is to say, to get away from methods of exposition and development which paralyze it, methods of presentation which thwart it, and

architectural conceptions which, on the stage and in the auditorium, no longer fulfil its needs'.²⁴ But as well as a means of escaping from the confinement of contemporary theatrical forms, Copeau's use of masks was also intended as a revival of neglected or unknown forms, such as the *commedia dell' arte*.²⁵

In order to develop this aspect of the *Vieux-Colombier* training, in 1924 Suzanne Bing suggested that they work on the Nō play *Kantan* (which had been translated by Arthur Waley). This project was undertaken, according to Saint-Denis, 'not in order to reconstitute a Nō, but to permit us to experience, to some degree, its ceremonial nature'.²⁶ It marked, for Saint-Denis, 'the incomparable summit of our work in Copeau's School/Laboratory, and for Harley Granville Barker, who saw a dress rehearsal, it sealed the success of Copeau's initiative, as he told the cast:²⁷

I have always doubted the legitimacy of a drama school, but now you have convinced me, and I no longer doubt that any progress can come from a school. If you have been able to do this in three years – in ten you can do anything.²⁸

Saint-Denis became general secretary at the *Vieux-Colombier* in this period, rising through a series of responsibilities (box office management, administration, publicity) to become a stage manager and then a rehearsal assistant. He also had his debuts both as an actor (Curio in the 1922 revival of *La Nuit des Rois*) and as a director (with a 1923 student production of *Amahl ou la lettre du roi*).²⁹ But it was Copeau's sudden disbanding of the *Vieux-Colombier* after *Kantan* in 1924 that gave him his opportunity to establish himself as more than just an assistant. Immediately after closing his theatre and school, Copeau took a group of young actors with him to Burgundy, where he proposed to undertake a 'conscientious examination of the principles of their craft'.³⁰ They created characters and scenarios from training exercises,

and whereas they had, until this point, seen the script as a kind of diagrammatic representation of performance, waiting to be revived by the actors, now scripts were evolved from performances improvised by actors in the studio.³¹

The group's first such attempts, *L'Objet ou le contretemps* (*The Object or the Setback*) and *L'impôt* (*Tax*), were hastily thrown together in an attempt to raise money from industrialists. They did not succeed and the exercise began rapidly to prove unsustainable. They were living on top of each other in squalid conditions and had no source of income. Consequently, at the end of 1925, Copeau was forced to return to Paris to seek funds and told Saint-Denis to disband the group.³² He did so, but then decided along with a few of the others to form a professional company. They decided to continue their development of characters and create new plays, which, according to the actor Jean Villard, would 'depart from the beaten path and put to use mask, mime, chorus, song'.³³ The group became known as '*Les Copiaus*' ('the little Copeaus' or 'children of Copeau') by the locals and, with Copeau still in Paris, they functioned much more as a collective, with Saint-Denis as their artistic director until Copeau decided to reinstate himself as their leader. This caused a great deal of tension, which was not resolved until Copeau wrote the scenario of *L'illusion* for them. This was a genuinely collaborative endeavour. Jean Villard composed the music, Maiène Copeau (Copeau's daughter) made the costumes, and the actors made their own masks and choreographed sequences of action and dance. It was this production which so thrilled the undergraduate Michael Redgrave.

However, despite the success of *L'illusion*, Copeau's absences became more prolonged and the actors more resentful of the re-imposition of his authority with each return. Eventually, in 1929, Copeau broke the company up, even though it was hardly his

to do so, and the ensemble re-formed under the leadership of Saint-Denis, then thirty-three years old. But the problematic relationship between authority and ensemble did not evaporate with the departure of Copeau, partly since Saint-Denis inherited from him the paradox of being leader of an ensemble created on the principles of collaboration between equal members. In 1931 Saint-Denis and the company's writer-in-residence André Obey decided to cast an outsider, the well-known actor Pierre Fresnay, as Noé. It was almost a solo role around which a chorus of human and animal characters revolved, and the company felt side-lined. These tensions were eased when Fresnay left the company and Saint-Denis and Boverio shared the role between them, but the paradox of Saint-Denis' exercise of an authority that he disavowed in principle would recur throughout his career.

But Saint-Denis and *Les Quinze* also inherited many positive aspects of their practice from Copeau. They had learned from him the value of ensemble training and experimentation, having spent a decade working together. They had learned by experience the truth of Copeau's assertion that

Art and métier are not two separate things. Inventiveness and genius cannot get along without knowledge or method. And those who work to acquire them, then to perfect them, will accomplish something durable only if they think of transmitting them by teaching.³⁴

Copeau had inculcated into Saint-Denis and the *Quinze* the habit of looking backwards to acquire knowledge from traditions either unknown or forgotten and also to learn what they had learned in order to be able to teach it. In this way they also developed the habit of looking forwards by seeing training as a 'preparation of the means suitable to the play of a broader, freer and more audacious dramatic imagination'.³⁵ This

challenge to the distinction between training and experimentation would be a constant feature of Saint-Denis' work, as would Copeau's belief that the theatre 'cannot exist without a subtle and strong craft, like all arts which rest on a mutual confidence between the spiritual and the material'.³⁶ This would be evident most of all in Saint-Denis' commitment to the exploration of style, which, he said, was not an external attribute, but 'the expression of real understanding' and evident in a play's 'construction and composition', 'rhythm' and the 'tone and colour of the language'.³⁷ Style for Saint-Denis, like Copeau's vision of the theatre, 'rest[ed] on a mutual confidence between the spiritual and the material'.

La Compagnie des Quinze

Les Quinze were, initially, both productive and successful. They had a studio built for them in Ville d'Avry outside Paris (thanks to the generosity of Obey's patron) which, following Copeau's example, they used as a space both for training and experimentation.³⁸ They also went further than Copeau had, creating plays in collaboration with Obey that were written not for but *with* the actors. The resulting aesthetic was termed by Saint-Denis a 'narrative' and 'epic' theatre, constituting a sequence of devised plays on subjects as diverse as Noah, the rape of Lucrece, and the Battle of the Marne.³⁹

They performed in a physically articulate style that drew on elements of *Nō* and the *commedia dell' arte* and extended the methods of Copeau. Their version of Shakespeare's *Rape of Lucrece* (*Le Viol de Lucrece*), for instance, used two half-masked narrators (the *Récitant* and *Récitante*) played by Auguste Boverio and Suzanne Bing.

Their vocal athleticism was matched by the physical expressiveness of the mimed characters in the story, played by Marie-Hélène Dasté (Lucrèce) and Aman Maistre (Tarquin). There were also two choruses, one military and male, the other domestic and female. This represented, in part, a reinvention of the structure of *Nô*, in which the principal actor (the *shite*) dances the central role with exposition and guidance supplied by a second performer (the *waki*) with a motionless, off-stage chorus adding narration. Through this bold stylised approach, the *Quinze* made a virtue of the simple narrative they had chosen, focussing the audience on the story as a symbolic and poetic sequence. They also drew attention to the story's relationship both to its tellers (at the point of the rape, for instance, the *Récitant* and *Récitante* left the stage and Tarquin cried out in triumph) and its hearers – the two choruses. By limiting themselves radically in this way, the *Quinze* company also drew attention to their own technical capability, which delighted many critics, but most importantly, they had begun to point towards a poetic theatre, liberated from the prosaic tendencies of realism. Writing about the opening of *La Bataille de la Marne*, staged on a simple raked floor in front of the theatre's bare walls which were only partly covered by a few hangings, the critic James Agate said that 'on a bare stage the actors recreated the passion not of one or two, but the agony of a nation'.⁴⁰

This simple aesthetic was partly a necessity. Not having a permanent home, *Les Quinze* performed in Paris at the *Vieux-Colombier* and toured widely. After three years of working in this way, during which time they created eight productions, the work seemed to lose some of its intensity. Phyllis Aykroyd reports that 'It was felt during their short 1934 season in London that the "Compagnie des Quinze" was to an extent losing grip'.⁴¹ A number of the original members had left, taking with them not only the memory of the first *Quinze* productions, but also the six years of training they had

shared during the period of *Les Copiaus*. It was therefore decided that the company must recommit to training and development. Saint-Denis and his colleagues made plans to move to 'a large house and estate two miles from Aix-en-Provence' called Beaumanoir.⁴² There are archived plans for what was hoped would become the company's permanent residence there, which must come from late 1933 or early 1934. These laid out a programme for each year involving '*quatre mois de tournées extérieures*', as well as '*deux mois de tournées en France*' and '*deux mois de représentations de plein air*'. Those 8 months of income would fund four months which the company would spend on '*entraînement technique et l'élaboration des spectacles prochains*'.⁴³ During this period of the company's residency at Beaumanoir (dated from 15 May – 15 September) when they would be performing outdoors and working in the studio, they proposed that '*un cours sera ouvert aux élèves français et étrangers*'.⁴⁴ The course would include '*résumé d'histoire du théâtre – interprétation et mise-en-scène – mimique et improvisation – travaux pratiques*',⁴⁵ and allow the more advanced students to help with the '*préparation du spectacle de plein air*'.⁴⁶

This project was significantly dependent upon patronage, and it quickly became clear that sufficient financial support could not be found. The English actress and *Quinze* member Vera Poliakoff later recalled depending 'mostly on the whims of rich ladies', such as Lady Cunard, who apparently hosted a charity performance for *Les Quinze*, only for the company 'to find that all the money gathered had unfortunately been spent on decorating the fit-up proscenium arch with orchids'.⁴⁷ In 1934, attempting to capitalise on their past success in Britain and the presence of two English actors (Poliakoff and Marius Goring) in the company, Saint-Denis sought funding in England. Realising that while he would not be able to accumulate enough money to maintain the company,

there was significant interest in his work as an individual, he decided to disband *Les Quinze* and move to England.

English Contexts for the London Theatre Studio

Saint-Denis was able to make the move to England because of the enthusiasm of an emerging generation of theatre-artists for his work with *Les Quinze*. John Gielgud had written that *Les Quinze* 'are making people realise the power and potentialities of simplicity'.⁴⁸ English accounts of their performances also repeatedly stressed the combined strengths of the ensemble and their physical ability. Gielgud praised their 'superb teamwork',⁴⁹ and Peggy Ashcroft their work's 'pattern, all orchestrated and timed to perfection. One mood holds them all. They seem unable to make a mistake'.⁵⁰ Tyrone Guthrie recalled a *Quinze* performance as 'like a delightful ballet, only it had fifty times more content than any ballet ever had'.⁵¹

The terms of this praise for Saint-Denis' company from young theatre-artists fastened particularly onto those qualities that they knew that they themselves lacked. Guthrie's evaluation of the *Quinze's* work as ballet-with-content, for instance, echoed his own prescriptions for a new theatre, published in his book *Theatre Prospect* (1932). There, he wrote that the development of the theatre would depend upon the founding of 'a school of movement based on our own folk-dances', where 'actors can be taught by a method that derives something from the exact science of the classical ballet' and 'something from the freedom and rhythmic energy of the revolutionaries'. Such a 'method', Guthrie argued, would provide an actor with 'types of movement to enable

him to appear adequately in Sheridan or Toller, *Everyman* or some experiment in an untried form'.⁵²

The idea of a ballet-with-content also related the work of *Les Quinze* to that of the *Ballets Russes* under Diaghilev. Terence Gray, the owner of Cambridge's Festival Theatre had described Diaghilev's work as all ballet and no content: it excelled, wrote Gray, as a 'kaleidoscope of pretty, harmoniously moving colours and pleasing musical vibrations . . . But of serious dramatic quality it has nothing whatever'.⁵³ For Guthrie and his fellow theatre-visionaries, then, Saint-Denis' work, represented the possibility of an answer to the implicit problem of what they saw as Diaghilev's partial success: a form of theatre which could excel visually and physically, but without sacrificing substance. Saint-Denis was not, of course, the first director to offer that possibility, but there was a widespread sense that his guidance was of great importance. So who had come before him, and why was he still needed?

Komisarjevsky

The Russian impresario Theodore Komisarjevsky (1882-1954) had arrived in England in 1919, and had already had a formative influence on this generation of theatre-makers. His influence was explicitly acknowledged by Guthrie's *Theatre Prospect* in an attack on 'the withered flower of naturalism':

Fortunately for London it has been possible to see the Tchekov plays interpreted by M. Komisarjevsky with wonderful sensibility . . . Here, if anywhere, lies the future of naturalism in the theatre: in a poetic purpose that is not content merely to imitate the outward appearance of commonplace things and reason about them, but attempts the glorification of the commonplace by arranging it to form a logical, musical and pictorial pattern of abstract significance. The producer has to 'see' the pattern and 'hear' the symphony in order to direct the actor's interpretation.⁵⁴

Komisarjevsky's 'poetic' naturalism and his creation of 'a logical, musical and pictorial pattern of abstract significance' was evidently a precursor to the ballets-with-content of *Les Quinze*, but what was the depth of his influence on the English?

Komisarjevsky was born Fyodor Fyodorovich Komissarzhevsky, half-brother of Vera Fyodorovna Komissarzhevskaya (1864-1910) leading actress in the Imperial (Alexandrinsky) Theatre. He was instrumental in the founding of Komissarzhevskaya's New Dramatic Theatre in St Petersburg in 1904, having abandoned his studies in architecture.⁵⁵ There he began to experiment with direction, working as an assistant to Meyerhold (who was the company's director from 1906-1907), with whom he travelled to Berlin to observe Max Reinhardt in rehearsals.⁵⁶ When Komisarjevsky took over the direction of the theatre, he set out to produce 'mystical realism rather than symbolism'.⁵⁷ This led Komisarjevsky to concentrate on the inner action of each play

which was to be expressed by its particular reality: a synthesis of settings, costumes, music, movement and speech.

Komisarjevsky termed this project the creation of a 'synthetic theatre'.⁵⁸ It was clearly indebted to his background in architecture (a practice which synthesizes numerous disciplines) and to the combined influences of Meyerhold and Reinhardt: 'the dynamic rhythm of the music of the action should be reflected in the dynamic environment of the actor. The dynamic decor of the Synthetic Theatre should be in harmony with the music and the ensemble of performers' who must create 'synthetic conditional characters with movements and intonations as demanded by the imaginative form of the play'.⁵⁹ Komisarjevsky honed and developed this notion in his productions and his teaching at the Vera Komissarzhevskaya Studio in Moscow, which he opened in 1910,⁶⁰ and to which he added, on 22 October 1914, the Vera Fyodorovna Komissarzhevskaya Theatre.⁶¹

That development from a stand-alone school to one existing in tandem with a producing theatre echoed the studio projects of Stanislavsky and Copeau. Likewise, Komisarjevsky's belief that 'the actor must be free of all methods and systems, but at the same time must study and be able to use them all' closely resembles Saint-Denis' philosophy of training.⁶² It is not clear that Saint-Denis was particularly conscious of these connections. Nonetheless, he was certainly conscious of Komisarjevsky's success with Chekhov in England. He wrote to Gielgud on 28 June 1937 that 'I did not tell you at once that I would definitely produce "The Three Sisters"; because Tchekov having been produced so successfully by Komisarjevsky, you will understand that I had to think it over. I have now decided to risk the comparison and accept your offer'.⁶³ Saint-Denis

also either knew or would go on to work with almost the entire cast of Komisarjevsky's 1936 *Seagull* at the New Theatre.⁶⁴

Komisarjevsky had travelled to England in 1919 with official dispensation from Anatoly Lunacharsky (Director of Culture) 'to acquaint himself with the work of Western theatres'.⁶⁵ When he arrived in London, however, Komisarjevsky quickly began to attempt a transformation of those theatres. The conductor Albert Coates, who knew him from St Petersburg, invited him to re-stage Sir Thomas Beecham's revival of Borodin's *Prince Igor* at Covent Garden. The production opened to enthusiastic reviews which led to offers of work across Europe. *The Daily Telegraph* reviewer's evocation of 'the harmoniously-composed beauty of many scenes' and 'the strange beauty and rare charm of the groupings' reflects Komisarjevsky's emphasis on a unity of staging, achieved through the mastery of rhythm and atmosphere.⁶⁶ But he found neither of these in the English theatre that he encountered at the start of the 'twenties, complaining in his 1926 article 'On Producing Tchekov' that English actors 'live their parts only when they speak, with the result that the rhythm of the play is continually being interrupted'.⁶⁷

Komisarjevsky must, however, have seen potential in some of these actors, because in 1925, having endured a 'quite ridiculous', 'monotonous and dreary' production of *The Seagull* at the Little Theatre,⁶⁸ he engaged its twenty-one year-old Konstantin, John Gielgud, to play Tusenbach in *The Three Sisters*.⁶⁹ This, the second of his now-legendary productions of Chekhov in a converted cinema in Barnes, south west London, opened on 16 February 1926.⁷⁰ According to Peggy Ashcroft (to whom he was briefly married), while he was at Barnes Komisarjevsky 'did a lot to shake up the English

theatre and foster a much more realistic style of acting'.⁷¹ He taught Gielgud, for instance, how

to play "with the fourth wall down", and 'not to act from outside, seizing on obvious effects and histrionics; to avoid the temptations of showing off; to work from within to present a character, and to absorb the general atmosphere and background of a play'.⁷²

According to Ashcroft, this process gave rise to the exploration of subtext, 'which we never talked about. We never used that word before'.⁷³

The revolutionary aspect of Komisarjevsky's Chekhov productions was highlighted in the manner of their presentation.⁷⁴ They began with a revival of his *Ivanov* (first staged at the Duke of York's in 1925), which was prefaced by a lecture on Chekhov from Komisarjevsky, disguised as a conversation with two actors who were given scripted interjections. The press response was extremely positive, both to this prologue and the production: a 'wonderful symphony, beautifully played by a large orchestra under the baton of an inspired conductor'.⁷⁵

That image of a triumphant maestro recurs across the press responses, but the implication that rhythmically-staged, atmospheric ensemble acting had to be imported from Russia by a director who was the creative centre of his productions is somewhat misleading. Desmond MacCarthy's description of the acting in Komisarjevsky's *Three Sisters* appreciated this:

The kind of acting which is absolutely essential in such plays is acting which restores the unity of impression. The method of this dialogue is disjunctive: the underlying unity must therefore be made prominent, and this can only be done by keeping every

actor and actress on the scene continuously and simultaneously acting. Mr Komisarjevsky's productions of Chekhov are successful beyond comparison because he insists upon this simultaneity.⁷⁶

In fact, Gielgud reports that Komisarjevsky did much less direct teaching or instruction of his actors than the lecture-curtain-raiser to *Ivanov* was intended to suggest. 'Actors,' said Gielgud, 'loved working for Komisarjevsky. He let them find their own way, watched, kept silent, then placed the phrasing of a scene in a series of pauses, the timing of which he rehearsed minutely'.⁷⁷ Therefore, although Guthrie's praise for Komisarjevsky as a proponent of the theatre's capacity to explore 'abstract significance' through its visual and musical aspects is certainly justified, it is not clear that he offered very much guidance as to how this may be achieved. A press account of his rehearsals described him creating an 'underlying rhythm and unity' by 'discuss[ing] what the character is thinking or feeling, and leav[ing] it to the actor' to work out how that may best be expressed. Likewise, his writings and archival records offer no detailed account, to my knowledge, of rehearsal or acting technique beyond the dictum that the producer must 'know how to make expressions come to life in an actor's mind' and must not 'force intonations, and movements upon him, which have been invented in the producer's study before rehearsals'.⁷⁸ Perhaps Ashcroft's description of Komisarjevsky 'shaking up' the English theatre is more specifically accurate than we might assume: the effervescence of talent for which he was apparently responsible was released, but not exactly created by him.⁷⁹

The Group Theatre

It is clear from Guthrie's *Theatre Prospect* that, while visionaries such as Komisarjevsky had supplied an excellent example to theatre-reformers, none had provided the explicit means by which their example might be followed. He writes that

any attempt to break away from the current naturalistic convention requires on the part of the director, not only sufficient originality to invent a new means of expression, but sufficient executive technique to make a new means of expression intelligible to the public.⁸⁰

It was, Guthrie considered, 'lack of technique that has hampered all experimental production in this country'.⁸¹ Therefore, while, by the time of his successes in England, Komisarjevsky appears to have abandoned the model of studio-and-theatre, Guthrie advocated its revival:

The greatest advantage, to my mind, of such a school would be the possibilities it offers of gathering recruits into a company, trained in an acting method peculiar to that company, and adapted to its particular needs. If the theatre had two directors, A. and B. on its staff, some such system would be possible: while A. was directing the rehearsals of the professional company – period three weeks – B. would be working with an experimental class of pupils, training them in the technique that would be required for his own experimental productions; doing for them, in less concentrated degree, but still with considerable possibilities of advantage, what Copeau did for his company during their period of Burgundian rustification.⁸²

Guthrie saw something of this ideal in the group of actors he encountered during his tenure as stage director at the Westminster Theatre (1931-1932).

Like the Barnes Theatre, the Westminster was a converted picture house, but more central. It opened with Guthrie's production of James Bridie's *The Anatomist*, a great success, which allowed its actors the luxury of time and money, both of which they invested in training and reading plays in impromptu groups. Through this, they met Rupert Doone, who had danced for the Westminster's owner-manager, Anmer Hall, at the Festival Theatre in Cambridge.⁸³ Doone led classes for the actors, and became a founder member of the resulting group, known, partly in imitation of *Les Quinze*, as the '8 Group'.⁸⁴ It expanded to form a 'Group Theatre' of thirteen in 1932, under the joint artistic directorship of Guthrie and Doone.⁸⁵

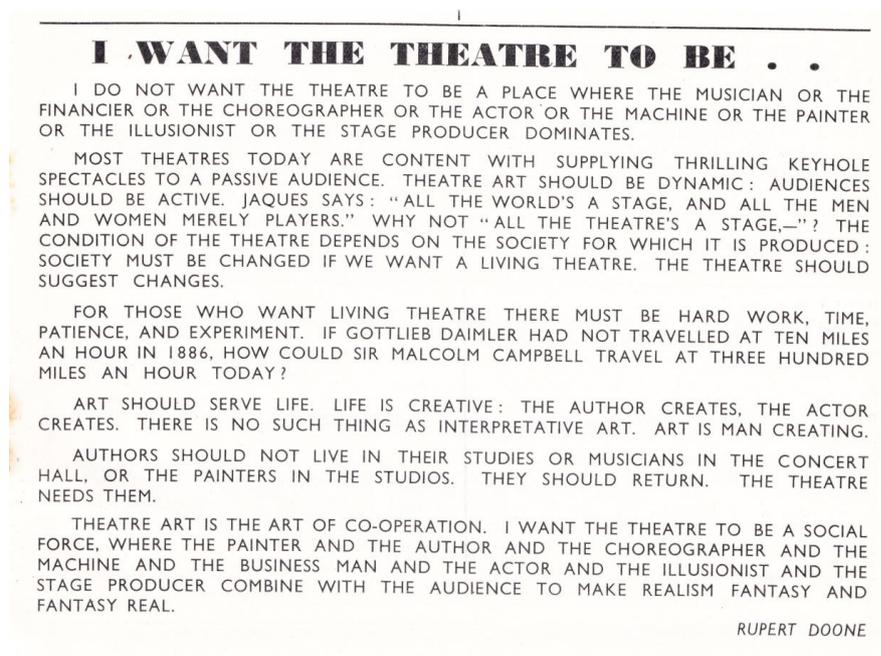


Fig. 43, Rupert Doone's 1935 Manifesto for the Group Theatre (taken from the programme for *The Sowers of the Hills*, Westminster Theatre, 1935)

Doone's vision for the Group Theatre was wider and more transformative even than Guthrie's. An early manifesto closely echoed *Theatre Prospect* and English praise for *Les Quinze* in its aim 'by improvisation to bring the actor to use his own powers of

invention and to rid him of self-consciousness,' and thereby 'to produce a company that will work like a well-trained orchestra' with 'a simple way of acting that is flexible and easily adaptable to any play, whether ancient or modern'.⁸⁶ Doone's 1935 manifesto (fig. 43), called for the Group to become

a social force, where the painter and the author and the choreographer and the machine and the businessman and the actor and the illusionist and the stage producer combine with the audience to make realism fantasy and fantasy real.⁸⁷

That vision is reflected in the membership of the Group, which had widened to 200 members by April 1933, and grew still further in the next two years to include both dancers and actors, as well as authors (such as W.H. Auden, Stephen Spender, Christopher Isherwood and T.S. Eliot), musicians (most famously Benjamin Britten), and visual artists (including the painters Duncan Grant and William Coldstream).

This diverse and growing membership was not only an expression of the Group's collaborative and co-operative ideals, it was also a means of generating income through the payment of subscriptions. The hope was that this income would pay for the ongoing training and experimentation of a small ensemble of performers which had been the Group's initial impetus. In August 1932, members of the Group had undertaken a 'summer study' at a school in Suffolk for a fortnight, echoing the rural, communitarian practice of 'retreat' which, since Stanislavsky and Copeau, had often been a significant part of the studio tradition.⁸⁸ Phyllis Akroyd, for instance, had emphasized the connection of *Les Copiaus' La Danse* (which told the story of François, a 'rosy-cheeked Burgundian rustic' who is lured away from the fields to an industrial town, but 'returns to the country and is reconciled to his sweetheart') with the life of its actors, who 'did the manual work connected with their craft, and also helped in the agricultural work of

the village . . . took part in the festivals of the countryside, [and] in the vintage celebrations'.⁸⁹

However, despite rapidly growing membership, the Group was unable to develop or even sustain its English version of this practice. Ormerod Greenwood wrote to Gordon Craig in 1935 that an appeal the previous year 'for a few hundred pounds to enable us to take a farmhouse, and train a company of young actors' was dismissed as the notion of 'lunatics', whereas funding 'a season of plays in London without any preparation or knowledge' was achieved 'without difficulty'.⁹⁰ Greenwood's subsequent rhetorical question: 'who are the real lunatics?' is apt, but equally the compulsion to compromise with these 'lunatics' was unavoidable. The first Group Theatre season opened in October 1935 at the same time as a flyer announced that the ideal of establishing a permanent company had been deferred, 'for this can only be formed by long search and special training'.⁹¹

Compromise, then, was a keynote of the first Group Theatre season. It began with a double bill of Eliot's *Sweeney Agonistes* and Auden's *Dance of Death* and continued with Saint-Denis' production of *Sowers of the Hills*, followed by Nugent Monk's staging of *Timon of Athens*, with music by Britten and dances choreographed by Rupert Doone.⁹² With a permanent company and a unified directorial vision, this eclectic programme might have cohered into a recognisable artistic vision, but without financial support for training, and with Doone, Guthrie, Saint-Denis and Monck all producing, that was a tall order. The situation was not improved by the inclusion, between the Eliot-Auden double-bill and *Sowers of the Hills*, of Rudolf Besier's *Lady Patricia*. This was a Group Theatre production in name only, and was in fact, as Michael Sidnell notes, 'precisely the kind of stuff it despised: a bit of West End flummery with an imported star,

staged with the tinsel and trappings that audiences still liked'.⁹³ By contrast, Giono's *The Sowers of the Hills* was far from antithetical to the Group Theatre's vision, but it was not exactly a Group Theatre production either.

The play, set in a farming community in Provence, had been written for *Les Quinze* who had already performed it in London, and it featured Marius Goring and Vera Poliakoff. Although they were both English and members of the Group Theatre, they were best known for their work with *Les Quinze*, who they had both left England to join. The programme acknowledged this slight distance from the Group Theatre's own work by describing the production as a 'co-operation' with Saint-Denis, 'under our auspices', which is intended to express 'the common aims which unite us, to see actors trained in common and working in their own style, and producers collaborating with writers, painters and musicians to form a unified theatre'.⁹⁴ Members of the audience who read this piece could hardly have failed to notice the full-page advertisement which appeared to the left of it, announcing the imminent opening of just such a 'unified theatre', namely Saint-Denis' London Theatre Studio (fig. 44, below). Alongside a 'School of Acting, both for inexperienced students and for actors', the advertisement claims that the London Theatre Studio would include a 'permanent company, trained to act together' which (as patrons would have been aware from the Programme Announcement quoted above) the Group Theatre had found itself unable to maintain. The school was intended to 'provide material' for this company, and the company would ensure that the school was 'in constant touch with the professional theatre'. This enterprise, billed as 'a practical effort by a man of the working theatre' contrasted with Doone's more idealistic 'I Want The Theatre To Be...' (fig. 43).

The Group Theatre never succeeded in establishing itself as a permanent ensemble, but it did provide Saint-Denis with vital (though not financial) support. It gave him connections with English collaborators beyond Goring and Poliakov, two of whom, John Allen and Oliver Reynolds, would join the teaching staff of the LTS the following year.⁹⁵ But most of all, the Group Theatre confirmed the existence of an appetite for the collaborative and self-sustaining Theatre Centre that he had in mind for the LTS.

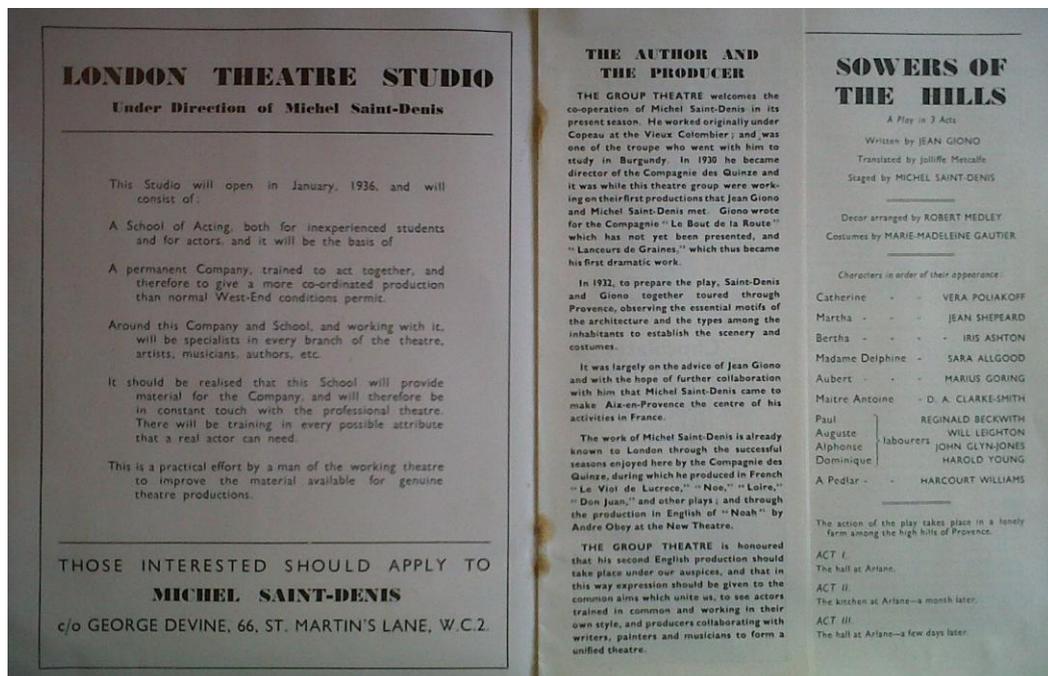


Fig. 44, Programme for *The Sowers of the Hills* (Westminster Theatre, 1935)

The Motley Studio

The Group Theatre alone could not give Saint-Denis a sufficiently secure foothold for his plans, since it could not find one for itself. On the other hand, it is certain that he could not have set up the LTS without the support of a group of actors

much closer to the centre ground of the English theatre at that time. They were to be found in the Motley Studio, in a yard opposite the New Theatre, where Saint-Denis described an 'atmosphere where technique, invention, and freedom blended'.⁹⁶ Here, John Gielgud ('lord of the London stage, but never lording it', according to Antony Quayle), who lived around the corner in Upper St Martin's Lane at the time, benevolently held court.⁹⁷



Fig. 45, The Motleys in their Studio

The young artists who gathered in the Motley Studio were not self-consciously alternative in the manner of the Group Theatre. Gielgud, for instance, was quite happy to praise his immediate predecessors Charles Hawtrey and Gerald du Maurier as

the undoubted masters of a school that achieved an enormously high standard during the first twenty years of the century, a standard founded, no doubt, on the productions of the Kendals and the Bancrofts.⁹⁸

Gielgud recorded that Komisarjevsky 'influenced me greatly', but also spoke of 'a love of tradition and a respect for experience', and therefore he advocated a balance between the impulses to preserve and to innovate.

Tradition can only be handed down, a delightful but ephemeral mixture of legend, history and hearsay, but style evolves afresh through the finest talents of each succeeding generation . . . The theatre needs both, and thrives on both, for both are the result of discipline, of endless experiment, trial and error, of individual brilliance and devotion.⁹⁹

Thus, while Komisarjevsky had been self-consciously foreign and the Group Theatre deliberately alternative, the theatre artists who gathered in the Motley Studios in St Martin's Court were not unaware of or opposed to innovation (they were often significantly involved in it), but were more likely to want to absorb it into an evolving tradition. Saint-Denis was introduced to the artists who frequented the Motley Studio by Marius Goring and Vera Poliakoff, including the man Saint-Denis later described as 'the soul of the [Motley] studio', George Devine. He would become, as Poliakoff remembered, Saint-Denis' 'devoted shadow'.¹⁰⁰

In 1935, Devine articulated a version of Gielgud's desire for simultaneous conservation and innovation and described an English stage crying out for reform: 'Theatrical presentation . . . in England stands roughly where it did before the War, and all the willingness in the world by individual specialists has had little effect'.¹⁰¹ Devine blamed commercial managers who were more interested in making their 'big money' through 'the gentle manipulation of 'stars'' than in

an attempted work of art, based upon a long period of concentrated effort by a group of craftsmen, working together under one director, who will give it that

perfection of balance expected of all arts – this kind of proposition is condemned either as an unnecessarily elaborate way of making money , or as regrettably impractical under modern conditions.¹⁰²

Having set out his radical stall, Devine turned somewhat conservative in his appeal to ‘that perfection of balance expected of all arts’, but he then returned to his anti-commercial theme, rejecting what he characterized as the dominant view of art as ‘an unnecessarily elaborate way of making money’. Devine sought to mobilise the innovative training methods of *Les Quinze* to serve classical values and protect the past from the clutches of a mercantile present.

The virtues of ‘a long period of concentrated effort by a group of craftsmen’ were visible at the Motley Studio. Whereas Anthony Quayle recalled a kind of ‘coffee-house’, Saint-Denis’ description of the place emphasized work:

The workshops where they made costumes and accessories were arranged on two floors crowned with a vast studio on the third. All three floors were served by an open iron staircase, doubtless once a fire escape. Until 1939 this picturesque place, constructed of brick and wood and painted black and white, was one of the principal centres where the new theatrical generation formulated its plans. In the upstairs studio, one could sit down before a great model stage set and work out a decor with Percy Harris, one of the three Motleys, pinning to the walls the costume designs entrusted to the Irish Elizabeth Montgomery, now working in New York under the Motley name. Sophia Harris, the third, was also a set designer and concerned herself particularly with the ateliers. About five in the afternoon, after rehearsals, the working room with its vast white walls was transformed into an artists’ studio, decorated with mirrors, candelabra, and cherubim in gilded wood among which actors, directors, and designers liked to meet.¹⁰³

The environment stood for Motley's approach. It incorporated all aspects of a production from planning with a model set, through rehearsing, building, painting, costume-making and -fitting and prop-making. The Motley aesthetic, which rejected the two-dimensional scenery and excessive detail of the pictorial school and focused instead on the sculptural qualities of both scenery and clothing was, of course, influenced by Edward Gordon Craig, but it also drew upon the work of Harley Granville Barker, the *Ballets Russes*, Komisarjevsky, and Terence Gray, for whom Elizabeth Montgomery designed costumes for *Romeo and Juliet* at the Festival Theatre, Cambridge in 1928.¹⁰⁴ But the final aesthetic, and its collaborative generation in a space which placed the theatre's many craft processes cheek-by-jowl with each other and with the designers, emerged from the materiality of the Motleys' practice, and their contact with crafts-people.

Motley eschewed the custom of using theatrical costumiers, and had costumes made to their own designs from scratch (taking advantage of the surplus of skilled seamstresses created by the recent growth of mass-manufactured clothing). For *Richard of Bordeaux* (1932) with John Gielgud at the Arts Theatre, they did all the cutting and making of costumes themselves;¹⁰⁵ the production also featured a bas-relief of a town for a background, made out of wood and tin by a young Angus McBean.¹⁰⁶ Texture and three-dimensionality were equally important in costuming: men's clothes were made almost entirely with 'woollen material [...] because it hung in the right sort of way, and it had body and didn't look phoney: it looked real'.¹⁰⁷ The requirement, in Motley's aesthetic, for scenery and costume to 'have body' had its basis in their contact with actors. As Margaret Harris puts it, 'you can't make an actor abstract': he has a body, so the design must have body.

It is rare for actors and designers to work closely together, even today. But the Motleys' creation of a shared working environment in their studio made this contact commonplace. In their Studio, innovative principles became unremarkable, however, because they were part of the fabric of its daily life. This would have a significant influence on the practice of both the LTS and the Old Vic School, both of which emphasised collaboration and expected their students to approach the theatre not from a theoretical or intellectual perspective, but through hands-on experience of all of its working processes. It is arguable that for Saint-Denis, this approach was inherited first and foremost from Copeau, who, he wrote, 'needed to be in close contact with people and in concrete touch with objects to be able to work', but he could not have generated interest in such an approach or managed to implement it at the LTS without the example and co-operation of Motley.¹⁰⁸ Their influence represented a communal and somewhat egalitarian corrective to the profoundly hierarchical working-practices of English theatre at the time.¹⁰⁹

Saint-Denis' presence in London in 1935 had a galvanising effect on these movements within the English theatre. Guthrie promised Saint-Denis 'thirteen hundred pounds' for his studio in a gesture which Saint-Denis said 'endorse[d] . . . our common theatrical convictions'.¹¹⁰ Furthermore, Vera Poliakoff's husband, Basil Burton, sold their country house and bought a London flat with a room for Saint-Denis, donating the remainder to the LTS. Among the other donors were Jacob Rothschild, Laurence Olivier and John Gielgud.¹¹¹ Saint-Denis' success in establishing the London Theatre Studio in 1935 depended principally on his ability to appeal to a variety of constituents within a theatre whose innovative and experimental impulses were scattered and latent but had

been gaining in strength for the best part of a decade. In January 1936, the London Theatre Studio opened as 'a practical effort by a man of the working theatre to improve the material available for genuine theatre productions'. But would its effort yield results?

¹ Redgrave, 1983, p. 109

² Aykroyd, 1935, pp. 20-21

³ Rudlin & Paul, 1990, p. 35

⁴ Copeau referred to Stanislavsky as the 'father' of the Vieux-Colombier (see Rudlin & Paul, 1990, pp. 216-218 and Evans 2006, pp. 29-30), though the extent to which that statement was a flattering, *post-hoc* articulation of their shared ideology is hard to ascertain.

⁵ Rudlin & Paul, 1990, p. xiii

⁶ From 'Le Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier', *The Drama*, XXIX (February, 1918), pp. 69-75, quoted in Katz, December, 1967, p. 434.

⁷ From 'An Essay of Dramatic Renovation' (quoted in Paterson, Spring, 1984, pp. 39-40)

⁸ Rudlin & Paul, 1990, p. 117

⁹ According to Jane Baldwin 'his tasks included running errands, cuing actors, and taking notes for Copeau' (Baldwin, 2003, p. 15).

¹⁰ Saint-Denis & Baldwin, 2009, p. 28

¹¹ See Evans, 2006, p. 10

¹² Rudlin, 1986, p. 13

¹³ Quoted in Paterson, Spring, 1984, p. 42

¹⁴ Evans, 2006, p. 89

¹⁵ Paterson, 1984, p. 45

¹⁶ Rudlin & Paul, 1990, p. 49; there is a timetable of the Vieux-Colombier training in Rudlin, 1986, p. 10, and the 1922-1923 syllabus is shown in Evans, 2006, p. 65. The greater emphasis on the development of physical expressiveness was strongly influenced by the ideas and practice of the director Adolphe Appia (1862-1925) whom Copeau had visited in Switzerland in 1915. That journey had been inspired by Copeau's reading of a pamphlet outlining the work of the composer and music teacher Emile Jaques-Dalcroze (1865-1950). Jacques-Dalcroze used gymnastic exercises to teach rhythm to his music students and later founded his own school where his techniques expanded in an attempt to harmonise all aspects of the performer in a system known as Eurythmics. Appia was Jacques-Dalcroze's collaborator in this process and rejected traditional nineteenth-century modes of staging, placing sole emphasis on the inner, rhythmic qualities of each piece.

¹⁷ Katz, December, 1967, p. 442

¹⁸ For information, see Evans, 2006, pp. 26-27, 104 and for the influence of Hébert, see Evans, 2006, p. 63.

¹⁹ Saint-Denis 1982, p. 32

²⁰ Rudlin & Paul, 1990, p. 49

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 34

²² See Rudlin, 1986, pp. 42-43 and, on the development of her teaching, Evans, 2006, pp. 26-27. Bing (1887-1967) was an actress and a teacher at the *Vieux-Colombier* and shared many of Copeau's explorations, travelling with him, for instance, to Switzerland in 1915. She was

responsible for much of the curriculum at the *Vieux-Colombier*, based on her extensive experience of testing and adapting his theories in practice.

²³ See Rudlin & Paul, 1990, p. 47 and Evans, 2006, pp. 70-73.

²⁴ Copeau & Pronko, summer, 1963, p. 183

²⁵ Rudlin, 1986, p. 101

²⁶ Saint-Denis, 1982, p. 33

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Rudlin, 1986, p. 49

²⁹ Baldwin, 2003, pp. 19, 22

³⁰ Rudlin & Paul, 1990, pp. 37, 169

³¹ On the script as a 'performance diagram', see Paterson, Spring, 1984, p. 45, on the development of *Les Copiaus*' practice, see Rudlin, 1986, p. 35 and Evans, 2006, p. 35.

³² For more detail on the events of this period, see Baldwin, 2003, pp. 26-38.

³³ *Mon demi-siècle* (Lausanne: Payot, 1954), p. 117, quoted in Baldwin, 2003, p. 29.

³⁴ Copeau & Pronko, summer, 1963, p. 185

³⁵ Rudlin & Paul, 1990, p. 27)

³⁶ Rudlin & Paul, 1990, p. 118

³⁷ Saint-Denis & Baldwin, 2009, pp. 67, 75

³⁸ See Aykroyd, 1935, p. 28

³⁹ Saint-Denis, 1982, p. 42

⁴⁰ Quoted in Baldwin, 2003, p. 52

⁴¹ Aykroyd, 1935, p. 58

⁴² Aykroyd, 1935, p. 59

⁴³ 'Technical training and the development of future shows'; this plan (which agrees with the description laid out in Aykroyd, 1935, p. 60) is archived in the Michel Saint-Denis Archive at the British Library (British Library Additional Manuscripts 81091), subsequent references to this collection give BL Add MS numbers.

⁴⁴ 'A course will be offered to French pupils and to foreigners'

⁴⁵ 'Summary of theatre history – interpretation and staging – practical work'

⁴⁶ 'The preparation of open-air performances'

⁴⁷ This is quoted from notes of a conversation with Marius Goring in BL Add MS 81105.

⁴⁸ Croall, 2000, p. 193

⁴⁹ Gielgud, 1974, p. 154

⁵⁰ O'Connor, 1997, p. 27

⁵¹ Wardle, 1978, pp. 44-45

⁵² Guthrie, 1932, pp. 58-61; see also Sidnell, 1984, pp. 32-33

⁵³ Gray, 1926, pp. 32-33; see also Sidnell, 1984, p. 30

⁵⁴ Forsyth, 1976, pp. 120-121

⁵⁵ See Borovsky, 2001, pp. 152-154

⁵⁶ See Borovsky, 2001, p. 178 and Braun, 1979, p. 73

⁵⁷ Borovsky, 2001, p. 237

⁵⁸ According to Victor Borovsky, Komisarjevsky uses the word 'synthetic' for the Russian 'sinteticheskii': 'synthesised'. The Synthetic Theatre is therefore not false, but a harmonious combination of its various aspects (Borovsky, 2001, p. 234).

⁵⁹ Komisarjevsky, 1929, p. 148

⁶⁰ See Borovsky, 2001, p. 271 and Komisarjevsky, 1929, p. 8

⁶¹ Borovsky, 2001, p. 278

⁶² Ibid., p. 284

⁶³ BL Add MS 81142

⁶⁴ The cast was: Peggy Ashcroft (Nina), Ivor Barnard (Medvedenko), Michael Brennan (Yakov), George Devine (Shamrayev), Edith Evans (Arkadina), John Gielgud (Trigorin), Alec Guinness (Workman), Frederick Lloyd (Sorin), Stephen Haggard (Konstantin), Clare Harris (Polina), Martita Hunt (Masha), Leon Quartermaine (Dorn) (Borovsky, 2001, pp. 370-385).

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- ⁶⁵ Borovsky, 2001, p. 315
- ⁶⁶ Borovsky, 2001, p. 317
- ⁶⁷ Komisarjevsky, 'On Producing Tchekov', February 1926, p. 17 (quoted in Borovsky, 2001, p. 349)
- ⁶⁸ Borovsky, 2001, p. 350
- ⁶⁹ Gielgud, 1979, p. 97
- ⁷⁰ It was preceded, on 16 January 1926, by *Uncle Vanya* (see Borovsky, 2001, pp. 351, 353).
- ⁷¹ Billington, 1988, p. 72
- ⁷² Gielgud, *Stage Directions*, 1963, pp. 13, 3
- ⁷³ Borovsky, 2001, p. 343
- ⁷⁴ His first English production of Chekhov was *Uncle Vanya* with the Stage Society at The Court Theatre in 1921.
- ⁷⁵ Borovsky, 2001, p. 350
- ⁷⁶ MacCarthy, *Theatre*, 1954, pp. 99-100; see also Borovsky, 2001, p. 358
- ⁷⁷ Gielgud, *Early Stages*, 1974, p. 65
- ⁷⁸ Komisarjevsky, 1929, p. 163; Komisarjevsky moved to America in 1939 and his archival records are held at Harvard. Jonathan Pitches notes that 'evidence of what Komisarjevsky actually did in the studio . . . is notable by its absence' (Pitches, 2012, p. 15).
- ⁷⁹ Ashcroft's description of Komisarjevsky as an agitator is supported by an article from the *Manchester Guardian* of 18 February 1926, which says that 'he gets more than ability out of' his 'able team at Barnes': 'he stirs the sparks in their English bodies and translates them . . . to the Russian world' (Pitches, 2012, p. 32).
- ⁸⁰ Guthrie, 1932, p. 51
- ⁸¹ *Ibid.*
- ⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 56
- ⁸³ As the owner of the theatre, Hall used the name A.B. Horne, and when he acted in productions, he was known as Waldo Wright (Sidnell, 1984, p. 47). Doone danced for Hall in *Tobias and the Angel*, and it was at this point, he first met Guthrie (Sidnell, 1984, p. 44).
- ⁸⁴ Sidnell, 1984, p. 49
- ⁸⁵ The Group Theatre's administration was managed by the actors Ormerod Greenwood and John Allen, assisted by the actress Isobel Scaife as Treasurer, Robert Wellington (not otherwise a man of the theatre) as Business Manager and John Moody as Stage Manager.
- ⁸⁶ Undated draft statement of Group Theatre's aims, quoted by Sidnell, 1984, p. 50
- ⁸⁷ 'I Want the Theatre To Be . . .', a manifesto by Rupert Doone, reproduced in the programme for *Sowers of the Hills* at the Westminster Theatre (October, 1938)
- ⁸⁸ Sidnell, 1984, p. 53
- ⁸⁹ Aykroyd, 1935, pp. 19, 21-22
- ⁹⁰ Sidnell, 1984, p. 122
- ⁹¹ 'Programme Announcement for Group Theatre', October 1935, quoted in Sidnell, 1984, p. 130.
- ⁹² Sidnell, 1984, pp. 284-286
- ⁹³ Sidnell, 1984, p. 130
- ⁹⁴ Programme for *Sowers of the Hills*, Westminster Theatre, October 1938.
- ⁹⁵ See Sidnell, 1984, pp. 51, 131
- ⁹⁶ Saint-Denis, autumn 1961, p. 33
- ⁹⁷ Quayle, *A Time to Speak*, p. 181. Gielgud moved from the flat in Upper St Martin's Lane to Avenue Close in St John's Wood during the run of *Romeo and Juliet* at the New Theatre, which opened in October 1935 (Mangan, 2004, p. 23).
- ⁹⁸ Gielgud, 1989, p. 153
- ⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 107, 112
- ¹⁰⁰ The letter is held in BL Add MS 81105.
- ¹⁰¹ *The Cherwell*, 9 November 1935.
- ¹⁰² *Ibid.*
- ¹⁰³ Saint-Denis, autumn 1961, p. 33

¹⁰⁴ Margaret Harris said of Craig in an interview with Richard Eyre that 'He was the beginning of the modern theatre' (Eyre, 2009, p. 29); on Gray's *Romeo and Juliet*, see Mullin, 1996, p. 27.

¹⁰⁵ Mullin, 1996, p. 35

¹⁰⁶ Harwood, 1984, pp. 25-26, see also Mullin, 1996, p. 35.

¹⁰⁷ Eyre, 2009, p. 31

¹⁰⁸ Typescript: 'My Years at the Vieux-Colombier', February 1962 (BL Add MS 81138)

¹⁰⁹ Of course these hierarchies persist today, and it is important to note that Saint-Denis' acceptance of common employment practices (such as a ten-fold pay-differential between company-members) throws into question the degree to which he was committed, in his professional practice, to the egalitarian principles of his training. But his willingness to compromise did not go so far as to cancel those principles out.

¹¹⁰ Saint-Denis, autumn 1961, p. 34

¹¹¹ This information is taken from notes of an interview with Vera Lindsay (as Poliakoff later became) on 17 January 1986 (BL Add MS 81105).

2.2 Practice: Training and Performance at the London Theatre Studio and the Old Vic Theatre Centre

The London Theatre Studio



Fig. 46, The entrance to the London Theatre Studio building in Providence Place, London N1

Selected Members of Staff at the London Theatre Studio, 1936-1938

- Michel Saint-Denis (Director)
- George Devine (Assistant Director)
- Margaret Harris (Head of Design)
- Suria Magito (Movement and Mask)
- Gerda Rink (Movement)
- Mona Swann (Voice)
- John Burrell
- Marius Goring

- Vera Poliakoff
- Oliver Reynolds

Selected Performances at the London Theatre Studio, 1937-1939

- *Judith* (adaptation of bible stories by Carl Wildman) directed by Michel Saint-Denis (1937)
- *The Fair* devised and directed by Suria Magito and George Devine (1937)
- *The Three Sisters* directed by Michel Saint-Denis (1937)
- *The Mad Woman* devised and performed by Suria Magito with students (1937)
- *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1937)
- *L'Occasion* directed by Michel Saint-Denis (1937)
- *The Beaux' Stratagem*, directed by George Devine (1937)
- *A Woman Killed With Kindness*, directed by Michel Saint-Denis (1937)
- *Hay Fever*, directed by Michel Saint-Denis (1937)
- *Ariadne*, directed by Michel Saint-Denis (1938)
- *Juanita*, devised and directed by Suria Magito with music by Stanley Bate (1938)
- *Electra*, directed by Michel Saint-Denis (1938)
- *La Première Famille* (Jules Supervielle) directed by Michel Saint-Denis (1938)
- *Alceste* directed by Michel Saint-Denis (1939)
- *The Confederacy* directed by Michel Saint-Denis (1939)
- *The Madras House* (1939)
- *La Vie Parisienne* (1939)

The LTS began its life in 1936 in what had been Diaghilev's rehearsal room in Kingly Court, off Beak Street W1, which was, as one of its first students Pierre Lefèvre recalled, 'a little room above a Spanish restaurant'.¹ The Studio went up in the world that Easter, when it moved to another temporary home: the Old Vic's large, top-floor rehearsal room.² During this period, work was undertaken to convert an abandoned chapel into the Studio's permanent home, funded by the donations which had been secured to start the LTS. The chapel was in Providence Place, off Upper Street in Islington, which Lefèvre reminds us was at '*le début de la banlieue*', off the beaten track (though near Sadlers Wells), and its performances were therefore frequented by '*un public au courant de l'avant-garde*'.³

The conversion of the chapel in Providence Place was orchestrated by the architect Marcel Breuer, and was intended to enable the double-identity of 'School and Company' which the advance publicity for the LTS had announced. It incorporated rehearsal space and workshops as well as a stage which was big enough to allow for a direct transfer to the West End, with a steeply raked auditorium of 190 seats and a control box at the back of the auditorium, not common at the time.⁴ Irving Wardle observed that this theatre 'was an exposure machine: it demanded performances sufficiently large to fill the spatial volume, and also truthful enough to withstand scrutiny at point-blank range'.⁵ In many ways the environment of Providence Place recalls both the *Vieux-Colombier*, upon which it was deliberately modelled, and the First Studio of the Moscow Art Theatre, which also had a steep auditorium, holding somewhere between 50 and 150 people,⁶ who were considered as a 'third author' of theatrical experience.⁷ All three of these auditoria, which were improvised within existing buildings, devoted to experimentation and the creation of new movements in

the theatre, placed the emphasis strongly on the performers' artistry and encouraged close contact between those performers and their audience.⁸

All of these studios also dedicated themselves first and foremost, as we have seen, to the young who, their older directors considered, would be most responsive to training, and therefore best-equipped to undertake their visionary projects. Saint-Denis put it simply: 'the kind of actor I wanted was not to be found ready-made',⁹ so he would need to use training to 'establish a habit' upon which he could base a new breed of actor.¹⁰ The resulting relationship between the visionary and his young disciples was captured forty years later by James Cairncross, who began his training in October 1936: 'Michel opened our young eyes and our imaginations and set our gaze on wider horizons'.¹¹ To do this successfully, Saint-Denis had to set his own gaze on wider horizons than the conventional drama students of the time, and if his training was unconventional, so too was his selection of students. Yvonne Mitchell (who became a successful actress and writer) recalled that a teacher from RADA suggested that she 'might succeed in spite of RADA, but certainly not because of it' and she was advised to 'try for an audition with Michel St Denis'.¹² She described an extremely inauspicious meeting in which she recited a passage of Desdemona with her back turned to Saint-Denis and George Devine. She protested that she 'can't think what they saw in me',¹³ but we do know what Saint-Denis was looking for: imagination and freedom from inhibition, and what he later described as 'young talent that was not yet ossified, still free of theatrical bad habits'.¹⁴

The crucial factor, though, was creativity, as Saint-Denis wrote:

The main objectives of the L.T.S. were to develop in the student initiative, freedom, and a sense of individual responsibility as well as the ability to merge his individual

qualities into an ensemble. Although the acquisition of a strongly developed technique of body and voice was one of our basic aims, technique was never to be allowed to dominate or supersede invention.¹⁵

In practice, this meant an intense focus on the development of physical expressiveness through movement, and of creativity through improvisation. Each day began with acrobatics,¹⁶ and there were 'traditional' voice classes (which emphasized breath control),¹⁷ as well as lessons in relaxation (Saint-Denis' later introduced the Alexander Technique into his plans for the curriculum of the Juilliard School).¹⁸ Despite Saint-Denis' deliberate attempt to develop his training in the area of voice and speech (which he says he 'had previously hardly touched upon'), it was through movement that the connection between technical skill on the one hand and creative freedom on the other was most securely made.¹⁹ Another LTS-graduate Peter Ustinov recalled the 'physical suppleness' taught by Gerda Rink which made him 'aware of the possibilities of physical co-ordination, and . . . its importance for an actor',²⁰ and the combination of these classes with acrobatics gave the students the physical basis for the more creative classes in dance and movement taught by Suria Magito.

Magito was hired to join the teaching staff on the recommendation of the composer Darius Milhaud, with whom Saint-Denis had worked in Aix. Magito also had a company in Paris, whose movement-based work used a 'percussion orchestra' and, as Saint-Denis recalled, combined forms experimentally: 'mime, the use of splendid original Nō masks, speech, chanting and dance'.²¹ She performed one such show, called *A Mad Woman*, at the LTS.²² According to Yvonne Mitchell, she based her dance teaching at the LTS on characters drawn from 'Goya or Breughel paintings or bible stories, taken to performance standard with specially written music and specially designed costumes'.²³

The characters from Breughel appear from photographs to have featured in *The Fair* (also March 1937), an acrobatic, ensemble performance directed by Magito and George Devine. The work on Goya developed his sequence of etchings *Los Desastros de la Guerra* to generate a danced response to the recent events of the Spanish Civil War and culminated in a performance entitled *Juanita* (1938).

The movement of Magito's classes from the technical exploration of creative impulses to the shaping of the material so generated into a finished performance is a commonly-recalled feature of the LTS training. Classes in Improvisation, which was taught principally by George Devine, and Mime, which was taught by Saint-Denis, followed the same trajectory. Devine's improvisation classes were ultimately directed towards the creation of full-length plays, in the manner of *Les Quinze*, though without a resident playwright to shape and guide that process.²⁴ There was also no given starting-point, except that students should create a character of their own invention. Yvonne Mitchell: 'Whether we were to start from a thought, from an observation, or from a physical characteristic didn't matter; different actors grow in different ways'.²⁵ She recalled the instinctive development of one character through a process of thinking-through-movement which resonates with Saint-Denis' later observation that 'the student should also learn that in whatever he does, however small the gesture he uses, a kind of current, *life*, must go through the whole body'.²⁶

The first intimation I got of the dirty old gin-swigger I was to become, was a habit or a tic I developed, whilst still sitting, of clicking my tongue whilst throwing my eyes up to heaven, as if to express disapprobation of something my old self had seen or heard.²⁷

Having begun in this way with the independent development of characters, Devine brought them into situations in which they could come into contact with each other,

from which scenarios or *études* and subsequently play-lets could be devised. *The Fair* (co-directed by Devine and Suria Magito) seems to have been one such performance.

Saint-Denis' classes in Mime were also designed to develop creativity and physical expression, beginning with observation and replication of simple movements, such as climbing stairs or picking up objects, and with visits to the zoo to study the movements of animals.²⁸ However, the focus shifted quickly from the technical to the imaginative, as students were encouraged to invent scenarios which would require them 'to conjure up scenery and props to the audience on a bare stage'. Saint-Denis described such an *étude* in *Training for the Theatre*, where 'a tightrope walker, in mid-course of his act, has a day dream and thinks himself a bird . . . he takes off from his tightrope . . . Flying around turning in the air, enjoying his freedom, he suddenly finds himself back on his tightrope'.²⁹ These *études* were judged as performances. Saint-Denis pointed out that 'the observer should actually feel the exhilaration of freedom experienced in this day-dream', and Yvonne Mitchell gave an example of the direct transfer of intense and detailed experience through mime in a performance by Merula Salaman:

I remember the goat she turned into, which I really believed hoofed its four-footed way up a stone spiral such as one sees at the zoo (the platform she was *actually* on was flat and wooden), and having frightened itself when it got to the top, began calling urgently for its mate, whilst chewing a branch of oak-leaves, before hoof-sliding down again. How did I, do I believe they were oak-leaves? That was her secret, her power of belief, conveyable in every imaginative detail to her audience.³⁰

Naturally, not every student was either so able or so appreciative of the opportunity to experiment. Yvonne Mitchell remembered that 'one girl remained rigidly cynical and did nothing but smirk at others' grotesque beginnings',³¹ and Peter Ustinov

recalled that his ‘habitual foresight in the face of the unusual’ led him to choose a salamander for his animal study, so that he ‘just dozed comfortably in the sun for three whole months, occasionally tilting a quizzical eye at the members of the faculty’.³² But this sceptical recollection of the exercise also reveals its value. Saint-Denis insisted that a student should not ‘try *to be* the animal in the abstract’, but ‘get the feeling of the animal in his body and *lend himself* to it’.³³ Ustinov’s evocative description of his salamander seems, albeit unwillingly, to authenticate the exercise.

Nonetheless, as Yvonne Mitchell remembers, Ustinov ‘thought the training arty’,³⁴ and this criticism can be separated into two related strands. The first concerns the training’s impracticality. According to Ustinov, the LTS ‘was much given to analysis, making the smallest gesture the pretext for lengthy discussions’, ‘much of’ which was ‘untranslatable into dramatic terms’.³⁵ The second concerns the training’s usefulness. Ustinov argued that the LTS encouraged students ‘into tiny temples of true art, making their own masks and coffee in chipped mugs, in the belief that, because money corrupts, poverty must therefore be equated with integrity’.³⁶ However, exercises like Saint-Denis’ animal-mimes and the improvisation classes were not impractical even in Ustinov’s terms, as they were not overly concerned with analysis. Quite the opposite: they were designed to enable ‘the physical modification of the self’, so that imagination and analysis were channelled immediately into action, and physical transformation; and Ustinov recalled that

when I applied what I had learned to a dramatic, or more especially, a comic text, I showed great improvement . . . I became at last deeply concerned with the job in hand, and work, for the first time in my life, became a pleasure. Even if the theatre had not been a vocation, at least it was becoming a profession.³⁷

The profession taught at the LTS, however, was manifestly distant from the profession outside its walls, and opportunities for students to 'apply what they had learned' were limited. Even Yvonne Mitchell said that the training 'did nothing to prepare us for the theatre of our day, nor for the decade after the war' although she added that 'all our teaching would have been relevant to the theatre of today'.³⁸ This is as much a criticism of 'the theatre of our day' as anything, and draws attention towards a dilemma faced by all vocational education: since the object of training is the future, how far should it be shaped by the needs of a present which will have become the past by the time it is used?

Saint-Denis wrote of the LTS both that 'our first, and most essential desire, was to serve the contemporary theatre' and that 'Experimentation, the quest for new forms, was our preoccupation',³⁹ and he attempted to solve this disparity through its practice. He planned to use training to generate a company capable of serving the dominant contemporary theatre and experimenting with Saint-Denis and his collaborators: 'a pool of actors . . . who would be able to occupy their free time between our plays with work elsewhere'. These actors would form the second half of the LTS organisation as it was advertised in the 1935 programme for *Sowers of the Hills*: 'a permanent company'.⁴⁰ The formation of that company which was the LTS' primary goal:

We were setting up a school only in order later to form a company, probably after three years. This company would be led by a few well-known actors . . . but it would find its core and the basis of constant renewal by engaging the best products of the school from year to year. We wanted to serve contemporary theatre, but needed to prepare actors capable of interpreting all styles without letting style deflect us from truth. We needed to strike a balance between a solid technique for the body and the voice, between the study and practice of texts . . . and the proper means of ensuring a

modern actor's creative freedom. Devoted primarily to interpretation, the school, with student actors working near young directors, set designers, and – we hoped – new dramatists, would be organised like a studio, with a theatre for performances. Experimentation and the quest for new forms were among our foremost preoccupations.⁴¹

Thus Saint-Denis' solution of the dilemma of how to define 'serving the contemporary theatre' was to 'prepare actors capable of interpreting all styles': actors who would be both commercially appealing and artistically experimental. In this solution, we can hear echoes of Devine's balancing of radical and conservative impulses: the LTS is both (conservatively) in the service of contemporary theatre and (radically) in the vanguard of 'the quest for new forms'. Likewise, the company would accept the commercial imperative to use 'a few well-known actors', but it would also be an ensemble, fed by graduating students. And it was this willingness to strike compromises with the contemporary theatre which both accounted for Saint-Denis' successes in establishing temporary versions of an LTS company and prevented him (the outbreak of war notwithstanding), from achieving a company of any permanence.⁴²

Beginning with the successes, the LTS was the origin of Saint-Denis' highly-acclaimed *Three Sisters* at the Queen's Theatre (1938). This was the third of four productions which all featured the same company, led by John Gielgud as actor-manager. On the one hand, the season was built upon Gielgud's appeal to what he called 'a sort of matinee-idol public', and on the other hand, the venture 'was considered rather daring because we engaged people for forty-three weeks . . . and we had a permanent company'.⁴³ Programmes for the season opened with full-page portraits of the actor-manager and his leading lady, but the company surrounding them

departed from tradition, since Gielgud created an ensemble, not simply a frame for his and Peggy Ashcroft's performances.

Ashcroft recalled that 'John really wanted to form a genuine company: that was what one had dreamed about and he realised'.⁴⁴ Gielgud envisaged that company with 'two sides': 'very enthusiastic young people . . . who were just beginning' and 'highly experienced people' so that 'the young people matched with their youthful enthusiasm what the older ones had in experience'.⁴⁵ Gielgud also chose increasingly egalitarian plays. The season began with *Richard II* (obviously intended as a popular and profitable start after the commercial success of *Richard of Bordeaux* at the New Theatre three years earlier). It continued with *The School for Scandal*, directed by Guthrie, a play which, despite offering two star-vehicles in Joseph Surface and Lady Teazle, depends for its success on high-quality ensemble acting. *The Three Sisters* was the third play with *The Merchant of Venice* last.



Fig. 47, *The Three Sisters* (1938), George Devine as Andrey kisses Angela Baddeley as Natasha (far R), watched by the rest of the company

By the time rehearsals for *Three Sisters* began, Gielgud's company had benefitted from the experience of 'five months of playing together',⁴⁶ to which were added a then-unknown seven weeks of rehearsal. The cast were concerned about this length of time at first, thinking, according to Saint-Denis, that it would 'render their acting mechanical, dry and sterile'.⁴⁷ However, Saint-Denis used the time to immerse his actors in character and situation more deeply than many felt they had ever previously achieved. Lengthy rehearsal-études established the changing atmospheres of the play, so that, reviewing the production, Audrey Williamson 'felt the town . . . and its stifling impact',⁴⁸ and, looking back, Peggy Ashcroft recorded that in the years since she had 'never seen a production . . . where you sensed so vividly the change of the seasons'.⁴⁹ Gielgud was justifiably proud of the production's 'teamwork', which is clearly visible from production photos showing Saint-Denis' detailed, rhythmic and harmonious staging (fig. 47) which Ivor Brown, reviewing the production in *The Observer* called 'well-nigh flawless'.⁵⁰ It was, he wrote,

. . . a restatement of an exquisite play made not only with exquisite sensibility, but also with the technical power to express in grouping, lighting, and intonation, all the comedy and pathos of the frustrate family and its military visitors. One could particularly notice how all the players seemed, on this occasion, to be above their usual best. Those who happen to have mannerisms, little tricks of voice or laugh, which can become irritating by repetition, either kept them under strict control or dropped them altogether . . . this lovely presentation of Chekhov may fairly be described as an all-star cast in a no-star play.⁵¹



Fig. 48, *The Three Sisters* (1938), Michael Redgrave as Tusenbach and George Devine as Andrey dancing

The production photographs do not, however, only show a harmonious ensemble. They also offer revelations of character. The company's previous production, Guthrie's *School for Scandal*, was criticized by Charles Morgan for turning the play into 'an elaborately stylized musical comedy,' overly concerned with 'pattern-making and elegant diversions', and lacking in substance and differentiated characterisation as a result. But Audrey Williamson found that the 'perfectly patterned whole' of Saint-Denis' *Three Sisters* 'illuminated' characters rather than concealing them. The dancing in Act 2 (fig. 48), for instance, gives a clear picture of Devine's paunchy, awkward Andrey, the 'chilling frustrated power' of Byam Shaw's Solyony, Frederick Lloyd's 'garrulous, drunken and sentimental old Doctor' (who is leaning to his left, apparently to glimpse the seated Irina, the object of his sentimental affection), and Michael Redgrave's Tusenbach with his 'ineffectual ugliness, stuttering kindness and spiritual pain'.⁵² In this respect, the production photographs perfectly illustrate Desmond MacCarthy's description (published eight years previously) of Chekhov's technique in the play, by which 'the

mood of the moment, the composite mood of those particular people talking together, is vividly conveyed to us as well as what each speaker is thinking and feeling'.⁵³

This balance between the ensemble and individual performances was achieved by Saint-Denis' refiguring of the role of a director. The extra time he was given allowed him to behave more as a teacher than a conventional 'producer', and to draw upon his experiences of collective creation, and of exploring character, mood and situation through movement with *Les Quinze* in ways which had not been possible in the rush to stage *Noah* with Gielgud three years earlier. The effect of this approach on many of the actors was both powerful and lasting. Michael Redgrave wrote of the experience to his actress mother in quasi-religious terms:

I have been trying to grow more part of the world around me, to be more selfless, to lose myself. I can see clearly that to achieve anything really *good* in art, one must lose oneself in it and this is why I know Tusenbach is the best thing I have done. I can completely lose myself in him . . . I have had a peep of the real thing, the living creation which breathes its own breath and lives now, and in the past and in the future. This is an immense encouragement to me, because I think you know how immensely self-critical I am as regards my work.⁵⁴

According to Saint-Denis, Redgrave's ability to work 'as if possessed by his characters' marked him out. He likewise singled-out Gielgud and Ashcroft for their 'extreme sensitivity invariably controlled by intelligence'.⁵⁵ These abilities had no doubt been honed by Redgrave, Gielgud and Ashcroft's independent studies of Stanislavsky. Gielgud had enthusiastically reviewed *An Actor Prepares* in 1937,⁵⁶ *My Life in Art* had been 'Peggy's Bible' while at Central,⁵⁷ and Redgrave had 'stumbled on a copy of . . . *An*

Actor Prepares in a bookshop in May 1937, a book which, he says, 'was to light my way for many nights to come'.⁵⁸

Their enthusiasm was shared by Saint-Denis, who drew consciously on Stanislavsky in the production, as he was 'emerging from a thorough study of *An Actor Prepares*' at the time.⁵⁹ He had an ideal opportunity for a 'thorough study' of Stanislavsky in a 'sketch' of *Three Sisters* with his students at the LTS in 1937.⁶⁰ A surviving photograph of the student-actresses who played the Prozorov sisters suggests a close connection with the Queen's production.⁶¹ The success of *The Three Sisters* may not have been simply a result of talented actors given adequate rehearsal time; it must also have rested on the willingness and ability of Saint-Denis' actors to embrace an experimental approach, and on his prior experience of the play at the LTS. This had given him an opportunity to, as he put it, 'arouse actors from inside', in other words to adapt the rehearsal techniques he developed with *Les Quinze* by using those of Stanislavsky.⁶²

These factors did not, however, guarantee success. Saint-Denis also ran a 'course in staging *Macbeth*', which was 'followed' by Olivier and resulted in a full production at the Old Vic in 1937.⁶³ This was a notorious event, largely because of the death of Lillian Baylis the day before its (delayed) opening. Despite playing to excellent houses, the critical response to *Macbeth* was widely disparaging.⁶⁴ Retrospectively, Olivier was likewise dismissive of his and Saint-Denis' attempt 'to make something real through a highly poetic and unreal approach'.

The make-ups were mask-like. I had a huge false face on . . . I put myself entirely in Saint-Denis' hands, but felt I was not good in such a theatrical production. I 'made up' to play *Macbeth*, instead of letting *Macbeth* play through me. I had everything outwardly

and not enough inwardly. I think, in that production, Macbeth was nearer my sleeve than my heart.⁶⁵

Seen from this perspective, Olivier's difficulty with Macbeth was that he depended too much on Saint-Denis to mould a performance for him.

By contrast, in *The Three Sisters*, Michael Redgrave remembered being provoked into his own discoveries:

Michel gestured at me impatiently with his pipe-stem, bringing me to a halt. 'No, no, my friend. You speak as if the lines were important. You speak as if you wanted to make it all intelligible, as if it all made sense.'

'Isn't that what an actor is supposed to do?' I asked, somewhat tartly.

'No,' said Michel.

I thought, to hell with it, and read the speech again, throwing it all away. At once it came to life.

Michel's reaction was immediate: 'There! You see? You 'ave eet!'⁶⁶

This dialogic approach to direction depends upon the actor's ability creatively to re-think his technique when faced by an unfamiliar challenge.



Figs. 49 and 50, Laurence Olivier as Macbeth at the Old Vic in 1937 (L) and at Stratford in 1955 (R)

Saint-Denis, however, did not make an explicit connection between his aesthetic decisions in *Macbeth* and the demands placed on his actors' technical resources. He blamed his inexperience with Shakespeare and pointed out that the conservatism of English critics before the war must be taken into account when considering their judgements, particularly when a foreigner is interpreting the work of their 'national poet'.⁶⁷ Significantly, a comparison of production photographs (figs. 49 and 50) supports Michael Mullin's assertion that the 1937 *Macbeth* 'anticipated the design of the best *Macbeth* of the mid-century, designed by Roger Furse in collaboration with Olivier, and directed by Glen Byam Shaw'.⁶⁸ Gielgud observed (of playing Noah for Saint-Denis) that he learned as much, if not more, from his failures than his successes,⁶⁹ and Olivier had two notorious early failures with Shakespeare: first with *Romeo*, then with *Macbeth*.⁷⁰ The first overbalanced into realism, the second was excessively stylized. By the 1955 *Macbeth*, Olivier had a secure grasp of the necessary balance between these two elements in Shakespeare's characters, which he would subsequently credit to Saint-Denis' influence:

When I was working with him on *Macbeth*, he said, 'It must be absolutely true, and you must find the truth *through* the verse, and you must not discard the verse and pretend it's prose, and you mustn't be carried away by the verse into utter unreality; therefore, you must find the truth *through* the verse'.⁷¹

The immediate legacy of Saint-Denis' success with *The Three Sisters* was the establishment at the Phoenix Theatre, albeit temporarily, of London Theatre Studio Productions, which Saint-Denis ran with Bronson Albery. Its 'Phoenix season' comprised Saint-Denis' 1938 productions of *The White Guard* and *Twelfth Night*. The first of these was a critical success, many of the reviews echoing their praise for *The Three Sisters'* detailed evocation of mood, while noting the comparative 'thinness' of Bulgakov's play.⁷² Nonetheless, it faltered at the box office, which Eric Keown suggested was due to the coincidence of the Munich crisis, and *Twelfth Night*, was a failure with both critics and public, though Redgrave's Andrew Aguecheek was enthusiastically received. Photographs show a figure reminiscent of Louis Jouvet in the part, no surprise given that Saint-Denis took the decision to more-or-less replicate Copeau's staging of the play. The critics were dismissive and Albery pulled out of the LTS Productions venture.

It is significant that Saint-Denis departed from his own model of practice at this crucial moment. He had planned the LTS Company as a highly-trained ensemble, but he could not secure that ensemble before beginning work on the season. What he could do was simply to cast the first play. Ashcroft, Byam Shaw and Devine all joined the company, along with Stephen Haggard, who had played Konstantin for Komisarjevsky, and was a devoted student of Stanislavsky in his own right.⁷³ Nonetheless, Saint-Denis did not have enough actors of sufficient calibre within the company when it came to casting *Twelfth Night*. He tried to persuade Ralph Richardson, Olivier and Edith Evans to

join them for the second play. When he failed to secure them, the production had to go ahead under-cast. Saint-Denis' journey from *The Three Sisters* to *Twelfth Night* took him from an 'all star cast in a no star play' to an almost no-star cast in an all-star play.

Had Saint-Denis directed either of the plays with his students and had the opportunity to test approaches and ideas, the story might have been very different. *Twelfth Night* was the last of the LTS Productions, and Saint-Denis returned to freelance directing alongside his teaching. In 1939, he directed Lorca's *Bodas de Sangre* (translated as *Marriage of Blood*) for the Stage Society, and a new play, *Weep for the Spring* by Stephen Haggard in which Haggard also starred opposite Peggy Ashcroft. In practice, however, there was little to distinguish between these productions and those under the banner of LTS Productions. In neither case were the actors permanently employed, they did not train together, and there was also almost a ten-fold differential between the pay of recent LTS graduates Merula Salaman and Pierre Lefèvre at the bottom end and Ashcroft and Redgrave at the top.⁷⁴

A year after the failure of LTS Productions at the Phoenix, Saint-Denis seemed to be on his way to repeating the success of *The Three Sisters* and another opportunity to publicise and develop his work with a production of *The Cherry Orchard* for H.M Tennent at the Queen's Theatre. It was to feature Edith Evans as Ranevskaya, Richardson as Lopakhin, Ronald Squire as Gaev, Ashcroft as Anya, Guinness as Trofimov and Cyril Cusack as Firs.⁷⁵ But it was not to be. Chamberlain's announcement of war was heard by the cast on a radio brought in during a rehearsal on stage in the theatre. According to Irving Wardle, Saint-Denis left for France immediately after being given a farewell lunch by the company, and the LTS was wound up.⁷⁶ But despite or perhaps because of this abrupt end to his work, Saint-Denis left behind a powerful sense of what

might have been. The day after his departure, Gielgud wrote to Noel Coward to ask him to 'use his influence' to divert Saint-Denis from active military duty, saying that

he is too important to the theatre to be allowed to go straight off to the army again if it can possibly be avoided . . . Michel is one of the few people who have something important to give in the theatre, and who ought to be looked after a bit if it is in any way possible.⁷⁷

Devine, Alec Guinness, Martita Hunt and Vera Lindsay tried to keep Saint-Denis' vision alive through the Actors' Company, and with the help of a cheque from Edith Evans for the £700 they needed (she had spent the same on a fur coat and said she couldn't 'let actors be out of work' for want of the same sum), they mounted a production of *Great Expectations* at the Rudolf Steiner Hall.⁷⁸ The adaptation was by Guinness and narrated, as the *Quinze's Viol de Lucrèce* had been, by male and female voices: Guinness and Merula Salaman (now his wife). Guinness also played Herbert Pocket, Martita Hunt played Miss Havisham, Marius Goring was the grown-up Pip and Vera Poliakoff the grown-up Estella. The young Estella was Yvonne Mitchell.



Figs. 51 and 52, Martita Hunt as Miss Havisham in *Great Expectations*, on the left directed by George Devine for the Actors Company at the Steiner Hall (1940) and on the right by David Lean on screen (1947)

The cast also included Kay Walsh, and the extent to which her husband David Lean's subsequent film was indebted to this production is suggested by Tynan's observation that the 'unbounded gaiety and élan' of Guinness' stage performance of Herbert Pocket was 'reproduced' in the film, which echoed Devine's setting, costume and physical characterisations. Devine's production seems also to have been cinematic in structure, with its narrators slipping in and out of character to splice scenes into a montage. Devine's production could not make enough money to keep the Actors' Company going, but it contributed to the feeling that Saint-Denis and his ethic of a living, creative and communal theatre had exciting work still to do.

This optimism was perhaps best expressed by Stephen Haggard, who wrote in 1940 that when he began working with Saint-Denis, the 'theatre seemed to me to be a real thing at last, [an] artistic venture run on a co-operative basis, not for personal profit but for love of the theatre',⁷⁹ and later prophesied that this venture would grow:

Everywhere a new team spirit has become apparent, a new faith, shyly and rather tentatively expressed perhaps, but still a new faith in what I should like to call the religion of the theatre. Stanislavski gave it to Russia before the turn of the century; Germany and France absorbed it out of the miseries of the last war. But in England, though Granville-Barker was preaching it in 1913, it never struck root. Possibly it had come too soon. For it is a humble faith. It does not thrive among self-seekers. It is the faith that the whole is greater than the part, and it is in direct contradiction to the last two centuries of English theatrical tradition.⁸⁰

Haggard was writing this immediately after playing what would be his last role, Lear's Fool in the legendary Old Vic production on which Harley Granville Barker worked with the actors for ten days. It was followed by *The Tempest*, was directed by George Devine

and Marius Goring (who also played Ariel).⁸¹ They added Saint-Denis' protégé Alec Guinness (Ferdinand) and their LTS colleague Vera Lindsay (previously Poliakoff) to the company,⁸² which also included LTS graduate James Donald,⁸³ and Peggy Ashcroft, who took over Miranda mid-run.⁸⁴ Goring and Devine apparently had plans to develop the company into the permanent ensemble of a national theatre, based at the Old Vic, but when France surrendered on the night of *The Tempest's* last performance, the Old Vic went dark.

The evacuation of Dunkirk returned Saint-Denis to England, where he spent the rest of the war broadcasting *Les français parlent aux français* from the BBC to occupied France. During the war, a strong case was made for the role of the arts in national life. Ballet, opera and theatre companies all played to capacity houses and toured widely to village and town halls, factories, military bases and hostels. This was made possible by funding from the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA), which was established in January 1940 and funded by the state from April of the same year. In 1946, CEMA became the Arts Council, which was funded annually directly by the Treasury. The possibility of sustained subsidy made Saint-Denis' dream of a sustainable theatre-organisation comprising school, studio and theatre a genuine possibility, enough to keep him from accepting the offer, in early 1947, to run the *Comédie Française*. An undertaking which had seemed quixotic and eccentric to many before the war was suddenly in tune with the spirit of post-war reconstruction.

The Old Vic Theatre Centre



Fig. 53, L to R, Michel Saint-Denis, George Devine and the Directors of the Old Vic Theatre Company: Ralph Richardson, Laurence Olivier and John Burrell

Staff of the Old Vic Theatre School

- Michel Saint-Denis (Director-in-Chief of the Centre)
- George Devine (Co-Director of the Centre and Director of the Young Vic)
- Glen Byam Shaw (Co-Director of the Centre and Director of the School)
- Margaret 'Percy' Harris (Head of Stage Design)
- Christopher Hassall (Director of Voice 1947-1948, also employed as a Lecturer)
- Suria Magito (Director of Movement)
- Marion Watson (initially Improvisation and Interpretation, Director of Voice 1949-1952)

- John Blatchley (initially Improvisation and Interpretation, later Assistant Director for Acting Courses)

- Cecil Clarke (Assistant Director for Technical Courses)
- Pierre Lefèvre (Assistant Director for Acting Courses)
- Peter Streuli (Assistant Director for Acting Courses, 1951-1952)

- Charles Alexis (Acrobatics and Fencing)
- Geraldine Alford (Diction and Elocution)
- Leslie Fyson (Instructor of Voice)
- Barbara Goodwin (Movement and Dance)
- Litz Pisk (Movement and Dance)
- Jani Strasser (Voice Production and Singing)

- Doreen Angus (Improvisation and Interpretation)
- Norman Ayrton (Improvisation and Interpretation)
- James Cairncross (Make-Up)
- Jeremy Geidt (Improvisation and Interpretation)
- Jack Landau (Improvisation and Interpretation)
- Jocelyn Lousada/Herbert (Wearing of Costume)
- Bertha Myers (Improvisation and Interpretation)
- Chattie Salaman (Improvisation and Interpretation and Make-up)

- John Allen (Lecturer: History of Drama)
- Ronald Fuller (Lecturer: Social Background of the Drama)
- Jack Isaacs (Lecturer: History of Drama)
- E Martin Browne (Lecturer: History of Drama)
- Richard Southern (Lecturer: Development of Scenery)

Performances by The Old Vic Theatre Centre

Old Vic School Shows

1948

- Programme A
Excerpts from Shakespeare directed by Glen Byam Shaw and from *Our Town*, directed by Michel Saint-Denis, with *A Musical Item* directed by Jani Strasser
- Programme B
An edited version of *The Plain Dealer* directed by Pierre Lefèvre, *The Wedding* (Chekhov) directed by George Devine, *Penthesilea* devised and directed by Suria Magito with a script by James Forsyth

1949

- Programme A
Right You Are (If You Think So) (Pirandello) directed by Glen Byam Shaw (1949), *The Quick Change* devised and directed by George Devine and *The Clandestine Marriage* directed by George Devine
- Programme B
All's Well That Ends Well directed by John Blatchley and *Down in the Valley* devised and directed by Suria Magito

1950

- Programme A
The Maid's Tragedy (Beaumont & Fletcher), *The 37 Sons of Monsieur Montaudoin* (Eugene Labiche), *A Musical Item*

- Programme B

Act II of *The Playboy of the Western World* directed by Marion Watson, *The Tricks of Scapin* (Thomas Otway) directed by John Blatchley, the final scenes of *Choephore* (Aeschylus) directed by Suria Magito

1951

- Programme A

The Doctor's Duty (Pirandello), *A Journey to London* (Vanbrugh), and *Fortunio's Song* (Offenbach) directed by Jani Strasser

- Programme B

Act 1 of *The House of Bernarda Alba* directed by Michel Saint-Denis, *The Comedy of Errors* directed by George Devine

1952

- Programme A

The Storm (Ostrovsky) directed by Peter Streuli, *The Provok'd Wife* (Vanbrugh) directed by George Devine and *A Divertissement of Dances and Songs*

- Programme B

King John directed by Michel Saint-Denis, *The Gay Lord Quex* (Pinero) directed by Glen Byam Shaw, *Kalevala* (the national epic of Finland) devised and directed by Suria Magito

Performances by the Young Vic Company

- *The King Stag* directed by George Devine (1947)
- *Noah* (Obey) directed by Michel Saint-Denis (1947)

- *The Shoemaker's Holiday* (Dekker) directed by George Devine (1947)
- *The Snow Queen* adapted by Suria Magito, directed by Michel Saint-Denis and Suria Magito (1948)
- *As You Like It* directed by Glen Byam Shaw (1948)
- *A Midsummer Night's Dream* directed by George Devine (1949)
- *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* directed by George Devine (1950)
- *The Merchant of Venice* directed by Glen Byam Shaw (1950)
- *The Black Arrow* (adapted by John Blatchley) (1950)

Performances by the Old Vic Company directed by the Centre Directors

- *A Month in the Country* directed by Michel Saint-Denis (1949)
- *Bartholomew Fair* directed by George Devine (1950)
- *Henry V* directed by Glen Byam Shaw (1951)
- *Electra* directed by Michel Saint-Denis (1951)
- *The Wedding* directed by George Devine (1951)

The Old Vic Theatre Centre was a 'Centre for Training and Experiment',⁸⁵ described in a Press Release dated 7 September 1946 as 'the nearest approach this country has had to a complete theatrical organisation . . . an organisation for training, research and development in all forms of theatre activity around a THEATRE SCHOOL, a THEATRE for CHILDREN, and, later on, a THEATRE in the CENTRE, open to the general public'.⁸⁶ The story of the centre began in June 1945, when Richardson, Olivier and John Burrell (Directors of the Old Vic Theatre Company) asked Michel Saint-Denis and George Devine to join them in developing the work of the Old Vic. At this time, the Theatre

Company had been exiled from the Old Vic since May 1941 when the building had suffered bomb-damage, and was resident at the New Theatre, as well as touring nationally and then internationally, thanks to the support from CEMA and then the Arts Council.

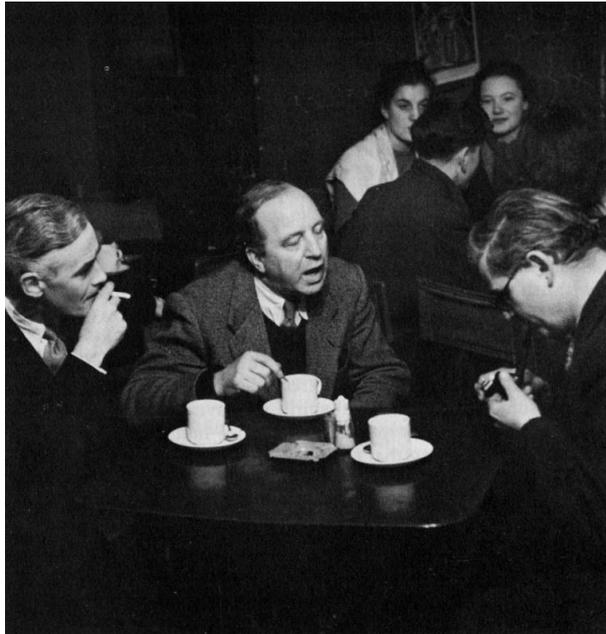


Fig. 54, The Directors of the Old Vic Centre, also known as 'The Three Boys': (L to R) Glen Byam Shaw, Saint-Denis and George Devine

Devine and Saint-Denis developed a plan. The experimental theatre was to be led by Saint-Denis, the theatre for young people by Devine, and the actor Glen Byam Shaw was recruited as Director of the School. Byam Shaw was in Saint-Denis' *Three Sisters* and *The White Guard*. His background was more conventional than Devine and Saint-Denis': he was in rep in Oxford under James Fagan and at the Lyric Hammersmith with Nigel Playfair. He had acted in Reinhardt's mime play *The Miracle*, and he and his wife, Angela Baddeley, were central members of Gielgud's unofficial circle. Devine wrote to Saint-Denis, summing up their new partner, that

until he came to your production classes, he was always in good theatres, but could never be accused of avant-gardism or experimentation, good quality without being daring. I do not say this to insult my old friend but merely to show that he has never been faced with the kind of life he is likely to meet now.⁸⁷

Like Devine and Saint-Denis, Byam Shaw was an actor; he was also a product of the Arts and Crafts movement: his father, the painter and illustrator Byam Shaw (John Liston Byam Shaw, 1872-1919) had co-founded the Byam Shaw Vicat Cole School of Art in 1910.⁸⁸ He was not unaware of the relationship between training, practice and experimentation that Saint-Denis and Devine were proposing.

Saint-Denis was fond of the image of a 'wedding-cake' to describe the Centre's structure, with the School as its base, the Young Vic run by Devine in the middle and Saint-Denis' Experimental Theatre at the top.⁸⁹ The experimental theatre was to be experimental in two senses. First, it would experiment with 'organisation and practical purpose', employing a semi-permanent company, including a Sunday production unit 'to give an opportunity to modern dramatists, to outside producers and to young actors', and giving small parts and walk-ons to students (if the training could be extended to three years).⁹⁰ This would mean, in the words of a memo from the Centre Directors to the Governors, that 'the theatre would . . . be experimental in that it would try to evolve the practical organization to give scope to new talent in every field'.⁹¹ But it would also be experimental in its 'architecture and artistic purpose', adapting the Old Vic building

into a modern theatre, from the point of view of stage and auditorium, to suit the production of the classics in a better way than is possible on the picture frame stage, and, at the same time, to be an exciting proposition to modern dramatists.⁹²

This building, newly-configured as the Experimental Theatre, would form the top-tier of Saint-Denis' wedding-cake. The bottom tier was the School, the idea being that students would be able to graduate from the school to join the Young Vic's touring company which would offered a further training-ground to what Saint-Denis called 'the best elements of the school'.⁹³ The Young Vic would also develop audiences. Its touring schedule picked up where the CEMA tours left off, with what Irving Wardle called 'the creation of a new performance circuit' of new locations and young audiences.⁹⁴ Saint-Denis emphasised this point in 1947: the Young Vic's work must 'be devised without any condescension to provide the right appeal to young audiences' so that they may 'become later on enthusiastic supporters of the living theatre'.⁹⁵ That 'living theatre' was embodied, for Saint-Denis, in the top tier of his wedding-cake: the Experimental Theatre.

This theatre would undertake a small number of productions each year, with short runs, designed to offer opportunities for experienced and accomplished theatre-artists to explore and test new ideas and develop new forms. It would benefit both from actors who were highly-trained both at the School and with the Young Vic, and audiences who, thanks to the work of the Young Vic, would be 'enthusiastic supporters' of the experimental work Saint-Denis' organisation was intended to generate. The image of the wedding-cake embodied two significant concepts in the Old Vic Centre's conception: the linear (upward) progression of a performer from the base to the top tier, and the idea that new movements in the theatre must be built on the secure foundation of a broad and substantial training. The first memo to the Old Vic Governors describing 'The Plan' also stated that: 'the building of this [experimental] theatre, and the artistic consequences of its existence, constitute the key-stone of the structure of

this whole plan'.⁹⁶ The key-stone was a very different analogy: without it the plan would fall apart.

The relationship of Saint-Denis' planned experimental theatre to the other parts of the organisation was crucial because the experimental theatre was without precedent at the Old Vic. The other two elements already existed embryonically. The December 1941 'Report on Recent Activities of the Old Vic and Sadlers Wells Companies' stated that the Old Vic Drama School was evacuated by its Principal, Greta Douglas, to Warwickshire in November 1940 where a barn was converted into a small theatre for performances, and where Douglas 'conducted a brilliant experiment in communal living; the students being responsible, under her direction, for the domestic economy of the farm'.⁹⁷ There was also a Young Vic Company, offering 'theatre for young audiences' which opened with Esme Church's production of a play called *Start it Yourself*.⁹⁸ These ventures had never been envisaged as part of a single Centre and were run more or less independently of each other, but when the plan for a new Theatre Centre at the Old Vic was put first to George Chamberlain, clerk to the Governors of the Old Vic, in December 1945, the school and Young Vic were uncontroversial. Chamberlain spoke to the Chairman, Lord Lytton, and reported back to Saint-Denis on 17 December that Lytton was in 'no doubt' that the proposal for the Children's Theatre and School would be approved and that authorisation would be given for George Devine's salary while he worked on the detailed proposals and estimated budgets. Lytton, however, did not express the same confidence about the Experimental Theatre, which he described as 'a venture which had no precedent in Old Vic affairs' and which he therefore felt unable to approve without consulting the rest of the Governors. He did so and approval for the scheme was given in principle in May of 1946. During a meeting held on 22 May, representatives of the Old Vic committees were told that the Arts Council, which had

only been mandated to offer guarantees against loss, would soon be able to provide capital grants. Consequently, on 3 July, the Arts Council was asked to provide £28,000 as a Foundation Grant to the Centre and guarantees against loss totalling £43,600 over five years, beginning with totals of £2,000 and £6,000 for 1947 and 1948, but rising steeply to £16,300 per year between 1949 and 1951. The Centre would also require 'a Building Grant of an unknown sum'.⁹⁹

Direct funding for the centre of £9,500 per annum was secured from the Arts Council from the beginning of 1947, but was only guaranteed for two years, and in the autumn of 1946 the School's first applicants (over 400 of them) were auditioned.¹⁰⁰ Simultaneously, George Devine was launching the new Young Vic Company, whose first show, *The King Stag*, opened on Boxing Day 1946 at the Lyric, Hammersmith. The School's opening took place on 24 January 1947 in the abandoned Old Vic Theatre, but its activities were housed at the Froebel Institute in Baron's Court, lent by the Royal Ballet School, which had acquired the premises which had been used by Pickford's as a packing depot.¹⁰¹ At the same time, a licence was granted to make the minimum repairs necessary to house the School at the Old Vic, allowing it to move there in September 1947. This appeared to signal a unique achievement: the visionary project of the LTS had succeeded in moving itself securely into the heart of the post-war British theatre establishment.

There was considerable continuity between the two projects. Despite having 400 applications for its first intake, the Old Vic School – like the LTS – chose atypical students.¹⁰² Lesley Retej, a member of the Old Vic School's first class, recalled that 'people who apparently had everything going for them were dismissed as not very interesting'.¹⁰³ The result was a socially diverse body of students, as described by Lee

Montague, the son of a Jewish tailor, who cycled every day 'from Bow to the Waterloo Road and into a different world' of 'folk songs from Mauritius', 'an exotic Viennese dancer' (Litz Pisk, who taught movement) and 'lovely untouchable girls', 'nymphs from the suburbs', who made him 'horribly aware of my cockney accent, my thick glasses and spiky hair'. Beyond the availability of scholarships (Saint-Denis says that two-thirds of the students were paid for by the Education authorities), there is no evidence of concerted positive discrimination towards working-class students.¹⁰⁴ However, the school's unconventional approach to training did require the selection of students by unconventional means. The German émigré Wilhelm Marckwald, who had worked with Max Reinhardt, helped Joan Plowright prepare 'the girl's mad scene' from Büchner's *Danton's Death* for her audition, which Devine later told her 'genuinely surprised' the staff, who expected 'the usual Saint Joan or Juliet'. Training for a year 'at the Rudolf von Laban Art of Movement Studio in Manchester' (later the Laban Centre) also enabled Plowright to present 'a detailed and accomplished mime'.¹⁰⁵

Mime was a compulsory element in the selection process because of the curriculum's emphasis, like the LTS, on physical training:

Movement is a more elementary and direct means of expression than speech: our first reactions are almost always physical. Notice that MIME is one of the oldest art forms...

That is why . . . we will start you off in your acting with silent IMPROVISATION, with exercises in physical expression. You should be able to realise how far physical movement helps invention, the life of the character you are portraying, and therefore the whole acting of your part.¹⁰⁶

This approach was not unquestioned. On 22 April 1946, a minuted meeting was held between Saint-Denis, Devine, Suria Magito and Pierre Lefèvre on the subject of

‘Criticism of the LTS vis-a-vis Planning of New School’. In spite of Lefèvre’s observation that ‘some students found mime very difficult’, there was general agreement that ‘there should be no question of cutting the Mime but that the link between Mime/Improv and interpretation should be better devised than at the LTS’.¹⁰⁷ This is in the spirit of the general principle, stated in the same meeting, that the ‘complete explanation of the training that was done at LTS should be kept and even elaborated’.¹⁰⁸ That training was not, however, conceived statically or monolithically. Saint-Denis was keen ‘to maintain a constant flow of freshness in the instruction’ and suggested that this could be achieved in practice by having ‘a sort of log book and manual of instruction . . . to be kept and handed down, as a record to be added to, reacted against, etc’. The meeting from which these notes are taken was a model of this reflective practice which is intended to evolve by challenging its own tenets.

Saint-Denis and his colleagues were most self-critical with regard to voice training, which they took to be the ‘greatest weakness’ of the LTS where, they felt, ‘the real gymnastics of the voice as in movement was never found’. Saint-Denis suggests that it is

very important to have a strong training in the gymnastics of different styles of text, cadence, form, etc. by reading much and often with the object of achieving a familiarity and skill with texts of different styles, expressed through the voice . . . All this is partly connected with the problem mentioned by Pierre of connecting the technical training on voice with the arrival of texts for interpretation.¹⁰⁹

Saint-Denis’ attempts to solve this difficulty led him to an element in his training known as *l’Expression Parlée*, in which ‘we attempt to find a way of acting without *doing*’: a complete expression of meaning through the use of the voice alone . . . tone, phrasing,

pace and rhythm'.¹¹⁰ In other words, *l'Expression Parlée* is the 'gymnastics of the voice' that Saint-Denis and his colleagues were aiming for at the Old Vic School. The classes were taught principally by Marion Watson, who had been Head of Drama at Toynbee Hall in Whitechapel. Her class plans made students explore physical sensations, moods, situations, relationships and genres, in terms of their effects on vocal tone, phrasing, and tempo.¹¹¹ Most of the speech in these exercises is improvised by a solo performer, but we also know that students read a variety of texts aloud in order to apply these techniques.

George Hall (a student at the Old Vic School who went on to run the Acting course at the Central School of Speech and Drama) considered that although the voice work at the Old Vic School was good, 'the speech work wasn't good enough'. He 'spent years thinking about breathing and voice training after I left, because I didn't get it there'.¹¹² This criticism, however, reiterated Saint-Denis and his colleagues themselves, who felt in 1946 that, at the LTS, 'breathing . . . was not taught enough – as a conscious technique with a complete range of possibilities', so it is quite possible that, given more than the five years for which the School ran, they would have found a solution to the problem.¹¹³ While the LTS training was characterized by experimentation, the Old Vic School aimed to provide what Saint-Denis would later describe as an 'absolutely necessary' situation for training: 'a more or less systematic basic plan, with some flexibility in the way of proceeding'.¹¹⁴

Diagrams in Saint-Denis' archive illustrate this systematic approach. One, titled 'Acting Course Outline' (1947) is divided, initially, into two sections: 'Technique' and 'Cultural Background'. 'Technique' is subdivided into 'Body and Voice', with a third category, 'Interpretation', sitting in the space between them. The prominence of

'Technique' on this chart reflects the initial plans for the Old Vic Centre, which state that: 'the main principle of the school will be to equip students with a firm technical basis on which to commence their professional work in the theatre'.¹¹⁵ Later, Saint-Denis divided that technique into three slightly different headings: 'Movement', 'Language', and 'Improvisation and Interpretation', and wrote that, at the start of the training particularly, they placed 'the main emphasis upon improvisation'.¹¹⁶ The reason for the weight given to the practice of improvisation was that it is, as Saint-Denis wrote, 'the very fact of acting': a 'creative experience' which contains the seeds of 'the mental and physical transposition required by style'.¹¹⁷

Style was always central in Saint-Denis' thinking, and classes in style were 'a central point of study and an opportunity for common work in the whole school' because they combined elements from all strands of the training. For example, since movement and language are always culturally determined, their independent study in classes focused on acting technique was related, via the teaching of style, to the study of the cultural backgrounds of different periods and genres. Directing students (on what was known as the Advanced Course) and Design and Production students worked on style in order that they could learn to relate their interpretation and staging of plays to the practice of the acting students. Saint-Denis devised what he called the 'Central Class', to do this, which had three strands.

1. Acting: 'the nature of acting, relationship between human reactions and characters, imaginative acting and technical means to achieve it'
2. Production: 'nature of production, conception, scenery and costumes, how expression is obtained: relationship between reality or character and poetry. Part to be played by music, dance and mime'

3. The relationship of both of these elements to the theatre-building and the play-text, which the document refers to as 'stage architecture and convention: nature of the written play'.¹¹⁸

The purpose of this class was to teach directing students 'how to obtain on the stage a dramatic life of the most human kind, and at the same time, of the most poetical sort', which is the equivalent of Saint-Denis' first goal for the acting students: 'to bring reality to the interpretation of all theatrical styles'.¹¹⁹ For the director's work to be 'human', the actors must 'bring reality' to the play's style rather than lapsing into theatrical cliché. For a production to be 'poetical', the actors must bring style to reality, rather than conceiving of their work simply as the reproduction of everyday reality. The Central Class was therefore the place in which students learned to make style a reality. That reality incorporated all elements of the actor's training, and therefore Saint-Denis' divisions of his training into different strands were always temporary and contingent: ultimately it was the continuity of the training which counted.

That continuity can be seen in the repeated three-part pattern of days from the start of the training to its end. The first part of each day is illustrated in the diagram below (extrapolated from a large chart of the Old Vic Training).¹²⁰ The progression of each day goes from left to right, and the development of the training over time goes from top to bottom.

Gym	Movement	Improvisation
Gym Limbering	Rhythm	Improvised Acting
	Dancing	Masks

Fencing	Animals
Acrobatics	Choral Improvisation
	Style
	Character Improvisation
	Make-Up

The development from purely physical practice in gymnastics classes via rhythmic and expressive forms to improvisation, characterisation and work on style was maintained throughout the training. This sequence of classes was followed by ‘Work on Plays’, and, after a Lecture (usually on either theatre history or its social context), there was a sequence of classes focusing on the function and use of the voice: ‘Speech Technique’, ‘Reading’, ‘Diction’, ‘Voice’, ‘Speech Delivery’, ‘Singing’, ‘Choral Speech’ and ‘Choral Class’. In both the first and last parts of each day, the progression (reminiscent of the LTS) from technical exercises to their creative application is obvious. It also did not go unnoticed by the students. Lee Montague recalls that ‘all the classes we had at the school, and all the teachers, were part of the same thing – cogs in the machine’:

Our voices and bodies had to become instruments, reflections of the roles we were playing. One of the methods was the physical approach, getting rid of our body tensions from head to toes . . . Litz Pisk was the lady in charge of loosening the knots . . . We would start every day with three-quarters of an hour of bar exercises, then go on to do the dance of different periods . . . The movements of history, the movements of emotion; she taught us to express feelings in the way we moved, to make our bodies take a different shape . . . From Litz we dragged our stretched limbs to Suria Magito . . .

who taught improvisation classes, then on to the Hungarian Jani Strasser who taught us voice production.¹²¹

This systematic progression was reinforced by overlaps between exercises used by the staff. Jane Baldwin notes that 'where Strasser utilised physical exercises in conjunction with vocalising to free the voice, Pisk employed vocal exercise in combination with movement'.¹²² Pisk's book *The Actor and his Body* (1975) regularly uses musical terminology to describe movement and contains exercises on, for example, 'Confluence of Movement and Voice'.¹²³

The extension of one discipline into another was a feature of the Old Vic training that Saint-Denis was keen to develop. Notes on the Advanced Course which probably date from 1948 suggest that its 'greatest omission' the previous year had been 'the lack of association with the Acting Students', and that if a third year were added to the course, 'this should include acting training for the Producer'.¹²⁴ The third year was never added, but it is nonetheless striking that rather than accepting the gap between actor and director, Saint-Denis' 'General Plan' of the Advanced Course (1948) tells his Student-Directors that 'all your work revolves round the knowledge and practice of the stage, considered in itself and from the auditorium, and from the inner knowledge of the actor's work'.¹²⁵ This aspect of the Old Vic training was publicly recognised as a unique strength from very early on. Reviewing a 1948 School Show in *New Theatre*, R.D. Smith wrote that *Penthisilea*, which was 'written and devised by James Law Forsyth in collaboration with Suria Magito', was

a breath-taking three-quarters of an hour, in which all the resources of the theatre were used to the full, Music, mime, poetry, movement, lighting, skilfully coordinated left the audience exhausted but exhilarated. Since the show was a school

show it's necessary to emphasise that the total effect was superior to all but the rarest occasions in the normal theatre.¹²⁶

Saint-Denis and his colleagues would have been delighted by the suggestion that they were blurring the distinction between a 'school show' and 'the normal theatre', which had always been central to their plan. To that end, in the early stages of negotiations with the Old Vic, Saint-Denis had written to the Governors to stress his 'intention to add to the school proper, certain advanced groups working on production, decor, stage devices, music and dance, together with a group of dramatists'. He added that 'the backbone of the Experimental Theatre organisation would be formed' by the 'creative and inventive work of these groups', whose members 'should not be considered as students in the school sense of the word'.¹²⁷

But there was a sense in which everyone at the Old Vic Centre was a student of the theatre as a whole, and the image of Saint-Denis' proposed experimental groups as the 'back-bone' of the centre captures its practice much more accurately than either of the analogies of a wedding-cake or a key-stone. It characterizes both the continuity and the centrality of experimentation in Saint-Denis' vision of the organisation. The teaching of students at the School by the Centre Directors, for instance, was not simply a process of handing knowledge down. The Directors clearly used the opportunity to experiment with ideas which they were not normally free to explore. The most striking example is Devine's 'Acrobatic Interlude' called *Quick Change*, performed at the Second School Show (1949). This grew out of a combination of improvisation classes and the necessity to change the set for *Right You Are (If You Think So)* in the first half of a 1949 School Show into that for *Clandestine Marriage* in the second half. Devine devised the piece with Charles Alexis, who taught acrobatics and fencing. The actors Alan Edwards and

Derek Godfrey, who were both in *Quick Change*, went on to join the Young Vic Company in *The Black Arrow*, alongside a number of other graduates of the school, and the adaptation of *The Black Arrow* was done by John Blatchley, one of Saint-Denis' 'monitor'-teachers at the School.

The role of 'monitor' was designed to bridge the gap between the students and professionals, emphasizing the continuous training and experimentation of an artist's career. Newcomers to Saint-Denis' training were to be supported by these 'monitors' – ex-students of the LTS 'in a middle position between the students and the teachers' – and by Pierre Lefèvre, the school's Assistant Director for Acting Courses. Lefèvre's fellow LTS-graduates John Blatchley and Chattie Salaman are listed amongst the Old Vic School Staff in the programme for the First School Show (July 1948), teaching 'Improvisation and Interpretation', and Blatchley would go on to take over as Assistant Director. In 1949, Blatchley was both directing students in *All's Well That Ends Well* and working on his adaptation of *The Black Arrow* for a Young Vic Company which would feature some of that year's graduates. These parallel activities connect the work of a 'monitor' to the role within the organisation of Saint-Denis' 'groups of inventors, who, not being content with waiting for writers and dramatists of genius to spring out of the earth (or from their study desks), would form *cellules de creation en vue de réalisations précises*'.¹²⁸

Thus, Saint-Denis planned that the Experimental Theatre would 'be a source of invention', nurtured by the practice of the Centre as a whole and not merely a seeker-after invention sourced from elsewhere. That notion informed Saint-Denis' thinking for the rest of his career, and he always linked it closely to the practice of improvisation. In *Training for the Theatre*, he proposed an 'Advanced Studio devoted to specialised forms of improvisation', in which 'actors, who have finished the basic . . . training' would be

'joined by especially gifted members of the profession (including dramatists, directors and designers)' to 'become the nucleus of . . . an experimental ensemble' and would also be 'the best school for playwrights in their search for a style'.¹²⁹ The principle underlying this combination of training and experimentation was remembered by Pierre Lefèvre as a process of '*auto-critique*', whereby, for instance, the staff of the School would come together to draw a lesson from the phase of training which had just been completed.¹³⁰ This process enabled the cyclical growth of the organisation and connected its two central activities: training and experimentation at the Old Vic Centre were two sides of the same coin.

This process also suggests the extent to which Saint-Denis' practice, far from being particular to him, was grounded in the principle of ensemble. There is clear evidence that he was significantly dependent on others. He went to Peggy Ashcroft for advice on the teaching of speech, for instance, before deciding on an approach to take at the Old Vic Centre.¹³¹ We also know from an exchange of letters with Gerda Rink (who taught movement at the LTS but not the Old Vic), that she considered her lessons to constitute 'my method'.¹³² Pisk and Suria Magito both brought long experience of dance-based practice to their teaching, and many notes and cuttings in Saint-Denis's archives relating to Style are in fact Magito's,¹³³ whom George Hall credited as an extremely capable director, held back by Saint-Denis and Devine.¹³⁴ Recalling Saint-Denis' first years in England, Vera Poliakoff even claimed that she researched and wrote Saint-Denis' first lectures for him.¹³⁵ It is notable that all of these unrecognised or over-written influences were women: Vera Poliakoff remembered 'the visionary but paternalistic methods of Michel'.¹³⁶

Saint-Denis had written that the LTS Company would be 'led by a few well-known actors', but with 'the best products of the school' as its 'core'. He had a similar plan in mind for the 'Advanced Studio' groups at the Old Vic Centre. This begs the question of how, in practice, he could hope to attract and retain both of these constituents simultaneously. If the company was to be continually engaging stars, the other actors at its 'core' would become second-class citizens. In that case, a fairly quick turnover of company members would be all-but-inevitable, inhibiting its development. The contradiction of an ensemble which is also hierarchically organised highlights another paradox built into both the LTS and the Old Vic Centre. In what was ostensibly a description of an ensemble company, Saint-Denis used the word 'us' to refer to the directors not the performers. Such divisions, as had been shown by Copeau and *Les Quinze*, have a habit of opening up over time.

This hierarchical organisation seems to have become a little more fluid by the time the Old Vic School and Young Vic were running, with a high proportion of later Young Vic companies made up by graduates of the school.¹³⁷ But the division between directors and actors remained. The designer Riette Sturge Moore also recalled that Saint-Denis 'could be terrifying in his assessment of students' work',¹³⁸ and according to Michael Salaman, whose three sisters all worked with Saint-Denis, he was

a very intelligent, charming and dedicated person, but also . . . a very egocentric and pretty overbearing one – full of his own ideas but not particularly interested in those of others; certainly very intolerant of anything which he suspected of being insincere or vulgar. I know he could be cruelly ruthless, even to the point of discarding loyal friends if by chance they happened to be impeding his immediate objective.¹³⁹

David Garnett, who was married to Angelica Bell, a student at the LTS, described ‘a peasant or a workman, he had that calm strength and self-assurance – and a total absence of fuss and of desire to be clever, or admire cleverness’. Garnett ventures that it was this quality in Saint-Denis that brought him to England and away from Paris, where they tend to ‘explain the concrete by the abstract. We, like the peasant and craftsman, when faced with the abstract find our explanation in the concrete’.¹⁴⁰ These paradoxical characterisations of Saint-Denis combine in a description of him by the designer Abd’El Kader Farrah, with whom he collaborated at the *Centre Dramatique de l’Est* in Strasbourg and at the Royal Shakespeare Company. He was, according to Farrah, ‘an extraordinary mixture’, a ‘chairman type’ with a sharp eye for detail (he could always ‘put his finger on the weak point’) and also a man drawn to ‘the roots of life: wine, women, trees, cheese’.¹⁴¹

The blend of superiority and camaraderie Farrah found in his colleague was also a feature of the Old Vic School training. It is caught in an anecdote from Joan Plowright, about her emergence from what was known as ‘the tunnel’, a stage in the training in which nothing seemed to go well and out of which the student felt they would never escape. Plowright emerged from this phase with her performance of the Courtesan in Devine’s production of *The Comedy of Errors* (1951) and encountered a mixture of camaraderie and paternalist condescension:

As I came off stage after the performance I met Michel Saint-Denis and George . . . Michel said, ‘You are now out of the tunnel. Do you know what you did? Can you remember how you did it? Can you do it again?’ This nearly sent me back in again. George slapped me on the bottom and roared, ‘There you are, you see!’ and strolled on, smoking his pipe.¹⁴²

Plowright's artistry and the speed of her rise from recent graduate to leading actress were certainly suggestive of the rigour of her training, and many of her fellow students, like her, would go on to play leading roles at the Old Vic, Stratford, the Royal Court, in the regions, and in the mass media.¹⁴³

However, by the time Plowright's success was apparently endorsing its great promise, the Old Vic School had been closed. The Centre was wound up in 1951 at the same time that she was emerging from 'the tunnel'. Saint-Denis left England in 1952, when the last class of students graduated from the School. Section 2.3 will address the reasons for that swift collapse and chart the legacy of the artistic technique that Saint-Denis and his colleagues developed during this period.

¹ *Julliard News Bulletin* Vol. X, No. 2, 1971-2, p. 5 (BL Add MS 81103)

² There are photographs of the end-of-term showings in Beak Street (March 1936) and at the Old Vic (July 1936) in BL Add MS 81251.

³ 'The beginning of the suburbs' and 'an audience who were up-to-speed with the avant-garde'; these quotations are taken from Jean-Baptiste Gournel's interview with Lefèvre.

⁴ The observation of the importance of the size of the LTS stage for transferring its productions was made in the *News Chronicle* of 21 April 1936 (see Baldwin, 2003, p. 65).

⁵ Wardle, 1978, p. 55

⁶ Estimates can be found in Benedetti, 1988, p. 211, Gauss, 1999, p. 39, and Black, 1984, p. 15.

⁷ See Black, 1984, p. 16; this quotation, from Leopold Sulerzhitsky, is taken from Pavel Markov's *Pervaiia studiia MXT (First Studio of the Moscow Art Theatre)*, which was translated in 1934 by Mark Schmidt for the use of the Group Theatre. A typescript of this translation is held in the Lincoln Center Library for the Performing Arts.

⁸ Stanislavski, 2008, p. 306

⁹ Saint-Denis & Baldwin, 2009, p. 47

¹⁰ Saint-Denis, 1982, p. 109

¹¹ Letter dated 8 October, 1976 (BL Add MS 81105)

¹² McCall, 1978, p. 79

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 79-80

¹⁴ Saint-Denis, 1982, p. 46

¹⁵ Saint-Denis, 1982, p. 46

¹⁶ McCall, 1978, p. 85

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 86

¹⁸ McCall, 1978, p. 86 and Saint-Denis, 1982, p. 104

¹⁹ Saint-Denis, 1982, p. 46

²⁰ Ustinov, 1998, p. 101

²¹ Saint-Denis, 1982, p. 48

²² A photograph shows her in a *Nō* mask, performing alongside two students (BL Add MS 81254).

²³ McCall, 1978, p. 86

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- ²⁴ Ibid., p. 84
- ²⁵ Ibid., p. 83
- ²⁶ Saint-Denis, 1982, p. 104
- ²⁷ McCall, 1978, p. 84, this process is also reminiscent of Chekhov's Imaginary Body exercise.
- ²⁸ See McCall, 1978, p. 82, Mitchell, 1957, p. 8, and Ustinov, 1998, pp. 100-101.
- ²⁹ Saint-Denis, 1982, p. 162
- ³⁰ McCall, 1978, p. 81
- ³¹ Ibid., p. 83
- ³² Ustinov, 1998, p. 101
- ³³ Saint-Denis, 1982, p. 159
- ³⁴ McCall, 1978, p. 89
- ³⁵ Ustinov, 1998, p. 114
- ³⁶ Baldwin, 2003, p. 76
- ³⁷ Ustinov, 1998, p. 106
- ³⁸ McCall, 1978, p. 81
- ³⁹ Saint-Denis, 1982, p. 47
- ⁴⁰ See Section 2.1, fig. 11.
- ⁴¹ Saint-Denis, autumn 1961, p. 34; he reiterated this rationale in the opening of the section on the LTS in Saint-Denis, 1982, p. 45.
- ⁴² It should be noted that, had Saint-Denis not been willing to compromise, he might have had the failure without the partial successes, but it is equally true that his strategy almost guaranteed a degree of failure, since the principles governing the commercial theatre were incompatible with the ideology of a permanent ensemble.
- ⁴³ Eyre, 2009, p. 7
- ⁴⁴ Billington, 1988, p. 77
- ⁴⁵ Gielgud, 1979, p. 109
- ⁴⁶ Williamson, 1951, p. 57; Gielgud did need to add to his company for *The Three Sisters*: the American actress Carol Goodner was brought in to play Masha and Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies to play Olga. Both, however, knew Gielgud and others in the company well.
- ⁴⁷ Saint-Denis, autumn 1961, p. 38
- ⁴⁸ Williamson, 1951, p. 58
- ⁴⁹ Billington, 1988, p. 93
- ⁵⁰ Gielgud, 1963, p. 91
- ⁵¹ *The Observer*, 30 January 1938
- ⁵² Williamson, 1951, pp. 59-60
- ⁵³ MacCarthy, 1954, p. 23; the quoted article was first published in 1930.
- ⁵⁴ Strachan, 2004, p. 137
- ⁵⁵ Saint-Denis, autumn 1961, pp. 38-39
- ⁵⁶ Gielgud, 1937
- ⁵⁷ Billington, 1988, p. 19
- ⁵⁸ Redgrave, 1983, p. 128
- ⁵⁹ Saint-Denis, autumn 1961, p. 39
- ⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 37
- ⁶¹ BL Add MS 81251
- ⁶² Saint-Denis, autumn 1961, p. 39
- ⁶³ Ibid., p. 36
- ⁶⁴ That said, Audrey Williamson described 'the best *Macbeth* before the war – though it was by no means perfect'. She acknowledged 'defects of intellectual subtlety and range' as well as Olivier's vocal shortcomings, but praises 'the spirit of darkling imagination . . . in Michel St. Denis' blood-boltered production' which 'crashed onwards to the final wolfishness with a tingling virility' (Williamson, 1951, p. 271).
- ⁶⁵ Olivier, 1986, p. 72
- ⁶⁶ Redgrave, 1983, p. 113

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- ⁶⁷ See Saint-Denis, autumn 1961, pp. 36-37
- ⁶⁸ Mullin, 1996, p. 65; the Olivier/Byam Shaw *Macbeth* was at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre in Stratford in 1955.
- ⁶⁹ See Gielgud, 1974, p. 150
- ⁷⁰ Gielgud, 1979, p. 104
- ⁷¹ Saint-Denis & Baldwin, 2009, p. 192
- ⁷² Keown, 1955, p. 60
- ⁷³ Christopher Hassall remembers *My Life in Art* 'ruling the roost' on the actor's bookshelves (Hassall, 1948, p. 16).
- ⁷⁴ In the week ending 10 December 1938, Ashcroft and Redgrave earned £30 for playing Viola and Andrew Aguecheek, while Salaman and Lefèvre took home £4, and walk-ons were paid £3 (BL Add MS, 81141).
- ⁷⁵ See Billington, 1988, p. 102
- ⁷⁶ Wardle, 1978, p. 81
- ⁷⁷ Letter dated 5 September 1939 (Mangan, 2004, p. 57)
- ⁷⁸ See Wardle, 1978, pp. 82-83
- ⁷⁹ Haggard, 1969, p. 45
- ⁸⁰ Hassall, 1948, p. 147
- ⁸¹ Williamson, 1948, p. 148
- ⁸² She, Renée Ascherson and Oriel Ross played the goddesses Iris, Ceres and Juno in the play's masque.
- ⁸³ James Donald was a Scottish actor, now best known for his performances in *Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957) and *The Great Escape* (1963).
- ⁸⁴ Croall, 2000, p. 287
- ⁸⁵ 'The Old Vic Theatre Centre', Theatre Newsletter No. 20, 19 April 1947
- ⁸⁶ BL Add MS 81173
- ⁸⁷ 19 May 1946 (BL Add MS 81173)
- ⁸⁸ The school relocated from Kensington to Archway in the 1990s and is now part of the Central Saint Martin's College of Art and Design.
- ⁸⁹ See Baldwin, 2003, p. 124
- ⁹⁰ The idea of experimental productions on a Sunday was not pursued at the Old Vic Centre, but it was eventually taken up at the Royal Court under Devine.
- ⁹¹ Memo No. 3, 'The Development of the Plan', 20 April 1947 (Arts Council File, ACGB/34/76)
- ⁹² Ibid.
- ⁹³ Letter to Governors, 18 April 1946, Aix-en-Provence (ACGB/34/76)
- ⁹⁴ Wardle, 1978, p. 121
- ⁹⁵ 'The Old Vic Theatre Centre', Theatre Newsletter No. 20, 19 April 1947
- ⁹⁶ Old Vic Memo No. 1, 'The Plan', 18 May 1946 (ACGB/34/76)
- ⁹⁷ ACGB/34/76
- ⁹⁸ Programme for *Start it Yourself* (ACGB/34/76)
- ⁹⁹ These figures were agreed at an Old Vic Sub-Committee Meeting on 25 June 1946 and communicated to the Arts Council in a 'Memorandum from the Governors of the Royal Victoria Hall to the Arts Council of Great Britain on the Subject of Old Vic Expansion', on 3 July 1946 (BL Add MS 81173).
- ¹⁰⁰ The source for the figure of 400 applicants is a document titled 'Annual Reports for Season 1946-1947 of The Old Vic and Sadlers Wells with Balance Sheets and Accounts for the Year Ending 30th June 1947' (BL Add MS 81173).
- ¹⁰¹ This became the home of the Royal Ballet School and is now the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art.
- ¹⁰² The 'Annual Reports for Season 1946-1947 of the Old Vic and Sadlers Wells' (BL Add MS 81173) give a figure of over 400 applicants (p. 7).
- ¹⁰³ Baldwin, 2003, p. 125
- ¹⁰⁴ Saint-Denis, 1982, p. 52

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- ¹⁰⁵ Plowright, 2001, p. 15
- ¹⁰⁶ Acting Course Outline, 1947 (BL Add MS 81176)
- ¹⁰⁷ BL Add MS 81173
- ¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*
- ¹¹⁰ Saint-Denis & Saint-Denis, 1982, p. 124
- ¹¹¹ The exercises are reproduced in Baldwin, 2003, pp. 199-200.
- ¹¹² Susi, 2010, p. 31
- ¹¹³ BL Add MS 81173
- ¹¹⁴ Saint-Denis & Baldwin, 2009, p. 111
- ¹¹⁵ 'Draft for Consideration by Friday 16th August [1946]' of 'The Old Vic Theatre Centre' (BL Add MS 81173)
- ¹¹⁶ Saint-Denis & Baldwin, 2009, pp. 89-90
- ¹¹⁷ Saint-Denis & Baldwin, 2009, p. 91
- ¹¹⁸ BL Add MS 81180
- ¹¹⁹ Saint-Denis & Baldwin, 2009, p. 88
- ¹²⁰ The chart is in BL Add MS 81179.
- ¹²¹ McCall, 1978, pp. 146-147
- ¹²² Hodge, 2010, p. 89
- ¹²³ Pisk, 1998, p. 91
- ¹²⁴ BL Add MS 81180; the notes refer to work done on *The Bronze Horse* by James Forsyth, which Saint-Denis directed for radio in 1947.
- ¹²⁵ BL Add MS 81180
- ¹²⁶ R.D. Smith, 'New Life at the Old Vic', *New Theatre*, July 1948, Vol. 5, No. 1 (BL Add MS 81176)
- ¹²⁷ Letter from Saint-Denis to Old Vic Governors, Aix-en-Provence 18 April 1946 (copy in ACGB/34/76)
- ¹²⁸ 'Creative groups for specific achievements'; quoted from the minutes of a planning meeting dated 20 April 1946 (BL Add MS 81173).
- ¹²⁹ Saint-Denis, 1982, p. 168
- ¹³⁰ Interview with Jean-Baptiste Gournel
- ¹³¹ There was a meeting with Ashcroft to discuss the teaching of voice and speech at the Old Vic School on speech 9 December 1946 (BL Add MS, 81173).
- ¹³² Rink went on teach at the Central School of speech and Drama, along with Oliver Reynolds, who was also on the staff of the LTS but not the Old Vic School; this quotation is from a letter dated 28 September 1946 (BL Add MS 81176).
- ¹³³ The notes are in her hand-writing (BL Add MS 81181).
- ¹³⁴ See Susi, 2010, p. 40
- ¹³⁵ BL Add MS 81105
- ¹³⁶ The notes record that the conversation took place at 77 Hamilton Terrace in St John's Wood, where Poliakov, who was by then known as Vera Lindsay, was living in 1977 (BL Add MS 81105).
- ¹³⁷ The 1948-1949 season of *As You Like It* and Suria Magito's adaptation of *The Snow Queen* was the first to feature graduates of the school (Wardle, 1978, p. 126). Numbers of graduates in the Young Vic companies grew, and in the 1950-1951 company for *Black Arrow* and *The Merchant of Venice* (Denis Quilley, Mervyn Blake, Tarn Bassett, John Garley, Alan Edwards, June Brown, Derek Godfrey, Phillip Guard, Laughlan McLean, Charmian Eyre, Jill Showell, Keith Michell, Shaun O'Riordan, Christopher Page, Peter Retej, Duncan Ross, John Southworth and Powys Thomas) two thirds were graduates of the school (Quilley, Blake, Garley, Guard, Eyre and Page were not).
- ¹³⁸ Letter to Suria Saint-Denis (BL Add MS 81105); Riette Sturge Moore was the daughter of the poet Thomas Sturge Moore and therefore associated, as were a number of Saint-Denis' early contacts in England, with the Bloomsbury Group. The young Peter Gill once stayed the night in her house, and he describes her and the world of which she was typical in Gill, 2008, pp. 25-27.
- ¹³⁹ This letter, dated 9 June 1976, was written to Susan Salaman, who forwarded it either to Aldo Scott or Suria Magito Saint-Denis, apparently without malicious intent: her brain-damage would

have limited her ability to appreciate the consequences of forwarding the letter. Mme. Saint-Denis must have protested and requested some clarification from Salaman as there is another letter from him to her in the file, dated 3 September 1976, giving some context and justifications for his opinion (both are held in BL Add MS 81105). This was one of the incidents which led to the abandoning of Scott's biography.

¹⁴⁰ Undated notes (BL Add MS, 81105).

¹⁴¹ Quoted in O'Connor, 1997, p. 65

¹⁴² Quoted in Wardle, 1978, p. 110

¹⁴³ See Williamson, 1957, pp. 72-76 for a survey of the work of then-notable graduates of the Old Vic School and Young Vic Company.

2.3 Legacy: The Closure of the Old Vic Theatre Centre and

Saint-Denis' Artistic Influence

In each production one was aware, not only of physical and vocal flexibility and a firm foundation of craftsmanship but of well-exercised imagination. It was clear that the students had been gaining a true insight into styles and that in the common building of moods, they had found out the complete interdependence of individual interpretations . . . sorrow at the loss will be felt in many parts of the world – perhaps not unmingled with astonishment that it [the closure of the Old Vic School] should have been allowed to occur.

The Times on the final Old Vic School Show (1952) ¹

The Closure of the Old Vic Theatre Centre

The Old Vic Centre is a significant aspect of Saint-Denis' legacy both as a consequence of its artistic and educational successes and of its failure to sustain itself. Although the *Centre Dramatique de l'Est* in Strasbourg (which Saint-Denis ran between 1952 and 1957) succeeded in operating along similar lines as those planned for the Old Vic, it did so with necessarily more modest ambitions and limited means and it was unique in its success with this model.² The other institutions founded or heavily influenced by Saint-Denis – The National Theatre School of Canada (founded in 1960) and The Julliard Drama Division (1968) – were both stand-alone schools, and the RSC Studio only worked with the current company, never taking advantage of the right granted in the RSC's charter to run a school.³ The assumption, revealed by this pattern, of the separation of training and professional practice was an underlying cause of the disintegration of the Old Vic Theatre Centre, and can be traced back to 1947, when the Old Vic School moved into the theatre's building.

The gaps between training, experimentation and production in the Old Vic Centre should have begun to be bridged by the redevelopment of the Old Vic auditorium to create Saint-Denis' Experimental Theatre. But plans were slowed as 'the seriousness of the financial situation' faced by the Old Vic became clear during the 1947-48 season,⁴ which would lose £9,000 in the absence of Olivier and Richardson (Olivier was on a tour of Australia and New Zealand, and Richardson was in Hollywood).⁵ The loss must have been particularly painful given the justification of the expense of creating the Old Vic Centre just a year earlier on the grounds that 'the Theatre Company now needs no support itself and can contribute considerably to its own expansion'.⁶ However, inadequate finance alone was not a satisfactory explanation of the failure of Saint-Denis' project.

By early 1948, the idea of the Experimental Theatre was already fading. On 3 April, a 'Memorandum on Building Requirements for the Old Vic' acknowledged the Governors' feeling 'that the time has come when the building should revert to its original purpose of presenting regular seasons of classical and new plays of outstanding interest, at cheap prices'.⁷ In other words, the way was already being paved for the Theatre Company to move back to the Old Vic, saving the expense of renting a West End Theatre and leaving Saint-Denis without his Experimental Theatre. The speed of this move against the core of Saint-Denis' Centre undermines the Associate Drama Director of the Arts Council's later description of the Centre as 'a three-tier plan . . . from which the top tier had been removed by force of circumstances'.⁸ Saint-Denis seems to have sensed this withdrawal of support ahead of time. He wrote to Lord Lytton as Chair of the Governors as early as April 1947 that, since his plan was 'a long-term effort', the support given to it 'at the beginning should be continued so that it may develop and blossom in

the future'.⁹ In fact, there is no compelling evidence that the initial support for the Centre amounted to the commitment of either the Governors or the Arts Council to Saint-Denis' plan in its entirety, and since entirety was the plan's defining feature, this amounts to a lack of support for Saint-Denis.

The most concrete example of incomplete support for Saint-Denis' plan was the building itself. The theatre's reconstruction was already being planned in 1943,¹⁰ but three years later, the project was envisioned by Saint-Denis much more extensively. Early memoranda on the Old Vic Centre referred to 'a search for the premises' of the Experimental Theatre, which 'will be designed with an adaptable stage', hinting at a new building altogether, or at least suggesting 'an architectural experiment' going further than the reconstruction of the damaged auditorium.¹¹ The Observer of 14 April 1946 announced a 'New Vic' as part of the Centre, 'a laboratory for the Old Vic, an Experimental Theatre where new forms of stage writing and presentation may be tested', which sounds like a new theatre.

A subsequent Press Release dated 7 September 1946 sounded a more cautious note, referring to 'the re-construction of the interior of the OLD VIC building', including 'a stage and auditorium, related to each other in a way which will enable a play of any period to be presented in its appropriate theatrical and architectural convention'.¹² Saint-Denis continued to promote this vision for 'a modified stage architecture', in order to 'speed . . . the birth' of 'the new convention towards which contemporary dramatic art is turning and groping its way amidst the social upheavals of these stirring times'.¹³ Diplomatically, he added that this new architecture would also offer a way of 'improving ways of producing old masterpieces'. But even this scaled-down vision of Saint-Denis' plans was ambitious compared to the reality.

The Theatres Trust database record for the Old Vic describes the 1950 alterations to the theatre as 'proscenium remodelled',¹⁴ because the rest of the theatre was simply restored. The project records illustrate the deep division of the Old Vic organisation at that time: the reconstruction of the *auditorium* was the business of the Old Vic Theatre Company, and was managed by Joseph Rowntree. Photographs of the work underway stress the careful repair of plaster mouldings, speaking unmistakably of the Governors' conservative ideals. By contrast, the adaptation of the stage under the leadership of the French architect Pierre Sonrel was guided by the Centre Directors, and the result resembles the simple, functional modernity of Copeau's *Vieux-Colombier* stage and Marcel Breuer's London Theatre Studio.

Sonrel's design required the boxes to the sides of the proscenium arch (which had, in fact, only been added in 1926) to be removed, so that the stage could be extended forwards without overlapping the audience. Before and after photos in the *Architects Journal* showed that the dominant difference was the forestage, which extended fourteen feet from the front of the proscenium arch stage. The photographs show the dramatic difference in height between the forestage and main stage, which was eighteen inches higher, with a 'stage lift . . . installed between the main stage and the forestage' which 'can be set at main stage level, forestage level, or intermediately'.¹⁵

This article recorded the difficulty of 'the designing of forestage flanks' so that they 'would appear to be part of the scenery when the forestage was in use and yet form part of the auditorium when realistic plays were being given on the main picture-frame stage'. It noted that this 'problem was solved largely by the skilful use of lighting', concealed in 'entrances and louvers at the side of the forestage . . . and in the ceiling to the front arch above the forestage'. It also noted that 'it has been necessary to raise the

levels of the auditorium floor to provide a good view of the forestage from all parts of the ground floor'. These points undermine the notion that, as the article put it, 'the new stage is designed to provide a greater link between audience and actors'. The forestage did project into the audience, but not enough to create the kind of dynamic space for which Saint-Denis had argued. The stage did resemble that of the *Vieux-Colombier* – recalling its forestage, arrangement of entrances and bare walls which meant that a set was not needed for every performance – but its genesis could not have been more different. Saint-Denis recalled that Copeau's stage was 'evolved . . . over a period of time, as the result of many experiments' conducted by Copeau and Louis Jouvet, with the permanent stage adapted according to their findings.¹⁶ The Old Vic's reconstruction, with stage and auditorium awkwardly accommodating each other, was a compromise between conflicting agendas.

Major conflicts in the Old Vic organisation began at the same time as the demise of the Experimental Theatre. In early 1948, the Old Vic's Governors led by the new Chair, Lord Esher, decided to oust the Theatre Company's Directors.¹⁷ Esher took advantage of Richardson and Olivier's absence and, on 9 July 1948, a 'Private and Confidential Memorandum on Future Administration' was sent to the Directors, announcing that their contracts (which ran until 1949) would not be renewed. Richardson and Olivier returned in the autumn to a worsening financial situation. A report on the Old Vic's financial position in November predicted that by 30 June 1949 its working capital would have plummeted from £21,700 two years earlier to £2,730, and that they should make allowance for the loss of a further £2,000, potentially leaving just £730 in the bank, with no provision for rebuilding and refurbishing the Theatre.¹⁸ On 4 November the Governors cancelled a North American tour. In early December, all of the Directors were

summoned in front of the Governors for a dressing-down. An enraged Saint-Denis reportedly said upon leaving that ‘They treated us like schoolboys – telling us we spent a lot of money and had not quite got all of it back!’¹⁹ At the same time, Llewellyn Rees (who had been Drama Director of the Arts Council), was appointed Administrator of the Old Vic, and in 1949, Hugh Hunt took over as the Theatre Company’s Director.²⁰ Hunt had been a near-contemporary of Devine’s at Oxford but had taken a different path, producing in the repertory system and gaining a reputation for running a tight ship. He was keen to move the Old Vic Company back to the Old Vic Theatre, remarking to Charles Landstone (Rees’ successor as Drama Director of the Arts Council) in the spring of 1949 that the claim of the Centre Directors to the Theatre was ‘Llewellyn’s worry. He will have to solve that one’.²¹

The solution did not come immediately. The Centre’s funding remained fixed at £9,500 (just covering the costs of the School and the Young Vic), and the decision was taken in June 1949 to find a permanent West End home for the Company, leaving the Centre nominally in control of the Old Vic Theatre. It could be redeveloped thanks to a grant of £50,000 from the Arts Council to enable the Old Vic’s participation in the planned Festival of Britain in 1951. But at the end of July 1949 the Treasury announced that the Arts Council’s promised grant could not be fulfilled.²² This further problem provided Hunt and Rees’ solution to the stalemate over the ownership of the Theatre. The building would have to be shared – they could not afford anything else – and the lion’s share of its reconstruction would have to be paid for by a bank overdraft.²³ It appears that the Centre Directors agreed to this in order to pursue a modified version of their plan to remodel the theatre into stage and auditorium suitable for the Experimental Theatre.²⁴ Nonetheless, as Jane Baldwin notes, in November 1949 Devine

voiced the obvious concern that the presence of the Theatre Company at the Old Vic could 'render the Centre Directors redundant before they had a chance to show their full worth'.²⁵ With these concerns unresolved, in December 1949 the School was moved to the vacated premises of Dulwich High School for Girls.

The Old Vic re-opened on 14 November 1950 with Hunt's production of *Twelfth Night*, and only two or three weeks later he was telling the other Directors 'that he was to be appointed senior director over the other three'.²⁶ Early the following year, Llewellyn Rees pressed a financial case for promoting Hunt, reporting to Lord Esher that he had spoken to Ernest Pooley (Chair of the Arts Council), 'who intimated that the Vic's grant from the Arts Council would not only revert from this year's £44,500 to the previous scale of £27,500, but that an additional cut of £1000 would probably be necessary'. By reducing Saint-Denis' salary (£1830.16.8) to a new salary as Head of the School (£1050.16.8), and by losing the other two Centre Directors (saving £3141.13.4) plus one secretary (£372.9.0) and associated administration and travel costs, even allowing for the engagement of an additional producer for the School, he told Esher that 'we may reasonably estimate the total saving at £3500 . . . a considerable item when we are being cut to the bone'.²⁷

Any doubts that Rees' proposal was motivated in part by antagonism towards the Centre Directors are undermined by a letter of a fortnight later, which claimed that 'I am continually hearing that the three ex-Centrics accuse me of being uncooperative' and described 'the growing antagonism of the staff they themselves selected and trained . . . they are quite incapable of running an organisation such as ours'.²⁸ I can find no corroborating evidence for Rees' assertions or for his claim that he had

realised what I partly suspected, that [the Centre Directors] are more concerned to use the Old Vic for their purposes than to be used by it. I am also driven to the conclusion that unless the policy of the school is radically altered we are accepting a grave responsibility both to the students and to the Theatre, which I myself would not care to shoulder. I am nonetheless convinced that our organisation is not complete without a school.²⁹

On 2 April 1951, the Governors proposed a solution: Glen Byam Shaw would be made Director of the Theatre Company at the end of Hugh Hunt's contract; Devine would continue to head the Young Vic and Saint-Denis would run the School. But the following day, Hunt wrote to Esher to register that he was 'very perturbed' by this proposal. He also stated that

ever since I have served the Old Vic my objective has been the ultimate merging of the Old Vic into the National Theatre, which in my view should be a popular theatre, a view which is not at present shared by the three directors into whose hands it is proposed to hand over the theatre when I leave.³⁰

On 12 April, an addendum was added to the Governors' proposal stating that Hunt's contract would run until June 1953. But Byam Shaw was not prepared to break solidarity with his fellow Centre Directors and refused to accept the demotion of Saint-Denis. Devine wrote to Lord Esher that the Old Vic had been overtaken by 'an atmosphere of petty squabbling and jockeying for position' and that since the Governors seemed to have only 'a sort of half conviction' in the Centre, he and his colleagues would 'resign if these matters cannot be resolved'.³¹ Their resignations were accepted by Esher in a letter of 7 May, and reported in the morning papers of 10 May.

On 19 May, many papers carried statements from the Centre Directors citing the interference of the administrator and 'a negative attitude and absence of a disposition to plan and work resolutely for the artistic entity which we had undertaken to create with the approval of the governors'. They also claimed that 'here is no case of impractical artists being at odds with financial realists', citing evidence of the profitability to-date of the 1950-51 season and the success of the Young Vic which, 'with no famous names and playing at half-price for children, took as much money in its one full week at the Old Vic as the senior company itself had made during the previous week'.³² This campaigning tone was amplified by what Irving Wardle described as an 'onslaught' of letters and public statements written in support of the Centre Directors.³³ As a result, Llewellyn Rees' resignation was requested and Hunt and the General Manager Stephen Arlen approached Tyrone Guthrie to become Artistic Director, with Hunt as Administrative Director. Guthrie agreed, and Byam Shaw recalled that he then took the Centre Directors out to lunch to tell them that the Young Vic would be scrapped because 'it's not worth the money being spent on it,' although he was embarrassed to have to admit to them that he had never seen any of its work.³⁴

The school remained open to honour its commitment to its students and the Centre Directors agreed to stay on for three terms while attempting to secure funding or other partnership-arrangements to ensure the continued life of the school, including a proposal to join Anthony Quayle's Shakespeare Memorial Theatre in Stratford, but without success. The future of the School hung in the balance until the Governors' decision to sell its premises. Devine wrote to George Chamberlain that since 'the Governors wish to sell the school premises, it makes it impossible for us to contemplate raising the necessary sum, as well as the £4,000 which would be the minimum required

for the annual running of the school'.³⁵ He also cited the appointment of Guthrie as Director as a reason for not continuing and recorded that he and his colleagues were 'deeply grieved that our misgivings have been proved to be right, and that, in one year, our whole principle of the organised development of young talent, at different levels, has been destroyed'.³⁶ On 19 May 1952 a press statement announced that the Old Vic School 'will have to be closed' and deployed the now-familiar motif of 'financial crisis'. At this time, members of the School's staff were also informed of its closure.³⁷

On 27 June 1952, the day after the school's closure, Esher wrote to Devine about 'a letter from Mr. Saint-Denis which indicates that my last attempt to save the Old Vic School has failed' and said it was 'hard to believe that you will not consider the long-term life of the institution you and your colleagues have created worth some temporary tribulation'.³⁸ Devine can only have been enraged by this letter as the addition of insult to injury, but he may subsequently have reflected on a revealing ambiguity contained in it. What exactly was the 'institution' created by Saint-Denis and his colleagues? Esher evidently means the School, but Saint-Denis did not set out to create a School, but 'an organisation for training, research and development'.³⁹ This institution never truly opened. Its failure to do so represents the failure of the vision of experimental practice articulated by Barker and Copeau to adapt itself to, and be accommodated by, the theatre culture of pre- and post-war England.

The question, then, is why did it fail? Since it was an attempt to create harmony, the answer must be that it was divided. But it is not simply a case of division between the Centre and the Theatre Company under Rees and Hunt. There were other significant divisions: between English culture and a French director, and between the priorities of theatre-artists and those of theatre-managers. Saint-Denis found himself to some extent

on both sides of all of these rifts. He was a foreigner in the English theatre, but also one of its central figures; he directed commercial productions but also ran organisations which were entirely dependent upon subsidy and he was an artist who began his career as an administrator and continued to undertake managerial responsibilities throughout his career. His position at the centre of the story of the Old Vic Centre therefore offers a test-case to examine the ways in which the post-war British theatre negotiated between the competing agendas of its national and international identities and the imperatives of both financial and artistic growth and sustainability.

A brief anecdote provides useful context to the international dimension. When the Old Vic's Chairman Lord Esher interviewed Kenneth Rae for the role of Secretary of the British Centre of the International Theatre Institute, he reportedly asked him if he spoke French. Hearing that he did, Esher asked if Rae would 'describe it as that public-school French, which instantly stamps you to everyone as an Englishman? Or is that very fluent French which at once makes you suspect to every Englishman?'⁴⁰ To be European was to be suspected, and according to John Elsom and Nicholas Tomalin, Esher 'could not understand St Denis' broken English, and dismissed him accordingly as a foreigner, whose proper place was somewhere else'.⁴¹ It is impossible to tell exactly how significant a role this xenophobia played in the downfall of the Old Vic Centre, but it does shed interesting light on criticisms which were levelled at the Old Vic School's training.

T.C. Worsley, for instance, questioned Saint-Denis' mime and movement-based methodology in a 1951 article 'The New Old Vic':

the Latins are by nature a physically voluble and expressive people . . . For them, mime is only the shortest of steps from their everyday behaviour. But for the withheld, inhibited, mooning English, it is quite another matter, and I feel it is a very dubious proposition that mime should be the basis of our acting as it was under Copeau in the Compagnie des Quinze.⁴²

Worsley's analysis of the Old Vic's work in support of this stance was ironically awry. He attacked, for instance, the 'semi-balletic crowd-work' of Hugh Hunt's *Twelfth Night*. Hunt had no professional training and no affiliation with Saint-Denis (far from it), and his production featured no actors trained by Saint-Denis and only one who was associated with him: Peggy Ashcroft (who played Viola). Worsley contrasted *Twelfth Night* to George Devine's 'splendid production' of *Bartholomew Fair*, which succeeds, he says, in 'clearly marking the pattern that might so easily get lost in the confusion, and bringing the crowd bustle and hubbub of the fair vividly alive'.

These aspects of Devine's production, singled out for praise by Worsley, were both explicit concerns of the 'Advanced Course' at the Old Vic School. A list of questions for 'Producers 2nd Interviews' in Saint-Denis' archive, asks applicants to identify the 'dramatic climaxes' of a text and key aspects of its setting: 'time of year', characters, relationships and so on.⁴³ These are also aspects of play-writing and direction which were stressed by Saint-Denis in the introduction to Obey's *Noah*: 'the pattern of the action on the stage, its rhythm, the sequence of events form a tangible structure in [the writer's] mind' and therefore 'the dramatic action must get back its rhythm, its musical and choreographic quality': just those qualities Worsley had admired in 'the pattern' of Devine's *Bartholomew Fair*.⁴⁴ It's also possible that Devine managed to capture the 'bustle and hubbub of the fair' so successfully because, in March 1937, he had directed a

performance entitled *The Fair* at the LTS. He may well also have drawn material from the field-trips he made with students to Docklands pubs and dog tracks which formed the basis of short devised dramas at the Old Vic School.⁴⁵ Xenophobic assumptions about the 'Latin' Saint-Denis often clouded the judgement of those who criticised his work.

But that alone does not explain the unease caused by the Centre's project, which quickly grew into hostility. The presentation of the Theatre Centre as a junior partner of the Theatre Company drew upon a widely-held assumption about its relative value. At the presentation of the Old Vic plan to the Arts Council on 22 May 1946, Sir Lewis Casson, attending on behalf of the Arts Council, 'considered the plan of great interest' but was

nervous of embarking on such an ambitious and costly enterprise at a time like this when the future of the theatre was so hazardous. He felt anxious about a possible future slump, which would put the Theatre Company itself in jeopardy, and, in this case, if the Old Vic had heavy financial commitments in its sideline activities, the Theatre Company might suffer, which would be a bad thing.⁴⁶

Devine and Saint-Denis were wary of being 'side-lined' by the Theatre Company and anxious to establish their independence from it. Saint-Denis stressed the need for 'complete control on all artistic matters, including . . . training', though he was also 'quite ready to collaborate fully with the theatre co[mpan]y'.⁴⁷ That was revealed, inevitably, to be a desire for the impossible, since the Centre directors depended upon a company from whom they needed to establish their independence.

They needed to do so for both practical and ideological reasons. The practical argument was put by George Devine, who was concerned that a financial shadow could be cast across the Centre by the Theatre Company's 'gross extravagance', which reflected the size of its ambitions.⁴⁸ In 1946, it visited New York, where John Burrell explained:

It is rather as though we spread the history of dramatic literature out before us as a map. As we move into a new era, we post a flag on a pin, as it were . . . Eventually, you see, we'll have flags flying in every age when great drama was produced – and then we'll have a great repertory.⁴⁹

This ambition for 'a great repertory' explains why Burrell, Richardson and Olivier were initially keen on the idea of the Centre. It enabled them to undertake international touring, broaden their repertory, and to address the main criticism of their wartime company, its lack of strength in depth: 'the trained actor is essential to the whole project, and that training must be along the lines conceived by the Old Vic', Burrell said. He outlined the 'development of the individual artist' from school to children's theatre to 'one of the subsidiary repertory companies at either Liverpool or Bristol' and thence to the London company.⁵⁰

Burrell's argument shared the view expressed by James Forsyth's 1946 article, 'The Old Vic Now' which made its case from the perspective of the Theatre Centre (he seems to have shown Saint-Denis the typescript):⁵¹

In order to keep going the high vitality of a good theatre company, the whole theatre organisation within which it operates must be healthy. No matter its isolated brilliance;

without that organisation which will develop its new blood and improve the appreciation of its audience, it will peter out.⁵²

But where Forsyth described a collective ‘company’, Burrell saw ‘successors to or colleagues of its present headliners’. Burrell likewise departed from the ensemble-based principles of studio-work by focusing on attracting and retaining *individuals* of sufficient quality: ‘we believe that the kind of actor we want will prefer the opportunity we can give him for a life of continuing creativeness on the stage to the short-lived notoriety of a film-career’, he said, and Burrell was not prepared publicly to commit to Saint-Denis’ model. He said only that ‘St Denis’ studio *may well* furnish the inspiration for method’ in the Old Vic training (my emphasis). Even Burrell’s apparent commitment to the ‘professional experiment’ of the Centre contained a divisive undercurrent, because it artificially separated ‘experiment’ from ‘the high-tradition’. As the careers I have traced show, tradition is generated by experiment and experiment responds to tradition, so each is part of the other. Their division runs the risk of turning the opportunity to experiment that was being offered to Saint-Denis into a poisoned chalice. Indeed a press release of September 1946 attempted to avoid the word ‘experimental’ in its description of the Centre, which it called ‘an alarming word, but . . . perhaps, the only word which adequately describes the nature of the work which will be carried out’.⁵³

Indeed it is hard to find evidence of agreement as to what the Old Vic Centre’s Theatre would do, apart from the tautologous statement in the same press release that it would be ‘a theatre . . . open to the general public’. The case for an experimental Old Vic was usually made by Saint-Denis alone. In his article entitled ‘Towards a ‘Realistic’ Theatre’, he cited *Peter Grimes* (1945) and the developments of ‘ballet’ as evidence of other theatre forms which have risen to the challenge ‘to speak the language of our

times'. He advocated a contemporary language of the stage and rejected the conception of the author as an 'independent genius' in favour of an author 'in constant touch with the stage' whose 'creative work' would be 'a collective effort, divided between producer, stage designer, musician, choreographer and actors', and would give rise to new theatre-forms:

If the writer could envisage the possibility of the actors playing in four different places at once, all in full view of the audience . . . he would probably give up dividing his plays into three, four or five acts: his mode of composition, modelled on architecture, would take a different turn. If the actor is allowed to come forward once more right out amongst the public, until he can feel the lines of sight of the spectators on either side of him crossing behind his back, do you not think that his acting will alter accordingly, that it will become more expressive plastically: whilst the impact of the living actor on the public will be increased, with a lesser expenditure of vocal effort, and with an increased subtlety of delivery? Will not the acting and the words gain by it a dramatic reality?⁵⁴

This was the new theatre Saint-Denis proposed to bring into being by creating experimental groups around a re-modelled Old Vic stage. The Old Vic's September 1946 press release did allude to this agenda, but only as the 'world-wide desire to provide the modern dramatist, actor and producer, with a freer and more flexible type of stage'. It made no reference to experimental *practice*. Where Saint-Denis' argument looks optimistically forward to a theatre which 'has broken the conventions which held it prisoner', the rhetoric of the Old Vic's press releases placed experimental freedom firmly in the service of a conservative ideal: the reconstruction of the Old Vic's stage and auditorium to 'enable a play of any period to be presented in its appropriate theatrical and architectural configuration'.⁵⁵

The problem was complicated by the advent of public arts funding. In this new context, Saint-Denis' argument that art cannot 'really be living if it does not renew itself' and cannot 'renew itself without experimenting' was fatally weakened. Subsidy was not justified on the basis of what the arts needed, but on the fact that the people needed the arts. Saint-Denis' commitment to experimentation for art's sake opened his project to the charge that it placed its own interests above those of the people who were paying for it. Thus Hugh Hunt was able to claim, groundlessly, that his vision of the Old Vic as 'a popular theatre' was not shared by the Centre Directors. Furthermore, Saint-Denis' artistic justification of his experimental agenda involved acknowledging that there was no financial justification for the investment: 'experiments in the theatre are viewed with mistrust', he wrote, 'because they are not paying propositions'. This flew in the face of the second accepted justification of investment in the arts: they generate a financial return. By contrast, the Theatre Company's appeal to the values of tradition could be justified by its commercial appeal.

This ironic situation, where the public subsidy upon which Saint-Denis' Centre depended also proved the strongest argument against it, was intensified by growing support for the establishment of a National Theatre. On 29 May 1951, at the height of the public furore over the resignation of the Centre Directors, Sir Ernest Pooley (then Chair of the Arts Council) wrote to Lord Esher that 'The Old Vic business is very tiresome – the only sensible comment I have seen is in the Economist'. The article to which he referred claimed that

Two points are clear. First, without some 'interference' the various activities of the Old Vic could not be administered and co-ordinated; and no-one has hitherto had the requisite over-riding authority. Second, it will be a great pity if so much talent

is irrevocably lost to the Old Vic; but if financial [pressures] should make necessary some curtailment of its activities, it must not be the main theatre company which suffers. The Old Vic is the nearest approach to a British national theatre, and the public looks to it for first-rate performances of the English classics. And it is the public which pays the piper.⁵⁶

This polarisation of the attitude of the Old Vic Governors and the Centre Directors was illustrated by a document prepared by the Directors for the Governing Body titled 'Draft: The Sonrel Forestage'. It argued that 'there are sound, artistic and economic reasons for seriously reconsidering' the decision to abandon the redevelopment of the theatre. The economic justification was simply that the expenditure was an investment which would be more than repaid once the theatre was opened. The artistic justification stressed the 'future development of theatre in this country', and the Old Vic's 'position of leadership', 'in the vanguard of theatre development'.⁵⁷ The governors' stated desire, however, was for the Old Vic to 'revert to its original purpose'.⁵⁸ That 'original purpose' was not defined, and could as easily have referred to popular entertainment or the Fabian ideals of the Old Vic of the 'twenties and 'thirties. In the event, the theatre's output in the nineteen-fifties under Michael Benthall's leadership was a mixture of the two: a repertoire based on Shakespeare with balletic direction by Robert Helpmann and painterly designs by Leslie Hurrey. It retained some of the educative ideals of the pre-war Old Vic, but presented them in a style which harked back, for the most part unsuccessfully, to the pictorial stage of the nineteenth century.

By contrast, Saint-Denis concluded his employment at the Old Vic still calling for progressive action to build upon the achievements of the Centre. His archive contains a sheet of scribbled pencil notes for a speech, apparently given on stage after the last

'School Show' at the Old Vic in 1952. Saint-Denis took the opportunity to observe that: 'We can feel happy and grateful. 6 years = 300 people' (the number of students trained at the School). He thanked 'students, staff, friends' and 'George and Glen' for 'heroic work in adverse circumst[ances]', observing that 'I asked them for best show ever' and they provided it. He also thanked 'public and friends' for 'a fortnight packed' and said that although 'people are sad', 'they should not be'. He made reference to the attempts to 'save the school', but observed that 'if it disappears = Young people to fight for their convictions = to pursue the work', which, he reassured his supporters, 'will not disappear'.⁵⁹

Later in 1952 Michael Redgrave gave the Rockefeller Foundation Lectures in the Department of Drama at Bristol University to an audience including students and lecturers in the University and at the Bristol Old Vic School, as well as actors and staff from the Bristol Old Vic Company and members of the public. In the second of his four lectures, he praised Saint-Denis's achievement in training and developing 'in many actors and actresses, designers, producers, authors, here amongst us, now, the seed, the flower and fruit of some of the best theatre of today and tomorrow'.⁶⁰ The following year, Redgrave went to Stratford, where Glen Byam Shaw had taken over as Director of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, and where he and George Devine were developing larger-scale productions of the Shakespeare plays they had directed for the Young Vic.⁶¹ In 1953, Byam Shaw directed *Antony and Cleopatra* with Redgrave as Antony, Peggy Ashcroft as Cleopatra, Marius Goring as Caesar and design by Motley. Redgrave also played Shylock to Ashcroft's Portia and was directed as Lear by Devine with Yvonne Mitchell as Cordelia. Mitchell was also Katherine in Devine's production of *The Taming*

of the Shrew and *Lady Anne* to Marius Goring's *Richard III*. The season broke records, playing to more than 360,000 people.⁶²

Saint-Denis' work was certainly not disappearing. And Redgrave was right: after the austerity of the nineteen-fifties had come and gone, Saint-Denis' collaborators and students did indeed represent the flowering of a new, subsidised theatre in the early nineteen-sixties: George Devine's English Stage Company at the Royal Court, Peter Hall's Royal Shakespeare Company and Laurence Olivier's National Theatre Company at the Old Vic. This was the transformed landscape of English Theatre to which Saint-Denis would return after an absence of eight years. Before addressing that next phase of work, however, it is important to consider whether these artists did indeed represent a meaningful tradition or movement in terms of their practice, and whether or not that practice was significantly related to the influence of Saint-Denis. Simply put: did Saint-Denis have an identifiable artistic legacy?

Saint-Denis' Artistic Legacy

Saint-Denis is now far from widely-known. His only book, *Theatre: The Rediscovery of Style* (1960) suggests one reason for that obscurity: his resistance to theoretical statements. 'General theoretical questions about acting should be avoided,' he wrote, 'experience is more helpful to a student than theories'.⁶³ The cumulative effect of Saint-Denis' widespread connections and his discomfort with theory and reluctance to produce records of his techniques has been a paradox: his influence has been found far beyond the schools that he founded, in devised theatre, in new writing, in mask theatre and in classical plays (as well as in places as varied as the *École Jacques Lecoq* in Paris, The Royal Court Writers' Group, The Royal Shakespeare Company, Joint Stock, The Manchester Royal Exchange and Grotowski's Laboratory), but it has often been unnoticed.⁶⁴

Another result of Saint-Denis' resistance to theory is that the iconic actors for whom Saint-Denis was a formative influence are not popularly associated with his work. They include Guinness, Redgrave and Olivier, all of whom tend to be considered as individual 'talents' and not part of a tradition, despite being profoundly involved with Saint-Denis' between 1935 and 1952. Olivier wrote of the break-up of the Old Vic Theatre Centre as a 'great and dire tragedy in the life of our theatre',⁶⁵ Redgrave wrote that the LTS and OVS were 'the most thorough theatre schools outside Russia',⁶⁶ and Guinness wrote to Saint-Denis that

my debt to you, dating from *Noah* and Beak Street days, is quite colossal . . .

You really illumined acting for me one afternoon in Beak Street when you indicated, very lightly, an approach to Epichodov in *The Cherry Orchard* for some young would-be

actor. It was a new world, and one which in my best moments is always before me, though I doubt if I gave you the credit for it until long after.⁶⁷

However, the following year, Kenneth Tynan claimed that 'Saint-Denis . . . did not make much impression on Guinness, an instinctive actor if ever there was one'.⁶⁸ Tynan advanced no evidence for this claim. It emerged naturally from his thesis, that 'Guinness is a prodigy, belonging to no tradition', and 'will likewise create none'.⁶⁹ It is fair to say that Guinness did not create a tradition. But is it true to say that he sprang from none?

Recalling his time at the Old Vic School, the director Frank Dunlop said that 'you weren't just you, you were part of an extraordinary tradition'. Dunlop said that he was asked to join Olivier's National Theatre Company as an Associate Director in 1968 'because I'd got my own company which was actually solvent and the National wasn't', but agreed to work with Olivier 'because to my utter amazement, he thought the same things I did about audience and plays and what the theatre was'.⁷⁰ Dunlop's biggest achievement with the National Theatre recalled Saint-Denis: he created a new Young Vic in a converted butcher's shop on the Cut. Therefore, we might see the ability and vision of Olivier, Redgrave and Guinness not simply as evidence of prodigious, individual talents, as Tynan did, but revealing an unseen thread of influence binding them to each other and to Saint-Denis.

There was a feeling among English actors after the Second World War of being unsupported by a theoretical framework they could call their own. As Michael Redgrave remarked in 1953, 'we have actors but no art of acting'.⁷¹ For Redgrave, this feeling was amplified by comparison with the situation in America where, in the wake of the Group Theatre's promotion of Stanislavsky and the subsequent development of the American

Method, actors wore their technique on their sleeves. Lecturing at Bristol University in the year of Saint-Denis' departure, Redgrave lamented the absence of such classes in England:

The opportunity for these classes is something which was offered here at St. Denis' London Theatre Studio before the war. Since then nothing has taken its place. In New York some of the best young actors and actresses under Elia Kazan have formed the Actors' Studio where they practice physical movement and voice exercises and where great store is set on improvisation.⁷²

The movement in the States to which Redgrave referred was not limited to the founding of The Actors Studio in 1947 (the same year as The Old Vic School). Between 1936 and 1949, Stella Adler, Sanford Meisner and Herbert Berghof all established their own acting studios.⁷³ This embracing of the ideals of ongoing training for professional actors created a cultural shift of which England had no equivalent.

Predictably enough, this cultural division led often to the flip-side of Redgrave's admiration: mutual suspicion. Judi Dench remarked, for instance, in an interview that

I remember going to the [Actors] Studio and seeing something, and I couldn't hear it. I just couldn't hear it . . . None of us could hear. So I don't know what that's got to do with acting. That's got to do, maybe, with self-examination, but it's not to do with telling the story of a great dramatist.⁷⁴

By contrast, Lee Strasberg, speaking to an audience of Actors Studio members, expressed a common American perspective on English acting with characteristic stridency:

the English theatre represents an outdated style. There is an English tradition in acting, but the English theatre now only holds on to the externals of that tradition. What is now created on the English stage is not humanity, not people, not reality, not even conviction. It is acting. It offers the best that acting has and therefore also the worst.⁷⁵

In short, on either side of the Atlantic there has been a tendency to reify either 'inner' or 'outer' work as more essential to acting. In her book *A Challenge for the Actor*, Uta Hagen even goes so far as to divide acting techniques not into 'outer' and 'inner', but into 'outer' and 'human'.⁷⁶ For Hagen, this distinction led to a definition of actors as either 'realist' or 'formalist'. She identified herself as a realist, an actor who

puts his own psyche to use to find identification with the role, allowing the behavior to develop out of the playwright's given circumstances, trusting that a form will result, knowing that the execution of his actions will involve a moment-to-moment *subjective* experience.

She contrasted this approach to the 'formalist', who 'objectively predetermines the character's actions, deliberately watching the form as he executes it'.⁷⁷ Both Hagen and Strasberg offered Olivier as an exemplary case of the English tradition of 'outer' technique, and Strasberg offered this rather back-handed compliment to his work:

it is marvellously clear. In his performance you watch an actor's mind, fantastic in its scope and greatness, working and understanding the needs of the scene. He understands the character better than I ever will. I don't even want to understand the character as much as he does, because I think it is his understanding that almost stops him from the completeness of response . . . If we criticize Larry Olivier's performance, it is only because it seems to us the outline of a performance.⁷⁸

This view has hardened with time, so that David Allen was able to dismiss Olivier in one sentence as ‘an actor who worked largely through external technique, with very little inner ‘truth’’.⁷⁹

If this is a misjudgement, then Olivier must bear some responsibility for it. He described his work going ‘from the outside in’ whenever he was drawn to speak about it, but these occasions were rare. He was unusually candid, however, in a 1966 interview with Kenneth Tynan:

some people start from the inside, some people start from the periphery. I would say, at a guess, that Alec Guinness is what we would call a peripheral actor. I think I’m the same. The actor who starts from the inside is more likely to find himself in the parts that he plays, than to find the parts in himself; perhaps not necessarily in himself, but simply to find the parts, go out and get them, and *be* somebody else.⁸⁰

Olivier’s description of his and Guinness’ approach depends upon two distinct ways of categorising actors. The first is the distinction, already noted, between ‘inside out’ and ‘outside in’, which was developed from Stanislavsky predominantly by practitioners of the American Method. The second is credited to Louis Jouvet (like Saint-Denis, a member of Copeau’s *Vieux-Colombier* company) who distinguished between *acteurs*, who bring the same characteristic qualities to every role, and *comédiens*, who attempt to transform themselves from role to role.⁸¹ Michael Redgrave also cited Jouvet’s distinction in his Bristol University lectures.⁸² Olivier implied that ‘start[ing] from the periphery’ is more likely to be the approach of those he would consider *comédiens*. He described such a process in the same interview, referring to his 1944 Richard III:

I had heard imitations of old actors imitating Henry Irving; and so I did, right away, an imitation of these old actors imitating Henry Irving's voice – that's why I took a rather narrow kind of vocal address. Then I thought about looks. And I thought about the Big Bad Wolf, and I thought about Jed Harris, a director under whom I'd suffered in extremis in New York. The physiognomy of Disney's original Big Bad Wolf was said to have been founded upon Jed Harris . . . And so, with one or two extraneous essentials, I began to build up a character, a characterization. I'm afraid I do work mostly from the outside in. I usually collect a lot of details, a lot of characteristics, and find a creature swimming about somewhere in the middle of them.⁸³



Figs. 55-57, Jed Harris, The Big Bad Wolf, and Olivier in the film version of *Richard III* (1955)

Olivier seems to need to discredit himself here by drawing attention to his make-up rather than his performance and by emphasizing his imitation-of-an-imitation-of-Irving and his imitation-of-an-imitation of a man whom he knew (and hated).⁸⁴ But Olivier was speaking within a culture in which Redgrave described an 'ingrained prejudice against any attempt at an analysis of acting'.⁸⁵ There is also a paradox in Olivier's account which is easily overlooked: he begins creating a character not with extraneous details, but 'with one or two *extraneous essentials*'.

The idea of an 'extraneous essential' defies the logic of the metaphor upon which it is based. That is the same spatial metaphor that underpins the binary of inside

and outside in acting, which George Lakoff and Mark Johnson have shown is a basic-level metaphorical concept for identity: the SELF is a CONTAINER.⁸⁶ According to this metaphor, the self has an inside and an outside, but according to Olivier's version of it, something which is outside the self can also be inside it, and not only inside it, but in the very centre of it. Describing his approach to Richard III later, Olivier again said that he worked 'from the outside in': 'I paint for myself a portrait of a man in my mind's eye as if I was oil-painting it, and I say to myself that's this man'.⁸⁷ But again, the inside/outside distinction collapses in Olivier's description: if his 'portrait' is 'in my mind's eye' and then imaginatively embodied, it is also coming 'from the inside out'.

Writing about the transformation into a character, the actress, playwright and graduate of the LTS Yvonne Mitchell used Redgrave and Guinness to exemplify Jouvet's '*comédien*'. She described them in terms which resonate closely with Olivier:

No actor can convince merely by his outward appearance. Make-up is the final touch in conveying his imagination to the audience. During rehearsals the type of actor who loses himself in other characters, will gradually imagine the outward appearance of the part he is playing. By the third week of rehearsal, when he has already accepted himself as that character, he would be surprised if a mirror were placed in front of him. His belief that the hooked nose or the greasy hair of Shylock already belonged to him would be shattered by seeing instead his familiar self.⁸⁸



Fig. 58, Michael Redgrave as Shylock and Yvonne Mitchell as Jessica (Stratford-upon-Avon, 1953)

The reference to Shylock suggests that Mitchell is thinking of Redgrave here, opposite whose 1953 Shylock she played Jessica (fig. 58). The process that she watched Redgrave undergo would have been familiar to her from her training, as described by Saint-Denis: 'The actor who can modify his physical self will be able to approach a role through *physical images*'.⁸⁹ For Saint-Denis, this process began with the student selecting 'a person whose nature, temperament and physique are as far removed from his own as possible, and . . . giving a convincing impression of this specific physical type'. The student 'then chooses various moods and exterior circumstances which would be meaningful for the chosen physical type and works on the transformation under those conditions'.⁹⁰

This process generated the same two-way traffic between 'inside' and 'outside' as Olivier and Redgrave's practice. Saint-Denis is evidently happy not to resolve the

contradiction between ‘two opposed ways of accomplishing the transformation: sometimes starting from the physical . . . sometimes starting from an inner feeling’, and he suggests that his students should ‘decide which way of working appears most fruitful’.⁹¹ His own teaching is similarly ambivalent: he describes ‘an ideal school of theatre’ where ‘the work is done from the inside out, rather than the outside in’, but his own methods ‘give priority, temporarily, to the physical’ because ‘everything starts from the body or passes through it’.⁹² Nonetheless, Saint-Denis did not reject the metaphor of self-as-container that this practice seems to transcend. He used it, but he did so inconsistently. He even offered inside and outside as interchangeable depictions of the same phenomenon when he said that ‘gesture must be inhabited by a thought; gestures not dressed by thoughts are empty and meaningless’.⁹³

That paradox reflected Saint-Denis’ definition of ‘style’: ‘the perceptible form that is taken by reality in revealing to us its true and inner character’,⁹⁴ which rejects implicitly a central distinction in the American Method between what Strasberg saw as ‘two basic styles of acting – one demanding truthfulness of experience and of expression, and the other emphasizing the rhetorical and external’.⁹⁵ Strasberg associated style with the external, superficial and untrue. Hagen wrote that ‘style is the dirtiest word in the actor’s vocabulary. It belongs to critics, essayists and historians, and fits nowhere into a creative process’.⁹⁶ And yet she also wrote that ‘the net result of the “style” – what the form, shape and sound will be – is a net product of the director’s concept of the playwright’s content expressed by the inner and outer life of the actor’, which Saint-Denis would have agreed with.⁹⁷ Therefore profound theoretical disagreement is not always reflected in practice. Even Strasberg, who took a much more dogmatic position than Hagen about ‘physical or external approaches to acting’ which,

he said, 'negate the presence of an emotional experience',⁹⁸ said that he used 'the animal exercise' because it 'trains the actor by forcing him to deal with the character's behaviour, rather than relying on his own feelings'.⁹⁹ Even here, though, in Strasberg's description of an approach which appears to contradict his own practice, he retained the absolute distinction of 'inside' and 'outside' upon which his theory was based: the exercise dealt, in his eyes, with 'behaviour, *rather than . . . feelings*'.

Insistence on the literal truth of the metaphor of inside and outside as applied to human behaviour was the crucial difference between Saint-Denis' teachings and those of the Method, which were otherwise frequently in sympathy with each other.¹⁰⁰ Saint-Denis alluded to this distinction, describing a production which exemplified for him the Method's failings:

The actors . . . were not concerned so much with the presentation of the play, the "cloth," as with the "lining." Their faces, their gestures and words, were far less important to them than their nervous systems, their secret "stirrings," the meaning behind the words. Though a photograph of life was intended, only the negative was being shown, not the finished print.¹⁰¹

The shortcomings of the Method for Saint-Denis, then, emerged from its strict adherence to a theoretical position and its consequent tendency to unbalance a performance by prioritizing one aspect excessively. That stood in clear contrast to his first goal for the Old Vic School: 'to bring reality to the interpretation of all theatrical styles, particularly the classical, and to achieve the greatest possible freedom in their practice'.¹⁰² Taken in isolation, that seems almost meaningless, but read against the detail of the Old Vic School's practice, it may point to Saint-Denis' theoretical perspective, which was based on a 'tremendous suspicion of *any* 'method', whether old

or new, which stops questions or discourages change'.¹⁰³ Questions and change lay at the centre of Saint-Denis' teaching, and that is why it was so essential for him that his schools were part of wider theatrical organisations, such as the Old Vic Centre, so each would

dedicate itself to a renewal of acting techniques and gradually invent new ways of working, while along the way training its own teachers. Regularly – in fact at the end of every school year – it would re-examine its ways of working.¹⁰⁴

This regular re-examination represented what Saint-Denis called a 'search for truth', but it also defined a particular understanding of truth, a truth which 'is always changing as our lives change'.¹⁰⁵

Conclusion

Saint-Denis' contingent and evolving conception of truth reflected the philosopher John Dewey's theory of 'experimental knowing'. Dewey divided this into 'two kinds of operations': sensory, by which we 'determine exactly what . . . is indubitably seen, touched and heard', and reflective, 'searching through previous knowledge to obtain ideas which may be used to interpret this observed material and to suggest the initiation of new experiments'.¹⁰⁶ Dewey used the example of a physician:

Sense data are signs which direct this selection of ideas; the ideas when suggested arouse new observations; the two together determine his final judgement or diagnosis and his procedure. Something is then added to the store of the clinical material of medical art so that subsequent observations of symptoms are refined and extended, and the store of material from which to draw ideas is further enlarged.

This interaction of 'sense data' and 'ideas' reflects Yvonne Mitchell's description of Redgrave's 'extraordinary mixture of mind and feeling' and her rejection of the 'critical misconception that an emotional actor . . . must lack intelligence, and that an intelligent actor . . . is without any warmth of feeling'. But her argument, like Dewey's, went further, identifying 'technique' as 'the ability to express what you feel', and to reclaim a moment when 'the spontaneity has gone out of it' (and therefore to feel what you express).¹⁰⁷ Therefore the actor's technique allows her, like Dewey's scientist, to make the connections between mind and feeling upon which her performance depends. This theoretical analysis draws a crucial distinction between what Saint-Denis tended to characterise as resistance to theory *in toto*, and resistance to theories which rely upon a categorical and permanent conception of truth.

Like 'style', the word 'technique' has been assumed to suggest exteriority and superficiality. But we must be careful not to make assumptions based on that connotation alone. For example, Olivier wrote that, when directing, he expected 'actors to do exactly what I tell them and to do it quickly'.¹⁰⁸ That would appear to represent the antithesis of 'experimental knowing', and, in Dewey's words, enable a 'preconceived idea to control [our] decision instead of using it as a hypothesis'.¹⁰⁹ However, Olivier justified the 'discipline' of speed in this approach because it gave him time to adapt. By having his actors sketch his instructions, he said, 'I can see my own mistakes immediately'. He expected his actors to treat his instruction as a hypothesis. In this sense, his approach fits Dewey's model of negotiation between 'ideas' and 'sense data': if the idea does not generate appropriate sensory responses, then it must be adapted, since 'sense data are signs which direct the selection of ideas'. Olivier's instructions

could therefore begin a dialogue between his *mise-en-scène* and the sensory stimuli generated by it for the audience and experienced through it by the actors.

This process is visible in Saint-Denis' production of *Oedipus* at the Old Vic (1945), in which Olivier played the title role. Olivier famously used the mental image of a trapped animal to achieve howls of pain at the moment of his blinding. These howls were both responses to an imagined sensory stimulus (and therefore spontaneous and subjective), and part of a tightly-choreographed piece of staging (and therefore predetermined and objective). That combination of formal inevitability and shocking reality was recorded in Kenneth Tynan's review:

from the first I was waiting breathlessly for the . . . lyric cry . . . but I never hoped for so vast an anguish . . . The two cries were torn from beyond tears of shame or guilt: they came from the stomach, with all the ecstatic grief of a newborn baby's wail.¹¹⁰



Figs. 59 and 60, Olivier as Oedipus, with Nicholas Hanne as the Chorus Leader and other members of the Chorus behind him, and surrounded by the chorus (1945)

Saint-Denis' staging likewise combined formality with the expression of intense experience. As Olivier's Oedipus came downstage after the blinding (fig. 59), his right

hand was raised in a gesture echoed by Nicholas Hannen as the Chorus Leader behind him, and by the anti-clockwise movement of the chorus. The hero's 'vast . . . anguish' was therefore also visible in its social and cosmic dimensions as a pattern of human interaction, or merely an abstract shape.¹¹¹

In a production which depended for its effect upon detailed patterning such as this, there can be only minimal freedom for an actor's subjective experience suddenly to revise the staging once it has been set. But it does not follow that the staging was imposed regardless of subjective experience, or that it did not depend upon spontaneity in the manner of its execution. As Saint-Denis wrote,

The creative artist cultivates, by appropriate exercises, his imagination and his faculties of observation. He puts his body and mind in a state of total relaxation, nurtures the feelings required for the part by all the contributions that his affinitive memory can make, and learns to conjure up and welcome the physical gestures that will awaken and sustain the inner life of the part.¹¹²

In fact, Saint-Denis' productions depended upon a kind of orchestrated spontaneity. John Gielgud recalled that, for his 1938 *Three Sisters*, Saint-Denis 'brought very full notes to rehearsal. Every move and piece of business was prepared beforehand on paper, and the play was placed very quickly in consequence'. But Gielgud also says of rehearsals that 'we never found them tedious and became daily more involved in the subtleties which they enabled us to develop in such harmony'.¹¹³ The paradox of a production both predetermined and evolving, put together quickly but only gradually achieved, and, as a consequence, both carefully patterned and strikingly alive is characteristic of the best work of Saint-Denis. It also marked a tradition of acting which has never quite been recognized as such, and was formed by Saint-Denis' influence.

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- ¹ Cited in a report by Stephen Maecht on the London Drama Schools (BL Add MS 81176)
- ² It had a parallel school, the *École supérieure d'art dramatique*, founded in 1953 in Colmar, which moved to Strasbourg in 1954 and fed into the company as well as employing company members as teachers. In 1962, five years after Pierre Lefèvre and Hubert Gignoux had inherited the school and company respectively, sixty percent of the company were graduates of the school (Baldwin, 2003, p. 158).
- ³ See Chambers, 1980, p. 21; the work of the RSC Studio is examined in detail in Section 3.
- ⁴ 'Draft: The Sonrel Forestage' (BL Add MS 81172)
- ⁵ Rowell, 1993, p. 140
- ⁶ Draft of 'the Old Vic Theatre Centre', August 1946 (BL Add MS 81173)
- ⁷ BL Add MS 81172
- ⁸ Landstone, 1953, p. 169
- ⁹ Letter from Saint-Denis to Lord Lytton, 29 April 1947 (BL Add MS 81172)
- ¹⁰ A letter dated 21 December 1943 to Miss Glasgow, from the Clerk of the Old Vic named Joseph Rowntree as 'the architect for the Vic and Wells' in the context of plans for re-building the theatre (ACGB/34/76).
- ¹¹ Old Vic Centre 'Memorandum No. 1', 18 May 1946, and 'Memorandum from the Governors of the Royal Victoria Hall to the Arts Council of Great Britain on the subject of Old Vic Expansion', 3 July 1946 (BL Add MS 81173)
- ¹² BL Add MS 81173; the wording of this press release is echoed by articles announcing the creation of the Centre in the Evening Standard of 11 September 1946 ('A Young Vic to start at the Old Vic') and The Times of 12 September 1946 ('Old Vic Theatre Centre: Plans for Acting, Training and Production').
- ¹³ *Theatre Today*, Spring Miscellany 1947, p. 2 (BL Add MS 812349)
- ¹⁴ <http://www.theatrust.org.uk/resources/theatres/show/1037-old-vic> accessed on 11 August 2011.
- ¹⁵ *Architects Journal*, 30 November, 1950 (BL Add MS 81171)
- ¹⁶ 'My Years at the Vieux-Colombier' (BL Add MS 81138)
- ¹⁷ Esher succeeded to the post following the death of Lord Lytton in 1947.
- ¹⁸ ACGB/34/76
- ¹⁹ O'Connor, 1982, p. 158
- ²⁰ Hunt had been Artistic Director of the Bristol Old Vic since 1945 and the Abbey Theatre, Dublin before the war.
- ²¹ Landstone, 1963, p. 163
- ²² *Ibid.*, p. 164
- ²³ There were also 'modest grants from the Carnegie and Pilgrim Trusts and the City Parochial Foundation' (Rowell, 1993, p. 141).
- ²⁴ See the undated document 'Draft: The Sonrel Forestage' (BL Add MS 81172), which argues that although the Centre Directors had 'dropped' the rebuilding project 'once the seriousness of the financial situation was realised', 'there are sound, artistic and economic reasons for seriously reconsidering' that decision.
- ²⁵ Baldwin, 2003, p. 131
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*
- ²⁷ BL Add MS 81187
- ²⁸ 2 March 1951 (BL Add MS 81187)
- ²⁹ 3 March 1951 (BL Add MS 81187)
- ³⁰ 3 April 1951 (BL Add MS 81187)
- ³¹ Wardle, 1978, p. 136
- ³² These quotations are taken from numerous cuttings gathered in BL Add MS 81187.
- ³³ Wardle, 1978, p. 137
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 138
- ³⁵ 25 April 1952 (BL Add MS 81187).

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- ³⁶ BL Add MS 81187
- ³⁷ Jane Baldwin, however, cites archival evidence that Saint-Denis was still writing to Esher in the school's final week in an attempt to save it (Baldwin, 2003, p. 139).
- ³⁸ 27 June 1952 (BL Add MS 81187)
- ³⁹ BL Add MS 81173
- ⁴⁰ Landstone, 1953, p. 145
- ⁴¹ Elsom, 1978, p. 100
- ⁴² *Britain Today* No. 179 (BL Add MS 81176)
- ⁴³ BL Add MS 81176
- ⁴⁴ Obey, 1967, pp. ix, xi
- ⁴⁵ Photos of *The Fair* at the LTS are in BL Add MS 81251; for reports of Devine's teaching at the OVS, see Wardle, 1978, p. 114.
- ⁴⁶ BL Add MS 81173
- ⁴⁷ 12 April 1946 (BL Add MS 81173)
- ⁴⁸ Letter from Devine to Saint-Denis, 11 May 1946 (BL Add MS 81173)
- ⁴⁹ 'The Old Vic in New York', *Theatre Arts* Vol. XXX, No. 3, (BL Add MS, 81174)
- ⁵⁰ He also stressed that the regional repertory theatres are not 'tryout theatres for London but 'ends in themselves' with 'repertories . . . chosen to supply the needs of the local audience'.
- ⁵¹ Forsyth's play *The Bronze Horse* was produced for radio by Saint-Denis in 1945.
- ⁵² BL Add MS 81173
- ⁵³ BL Add MS 81173
- ⁵⁴ 'Towards a Realistic Theatre', typescript, 1947 (BL Add MS 81239)
- ⁵⁵ BL Add MS 81173
- ⁵⁶ *The Economist*, 26 May 1951 (BL Add MS 81187)
- ⁵⁷ BL Add MS 81172
- ⁵⁸ Memo, 3 April 1948 (BL Add MS 81172)
- ⁵⁹ BL Add MS 81180
- ⁶⁰ Redgrave, 1995, p. 32
- ⁶¹ Byam Shaw directed *As You Like It* for the Young Vic in 1949 and in Stratford in 1952 and Devine directed *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for the Young Vic in 1949 and in Stratford in 1954.
- ⁶² The continuity between the Old Vic and Stratford was equally in evidence behind the stage. Peter Streuli, from the Old Vic School's Staff, for instance, was employed as a Stage Director at Stratford, a job which included a wide range of responsibilities: stage management, lighting, rehearsing understudies, and so on.
- ⁶³ Saint-Denis, 1982, p. 199
- ⁶⁴ See Section 3.1 for more information on Saint-Denis' English legacy. Saint-Denis' contact with Grotowski during the nineteen-sixties is mentioned in Saint-Denis & Baldwin, 2009, p. 176. Peter Gill describes mask exercises from the Old Vic School being taught at the Royal Court Writers Group (Gill, 2008, p. 59), although Keith Johnstone, who ran that member of that group with William Gaskill, is keen to stress that he and Gaskill changed the approach taught to them by George Devine, see *Keith Johnstone Teaches Trance Masks with Steve Jarand* (DVD). Yvonne Mitchell recognizes the process she learned at the LTS of moving from improvisation classes to completed plays in the work of Joint Stock (McCall, 1978, p. 84).
- ⁶⁵ Saint-Denis & Baldwin, 2009, p. 192
- ⁶⁶ Redgrave, 1958, p. 51
- ⁶⁷ Letter dated 4 September 1952 (BL Add MS 81094); it's possible that Guinness is referring here to Saint-Denis demonstrating to Marius Goring a way of playing the squeaking shoes that Chekhov gives to his luckless, awkward clerk (see Read, 2003, p. 52).
- ⁶⁸ Tynan, 1953, p. 27
- ⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 12
- ⁷⁰ Interview by Lydia O'Ryan for the Richard Negri Project, www.richardnegri.co.uk/interviews.htm accessed on 30 August 2010
- ⁷¹ Redgrave, 1995, p. 54

⁷² Redgrave, 1995, p. 66; Redgrave's book is a transcription of four lectures given at the University of Bristol in 1952. It's worth mentioning that five years later Redgrave declared himself 'one of [the] more half-hearted champions' of the Actors' Studio and expresses concern about its 'distortions of Stanislavski's precepts', but he remained a whole-hearted champion of the principle that actors must train regularly, throughout their careers (see Redgrave, 1958, p. 50).

⁷³ The Actors Studio was founded by Elia Kazan and Cheryl Crawford, with its most famous teacher, Lee Strasberg, joining in 1949 (Strasberg & Hethmon, 1965, p. 8). Sanford Meisner started teaching at the Neighborhood Playhouse in 1935 and became its director in 1936. Uta Hagen's husband, Herbert Berghof, set up the HB Studios (where she also taught) in 1945 and Stella Adler established her acting studio, now called The Stella Adler Conservatory, in 1949.

⁷⁴ Zucker, 1999, p. 49

⁷⁵ Strasberg & Hethmon, 1965, p. 379

⁷⁶ See Hagen 1991, pp. 37-50; I have used Strasberg and Hagen together here not to imply that they were always in agreement, but to show that there are certain basic tenets which are common even to those practitioners of the American Method between whom there are significant differences.

⁷⁷ Hagen, 1991, p. 42

⁷⁸ Strasberg & Hethmon, 1965, p. 380, see also Hagen, 1991, p. 47. When Strasberg is writing, rather than speaking live to a presumably captive audience at The Actors' Studio, he is not so damning: 'There is in Olivier's most distinguished performances more than just technique and skill', he writes (Strasberg & Morphos, 1987, p. 177).

⁷⁹ Allen, 2000, p. 124

⁸⁰ Olivier, winter 1966, p. 89

⁸¹ Chekhov made the same distinction repeatedly, saying in his Hollywood lectures, for instance, that 'every true artist, and particularly a talented actor, bears within himself a . . . desire for transformation, or, speaking our theatrical language, a desire for characterisation' (On Theatre and the Art of Acting).

⁸² Redgrave, 1995, p. 6

⁸³ Olivier, winter 1966, pp. 88-89

⁸⁴ Jed Harris (1900-1979) directed Olivier in *The Green Bay Tree* (1932) and was almost universally detested.

⁸⁵ Redgrave, 1983, p. 203

⁸⁶ Lakoff & Johnson, 1999, p. 277

⁸⁷ *Laurence Olivier: A Life*

⁸⁸ Mitchell, 1957, pp. 19-20

⁸⁹ Saint-Denis, 1982, p. 157

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Saint-Denis, 1982, p. 157

⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 79, 149-150

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 148 (the under-lining is my emphasis, the italics are Saint-Denis')

⁹⁴ Saint-Denis & Baldwin, 2009, p. 61

⁹⁵ Strasberg & Morphos, 1987, p. 30

⁹⁶ Hagen & Frankel, 1973, p. 216

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 217.

⁹⁸ Strasberg & Morphos, 1987, p. 184

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 147

¹⁰⁰ For instance, see Hagen's instruction to actors in the playing of style by telling them to 'find what it came from': 'It's not a matter of playing style 'because that's how they were,' it's a matter of finding what it came from' (in this example, from the DVD *Uta Hagen's Acting Class*, she is talking about a nineteenth-century play). Saint-Denis also writes of historical styles that 'the student must understand that we are not trying to imitate moves and manners in a purely

historical way; we are trying to find the reasons why people behaved in a certain way' (Saint-Denis, 1982, p. 144).

¹⁰¹ Saint-Denis, 1982, p. 189

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 53

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 80

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 81

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 80)

¹⁰⁶ Dewey, 1929, p. 173

¹⁰⁷ Mitchell, 1957, pp. 13, 15

¹⁰⁸ From 'The Olivier Method', an interview in *The New York Times*, 7 February 1960 (Cole, 1973, pp. 412-413), this quotation p.412

¹⁰⁹ Dewey, 1929, p. 175

¹¹⁰ Quoted in Baldwin, 2003, p. 118; see also pp. 155-120 for a close analysis of elements of the staging and the reviewers' responses.

¹¹¹ A print of his photograph is held in BL Add MS 81256.

¹¹² Saint-Denis, 1982, p. 134

¹¹³ Gielgud, 1963, pp. 90, 91

Appendix to Section 2 Students of Saint-Denis, 1935-1952

Selected Students of The London Theatre Studio

NB: These are full-time students. The list does not include those actors (such as Laurence Olivier and Alec Guinness) who took occasional classes at the LTS whose presence is only recorded by anecdotes.

- Mary Alexander
- Angelica Bell
- John Blatchley
- James Cairncross
- James Donald
- Ann Heffernan
- Jocelyn Herbert
- Pierre Lefèvre
- Gay Lewis
- Yvonne Mitchell
- Chattie Salaman
- Merula Salaman
- Peter Ustinov
- Noel Willman

Students of the Old Vic School

Acting

- John Abineri
- Graeme Allwright
- Keith Andrews
- Doreen Angus
- Suzanne Armstrong
- Jack Aronson
- Irene Ash
- Margaret Ashcroft
- Norman Ayrton
- Sheila Ballantine
- Ronald Barlow
- Valerie Barnsley
- Janet Basham
- Jan Bashford
- Tarn Bassett
- Geoffrey Bayldon
- Malcolm Black
- Yvonne Bonnamy
- Victoria Boothby
- Jennifer Bourke
- Barbara Bracher

- June Brown
- Hannah Browne
- Christopher Burgess
- Jennifer Burke
- Jeremy Burnham
- Richard Burrell
- Shirley Bush
- Jeanne Campbell
- Edith Campion
- Richard Carpenter
- Peter Carreras
- Diana Chadwick
- Patrick Cheeseman
- Ross Chisholm
- Margaret Chisholm
- Leo Ciceri
- Rosemary Clarke
- James Coats
- Reginald Collin
- Jean Cooke
- Sheila Cooper
- Catherine Dasté
- Lesley Davis
- John Dix
- Alan Dobie

- Peter Duguid
- Teresa Dunien
- Alan Edwards
- Avril Elgar
- Joyce Fenby
- Sylvia Fischel
- Robert Floyd
- Ida Franklin
- John Fraser
- Norman Fraser
- Patience Gee
- Jeremy Geidt
- Georgie Gibbs
- Anita Giorgi
- Derek Godfrey
- Ida Goldapple
- Barbara Grimes
- Elvi Hake
- Jacqueline Hales
- George Hall
- Dilys Hamlett
- Christopher Hancock
- Judith Harte
- Chrtistine Hearne
- Paul Herbert

- Julian Herrington
- Paul Homer
- Paul Hoppe
- Prunella Illingworth
- Michael Jackson
- Murray Jacobs
- Colin Jeavons
- Harald Jensen
- Raymond Jessop
- Reginald Jessup
- Ivo Joyce
- Katherine Karne
- Maurice Kaufman
- Bernard Kay
- Michael Keir
- Rosalind Knight
- Joanna Korwin
- Sheila Lader
- Ann Leake
- James Lenton
- Gillian Lutyens
- Vanora MacIndoe
- Leonard Maley
- Ruth Mandl
- James Maxwell

- George McCallum
- Sheila McKeown
- Lauchlan McLean
- Edward Meigh
- Keith Michel
- Roger Milner
- Gerald Mirowitz
- Lee Montague
- Gerald Morgan
- Priscilla Morgan
- Michael Morgan
- Jean Morley
- Ann Morrish
- Doria Noar
- Shaun O’Riordan
- Elizabeth Oakley
- Marilyn Oates
- Beryl Parish
- Donald Pascoe
- Robert Pears
- Morris Perry
- John Petit
- Donald Pickering
- Raymond Pike
- Joan Plowright

- Elizabeth Pollitzer
- Joan Poulter
- Maureen Quinney
- Douglas Rain
- Phillipa Reid
- Peter Retey
- Clive Revill
- John Roberts
- Rex Robinson
- Ivo Rodric
- Elizabeth Rogers
- Anne Ronaldson
- William Rothery
- Peter Russell
- Maragaret Sasha
- Brenda Saunders
- Prunella Scales
- Gideon Selver
- Bruce Sharman
- Sylvia Short
- Jill Showell
- Shirley Simmonds
- Ena Singer
- Cynthia Smith
- Shirley Smith

- Gordon Souter
- John Southworth
- Alan Spencer
- Gillian Spoor
- Trevor Stanley
- Rilla Stephens
- Terence Stevens
- David Stevens
- John Stockbridge
- Theresa Strasburger
- David Terence
- June Theobald
- Powys Thomas
- Eric Thompson
- Mary Thorne
- Moira Troup
- Susan Tunnington
- Doreen Turner
- Roberta Unger
- Eileen Usher
- James Vowden
- Michael Vowden
- Michael Watkins
- Mary Watson
- Veronica Wells

- Ruth Whine
- Jessica White
- Pamela Wickington
- Nancy Wickwire
- Jerome Willis
- David Woodman
- Edgar Wreford
- Mary Wylie
- Patrick Wymark

Advanced Production and Design Courses

- Donald Barry
- Patricia Blamires
- Michael Casey
- Robin Conelly
- Frank Dunlop
- Ralph Dyer
- Olthje Von Erpecom
- Barbara Fenton
- Michael Franklin
- Wendy Fullerton
- Yvonne Gordon
- Brian Jackson

- Martha Jamieson
- Graham Jenkins
- Jean Love
- Jack Landau
- Johannes Marrot
- Valentine May
- Janette McLaren
- Christopher Morahan
- Richard Negri
- Malcolm Pride
- Desmond Scott
- Alan Tagg
- Caspar Wrede

Technical Courses

- Michael Ackland
- Jonathan Alwyn
- Sue Armstrong
- John Barker
- Maragaret Barnett
- Margaret Beech
- Jacqueline Beere
- Derek Bennett
- John Blezard
- Raymond Boyce

- John Brebner
- Tom Brown
- Shirley Butler
- Jasia Ceglowska
- Owen Chain
- Deryck Clarke
- Robin Connelly
- Jill Crockfrod
- Gay Dangerfield
- John Dilly
- Ann Don
- Stephen Doncaster
- Ann Duffy
- Tony Easterbrook
- John Edmonds
- Glen Edwards
- Martha Farrar
- Barbara Fenton
- Ann Firbank
- Elizabeth Fox
- Angus Franklin
- Michael Franklin
- Barbara Glenn
- Menahem Golan
- Susan Goldsworthy

- John Griffin
- Peter Hayes
- Veryan Herbert
- John Hickson
- Michael Hoare
- Lyndall Hopkinson
- Janet Hotine
- Jennifer Hughes
- Elizabeth Hunter
- Brian Jackson
- Martha Jamieson
- Clare Jeffrey
- Victor Kennedy
- John Knight
- Mary Kors
- Denis Lansdell
- Michael Lacey
- Eva Lapper
- Janet Lenton
- Reynaud Leyden
- Jean Love
- Dorothy Marshall
- Derek Mason
- Stanley Morris
- Keith Morton

- Rohan Naldrett-Jays
- Richard Negri
- John Oakins
- Gwenllian Owen
- Prudence Owen
- Jim Page-Roberts
- Valerie Papineau
- Michael Paul
- Dawn Pavitt
- Margaret Peacock
- Jennifer Phillips
- Angela Philpin
- Peter Quinton
- Ann Rodger
- Maureen Ross-Smith
- John Salmon
- Desmond Scott
- Ann Shaw
- Yoel Silberg
- Alan Sleath
- Norman Smith
- Ann Spiers
- Tamara Spiers
- Elizabeth Spurling
- Dorothy Sudell

- Robert Stead
- Peter Symcox
- Wojciech Szdendzikowski
- Alan Tagg
- Doreen Taylor
- Peter Theobald
- Wendy Turner
- Carl Toms
- Margaret Venner
- Sheila Ward
- Claude Whatham
- Rosemary Wilkins
- Jean Wilkinson
- Barbara Wilson
- Sylvia Wrangham
- Caspar Wrede

Section 3 Saint-Denis and Chekhov at the Royal Shakespeare Company, 1961-1965

Introduction

On 4 August 1952, Saint-Denis wrote to George Devine from Paris having left England in July. He was 'exhausted' and 'bewildered by my own feelings' in the aftermath of the demise of the Old Vic Centre but his letter was also defiant:

I swear it is not the end. I know it cannot be: something infinitely strong binds us. Perhaps we needed this provisional end, this break to realise it: the way in which it has taken place is so strangely, so [*illegible*] unforgettable, that it contains the certainty of a future, otherwise it would be the unnatural destruction of life.¹

That 'future' is the subject of this concluding section. The ideal for which both Chekhov's and Saint-Denis' studios strove was of a theatre as an evolving ensemble dedicated to productions based upon training and experimentation. They shared a dedication to the expansion of the art of the theatre, rather than simply to its continuation. Public funding after the war certainly had the effect of expanding the volume of activity in the theatre, but did the *art of the theatre* also expand? And did Chekhov and Saint-Denis' practice play a significant role in that expansion?

Since Chekhov died in 1955 and Saint-Denis suffered declining health during this period, this story is concerned with legacy and influence as much as it is with direct action. It is therefore more fragmentary than the narratives of Saint-Denis' and Chekhov's own studios and is divided into five parts as follows:

- 3.1 The After-Lives of the Chekhov and Saint-Denis Studios, An Overview**
- 3.2 Saint-Denis at the RSC Studio, 1962-1965**
- 3.3 Saint-Denis in Rehearsal: *The Cherry Orchard***
- 3.4 Chekhov at the RSC: Paul Rogers in *The Homecoming***
- 3.5 After 1965: The Legacy of Saint-Denis' RSC Studio**

¹ BL Add MS 81091

3.1 The After-Lives of the Chekhov and Saint-Denis Studios, An Overview

Both Chekhov's and Saint-Denis' studios had complex legacies. Chekhov's was almost exclusively American, as the studio which transferred to Ridgefield, Connecticut at the start of 1939 went on to perform *The Possessed* on Broadway in October of that year and to tour universities on the East Coast in 1940 and 1941.¹ There were further Broadway performances of *Twelfth Night* (1941) and a benefit performance in New York of some adaptations of Anton Chekhov's short stories (1942).² During this time Chekhov also gave the lectures recorded in *Lessons for the Professional Actor*, whose audiences included Broadway actors and members of the Group Theatre.³ When, in 1943, the draft for World War Two removed crucial male members of the company, it was forced to dissolve, and Chekhov went to Hollywood, where he would find his last and inevitably most famous pupils.⁴ But Chekhov never had another studio, and there was a twenty-five year gap after his death until another institution dedicated to his work opened in America. This was the Michael Chekhov Studio, begun in New York in 1980 by Beatrice Straight and led, until his death in 1983, by her fellow student from Dartington, Blair Cutting. Deirdre Hurst du Prey also taught at the studio, and, following the death of Blair Cutting, it was taken over by Mel Gordon. Despite the gap in time, however, the legacy was direct: Chekhov's students taught from the plans of lessons he had given almost half a century before.⁵

In England, as Jerri Daboo has shown, there was no continuous legacy of the work of Chekhov's studio.⁶ It was, astonishingly, not until 1989, when Felicity Mason held a workshop in London along with Deirdre Hurst du Prey, Eleanor Faison, Hurd

Hatfield and Paul Rogers (all of whom had trained together at Dartington), that the practice of Chekhov was revived in England. Mason established the London branch of the Michael Chekhov Studio, which she ran from her home, and which maintained connections with the New York Studio. Further to this, in 1994 there was an international workshop at Emerson College (an institution based on Steiner's principles in Forest Row, Sussex), and as a result of that meeting the Michael Chekhov Centre UK was established in 1995 by the actor, director and teacher Sarah Kane (who had discovered Chekhov's work in Europe) and the television director Martin Sharp.⁷ They were later joined by the Australian actor, director and teacher Graham Dixon, who had been taught by Alice Crowther, the Steiner speech teacher at the Chekhov Theatre Studio. Subsequently, Dixon established the Michael Chekhov Studio London, but this studio, which is intermittently active for workshops and courses, only offers training.

The legacy of Saint-Denis' studios has been much more widely spread, predictably so given the relative prominence of his work in Anglophone countries. Peter Hall said at Saint-Denis' funeral that 'four major theatres' (the National Theatre, the RSC, the Royal Court, and what was then the Sadlers Wells Opera) 'all owe something of their way of working to him'.⁸ Hall might also have mentioned Frank Dunlop's theatre at Chorlton-cum-Hardy, which led to his Pop Theatre, and ultimately to his establishment, under the aegis of Olivier's National Theatre Company, of the Young Vic. The other 'major theatre' not mentioned by Hall is Michael Elliott and Braham Murray's Royal Exchange Theatre in Manchester, which opened in 1976, a collaboration between them and Old Vic School graduates James Maxwell, Caspar Wrede and Richard Negri. It grew from the 69 Theatre Company, which had been based in Manchester's University Theatre (now The Contact) and had, in turn, grown from the success of Elliott's work

with Wrede (and a number of actors who trained under Saint-Denis) with the 59 Theatre Company at the Lyric Hammersmith and in their subsequent season at the Old Vic in 1961, the last before the arrival of Olivier's National Theatre Company.⁹

In the field of training – even if we confine ourselves to England and therefore omit the *École supérieure d'art dramatique* in Strasbourg, the Julliard Drama Division and the National Theatre School of Canada – Saint-Denis' legacy was significant. Old Vic School graduate George Hall recorded that the training at the Central School of Speech and Drama when he arrived in the early nineteen-sixties was 'almost entirely the Vic syllabus'.¹⁰ His fellow graduates Norman Ayrton and Duncan Ross ran LAMDA and the Bristol Old Vic School respectively,¹¹ and the Drama Centre was established in 1963 by Saint-Denis' colleague John Blatchley along with Christopher Fettes and the movement teacher Yat Malmgren.¹² At the same time Old Vic School graduate Richard Negri was running the Theatre Design Course at the Wimbledon School of Art.¹³



Fig. 61, George Devine teaching at a Royal Court studio

However, these many and significant successes for those who had been involved in Saint-Denis' studios did not necessarily entail success for the project of those studios as a 1957 letter from Devine to Saint-Denis demonstrated:

I have made a plan for myself which I intend to keep to. I shall work on here [the Royal Court] for another two years – roughly till April 59 and then take a long break, at least six months, when I shall have a long holiday, go abroad, produce abroad, etc. and try to renew myself. When I come back I shall attempt to concentrate more on the training and development side of the organisation, more experimental work, maybe a school etc. Hoping that by then Tony [Richardson] will be able to take the bulk of the work at the theatre.

Devine did make progress 'on the training and development side': in 1958, he started a Writers' Group at the Royal Court, but it seems that it was not until it was reconvened under the leadership of William Gaskill and Keith Johnstone in the early nineteen-sixties that it achieved regularity and success.¹⁴ Gaskill decided that since these meetings had 'usually drifted into theoretical discussion', he would insist that they were kept active and practical:

The only idea in my head when I started the group was that we would not discuss each other's work or read passages from it. The class would be an acting class in which everyone would take part. We would learn what we wanted to find out about the theatre by doing it.¹⁵

The group used exercises from Étienne Decroux (who had worked with Copeau and taught Gaskill mime) as well as 'Stanislavsky improvisations with objectives'.¹⁶ The result was, according to Irving Wardle, that

every Wednesday for two years, writers including Jellicoe, Wesker, Wole Soyinka, Edward Bond and David Cregan turned up for these workouts, and passages in their subsequent plays . . . arose directly from improvisation. Devine's mask classes . . . stimulated Arden to write *The Happy Haven*, and Johnstone to form his mask troupe Theatre Machine.¹⁷

This is confirmed by David Cregan who recalled 'a lot of improvisation, and mask work', and Ann Jellicoe remembered bringing a scene from her play *The Knack* to the Writer's Group when she was 'blocked', and setting up an improvisation with Gaskill and Harriet Devine, which then went directly into the play.¹⁸

There was also an Actors' Rehearsal Group, created by Lindsay Anderson and Anthony Page; Page had trained with the American actor and teacher Sanford Meisner, and used the sessions to pass on the techniques of the American Method to the actors. The Royal Court did subsequently form an Actors' Studio, based at the Jeannetta Cochrane Theatre and shared with the National Theatre. Devine and Keith Johnstone both taught at this Studio, but it was short-lived.¹⁹ Indeed, all of these ventures were constrained both by finance and by time. Despite its notable successes, the Royal Court was still financially far from secure when, in October 1963, Devine was forced to reduce his work-load by cardiac spasms which signalled the heart disease of which he would die in January 1966.

Devine never involved Saint-Denis directly in his work at the Royal Court, possibly because his co-director Tony Richardson was against it.²⁰ Nonetheless, Saint-Denis was acknowledged as a 'tremendous influence' by the Court's most prominent designer, the LTS-graduate Jocelyn Herbert, and Devine was energetically attempting to realise the vision that he and Saint-Denis had shared at the LTS and the Old Vic Centre.²¹

The Court was training and developing many of the young actors who would go on to form the nucleus of Olivier's National Theatre Company; it was reinvigorating the work of an older generation, such as Olivier, by bringing them into contact with new forms of writing; it was enabling writers to experiment by using improvisation and acting exercises, and to explore theatre forms which were new to them, such as mask. Arnold Wesker recalled that 'four elements – the base at the Royal Court, the international spotlight, the writers' group and, most important, the team – all culminated in the fifth element: self-confidence'.²²

Bill Gaskill tried to continue this legacy after Devine's death, but he could not sustain it at the Royal Court. He left the organisation with the feeling that there was work still to be done.

Like George Devine, I still nursed dreams of what the Court might have: a permanent group of actors, a studio attached to the theatre exploring new ways of working and a committed but popular audience. The ensemble of my first season had folded and though we had returned to groups of actors for the Bond and Lawrence seasons we could no longer afford a full-scale company on regular salary. The studio work disappeared because we were all too busy running the theatre and directing plays to teach.²³

Gaskill went for a period to the National Theatre, and then left to divide his time between teaching and creating new, experimental work with the company Joint Stock (dubbed by Edward Bond, 'the Royal Court in exile').²⁴ Gaskill was never able to combine these activities in one studio, and nor was the Royal Court. Its studios were, in effect, a series of distinct workshops: places for groups to convene on a relatively casual and short-term basis and experiment together. They did not represent the nucleus of a

company, because, after the repeal of the increased Arts Council grants given during the first years of Harold Wilson's Labour government, there was never sufficient subsidy to support such a company. Therefore the work of training and experimentation which went on at the Royal Court was never unified, but separated with the careers of the individuals who passed through the theatre.

Many of those individuals went on to join Laurence Olivier's National Theatre Company at the Old Vic. Olivier did manage to sustain a permanent company, and he also committed to their training, offering movement classes with Yat Malmgren and voice classes with Kate Fleming. However, as Simon Callow records, the planned acting studio, begun jointly with Devine's Royal Court (which Kenneth Tynan had suggested would offer 'constant practice in a sort of acting gym') was never securely established. There was, as Callow remembers, 'a more conventional gymnasium, with bar-bells and weights, in the basement'.²⁵ For Olivier, athleticism was always an essential part of the actor's craft, as it had been twenty-five years earlier when he had enrolled in classes in acrobatics at the London Theatre Studio.

Whether or not Olivier would have invited Saint-Denis to join him at the National Theatre, however, we cannot know, because by that time, Saint-Denis was already under contract to Peter Hall's Royal Shakespeare Company. Saint-Denis met Hall in Hollywood in 1959 after leaving the *Compagnie de l'Est* in Strasbourg, and wrote to George Devine that they had 'a very interesting conversation'. Saint-Denis was clearly still keen to speak to Devine about what he called 'this pursuit of "something" that I know, which animates my present work, as it did when we started', and 'nobody . . . understands . . . like you'.²⁶ But with Devine unable or unwilling to enter into this

discussion, Saint-Denis turned to the newly-established Royal Shakespeare Company. In July 1960 he visited Stratford to advise Hall.²⁷

¹ After the war Alice Crowther returned to her native Australia, where she continued to teach the Steiner Speech Method, but since her practice had pre-dated Chekhov's studio, this is not exactly part of its legacy.

² See Marowitz, 2004, pp. 189, 194

³ For a complete list, see Chekhov, 1992, p. 19.

⁴ They included Ingrid Bergman, Gary Cooper, Marilyn Monroe, Jack Palance, Gregory Peck, Anthony Quinn and many others, see Marowitz, 2004, pp. 203-205.

⁵ I was told this by Lenard Petit, who trained at the Michael Chekhov Studio, and was given some class-notes from the Michael Chekhov Studio by Bonnie Eckard, now a Professor of Theatre at Arizona State University, when I was a visiting speaker there. Some are simply photocopied from the class-notes typed up by Deirdre Hurst du Prey in the late nineteen-thirties.

⁶ Daboo in Pitches 2012, pp. 78-79

⁷ Daboo's chapter contains further details of the current state of the practice of Chekhov's technique in the UK (Pitches, 2012, pp. 74-83), and there will be a jointly-authored piece about the work of the Michael Chekhov Centre UK in the forthcoming special issue of the journal Theatre, Dance and Performance Training on Chekhov, ed. Jonathan Pitches and Franc Chamberlain, due for publication in 2013.

⁸ The text of the address is in BL Add MS 81103 and is reproduced, with a few necessary changes, as the Foreword to *Training for the Theatre*, Saint-Denis, 1982.

⁹ There is more information in an interview with Elliott's wife Rosalind Knight, herself an Old Vic School graduate, conducted as part of the British Library's Theatre Archive Project : <http://www.bl.uk/projects/theatrchive/knight1.html> - <http://www.bl.uk/projects/theatrchive/knight4.html> accessed on 30.08.10.

¹⁰ Susi, 2010, p. 68

¹¹ Saint-Denis & Baldwin, 2009, p. 83

¹² <http://www.csm.arts.ac.uk/dramacentrelondon/about/historyandprofile/> accessed on 9 February 2012

¹³ Negri was the subject of a recent research project, archived at www.richardnegri.co.uk (accessed 30 August 2010).

¹⁴ Gaskill describes the work of the Writers' Group in Gaskill, 1988, pp. 36-39; see also Johnstone, 1989, pp. 25-26. Johnstone is also at pains to stress the importance for his work of a break with Devine's approach, which he considers to have been overly dry and academic (see *Keith Johnstone Teaches Trance Masks*, DVD).

¹⁵ Gaskill, 1988, p. 36

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 37

¹⁷ Wardle, 1978, pp. 199-200

¹⁸ Harriet Devine is the daughter of George and Sophie Harris of Motley. She became Literary Manager of the Royal Court between 1968 and 1969.

¹⁹ See Johnstone, 1989, pp. 26-27

²⁰ There is a note in the Saint-Denis (presumably by Also Scott), saying that 'Suria [Saint-Denis] and Jocelyn [Herbert] both indignantly deny that Michel wanted George to employ him at the Royal Court after he left Strasbourg and was wandering, and was bitter when he was never asked. On the other hand, Michel's letters to George put out some pretty strong hints. I suspect

Tony Richardson was the main influence – it appears he disliked Michel and anything to do with the Old Vic Theatre Centre (except for George)’ (BL Add MS 81091).

²¹ Letter to Saint-Denis, 26 July 1959 (BL Add MS 81094)

²² Farthing, 2011, p. 55; Wesker had seven plays produced at the Royal Court, five of them (*Chicken Soup With Barley*, *Roots*, *I’m Talking About Jerusalem*, *The Kitchen* and *Chips With Everything*) between 1958 and 1962 under George Devine and two (*Their Very Own* and *Golden City* in 1966 and *The Old Ones* in 1972) under Gaskill.

²³ Gaskill, 1988, p. 131

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 136

²⁵ Callow, 1997, p. 16

²⁶ 23 March 1959 (BL Add MS 81091)

²⁷ A letter from Peter Hall dated 13 Aug 1960 thanks Saint-Denis for his visit and advice ‘at the end of July’ (BL Add MS 81192).

3.2 Saint-Denis at the RSC Studio, 1962-1965

By January 1961, Hall and Saint-Denis were exchanging letters regarding the casting of a production of *The Cherry Orchard*, to be directed at the RSC by Saint-Denis at the end of that year. Chekhov's play must have represented unfinished business for Saint-Denis since he had abandoned his London production with the outbreak of war in 1939, but his sense of the work still to be completed went much further. Peter Hall wrote to him on New Year's Day of 1962, after the opening of *The Cherry Orchard*, to say that 'our association has got to gather all of the riches of your work in England in the past and hand it on to the future'.¹ Hall was not explicit about the means whereby this would be achieved, but training was evidently important. He wrote to Saint Denis towards the end of the month after *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the Royal Court which, he said, 'exposes the need for classical training, and our Shakespeare study group, in the clearest way imaginable' and 'shows the importance of what you want to do most clearly'.² Two weeks later, *The Times* reported that 'M. Michel Saint-Denis has accepted the newly created post of General Artistic Adviser to the Royal Shakespeare Theatre Company. He will be mainly concerned with basic planning and artistic development in collaboration with Mr. Peter Hall'.³ Saint-Denis' employment began on 1 March 1962. He was immediately given particular responsibility for the development of an RSC Studio.⁴

In July 1962, Saint-Denis prepared a document entitled 'Stratford Studio', outlining his vision for this aspect of the RSC's work.⁵ It set out the 'main purpose of the Studio' as

to evolve the ways and means, to find out the kind of work and to conduct the experiments through which a contemporary way of producing Shakespeare and the Elizabethans, and perhaps other styles, as a consequence, can be prepared.

Saint-Denis proposed a 'search for deep reality' and 'convincing psychology' in Shakespeare's plays while at the same time embracing the 'opened and frank convention' and 'un-operatic production' of the 'anti-illusion stage'. To enable actors and directors to succeed in this 'contemporary way of producing Shakespeare and the Elizabethans', Saint-Denis argued that they must learn to understand and appreciate 'style, considered as a reality in itself, artistically bound to the expression of reality as a whole'. This would, he said, require each actor to 'develop his imaginative power as well as the strength and variety of his means of expression'. For the actors to achieve this, the document proposed technical training in movement, voice and music as well as acting training including 'improvisation with and without masks', 'theoretical and practical work on acting of dramatic poetry of varied styles' and discussions 'about the Elizabethan theatre and all modern currents'.

In order that the company's directors would be able to benefit fully from these improvements to the actors' technique, a series of 'experiments' was proposed, namely:

- Production of typical scenes and acts from Shakespeare and the Elizabethans.
- Poetry, singing, dancing.
- Production of selected pieces from the Far-Eastern theatre, from Brecht and from modern dramatists.
- Technical experiments on the "space-stage" in scenery, costumes, lighting, sound, make-up, with elements of scenery and a transformable costume, to be used for style plays.

The facilities envisaged for this work were reminiscent of those built for Saint-Denis' London Theatre Studio and Chekhov's Dartington Studio: an 'empty volume, about the size of the Conference Hall (the RSC's rehearsal room, in the shell of the old Memorial Theatre, now redeveloped as The Swan auditorium), in which a "space stage" with apron and dispositions for public seating in amphitheatre shape can be tried, on a reduced scale'. This experimental theatre would also require 'facilities for hanging above stage and apron' as well as lighting, sound and control for both. There is also mention of an 'auditorium for about 200 people', as well as dressing-rooms and two 'small workshops', one for costumes and one for 'props, masks, painting' as well as three studios: one each for movement, voice and rehearsals. It is not clear to what extent Saint-Denis was aware that these proposals were unrealistic in a company which, if Peter Hall's memos are to be believed, was permanently in the process of averting financial crisis. But the necessary shift from this idealistic conception of the Studio to its pragmatic reality began as Saint-Denis started to produce more concrete and detailed plans in the subsequent weeks.

In a memo dated 10 September 1962 to Peter Hall, his fellow Associate Director Peter Brook, and the theatre's General Manager Patrick Donnell, Saint-Denis announced that Clifford Williams had agreed to assist him in running the RSC's proposed Studio. Williams, who had been both a dancer and an actor before the war, had been taken on as a staff director in the company following success with productions of Lorca's *Yerma* (1961) and Eugene O'Neill's *Moon for the Misbegotten* (1962) at the Arts Theatre and after running his own mime company in the Midlands. He and Saint-Denis proposed the following programme for the Studio's work.

We believe there should be two sides to the Studio work: permanent basic training on voice and movement, verse-speaking and some kind of improvisation. This basic work should be permanent. That is it should take place during the whole of the Stratford season and be suspended only during the most hectic periods of work from February to April . . . On top of this permanent training, the Studio would flare up into more active and exciting experiments of a limited duration every time a producer is available to do work. For instance, permanent training and experimental work could take place on the occasion of the opening of the Studio in the Conference Hall between November 12th and December 8th. Then the Studio would move to London and go on with basic training until the latter part of January.

On 19 October 1962, a document entitled 'Notes and Timetable' of Studio work from 12 November to 8 December was published, listing subjects to be studied, staff and times. All Studio members were to have classes in Theory of Voice and Speech, Voice Exercises, and Limbering. Selected members would also have Tutorials on 'voice, speech, poetics, acting', as well as Movement and Dance, Mask, Fencing, Discussion and Make-up. Selected members of the Studio would also rehearse either Brecht's *The Exception and the Rule* with Saint-Denis, or 'an act from an Elizabethan play' with Clifford Williams.

The document listed the following members of staff, including Geraldine Alford (voice teacher from the Old Vic School):

MICHEL SAINT-DENIS	Rehearsals, Masks, Discussion Groups.
CLIFFORD WILLIAMS	Rehearsals, Limbering, Movement, Discussion Groups.
SURIA SAINT-DENIS	Rehearsals, Masks.

JOHN BARTON	Tutorials, Fencing.
GERALDINE ALFORD	Voice Theory, Voice Tutorials.
COMPANY MEMBERS	Limbering, Voice Exercises.
PETER HALL, PETER BROOK	As available – for discussion.

The document also offered a breakdown of the total amount of time to be spent on each area of the Studio's activity.

All members receive the following tuition during the course of the month:-

○ Theory of Voice and Speech	1 ¼ hours
○ Voice Exercises	8
○ Limbering	7 ¼
○ Discussion (2x 1 hour)	2

Selected members receive in addition:

○ Further voice work	1 ¾
○ Movement and Dance	5 ½
○ Mask work	8 ½
○ Fencing	3 ¾
○ Makeup (if required)	2

Plus the following tutorial sessions:

○ Voice, speech, prosody, etc.	4
○ Acting	2
○ MSD, PH, PB	?

That final question mark against the availability of Saint-Denis, Peter Hall and Peter Brook spoke eloquently of the compromised position of the RSC Studio even at its outset. Saint-Denis had envisaged permanent training, yet this plan provides very little training outside the Studio's 'flare-up period' at the end of the season. 'Flare-ups' had been proposed every time a producer was available, so that the vocabulary of the company's permanent training could be built upon and expanded in the process of developing ideas for future production, a scheme which would have enabled the Studio to function as the engine room of the company's creativity, like the experimental groups which Saint-Denis had planned for the Old Vic Centre. But with only one annual flare-up period confined to a brief time at the end of the season, the ability of the Studio to fulfill this central, experimental function was – like the availability of the company's directors – under question from the outset.

There was another question mark over the central purpose of the Studio. In an address to the company in 1962, Peter Hall said that verse is 'a craft that you can learn very quickly', and that 'in our new studio . . . we want to tell you about line-structure, alliteration, rhyme and counter-rhyme and the meaning of imagery'.⁶ But the studio was also intended, according to Hall, to 'train and develop each individual actor's potential to its utmost and to explore continuously all forms of staging and dramatic presentations'.⁷ The studio's goals were therefore both literary and theatrical. This is not of necessity a contradiction, but the two undertakings are quite distinct and this was never directly addressed. There was also an unacknowledged difference between knowledge which can be communicated quickly in individual tutorials and technique, which must – as Saint-Denis knew well from his studios and schools – be developed gradually by an ensemble training together. In the RSC's 1962 Studio the only training provided to all

members of the company was voice training. Work on movement, masks and acting was only available to selected members of the Studio. Additionally, as Clifford Williams noted in presenting his plan, 'improvisation has been deleted as an individual subject'. This was one of what Williams called his 'last-minute, late-night decisions', taken for pragmatic reasons, but nonetheless the result was that improvisation and movement (which were always at the heart of Saint-Denis' work) were given distinctly low priority at the RSC in the early nineteen-sixties, which was described by Peter Brook as 'a theatre dominated by the obsession with spoken language'.⁸

For this reason, Williams, whose experience lay primarily in movement, was an unusual figure at the RSC, and he was reportedly told by Hall when he began work there as a staff director that 'you'll never be a producer here'.⁹ However, an opportunity quickly came his way as a last minute replacement for Peter Wood directing David Rudkin's *Afore Night Come* (1962). Williams' work on this production led to an offer to direct something to fill a gap in the company's schedule which emerged – again at the last minute – as a result of the postponing of Peter Brook's *King Lear* (so that an exhausted Paul Scofield, due to play *Lear*, could recover from a long tour). Williams' resulting production of *The Comedy of Errors* demonstrated that the tension between his approach and that of the RSC could be creatively exploited, and it was the company's first major success. Williams had three weeks to rehearse the play and, according to Colin Chambers, 'relied on the actors' and on 'the RSC's verse classes' to look after the handling of the text, while stretching them in a different direction with a production characterized by unusually high physical demands.¹⁰ It began with a set-piece, mimed to music, in which the company entered, all dressed in what looked like grey Marks & Spencer slacks or skirts, and sweaters. The two Antipholuses, placed centre, then looked

at each other and there was a moment of recognition between them before the company scurried off in all directions, re-appearing with elements of costume – hats, coats, and so on, all brightly-coloured – to create a parade of characters from the *commedia dell' arte* – a *capitano*, a *pantalone* and so on – who formed the population of Syracuse. This pageant-like opening, which had as its central motif the doubled encounter of the self and the other and employed the presentational language of costume and theatre history, encapsulated the play's paradox of psychological enquiry and formalized theatricality.

What followed was a swift and energetic production, played out on a stage of three large platforms narrowing to a false perspective. Not only did Williams' actors therefore have nowhere to hide, they had to exist convincingly in a vibrant and technically-challenging performance-vocabulary which was foreign to them. The debt to Saint-Denis' stylized productions of *The Witch of Edmonton* and *Macbeth* at the pre-war Old Vic may not have been conscious or deliberate, but it was certainly present. And it was to Saint-Denis that an unconvinced Peter Hall turned after the production's dress rehearsal, saying: 'you like *commedia*'.¹¹ Saint-Denis' response is not recorded, but Hall was confirmed in his opinion that the production should not open. However, possibly thanks to Saint-Denis' support and certainly because of Williams' determination, the production went ahead. Kenneth Tynan described a 'momentous' achievement, which 'means that Peter Hall's troupe has developed, uniquely in Britain, a style of its own'.¹² This *Comedy of Errors* continued to be revived by the company as late as 1972.¹³

The company's style would be further extended by Brook's bleak, uncompromising and unanimously acclaimed production of *Lear*, which viewed the play to a great extent through the lens of Jan Kott's groundbreaking book *Shakespeare Our*

Contemporary which identified it as Beckettian and absurdist as well as Shakespearean. To this combination of a radical, revisionist version of a classic tragedy and a revival of a then little-known comedy, steeped in the traditions of comic and physical theatre, was added Saint-Denis' programme for training in the Studio. This involved eighty percent of the company, and would – he hoped – generate the technical means whereby its emerging style would be further developed. The programme was funded by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (mandated to fund training in particular), and began during rehearsals by providing both individual and group training sessions for the actors.

The timetable for the Studio's flare-up period shows that it had use of the Conference Hall in Stratford as well as Room 16 (a stage management room adjoining the Conference Hall), and the circle foyer. This foyer had reportedly been used in 1959 by Sam Wanamaker and Paul Robeson for extra rehearsals of the *Othello*/*Iago* scenes for the Memorial Theatre's anniversary production of *Othello*.¹⁴ These sessions had been initiated by Wanamaker, who was accustomed to improvisation from his work in the States, and felt that Robeson, who had not acted for some time and was more accustomed to the concert platform than the stage, needed the alternative approach to make his performance more lively and responsive, particularly in the long duologues. This anecdotal evidence suggests that the RSC Studio's beginnings lay, in part, in the formalizing of what had been common practice undertaken by actors and directors outside the scheduled business of rehearsals and performances. The Studio's work also incorporated individual or small group tutorials with John Barton, which were also an established practice in the company, and took place in any space that could be found, including dressing-rooms.¹⁵ Barton recalls that he was hired in the first place 'solely to work on text and help the actors' because, when he was offered the position of Director

of the Memorial Theatre, Peter Hall 'wasn't very sure of himself with Shakespeare'.¹⁶ Barton's role as a tutor is confirmed by RSC programmes which pre-date the formation of the RSC Studio, which list the following as 'teaching staff':

Verse Training – John Barton

Singing – Denne Gilkes

Voice Production – Iris Warren

Movement – Norman Ayrton

But the Studio was not only a way of formalizing miscellaneous extra rehearsal and tuition. In 1962, it also rehearsed two projects in the Conference Hall, once the space had been vacated by rehearsals for Brook's *Lear*: Brecht's *The Exception and the Rule* with Saint-Denis and part of Marlowe's *Dr Faustus* with Williams. These projects were integral to Saint-Denis' attempt to transform the relationship of training and production in the company. Previously, the company's 'teaching staff' had been employed simply to ensure that the actors were capable of handling the twin demands of a repertory of complex texts and the challenging size and acoustic of the Memorial Theatre, where performing had been described by Balliol Holloway as like 'acting from Calais to the cliffs of Dover'.¹⁷ The training offered by the company to help actors overcome these difficulties was evidently conceived as conventional teaching: experts were brought in to impart their knowledge and technique. By contrast, Saint-Denis had never worked on Brecht before (though he would direct *Squire Puntilla and his Man Matti* for the RSC in 1965) and Williams had no experience of Marlowe (though he would go on to direct *Faustus* at the RSC in 1968).

In their experimental work in the 1962 Studio, Saint-Denis and Williams seem to have been as concerned with training themselves as they were the company, and thereby evolving their – and the RSC’s – future work. It is also striking that their choice of projects attempted to evolve the company in directions which complemented or offered a corrective to the coolly rational, text-centred and Cambridge-influenced style for which the RSC under Hall would become known. Brecht’s plays (and particularly the avowedly anti-naturalistic *Lehrstücke*) depend upon a physically articulate style to communicate what he calls their ‘gestic content’.¹⁸ Likewise, *Faustus* is a play which, more so than any by Shakespeare, exploits the full gamut of Elizabethan theatricality, and particularly the carnivalesque: conjuring tricks, slapstick comedy and grotesque characterization. Williams’ exploration of it with a large group of actors laid the foundations for his 1968 production, which emphasized these elements: masked performers played the Seven Deadly Sins (see fig. 62) and Eric Porter’s *Faustus* literally fought off damnation until it arrived in a *coup de théâtre*:



Fig. 62, Eric Porter as *Faustus* (right) with the Seven Deadly Sins (RSC, 1968)

Eric Porter plays the last scene unforgettably, matching the mental torment with a physical struggle, as he combats the inevitable summons to damnation, until, with a stunning theatrical coup, the looming black wall at the back falls down to reveal the flames of Hell, and the devils swarm out to claim their prey.¹⁹

Exactly how much of this production had been developed during the Studio explorations which culminated in a single performance in the Conference Hall on 7 December 1962 is impossible to tell, but it certainly involved enough actors to create the 'swarm' of devils, and given Williams' background in dance and mime, it seems highly unlikely that his time working on the play in the Studio was spent on the intellectual analysis of text.²⁰ Both Williams' and Saint-Denis' 1962 Studio projects were therefore centrally concerned with non-verbal content and with the development of physical expression.

However, this ambitious start for the RSC Studio was not achieved without difficulties. After the first week of its flare-up period, a group of younger actors complained that they were being overlooked and that their understudy work had gone unrewarded. The older actors, by contrast, were concerned about being *over-worked*: they were tired, the season was nearing its end, and they did not want simply to be used to secure funding for a venture that they felt might have little to offer them. The result was that Williams' work on *Faustus* was opened to the entire company (except those working on Brecht with Saint-Denis), and the training was relaxed.²¹ Despite these problems, however, the 1962 Studio established an important precedent for training and experimentation as an official part of the RSC's regular programme. As a consequence, the Governors agreed, in principle, to the construction of a permanent home for the Studio and for understudy rehearsals next to the costume store on Southern Lane in Stratford.

Plans for that building were not approved, however, until early 1965.²² So in 1963, the Studio was housed in a tent erected on Avonside, as the 'Royal Shakespeare Staff News-Sheet' of 20 May 1963 announced:

A large tent now stands on the lawn at Avonside housing the new Studio which will work under the general direction of Michel Saint-Denis assisted by Clifford Williams. Members of the company will attend classes in speech, movement, dance, acrobatics, wrestling etc., and experiment in new forms of staging. Sandy Black is Studio Manager, and classes are being taken by Geraldine Alford (voice) and Molly Kenny (movement).²³

The Studio Report dated 27 August 1963 records that despite 'great demands on the company's time' being made 'by the very complex Histories rehearsals', Studio work was maintained through the summer of 1963 and involved five-sixths of the company. Particular achievements were reported in the area of voice work, and the reports of assistant directors are mentioned as evidence that 'these improvements are being used in performance'. Nonetheless, voice and movement work in this period seem to have been predominantly either remedial or basic, and directed at the individuals in the company rather than the company as a whole.

Geraldine Alford reported that her work was done in individual tutorials, and that 'it is only by having them alone that I am able to establish the necessary confidence'. She also reported that she has 'been struck by the lack of any sound basic training or understanding of the use of voice', which meant that 'the first few tutorials are usually spent in removing misconceptions and getting over a few simple, but essential principles and related exercises'. She put this situation down not only to the uneven training of members of the company, but 'lack of practice and not enough challenge'. She recorded that

I am trying to impress upon the younger actors and walk-ons etc., that the tutorials are wasted unless they follow up with regular limbering, leading to the speaking aloud of speeches and texts which make big demands on their lungs and articulating muscles.

Nonetheless, she also confessed to 'a strong feeling only a few do this regular practice at all'. It is also evident from Alford's admission that 'it needs a lot of application and will power to practice on one's own' that training together was not a part of the culture or practice of the company.

Molly Kenny left the company during 1963 to travel to America, and her teaching of movement was taken on by John Broome, who remained with the company for a number of years before moving to Stratford, Ontario. His work also seems to have been largely individual and mainly remedial, and his summation was no more encouraging, in terms of the overall standard of the company's work, than Alford's. He concluded that there was a lack of the following: 'any feeling for working together with sensitivity and warmth', 'any real surety of expressive gesture and a live awareness of the sense of touch', 'a firm sense of shape, the use of space as volume, and space-direction', and 'an experienced understanding of movement qualities'. Broome's proposal to improve this situation was notably reminiscent of the practice of both Chekhov and Saint-Denis' studios. He insisted that 'movement is the exercise of a hidden power not a callisthenic frolic', and that this power 'can be caught and controlled, given a rhythm, a shape and an inflexion of meaning' through group training requiring nothing more than 'a room and floor-space to be conquered, a sympathetic and unsuspecting group, a responsive musician reflecting or leading the action'. That training would develop, according to Broome, a paradoxically felt-sense of the intangible content of

movement, which is, he said 'from the point of view of training, a tactile and not a visual art', and, he argued, 'once this is experienced the imaginative control of the body begins and it awakens to the possibilities of its own expression'.

Despite these less-than-encouraging reports, Peter Hall wrote to Saint-Denis in September 1963 that 'I think you will find the Company very ready and willing to participate in Studio activities. The two necessities, as last year, remain that Studio work should give a) a break from Shakespeare, b) should enable actors from the middle and lower regions of the company to develop themselves'. Hall adds that any actors 'completely left out' after casting has been decided for the Studio's work 'can be given then to John Barton (he is willing) to get up some test scenes, as the Aldwych company did last year'.²⁴ This letter suggests that the argument made by Saint-Denis in a 1963 typescript headed 'Article for the Stratford Book' that exercises and training alone are not sufficient to constitute a studio and that 'experimental shows must be organized' was not yet fully accepted. Hall accepts in his letter to Saint-Denis that the principle that 'everybody should get a chance' is 'not strictly in the spirit of the studio', but is evidently more concerned with morale than with the value of experimental productions to the company's future. Nonetheless, experimental work continued in the 1963 'flare-up' and included Chekhov (Saint-Denis worked on the story 'On the High Road'), Brecht (Sandy Black directed *The Wedding Party*), Sophocles (Martin Jenkins directed *Oedipus*), Jonson (Garry O'Connor directed *Catiline*) and Genet (Frank Evans directed *Death Watch*).²⁵ There was also an improvised dance-drama, a project on Lorca and choral singing.²⁶ Williams was probably involved in the Lorca project – he had directed *Yerma* at the Arts Theatre in 1961. The programme was particularly reminiscent of earlier Saint-Denis studios in its placing of improvised and movement-based material and music on the

same platform as classical and classic contemporary writing, but the depth of Saint-Denis' direct involvement is difficult to ascertain. It is notable that all of the other directors involved were employed as staff directors. The implicit link made by Hall in his letter between the Studio and the 'middle and lower regions of the company' is more in evidence in this 'flare-up' programme than the first.

After the 1963 'flare-up' the Studio began to suffer a change of fortunes. This may have been initiated by a financial crisis in the company which forced Hall to write what he called 'an appeal letter to the influential in the land' at the very end of the year.²⁷ He wrote to an 'over-worked and over-strained' organisation in early 1964 that the company needed a further £50,000 by September if it was to survive.²⁸ He also wrote that he intended to 'do less big work in the harsh glare of the spotlight and more small, experimental and studio work, etc. where we can have the freedom to breathe and develop'. The insertion of 'and' between 'experimental' and 'studio' is telling, because at this point the separation between the training and experimental strands of the RSC's work began to be – at least tacitly – formalised. In 1964, Saint-Denis' fellow Associate Director Peter Brook, assisted by Charles Marowitz, took a small group of RSC actors to LAMDA to work on a season based on Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty. A press release, announcing the formation of this 'Royal Shakespeare Experimental Group' describes its work in terms very close to those proposed initially by Saint-Denis for the Studio.

The programme will involve the audience in a public session of work-in-progress – improvisation, exploration and a re-examination of accepted theatre forms – by a group of ten actors and actresses: Mary Allen, Jonathan Burn, Richard Dare, Freda Dowie, Rob Inglis, Glenda Jackson, Alexis Kanner, Leon Lissek, Robert Lloyd and Susan

Williamson. After this first public session has ended, the experimental work will continue, mainly in private, so that the ideas raised whilst playing to an audience can be followed up. The climax, after further public performances at LAMDA in the spring, will be a full-scale production of Genet's *The Screens* at the Aldwych Theatre in June.

Brook stressed that this experiment was primarily theatrical as opposed to literary: 'we have not aimed at presenting new forms of theatre-writing, we are exploring theatre-language', he said.

The historic significance of this group's Theatre of Cruelty experiments and their influence on Brook's later work are well-known, but it also had the effect of removing the experimental remit of Saint-Denis' Studio. At the same time as the Studio lost this function, a memo from General Manager Patrick Donnell (dated 21 January 1964) announced that 'the responsibility for the organising of all understudy rehearsals will be that of the Studio in Stratford in direct liaison with the Stage Management'. The decision was also recorded, in a memo of 22 May 1964 that all Studio work was to be organized 'on a strictly voluntary basis', and that the 'top priority for the Studio for this season is to maintain the life of the actors in the company', meaning that it should focus on 'tutorials and acting opportunities for members of the company'.²⁹ Memories of the dissatisfaction of junior company members in 1962 and Hall's concern for morale seemed to have trumped the artistic imperatives of Saint-Denis' project. The Studio's next priority was identified as 'the improvement of the vocal equipment of the Company', and it was decided to make investigations as to the possibility of Geraldine Alford doing more group work on voice and speech. It was also decided in principal to reserve Saturday mornings for group work on verse to be led by John Barton or another member of the company. Less emphasis was placed on movement, which would

‘continue as usual with the addition of a Period movement class to be taken by Miss Kenny’, and there was no mention of acting or improvisation work of any kind except for the flare-up programme, which was planned for the six weeks from 21 September to 1 November, with showings during the last two weeks.

In a memo dated 16 September 1964, the staff director Sandy Black, who had been given the role of Studio Manager, expressed concerns about the implementation of these plans which entailed working on 30 understudy scenes and 13 duologues, the duologues being organised to provide opportunities to develop junior members of the company who were employed principally as understudies. He wrote that ‘the voluntary nature of Studio work is difficult to define – especially in understudy work’. Understudying clearly could not be considered as a voluntary activity in itself, though the further development of understudies through scene-work for which they were not employed evidently was. Black also pointed out that the supplementary and voluntary nature of this developmental work had caused ‘a feeling that Studio work is not important from some other departments’, which was further exacerbated by the lack of ‘sufficient time, facilities or inclination’ for understudy development work, which he therefore suggests ‘can only damage the company’s attitude to the work and to the whole concept of the Studio’.³⁰

Pressure on the Studio was set to increase still further in the flare-up period, as the Studio Report for May 1964 – March 1965 explains.

The extremely heavy 1964 season at Stratford forced the Studio into a very difficult position. Because of the frantic pressure of work and the general lack of time, it was practically impossible to plan any co-ordinated work or to consolidate the substantial gains we had made with the company during 1963.

The directors' feedback reports on the 1964 flare-up period almost unanimously cited the shortage of time as a crucial limiting factor. There were mentions of occasional classes in improvisation, but clearly there was no opportunity to develop this experimental aspect of the studio's work, and, as the assistant director William Davis put it: 'two classes are only slightly better than no classes'. It seems that what Sandy Black called 'a general feeling of frantic improvisation from all the members of staff, coupled with a determination to carry on . . . because of the importance of the work' prevailed. The flare-up period was cut to five weeks, and during this time, John Barton co-ordinated '40 separate acting exercises (5-15 minutes in length) involving 133 acting parts, 4 imported directors and 10 company members directing (and sometimes acting!)' which 'were rehearsed during 3 ½ weeks (simultaneously in 9 rehearsal rooms flung all over the town) and all presented in 1 ½ days'. It is important to note the geographical dislocation of the work: plans for the Studio's tin hut had still not been approved.

The impact of all of these factors created a widespread feeling that Studio work was viewed as 'an extra-curricular activity' (in Michael Rudman's phrase), and the company's lowest priority. The 1964 report recommended that 'long range planning' and 'the planning of rehearsals' both needed to involve the Studio 'if the company is to benefit fully from the facilities of the Studio'. There is also a request that 'clearer directives must be given to the company as to the function of Studio. These can only be effective if the Direction really clearly states the policy of Studio work'. Having emerged, in part, from the informal activities of actors and directors, the Studio in 1964 was threatening to lapse back into informality and become an officially-sanctioned but low-

priority festival of activities to sustain the company's interest and energy towards the end of each year's season.

The following year, the Studio's temporary building in the Paddock was constructed. However, as a result of his poor health and his responsibilities as an Associate Director, Saint-Denis was forced to pass the running of the Studio on to John Barton, and his involvement was much more limited. The 'flare-up' that year was focused on Barton's interest in ancient Greece (using texts not only from its drama but from its wider social and intellectual life) and resulted in the Studio's new tin hut being re-named 'The Greek Faculty'. Given his *avant-garde* plans for the Studio, Saint-Denis can't have been much amused by the joke. He directed *Squire Puntila and his Servant Matti* in 1965 and he seems to have used the opportunity to bring together diverse elements of the company, casting Roy Dotrice (an actor under long-term contract whose casting as Firs in *The Cherry Orchard* Saint-Denis had initially questioned) as well as Patrick Magee and Glenda Jackson, both of whom had been members of Brook's experimental group for the *Marat/Sade*. But the production was not a success.

In 1965, Peter Hall announced the necessity of significant cuts to the company's work for 1966. These cut-backs were known in the company as the Goodwin Plan, after their author, the company's Head of Publicity John Goodwin. Peter Hall summarized the plan as a reduction 'to ONE permanent company (rather larger than the normal Stratford company) which would play a slightly curtailed Stratford season, and then move to London annually to play a short 4 ½ month season at the Aldwych'.³¹ The plan also involved reducing Studio activity 'to essential voice and movement work, and to a flare-up period on the lines of the 1962/3/4 Seasons', which would save the company an estimated £7,000. That figure represented a little over 1% of the company's projected

total expenditure for the year of £590,000, or 5% of the company's salary bill of £132,000. But even the Goodwin Plan (which allowed 'no room for experiment' and required actors to play fewer roles over longer periods as well as playing in a much higher proportion of revivals) was not sufficiently harsh in its cuts. It made no provision for the company's holidays, for instance, and did not reduce projected expenditure as low as the figure of £551,000 which represented estimated income of £401,000 and an Arts Council grant of £150,000. In the event, as Peter Hall's memo to the Arts Council in support of the draft budget for 1967-68 reported, 'studio and training activities have had to be abandoned through lack of finance'.³²

At the same time as this, Saint-Denis had a severe stroke which left his speech impaired, and was the first of a series over the next two years that left him, by 1969, permanently brain-damaged. It is consequently impossible to trace his direct influence on the company's practice after 1965. His work in the RSC Studio is also under-represented in the records which survive, partly because the documents we have are reports which were submitted to him as head of the Studio and to his fellow Directors. There are a few photographs showing classes and improvisations, but none features Saint-Denis himself. There is a record, however – in the form of rehearsal notes by his assistant director Stephen Aaron – of Saint-Denis' work on *The Cherry Orchard* in 1961. The production was also re-directed for television by Michael Elliott, using an adapted version of Farrah's set. Using these two records, alongside the production's prompt-book, it is possible to reconstruct some significant aspects of Saint-Denis' work in England in the nineteen-sixties. These records enable us to grasp more fully Saint-Denis' vision for the practice of the RSC Studio than do its administrative records or the abstractions of the rhetorical prose in which it was often discussed.

¹ BL Add MS 81192

² 26 January 1962 (BL Add MS 81192)

³ The Times, 8 February 1962

⁴ There is a contract letter dated 2 June 1962, for 'a minimum of two years and six months from 1st March 1962' at a rate of £5,000 per annum 'pro rata with the amount of time spent in your active duties with this theatre' (BL Add MS 81192).

⁵ The document is in BL Add MS 81192.

⁶ Greenwald, 1985, p. 35

⁷ Ibid., p. 36

⁸ Schechner et al, spring 1986, p. 54

⁹ Alan Strachan, 'Obituary: Clifford Williams', The Independent, 23 August 2005

¹⁰ Chambers, 2004, p. 22

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Quoted in Chambers, 2004, p. 23

¹³ The 1972 revival was used to fill a gap in a season for the RSC's second Artistic Director, Trevor Nunn. Williams' production must have been a strong influence on John Barton's celebrated 1973 *Richard II*, which began with a set-piece which hinged on the doubling of Richard and Bolingbroke by the actors Richard Pasco and (one of Williams' original Antipholuses) Ian Richardson.

¹⁴ This information was given to Tony Howard in interviews conducted with the surviving members of the company as part of his research for an exhibition on Robeson and *Othello* which toured with the RSC's 2009 production of the play.

¹⁵ When the Donmar rehearsal rooms were unavailable in London, studio classes took place in a dressing-room at the Aldwych.

¹⁶ My source here is an interview with Barton, conducted by Carol Rutter for the 'Becoming the RSC' research project, conducted by Warwick University's CAPITAL Centre from 2008-2010. He was, however, also hired to direct *The Taming of the Shrew* (1960) with Peggy Ashcroft and Peter O'Toole as Kate and Petruchio, but Hall had to take over the production when Barton's controlling direction caused controversy in the company, see Greenwald, 1985, pp. 36-7.

¹⁷ Quoted in Norman Marshall, *The Other Theatre (1947)* by Mackintosh, 1993, p. 101

¹⁸ *The Exception and the Rule*, or *Die Ausnahme und die Regel*, is one of the short *Lehrstücke*, or 'teaching plays', written in 1929/30 and designed to be toured around factories, colleges, and so on. The reference to 'gestic content' is from Brecht's 'Short Organum for the Theatre' (Willett, 1992, p. 198).

¹⁹ Quoted in Hattaway, 2004, p. 183

²⁰ http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/ren/elizabethan_jacobean_drama/christopher_marlowe/dr_faustus/stage_history/professional/ accessed on 23 February 2012

²¹ My source for this information is Chambers, 2004, pp. 148-149, but he does not give his own primary sources and I have been unable to confirm this narrative with archival evidence. However, as he was the RSC's Literary Manager, Chambers has inside knowledge of the building and this version of events makes sense of some subsequent comments, so I have no reason to mistrust it.

²² Chambers, 2004, p. 149

²³ BL Add MS 81190

²⁴ 3 September 1963 (BL Add MS 81190)

²⁵ There is a list of Studio Productions for 1963 in BL Add MS 81192.

²⁶ Chambers, 2004, p. 149

²⁷ He mentions this in a memo of 30 December 1963 (BL Add MS 81190).

²⁸ Letter addressed 'To all members of the Stratford and Aldwych Companies and others within the organisation', 1964 (BL Add MS 81190).

²⁹ 'Studio 1964-65' (Maurice Daniels Collection, Shakespeare Centre Library and Archive)

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ All quotations relating to the Goodwin Plan are taken from an undated 1965 memo from Peter Hall to all members of the Royal Shakespeare forum, in which the planned changes are described in some detail (Maurice Daniels Collection, SCLA).

³² Memo dated 3 September 1966 (Maurice Daniels Collection, SCLA)

3.3 Saint-Denis in Rehearsal: *The Cherry Orchard*

. . . so many glorious things – all the ballroom wildly successful . . .

Laurence Olivier to Saint-Denis after seeing *The Cherry Orchard*, 18 March 1962



Fig. 63, *The Cherry Orchard* (Patience Collier, Ian Holm, Peggy Ashcroft and company) in the televised version of Saint-Denis' production directed by Michael Elliott.

***The Cherry Orchard* Company (RSC, 1961-1962)**

Lopakhin	George Murcell
Dunyasha	Patsy Byrne
Epikhodov	Patrick Wymark
Firs	Roy Dotrice

Madame Ranevskaya	Peggy Ashcroft
Anya	Judi Dench
Varya	Dorothy Tutin
Gaev	John Gielgud
Pischik	Paul Hardwick
Charlotta Ivanovna	Patience Collier
Yasha	David Buck
Trofimov	Ian Holm
Passer-By	Gordon Gostelow
Coachmen	Russell Hunter
	Peter Holmes
Gardener	Julian Battersby
Stable Boy	Michael Warchus
Stationmaster	William Wallis
His Wife	Narissa Knights
Government Official	Michael Murray
Schoolmaster	Ronald Scott-Dodd

His Wife	Rosemary Mussell
Post Office Clerk	Gareth Morgan
Directed by	Michel Saint-Denis
Designed by	Abd'Elkader Farrah
Soundtrack by	Roberto Gerhard
Music Arranged by	Brian Priestman
Lighting by	John Wyckham

Rehearsals for Saint-Denis' production of *The Cherry Orchard* began on 17 October 1961 and were scheduled to run for seven weeks (although with evening performances and matinees taken into account, they only occupied a total of twenty-two and a half hours per week).¹ This was an unusually long time and on the first morning, Saint-Denis 'asked the actors not to be frightened of this long rehearsal period' and 'explained that often, after the first four weeks of work, new aspects of the role, which had been missed previously, suddenly come to light'.² To support his case, Saint-Denis recalled the concerns of Gwen Frangcon-Davies about the length of rehearsals for his 1938 *Three Sisters* and 'her final realization that it suited that kind of play'.

Oddly, despite the gap of nearly thirty years, the only actors in the company with any experience of Chekhov – Ashcroft and Gielgud – also played leading roles in *The*

Three Sisters, but even they did not find the work easy. On 23 November, Ashcroft was reportedly 'still worried about her second act speech, still trying to hurry it too much' and 'glanc[ing] at Saint-Denis during her scenes all the time – apparently trying to read his reactions'. There was evidently some disagreement between Saint-Denis and Ashcroft. On seeing the drawings for her costume, Ashcroft wrote to him to request some changes:

I would like more to have seen a conception of Ranevsky that I could transform myself into . . . I must present physically a very feminine woman – not a French fashion plate or a Romantic Lady, I don't mean that – but a woman who wants to be elegant and is extravagant but who finally is a bit untidy; but never formally smart – alluring but not emphatically so.³

Saint-Denis disagreed:

Ranevsky is a bourgeoise and she is provincial. Her behaviour does not fit with the way she looks: she looks like a mother, like a serious woman. She is not "untidy", but a little extravagant in details . . . Her real, generous temperament must not affect the way she dresses.⁴

Saint-Denis' sense of theatre history seems to have got in his way: his memory of Olga Knipper in the Moscow Art Theatre production was likewise 'not of an elegant woman, but of a mother, of a *bourgeoise*'. He seems to have held determinedly to that interpretation in spite of the perfectly reasonable alternative suggested by Ashcroft.

Nonetheless, Ashcroft's portrayal skilfully creates the character Saint-Denis' described to her as 'sensual' and 'able to change moods at a moment', despite looking a little too much 'like a serious woman', which doesn't quite match a physical

performance of untidy gestures, uneven tempo, and an indirect, wandering quality of movement and gaze, particularly in moments of tension. Ashcroft attempts to resolve this contradiction through her use of costume: in Act Two, her shawl is disarranged and she fiddles absent-mindedly with her hat. But nonetheless, the contradiction between the propriety and order of her dress and her changeable and often disordered behaviour doesn't quite cohere into the paradoxical complexity of character which Saint-Denis wanted.



Fig. 64, Ashcroft as Ranevskaya, Act Two.

Gielgud's work on Gaev was also not without its struggles, and, like Ashcroft, he was resistant to his costume, which, according to Jonathan Croall, 'Saint-Denis wanted to be faded, like Gaev's life'.⁵ Gielgud wanted more stylish clothes but when Saint-Denis was insistent, he agreed, and his performance entirely captures Saint-Denis' vision of Gaev as 'hollowness inside an elegant shell'.⁶ Gielgud orchestrates the melodic lines of Gaev's text with meticulously constructed business which creates both the impression of spontaneity and artful resonances and ironies. His playing of Gaev's promise to Anya in Act One that 'the estate shall not be sold' exemplifies this effect. Gielgud uses a tender

yet condescending tone, suggesting (as do the faded clothes) that Gaev is living in the past and speaking to the girl Anya was and not the young woman she is becoming. He also gives the line very pointed emphasis ('the estate shall not be sold'), underscored by a percussive movement of his right thumb and forefinger, which are holding a small caramel that he has just taken out of the tin he holds in his left hand. This realistic detail is also poetic in its juxtaposition of Gaev's promise and his indulgent frivolity. He is a man who has measured out his life in little sweets, and will, when he attends the auction for the estate, be outbid by the starting-price. The critic John Whiting remarked that 'it is impudent to write about acting such as this. It must be seen to be believed'.⁷ Olivier, who saw the production while preparing for his production of *Uncle Vanya* with Michael Redgrave at Chichester, also thought Gielgud 'miraculously good'.⁸



Figs. 65 and 66, Gielgud as Gaev: 'I've had to suffer a great deal for my convictions' and 'The estate shall not be sold'

Gaev's vain promise to Anya also demonstrates the patterns of Saint-Denis' staging. He divided the characters early in rehearsals into those representing 'the dying past' (Ranevskaya, Gaev, Firs, Charlotta), the future 'in which lies all hope and promise' (Anya, Trofimov and 'most important of all', Lopakhin) and those who were 'damned' (Varya and Yasha, the latter being, in Saint-Denis' eyes, 'genuinely evil' and 'irredeemable').⁹ The stage picture created in Gaev's promise (fig. 66), therefore, is of

the faded, indulgent past making a promise to the bright, hopeful future, which the dark figure of the 'damned' Varya sees that it cannot keep.

Despite Saint-Denis' famously precise and detailed plans, however, staging patterns such as this trio were not simply imposed upon the actors schematically. Saint-Denis saw that the company's 'impulse is to jump to conclusions' and wanted them to resist it.¹⁰ Rehearsals therefore proceeded slowly, through a process of 'careful detailed analysis of the text', with the focus on characterisation, 'moods', the 'key points within each act' and tempo.¹¹ This was too much for some of the actors: Roy Dotrice thought at the end of the first week that 'we'd read the thing out of sight' and Gielgud began the second week with the outburst: 'For God's sake let's do some acting!'¹² But the pacing of rehearsals was designed more for the majority of actors who were unfamiliar with Chekhov than the more experienced performers. Rehearsal records show that Saint-Denis' staging of Act One began, in fact, on the Thursday of the first week, when the actors 'walked through the moves as he either described them or illustrated them'. However, this process, whereby they 'would simply broadly sketch in the moves' would not have felt like 'acting' to Gielgud.¹³

Saint-Denis was possibly trying to manufacture the desire to get up, act and improvise in rehearsals by initially suppressing it. He was certainly aware of the danger of generating frustration by this approach, and sought to reassure the actors as early as the second day that the time spent reading and analysing 'will pay off in the later rehearsals'.¹⁴ One pay-off, still visible today in the televised version, is the scoring of action through tempo and mood. Saint-Denis ensured that these were clearly – though broadly – defined before the play was staged, so that by the beginning of the process

that he called 'placing the play', he had already emphasized the development of its moods:

Act One: 'a mixture of tiredness and rediscovering old friends'

Act Two: 'andante, leisurely and quiet'

Act Three: gathering pace towards 'the climax at Lopakhin's entrance'

Act Four: 'the golden glow after a convalescence. Time has passed since the end of Act Three – giving Ranevskaya and Gaev a chance to be brave at first, even though their emotions are at the top'.¹⁵

The process of staging was to integrate this sequence with the 'circulation of action in the play', structured by Abd'Elkader Farrah's ground plan for the set, but governed from inside the scene rather than imposed upon it. Saint-Denis worked 'from one pause to another, so the patterns have this framework, in a musical way',¹⁶ but also remarked to his actors, that 'pace is something internal in the scene and not based on a director's instruction to "hurry up"'.¹⁷ Saint-Denis therefore gradually adjusted the staging, using what he called 'floating furniture', which, Aaron observed, he 'continually repositions until the actors are comfortable with it'.¹⁸ By beginning in this way with the production's topography, Saint-Denis ensured that 'the visual, upright elements of the set' occurred at rhythmic intervals which were suited to the play's action and were therefore synchronised with the bodies and movements of the actors.¹⁹

The actors' ability to improvise was essential in these rehearsals. On the first day, for instance, Gielgud was concerned that it should be clear that in Act One Gaev has only been to the station, he has not travelled from Paris. Stephen Aaron recorded that

'Saint-Denis felt it would be impossible to point this up within the context of the action of Act One', but Ashcroft and Gielgud found a way: as Ashcroft's Ranevskaya expresses her surprise and delight at arriving in the nursery, she embraces Gielgud as Gaev.²⁰ The embrace has the quality of a greeting and emphasizes the rhythmic difference between the characters: Ranevskaya is elated to have arrived, whereas Gaev expresses no surprise at his surroundings and is somewhat tired by the wait for the delayed train. It's a small example, but it exemplifies Saint-Denis' dialogic approach to rehearsal, which stunned Aaron:

After working through the scene once, Saint-Denis asked the actors what they should do! He explained that they gave him nothing yet to work on. Should they do it again and again? But then each time the actors must bring to the scene something new. The actors are used to working too quickly: they set Shakespeare in one week and never change.²¹

By bringing 'something new' with each repetition of the scene the actors developed the sculptural quality of the staging and the result was a production which develops a complex but nonetheless extremely clear theatrical language for the play.

This aspect of the production was praised by Olivier, who wrote to Saint-Denis that 'there was a bit of direction between Peg and Dotrice . . . which was the most glorious thing I've ever seen'.²² Probably this referred to a piece of business, lifted directly from Saint-Denis' memory of the Moscow Art Theatre production, where Firs spills tea on Ranevskaya's hand in Act Four (see figs. 67-69). She is distracted by the noise of the party, tea splashes onto her hand, the cup falls and breaks and she leaps up, her hand burned, causing her lover's telegram to fall from her *décolletage*. It is picked up and given to her a few moments later by Trofimov.²³ It emphasizes Firs' developing

weakness and projects Ranevskaya's nervous state about the sale of the orchard onto the functioning of the whole house. It also foreshadows Lopakhin's drunken breaking of a vase after his return from the sale, when he announces 'here comes the new master' and Ranevskaya sobs over the sale of the orchard (fig. 70). The breaking of the cup therefore subtly shifts the production's emphasis away from private grief and onto the play's domestic portrait of a changing society. But it does not thereby cancel out the personal in favour of the political. Instead, it locates the personal and the political each within the other, blurring their usual distinction. The tears shed by Ranevskaya for the death of her son are juxtaposed with those shed for the loss of her estate and an image of the breaking-up of the estate at the hands of its new owner is echoed by an image of the breakdown of an unsustainable domestic and political structure.



Figs. 67-70, Roy Dotrice as Firs spills tea on Peggy Ashcroft's Ranevskaya and she drops the cup (Act Four); later Lopakhin, the 'new master', breaks a vase

The reiteration of a motif is characteristic of the production's physical language. Some function as structural markers for the narrative such as the opposition of the youthful Anya alone in the nursery at the arrival of Ranevskaya and her entourage, and the dying Firs left alone after their departure (figs. 71 and 72).



Figs. 71 and 72, Anya arrives (Act One) and Firs is left (Act Four)



Figs. 73-75, Judi Dench as Anya with Dorothy Tutin as Varya, Ian Holm as Trofimov, Peggy Ashcroft as Ranevskaya

Other motifs show the development of a character through the action. Saint-Denis spoke on the first day, for instance, of the 'significant development of Anya' from 'the young girl – sleepy and passive' through 'her conversation and relation to Trofimov' to 'a woman with her own convictions and purpose', a process captured by series of embraces at the ends of Acts One, Two and Three (figs. 73-75). First Anya is asleep on Varya's shoulder, then full of hope and purpose in the arms of Trofimov, and finally

supporting her collapsing mother with an optimistic vision of her own ability to provide for the future.

The optimism of this narrative is, however, undercut by the recurrence of embraces in the production which express distance more than intimacy. They range from the cruel (Dunyasha's hopeless attempt to hold on to Yasha in Act Four, fig. 76) to the melancholic (Ranevskaya and Gaev's embrace before departing in Act Four, fig. 77).



Figs. 76 and 77, David Buck as Yasha is embraced by Patsy Byrne as Dunyasha and Peggy Ashcroft as Ranevskaya and John Gielgud as Gaev embrace before leaving their house (both Act Four).

The unequal intimacy of these embraces echoes another common image in the production: the unsuccessful offer, which is also reiterated by a number of characters through the action. Figs. 79 and 80, for example, show George Murcell as Lopakhin in Act Four offering champagne to Ranevskaya and Gaev, and money to Trofimov. They echo another motif, where a departing or departed character is called-to in vain. Again, this is passed between characters (see, for instance, figs. 81 and 82 in which Varya calls to Anya and Ranevskaya to Trofimov). These motifs underline the extent to which every character repeatedly attempts to reach others and to give to them what they think will be wanted, only to be ignored or rejected. These motifs are strands within a broader

exploration of isolation in the production, a theme which is underscored by the staging from the outset.



Figs. 79 and 80, Lopakhin's offers of champagne and money in Act Four



Figs. 81 and 82, Varya calls out to Anya (Act Two), and Ranevskaya calls Trofimov back after he has angrily left her (Act Three).

As Lopakhin presents his plan for the orchard, there is a flurry of business around the coffee at the table (fig. 83) which emphasises his separation from the people he is trying to reach. The image is echoed in what Saint-Denis saw as the play's climax: Lopakhin's announcement of his purchase of the orchard. This was staged, as it is shown in the televised version (fig. 84), 'pushed way down stage on the apron', isolating Lopakhin.²⁴ This pattern of isolated figures culminates in the assembly before departure in Act Four, where the characters' separation is underlined by the shortage of furniture

and by their subsequent, staggered departures. The pattern of separations, of which this moment is the culmination, allows us to see the isolation of each character at the play's close in its full, spiritual dimension.



Figs. 83 and 84, Lopakhin presents his plan for the orchard and announces its sale.



Figs. 85-87, The assembly before departure, Dorothy Tutin as Varya with Patience Collier as Charlotta behind her, John Gielgud as Gaev and Peggy Ashcroft as Ranevskaya leave

The motif of isolation is echoed by the key visual elements of Farrah's set, such as the stove upstage, slightly off-centre. Its usual symbolic suggestions of warmth and domesticity are undercut from the outset by references to the cold, and as the furniture is stripped away in Act Four it stands monolithically cold and alone. Its verticality is echoed in Act Two by what look like a pair of telegraph-poles, rising jaggedly behind the action. By contrast, the orchard, with its associations of community and continuity, is kept off to the side, seen by Ranevskaya and the others through the stage left windows

in Act One, but not by the audience. However, the audience did *hear* the orchard, or rather they heard its clearing: timed carefully in Roberto Gerhard's soundtrack to underscore the action. The prompt-book notes two axe-strokes on the off-stage sound of the departure of the carriage, the 'second with rending wood'. Then Firs comes in. There is another stroke 'as Firs on pit steps', and another 'as he is C[entre]'. The effect of aligning the felling of the orchard with the process of Firs' death is further emphasized as the axe-strokes (notated 'X') co-ordinate with his speech and movements. He tries the door: 'Locked! X', 'as he reaches U/C X', 'as he sits X', 'these young people X', 'I'll lie down for a little X', and so on. Thus diegetic sound is treated as underscore, and is both realistic and symbolic, and part of the play's action. This use of sound reflects the weaving of the inanimate visual elements of Farrah's design into the production's score of action, and completes Saint-Denis' sculptural realisation of Chekhov's play as a creation of and for the theatre in its entirety.

The theatrical language created for the play by Saint-Denis depended, first of all, upon the technique of its actors. Stephen Aaron noted that Saint-Denis was 'trying to teach the younger members of the company a new technique'.²⁵ This was both the production's greatest strength and its Achilles heel, as we can see from looking at the performances of Patrick Wymark as Epikhodov and Ian Holm as Trofimov. Wymark was a graduate of the Old Vic School, and had wanted to play Lopakhin. His failure to be cast in that leading role meant that he was labelled (by Stephen Aaron at least) as 'a discontented actor'.²⁶ But Aaron also observed that he 'has a wonderful sense of comedy and is obviously perfect for the part'. He demonstrates both of these qualities in his use of imbalance in the role. In figs. 88-90, for instance, he slips in moving between his attempts at a swashbuckling pose and a romantic clinch with Dunyasha, and in figs.

91-93 a rebuke from Varya catches him off balance, and he stumbles backwards before attempting to collect himself with the line 'I do wish you'd make use of more refined expressions'.



Figs 88-90, Act Two: Patrick Wymark as Epikhodov and Patsy Byrne as Dunyasha with David Buck as Yasha



Figs. 91-93, Patrick Wymark as Epikhodov in Act Three

This motif of imbalance was taken up by Ian Holm as Trofimov, responding to Ranevskaya's amused observation that he 'should have a mistress'. However, Holm – whose verbal performance is extremely clear – does not have Wymark's command of movement. Rather than expressing Trofimov's awkwardness, Holm's performance of this business is itself awkward, and elements familiar from elsewhere in the production – the hand to the throat, the backwards stagger – seem to have been imposed upon rather than discovered by him.



Figs, 94-96, Ian Holm as Trofimov and Peggy Ashcroft as Ranevskaya in Act Three

If there was one performer in the company who was made most aware of their technical shortcomings, it was Judi Dench. Given Saint-Denis' commitment to training, his management of this situation was at best unfortunate. Dench, new to the RSC, had spent four years at the Old Vic, where, by her own admission, acting technique was hardly mentioned. She struggled in rehearsals and reportedly developed 'a nervous stomach condition' which she put down to 'her problems with the role'. Saint-Denis was concerned and, finding her reading a newspaper during rehearsals, 'stopped and asked her to watch Ashcroft carefully', expressing himself 'amazed that the younger members of the company do not take advantage of the opportunity to watch experienced professionals at work'.²⁷ According to Dench, even before this, Peggy Ashcroft told her that 'I recognise you've become the whipping boy' and advised her: 'Never let him see you cry'.²⁸

Again, as Jane Baldwin has observed, Saint-Denis' memory of the Moscow Art Theatre production seems to have been a strong influence in his direction of the role.²⁹ In Stanislavsky's version, Alla Tarasova's Anya had entered and jumped onto the nursery sofa in a combination of 'exhaustion, happiness, youth and tenderness'. Dench's failed attempts to recapture this moment made her, she said, 'completely hysterical'.³⁰ But she did eventually achieve it to Saint-Denis' and her own satisfaction (see fig. 97), and when she played Ranevskaya at the Aldwych Theatre in Sam Mendes' 1989 production,

Miranda Foster as Anya repeated the business.³¹ Nonetheless, Dench's performance retained a forced quality which testifies to the strain of the experience.



Fig. 97, Judi Dench as Anya jumps onto the nursery sofa in Act One.

Saint-Denis' production was, therefore, a striking testament both to the potential of the experimental study of technique that he advocated for the RSC Studio and to some notable gaps in the technique of the company at that time. It also highlighted some mixed blessings of being directed by Saint-Denis. His dialogic approach to working with the actors through questions and provocations sometimes created ideal conditions for creative acting (as in Gielgud's Gaev), but it also left Dench as Anya almost wincing at every note.³² At its best, however, the production remains a convincing testimony to the potential of a company whose technical and imaginative abilities could combine to develop an original and striking 'theatre-language', an ideal to which Saint-Denis remained committed.

¹ The actors' contracts allowed for five hours of rehearsal on a full day and half that on the three matinee days each week. A rehearsal schedule is held in BL Add MS 81193.

² Subsequent quotations from rehearsals are referenced by date only. They are all taken from a copy of the staff director Stephen Aaron's notes, which he sent to Suria Magito Saint-Denis on 3 January 1968 and is held in BL Add MS 81194.

³ This letter (BL Add MS 81195) is only dated 'Tuesday morning', and was written while Ashcroft was in rehearsals for *Othello*. Presumably it dates from early October 1961.

⁴ 4 October 1961 (BL Add MS 81195)

⁵ Croall, 2000, p. 424

⁶ 18 October

⁷ Croall, 2000, p. 423

⁸ Letter to Saint-Denis dated 18 March 1962 (BL Add MS 81195)

⁹ 17 October

¹⁰ 19 October

¹¹ 18 October

¹² Croall, 2000, p. 423

¹³ 20 October

¹⁴ 18 October

¹⁵ 18 and 19 October

¹⁶ 23 October

¹⁷ 30 October

¹⁸ 27 October

¹⁹ 28 October

²⁰ 17 October

²¹ 28 October

²² Op. cit.

²³ This is an alternative to Chekhov's stage direction in which Ranevskaya removes her handkerchief to wipe away tears (caused by the memory of her son's death), which causes the telegram to fall.

²⁴ 19 October

²⁵ 18 October

²⁶ 1 November; by coincidence, Paul Rogers mentioned Wymark in his interview with Martin Sharp as a 'notorious resister' of Saint-Denis' teaching at the Old Vic, but Aaron reports a change or difference of opinion: 'he was one of Saint-Denis' pupils at the London Studio school [this is incorrect – he was at the Old Vic School] and remembers when Saint-Denis was much more of a martinet in rehearsals; he feels Saint-Denis has mellowed a lot'.

²⁷ 24 October

²⁸ Zucker, 1999, p. 52

²⁹ See Baldwin, 2003, p. 89

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ See Baldwin, 2003, p. 89

³² 31 October

3.4 Chekhov at the RSC: Paul Rogers in *The Homecoming*



Figs. 98 and 99, *The Homecoming* in the theatre (Broadway, 1967) and on film (American Film Theatre, 1973), L to R: John Normington as Sam, Paul Rogers as Max, Terence Rigby as Joey, Ian Holm as Lenny, Michael Jayston as Teddy; Michael Jayston as Teddy, Ian Holm as Lenny, Cyril Cusack as Sam, Paul Rogers as Max

In 1965, the leading actor in the RSC's Aldwych Company was Paul Rogers, who had left the Chekhov Studio when it transferred to America so that he could marry his fellow student Jocelyn Wynne. He made a name for himself first at the Bristol Old Vic and then in the post-war Old Vic in London. Of his work there, Cecil Wilson had written that 'one of these nights, Paul Rogers will walk onto the stage . . . looking something like himself and nobody will recognize him'.¹ His versatility was also recognised by Michael Redgrave, who inscribed an edition of *Don Quixote*, given to Rogers as a Christmas present in 1949, 'To Paul Rogers – the only actor I can think of who could conceivably play both Don Quixote and Sancho Panza'.² Rogers' best role of 1965, Max in Harold Pinter's new play *The Homecoming*, a delusional poet of violence and an earthy pragmatist, contained elements of both.

Rogers won a Tony Award for Max in the production's 1967 Broadway transfer, and repeated it for Ely Landau's American Film Theatre series in 1973. Peter Hall, who

directed both production and film, remembered Rogers' intuitive grasp of Pinter's character from the outset, describing a trip with Harold Pinter to Hackney to see what Pinter said was 'the sort of house I was thinking of' when he wrote the play:

as we walked past a house, an old man came out, with a walking stick and a cloth cap and a cardigan, wearing sneakers – trainers – and said 'Harold, my boy, how are you? Come in and have a drink' . . . I was introduced, and Harold said 'And how is Moishe?' And we heard how Moishe was, and he was a professor of literature at a Canadian university . . . And I said to Harold afterwards 'is this how it all started?' and he said . . . 'some of the triggers, certainly' . . . But what really shook me was that I don't remember a moment when we said to Paul Rogers 'why don't you wear tennis shoes and a hat and carry a stick and wear a cardigan night and day . . . but there he was: the same Max that we met in Hackney.'³

This is the Max we first see, scrabbling in the kitchen drawer for a pair of scissors before walking into the living-room:

MAX comes in, from the direction of the kitchen. He goes to the sideboard, rummages in it, closes it.

He wears an old cardigan and cap, and carries a stick.

He walks downstage, stands, looks about the room.

MAX What have you done with the scissors?

Pause.

I said I'm looking for the scissors. What have you done with them?⁴

In June 1936, Chekhov had told Beatrice Straight and Deirdre Hurst, when training them to act as his assistants that the ‘how’ is much more important than the ‘what’. . . Actors are always playing ‘what’ and never ‘how’; therefore they are all so dry, so clever, so mechanical, so without soul’.⁵ The question for the actor with Pinter’s detailed instructions as to *what* he does, then, is *how*? How does Max go to the sideboard? How does he rummage, walk, stand, ‘look about the room’?



Figs. 100-102, Paul Rogers as Max and Ian Holm as Lenny: ‘What you have you done with the scissors?’

Rogers carries Max’s stick in a gripped fist, horizontally, at hip level. This is not only a symbol of masculinity and violence, but emerges naturally from Rogers’ Psychological Gesture. Chekhov observed to his students that ‘Psychological Gestures are not symbols – they are absolutely concrete things – as concrete as the floor. One of the big mistakes is that we do not do the gesture with the full being, the whole being’.⁶ Rogers’ gesture for Max is visible in the way he carries the stick, in the crouch in his body over the drawer, the forward hunch of his shoulders: it expands forwards with an outer quality of forceful and gradual intensity off-set by an inner tempo which is quick and sudden, felt in the speed of his rummaging and raising his stick. Thus, in the first moments of the film, Max is established: his forceful will; his domination of the domestic space as he cuts across it, stick raised in readiness; his sudden violent aggression,

masking an inner uncertainty or weakness. All are palpably present in this brief opening sequence.

Next, Max sits in the armchair which is the film's centre-piece and was similarly prominent in the stage production (see fig. 98). Rogers uses the chair as a throne, he expands into it and incorporates its weight (with his hanging elbows and slack jaw) and its imposing authority (with the superior gestures of the hand that holds his cigar). But the chair is not only 'large' and imposing. It is also an image of Max in its squat, grey seediness. It is coming apart at the seams and its legs look ready to buckle. Again, we might simply think of this correlation as symbolic, a parallel to be noticed by the observant viewer, but Rogers' performance goes further than that: he scratches in his cardigan pockets and undermines his expansive forcefulness, suggesting that he, like the chair, is on his last legs.



Figs. 103 and 104, Paul Rogers as Max in his armchair (Act One)

This inter-relation between the actor and his environment was central to Rogers' training with Chekhov at Dartington, but it is notably absent from Peter Hall's recollection of directing the film, despite the fact that he is very clear about the stylization for which he was aiming:

I hope that what we've done is create a surrealistic style which enables one to believe that it is, and it is more than it is. It's got the longest staircase of any house in London, for instance; it's a very bare and extraordinary room. The way that it's shot is, in that sense, slightly stylized.

Hall's stylization was concentrated, as his remarks indicate, on the set and on 'the way it's shot' and is not consistently realized in the acting. Nonetheless, the actors do succeed in capturing the economy of Pinter's play, an aspect of his writing which Pinter himself was keen to stress: 'the key word is economy, economy of movement and gesture, of emotion and its expression, both the internal and the external in specific and exact relation to each other, so that there is no wastage and no mess'.⁷



Figs. 105-107, Michael Jayston as Teddy and Ian Holm as Lenny

This 'economy' is apparent throughout the film. Indeed, it borders on a complete absence of 'movement and gesture' and of 'emotion and its expression'. At Teddy and Lenny's first meeting, for example, there are no manual gestures except Ian Holm as Lenny folding his arms which had been clasped behind his back (figs. 105 and 107). Throughout the film, the characters' bodies are fixed in particular attitudes like this. The effect is to emphasize strongly the characters' speech, which is in line with Hall's intentions: he was 'worried about the actors bringing down the performance to the right level for camera, and by doing that, not losing the verbal and cruel intensity of what they're saying'. This identification of acting with speaking (the 'performance' is

'what they're saying') is typical of Hall's direction, and here it generates performances that are held up more to be admired than experienced, because of the intensity of their focus on the writing *as writing*, which draws attention more to its artifice than its life. Rogers' performance is no less economical than the others', but rather than holding the writing up to the light, he gives it physiological substance. In this, Rogers echoes Chekhov: 'in every part of your body the style, like blood, must run through you'.⁸

Part of the play's 'style' is determined by its thematic content. It is a play about power (male power specifically), which is enforced by the threat of violence and embodied, as Hal observed, by Max:

The Homecoming is dominated by Max . . . this violent retired butcher . . . in a house [from] which he's expunged all softness, all femininity, because his wife has betrayed him. He's male, sarcastic, belligerent, in many respects a dreadful man, nearing the end of his life and still fighting like a great resentful bull.



Figs. 108 and 109, Cyril Cusack as Sam and Paul Rogers as Max

But Rogers is not only the 'great resentful bull' of fig. 108, he is also bitter and snarling (fig. 109). In fact, he uses a heavy, blunt, bullish quality sparingly, and his performance's most striking achievement is its expression of the play's particular blend of stylistic elements. Rogers' Max is also surreal and consciously theatrical, he tells anecdotes lightly while sipping coffee as though in a drawing-room comedy of manners (fig. 110),

then grins grotesquely like a death's head (fig. 111), and strides in, stick jauntily over his shoulder like an end-of-the-pier comic (fig. 112) to ask 'Where's the whore?'⁹



Figs. 110-112, Paul Rogers as Max in contrasting styles

Rogers' performance is likewise successful in its incorporation of Pinter's characteristic pauses, which are, in Chekhov's phrase, 'spiritually awake and physically quiet'.¹⁰ In the following passage, for instance, Rogers' animation of each pause is illustrated by stills (figs. 113-115):

LENNY I've got a better idea. Why don't I take her up with me to Greek Street?

Pause.



MAX You mean put her on the game?



Pause.



We'll put her on the game. That's a stroke of genius, that's a marvellous idea.

You mean she can earn the money herself – on her back?

LENNY Yes.¹¹

Rogers has two 'inner' gestures here. Both occur in the pause after Lenny has suggested taking Ruth 'with me to Greek Street': a quick upwards movement of his forehead and left hand is forestalled by an uncertain movement towards Lenny of both head and hand with the line 'You mean, put her on the game?'

The first of these gestures (upwards) relates to taking in Lenny's suggestion and Max's combination of enthusiasm and relief that a solution has been found to paying for Ruth's upkeep. The second relates to his speech and checking that he has understood Lenny correctly. This questioning gesture has a tentative quality, the head moves away to the right a little as the left arm extends in Lenny's direction, with the palm down.

Rogers' Max is clearly right-handed, so the left-sidedness of this gesture removes his characteristic dominance. The first, upwards gesture is repeated in the pause after his question to Lenny. This time it is an expansive, upward and backward movement: a slower, longer version of his quick, initial response to Lenny's suggestion.

This technique of filling each pause with 'inner' movement reflects Peter Hall's direction 'to have the courage to allow the inner life to go on inside you so that the pauses and the silences are filled with something'. This would have chimed with Rogers' training at Dartington. Chekhov writes that 'the strongest inner activity is a complete Pause. The Pause as emptiness, as a full stop, does not exist on the stage'.¹² But Hall's notion of what the 'something' that each pause must be filled with is importantly distinct from Chekhov's. Hall turns back into verbal content: 'The pause is there because it actually is a line, and you may not say anything, but you have to express something, and our task is to find out what that expression is'. For Chekhov and for Rogers, however, there is no need to fill each pause with unspoken text, because for them, the pauses are filled with inner movement. Chekhov wrote that 'the main characteristic of a true pause is a moment of absolute Radiation'.¹³



Figs. 116 and 117, Two Kinds of Pauses: Terence Rigby as Joey, Cyril Cusack as Sam and Paul Rogers as Max see Teddy and Ruth coming down the stairs, and Paul Rogers as Max is ignored by

Ian Holm as Lenny after Teddy's departure while Vivien Merchant as Ruth strokes the hair of Terence Rigby as Joey

For Chekhov, a pause was simply a glimpse of the continuous stream of inner life which runs through every play, but is often concealed by 'outer action':

From the Point of View of Composition and Rhythm, where everything becomes a kind of "music," where everything moves, fluctuates, interweaves, we always experience a Pause on the stage. The Pause disappears only when the outer action is complete, when everything becomes outwardly expressed.¹⁴

Chekhov therefore saw two distinct kinds of pause:

One . . . appears before a certain event takes place. It foretells what is to come . . . it awakens the audience's anticipation. Through it the onlooker is prepared for the approaching scene. He is spellbound by it . . . The other kind of Pause, quite opposite in character, appears after the action is fulfilled, and is a summing up of all that has happened before.¹⁵

For example, when Max, Joey and Sam first see Teddy and Ruth coming down the stairs in their dressing-gowns (fig. 116), Rogers' Max expands in this pause into the 'resentful bull', and the pause then gives way to outer action as he squares up to his eldest son, firing questions and accusations. That pause, which anticipates the play's action, is balanced by a stream of pauses after that action has occurred and Teddy has left the house:

TEDDY goes, shuts the front door.

Silence.

The three men stand.

RUTH *sits relaxed on her chair.*

SAM *lies still.*

JOEY *walks slowly across the room.*

He kneels at her chair.

She touches his head, lightly.

He puts his head in her lap.

MAX *begins to move above them, backwards and forwards.*

LENNY *stands still.*

MAX *turns to LENNY.*

MAX I'm too old, I suppose. She thinks I'm an old man.

Pause.

I'm not such an old man.

Pause.

(To RUTH.) You think I'm too old for you?

*Pause.*¹⁶

No one else speaks for the remainder of the play, and Max's remaining speech is punctuated by these pauses which Rogers does not play strictly: they are not the only pauses in his speech, they are not of equal length, and some of them he hardly

observes. But the entire speech is suffused with the *quality of a pause*, as opposed to the quality of outer action. Thus, Rogers surrounds the main action of the play with two pauses: one anticipates its action and one which reacts to it.

The falling movement of the invisible body of Rogers' Max in this final pause begins as he looks towards Ruth after Teddy's exit, and his haltingly confrontational lines thereafter represent futile attempt to resist this draining away of his power. Consequently, his collapse begins, inwardly, a page before it is noted in the printed text, and the play's ending is not simply the point at which the action is cut, but the moment at which the active element in the play is on the point of being overwhelmed by the element of the pause, against which Max struggles to raise himself up for the final line: 'kiss me' (fig. 120). In other words, Rogers' does not simply play Max line-by-line, observing pauses and silences as he goes, but creates a performance which is entire unto itself and whose last moment is its consummation: an old man, clinging onto his stature as life falls from him, both begs and commands the woman who has displaced him from the centre of his domestic kingdom (and whom he both desires and despises) to kiss him. But this vivid demonstration of artistry came at a time when the future of training and experimentation at the RSC hung in the balance.



Figs. 118-120, Paul Rogers as Max after Teddy's exit, collapsing after the line 'she won't be adaptable', and telling Vivien Merchant as Ruth to 'kiss me'

¹ Williamson, 1956, p. 13

² Ibid., p. 57

³ 'Interview with Peter Hall', *The Homecoming* DVD Extras

⁴ Pinter, 1991, p. 15

⁵ Chekhov & Hurst du Prey, 2000, pp. 69-70

⁶ 22 February 1938

⁷ Pinter, 1991, p. 11

⁸ *The Actor is the Theatre* (24 November 1937)

⁹ It is tempting to observe that Sandy Black's RSC Studio explorations of alternative styles (realism, farce, comedy of manners and grotesque mask) for Chekhov's *The Proposal* in the previous year's 'flare-up' had found their way into a single character.

¹⁰ Hurst du Prey, 2004, p. 54

¹¹ Pinter, 1991, p. 80

¹² Chekhov, 2002, p. 118

¹³ Chekhov & Gordon, 1991, p. 137

¹⁴ Chekhov & Gordon, *On the Technique of Acting*, 1991, p. 137

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 138

¹⁶ Pinter, 1991, p. 88

3.5 After 1965: The Legacy of Saint-Denis' RSC Studio

In the late summer of 1965, the actors of the RSC attempted to take advantage of the upheaval created by the proposed introduction of the Goodwin Plan to persuade the company's Directors to contemplate some changes to their working pattern, which they described as 'a challenging rededication to the craft of the theatre'. They sent a lengthy 'Memorandum on the Future Organization, Policy and Training of the Royal Shakespeare Company', to Peter Hall.¹ The memo described the 'last five years' as a 'history of high endeavour, continually compromised by expediency', but it was also positive and committed to the functioning of the RSC as 'one unit'. It proposed ongoing training 'to reawaken the imagination and the intellect' and 'develop the power of body and voice to express what we want to express'. It acknowledged the kinds of failings that had been recorded over the preceding two years by Studio tutors, such as the loss of 'music' in speech that the actors felt should be more 'expressive of genuine emotions, moods and flights of the imagination'. They were particularly concerned, however, by the weakness of the company's movement: 'we have failed totally', they wrote, to express anything of consequence with our bodies (except in fleeting areas of the "Comedy of Errors" and the "Marat/Sade")'. With Saint-Denis too ill to lead the company's development, the actors proposed Barton and Clifford Williams to implement the permanent, evolving training that they envisaged.

The memo proposed embedding training in the company from the ground up by using students as opposed to walk-ons. These students would 'form the nucleus of an R.S.T. School, the first stage in its realization'. The memo suggested two voice teachers and one teacher each for movement and fencing, all of them on a permanent salary, so

that training could also be 'included in the daily routine of every actor in the company'. This could be achieved, it suggested, by holding rehearsals from 10am until 2.30pm, followed by a one hour break, and a training period from 3.30 until 5.30pm. Since each actor's contractual commitment could not exceed 5 hours per day plus performance (or half that on a matinee day), the proposal was that 'an actor must be given the chance to devote at least one of those five hours to training'. The memo suggested that, in return for this greater commitment from the acting company, it is 'not unfair that we should in turn press you to streamline your central administration of this Company'. Apart from the provision of teaching staff, this was the only concession requested from the management.

The document was discussed at a meeting of the Company Committee on 25 October 1965, and the idea of training students was rejected on the grounds that 'in present circumstances, adequate training facilities could not be provided'. The idea of a daily two-hour slot for studio work was tentatively accepted, but with the proviso that this work should consist of the following:

- 'understudy rehearsal',
- the 'maintenance of standard in current repertoire',
- 'freer handling of problem scenes now in rehearsal',
- 'individual tutorials in voice, movement and music',
- 'rehearsal of Theatreground and other Club activities',
- and 'experimental work on future projects for the main repertoire'.

The effect of these conditions was to disperse the unified principle of continual training of the company as 'one unit', which the actors' memo had proposed, and replace it with a laundry-list of activities which didn't have a natural home anywhere else in the RSC's

structure. Most of the items prioritised here represented over-spill from the rehearsal room: understudy rehearsals, the re-rehearsal of work already in the repertoire, and technical support for individual actors were (and still are) elements of rehearsal commonly neglected under the usual conditions of time-pressure and scarce resources. Since this list of Studio activities stipulates 'individual tuition' as opposed to the group training envisaged first of all by Saint-Denis and then by the company's memo, the only aspect of Saint-Denis' vision for the Studio which remained was 'experimental work on future projects for the main repertoire'. However, with the exception of Brook, who continued to experiment with the controversial, improvised *U.S.* in 1966, there is little evidence of experimental work in the company's practice in the years immediately following the closure of the Studio.

The sanctioning of rehearsal for Theatregoround (TGR) needs contextualising. TGR was a small group of six actors, who, under the leadership of Michael Kustow and with the support of the RSC Members' Club, had just started giving short performances of extracts from Shakespeare and other writers around the London Boroughs.² They would go on to tour schools in the Midlands in 1966, performing intermittently, before achieving their first full year's operation in 1967, when they gave 295 performances to 111,637 people of whom 57,239 were children and 54,398 were adults.³ The idea of TGR replicated George Devine's Young Vic in some ways, as it was a means by which the theatre could engage and develop new audiences. As such, TGR's repertoire comprised edited versions of Shakespeare, such as *The Battle of Agincourt* (a condensed version of *Henry V*), Barton's *The Hollow Crown* (an anthology of Shakespeare's observations of kingship, which was already a staple of the RSC repertoire), and plays adapted from or

similar to the RSC's contemporary repertoire such as Pinter's *The Dumb Waiter* and an edited version of Brook's *U.S.* directed by Geoffrey Reeves.

TGR also aimed to educate its audiences (whether they were young people or not) in the history and practice of theatre, and to do so it borrowed from the work of the RSC Studio. Its core repertoire also contained two performances taken directly from the Studio's 1964 flare-up: *The Second Shepherd's Play* (one of the sources for *The Shepherd's Pageant* in the 1964 flare-up) and Chekhov's *The Proposal*, which was played (both at the Studio and for TGR) alternately in the four styles of a comedy of manners, farce, naturalism and grotesque mask, 'to show different styles of acting'. There were also two demonstrations of practice, *The Actor and Director*, 'an examination of text and audience communication' directed by Trevor Nunn and *The Actor at Work*, a 'demonstration of acting techniques', directed by Terry Hands and then by Mike Leigh, who was taken on by the RSC as an assistant director in 1966. When TGR expanded its repertoire, as well as more anthology programmes, it introduced a demonstration of theatre music by Guy Woolfenden called *Alarums and Excursions* and a 'demonstration of rehearsal techniques' called *The Play in Rehearsal* directed by Nicholas Barter, as well as Ann Jellicoe's play *The Knack* (1962). The fact that this play, which was directed for TGR by Mike Leigh, had been developed through improvisation by the Royal Court Writer's Group was illustrative of TGR's relationship with studio practice. It was certainly interested in experimentation and the development of technique, but for the most part it demonstrated experiments and techniques which had been developed elsewhere.

Experimentation did constitute the third of TGR's three aims as they were constituted in 1968.

- A: The performance of live theatre in any place suitable with a four-fold purpose.
1. To perform theatre in places where there is a demand but no facilities.
 2. To interest young people in Drama and develop a wider audience for the theatre.
 3. To demonstrate and explain techniques and language of professional theatre.
 4. To enable RSC actors to extend the range of their craft and to meet and talk with their audience.
- B: Working with people from educational establishments. There is a four-fold purpose.
1. The development of teachers' courses in drama.
 2. To demonstrate that drama, properly used, can be of value to the education of all people irrespective of their subject.
 3. To show teachers how to follow up and capitalise the interest aroused by a Theatregoround visit.
 4. The secondment of teachers to a Theatregoround unit so that they can keep abreast of latest developments in professional theatre and drama in education.
- C: To carry out experimental projects as requested by the RSC.

Aims A and B constitute the kinds of educational and outreach programmes which became common in the subsidised sector in subsequent years (not least as a means of justifying public subsidy). Their debt to Saint-Denis, Devine and Byam Shaw's conception of the Old Vic Centre is significant: Saint-Denis spoke regularly to teachers, students and amateurs while he was there, and the relationship between Devine's Young Vic and TGR

has already been noted. However, there was one significant difference: whereas at the Old Vic these activities were core functions of the Centre, here they were assembled as the purpose of an organisation which, while falling within the broad church of the RSC, was nonetheless a supplement to its main activities. The RSC never called on TGR to 'carry out experimental projects', not least because the only senior figure in the company who was committed, in practice, to experimentation was Peter Brook, and his work was also becoming something of a supplementary activity to the main thrust of the RSC's practice.

Brook's commitment to the ensemble creation of a production through the experimentation and collaboration of the rehearsal room marked him out from all but a few of his colleagues at the RSC. He was, in a sense, the exception that proved the rule that at the RSC it was the writer – whether or not he was Shakespeare – in whom creativity was located, and the director was employed to interpret for him. This was reflected in the organisation's management structure, which Peter Hall had reorganised in 1963 by forming a series of committees: a Directors' Committee which was responsible for advising on artistic policy; a Management Committee, which added those responsible for production, administration and publicity to the membership of the Directors' Committee, and a Company Committee, 'with representatives from Stratford and the Aldwych Theatre, to meet with representatives of the Direction and Management'. At the first meeting of the Company Committee, on 2 December 1963, the representatives of the company asked Hall about 'the possibility of having an actor on the Management Committee'. They were told that this had been discussed by the Management Committee but

anything managerial could be raised at the Company Committee. It was agreed that the question of whether an actor should be on the Management Committee [was] to be put on the agenda of both Management and Company Committees in three months time and considered again.⁴

However, four weeks later, at the next meeting of the Company Committee, the idea was summarily rejected: 'Mr. Hall said it was not considered advisable to invite an actor to the Management Meetings. It was better that difficulties and problems be fully aired at Company Committee Meetings'.⁵

At the same time as the actors were being kept at a distance from the decision-making apparatus of the company, however, Brook was placing them at the centre of his exploratory work. In the Company Committee meeting of 2 December 1963, Roy Dotrice asked Peter Hall 'what is the experimental theatre?' and was told that 'Peter Brook is trying to do a number of projects which relate to the Theatre of Cruelty, and is attempting to fit into the organisation something we know nothing about'. Hall wrote to the company on 30 December 1963 that Brook's project would 'be so far out, both in content and style, that it could not, and should not, be presented in a public theatre'.⁶ The following February, the subject of Brook's Experimental Group came up again when it was reported that 'it had been commented by Aldwych and Stratford companies that everything the Experimental Group were doing was a load of rubbish'.⁷ Robert Lloyd asked other members of the company to appreciate that the Experimental Group 'were working very seriously and what they were producing as an end product might be a load of rubbish but would the company respect their aims'. Paul Hardwick proposed that the committee resolve to communicate that 'whatever is thought personally about the end product, the admiration of the parent company for the experimental group working as

individuals and as a company is tremendous' and John Barton added double-edged support, saying 'that everyone is full of admiration for the work of the actors, even if one didn't like what they were doing'.

This indulgent acceptance by the 'parent company' of Brook's Experimental Group (casting them in the role of delinquent children) was, in a sense, generated by the authoritarian structure of the company, in which power was passed down from an Executive Council and influence increased with proximity to it. This control had to extend beyond the financial management and administration of the company to its artistic expression because, as Nevill Coghill put it in a memo of 12 August 1963 'for consideration by the Directors and Executive Council', the company depended for its identity upon its self-authorising claim to provide 'the authentic interpretation of Shakespeare by the most talented and discerning artists'. There was consequently a contradiction built into the relationship of the company's executive and its artists, which Coghill summarised, albeit without apparently recognising it:

The Executive Council gives 'complete artistic freedom' to the artists it engages, and this is clearly right in principle, provided it is understood to mean 'freedom in the service of Shakespeare' and does not include freedom to mutilate, distort, misrepresent and defeat his manifest intentions. He is an author in whose plays many different meanings may legitimately be found: but this is not to say that all treatments of his text are legitimate.⁸

From this authoritarian perspective, Brook's experimental work could only be legitimate if it fulfilled the role of licensed fool to the company's Shakespearean monarch. Consequently, his work was commonly seen as 'alternative', but Brook did not see it this way. He wrote of the improvised *U.S.* (which took as its subject matter the involvement

of the USA in the war in Vietnam) that it was part of a 'sequence of work' which began with his 1962 *Lear*, and he wrote of *Lear* that 'the Goneril-Regan relationship is a completely Jean Genet one' – Genet's *The Screens* was the first project to be undertaken by his Experimental Group in 1964.⁹

These direct connections between Brook's productions were based primarily on the process of their creation. In both cases, Brook used 'acting exercises' and 'improvisations' in a 'series of attempts to probe a certain problem' set by each subject. In that sense, both *Lear* and *U.S.* were the result of 'experimental laboratory work', though each had its particular difficulty to surmount in order to reach an audience: 'the contemporary event touches raw nerves but creates an immediate refusal to listen. The myth and formally shaped work has power, yet is insulated in exact proportion'.¹⁰ Brook wanted his actors to learn the lessons of this duality and see that they could perform with both 'distance' and 'presence':

Distance is a commitment to total meaning: presence is a total commitment to the living moment; the two go together. For this reason, the most eclectic use of rehearsal exercises – to develop rhythm, listening, tempo, pitch, ensemble thinking or critical awareness – is most valuable provided none of them is considered a method. What they can do is to increase the actor's concern – in body and in spirit – for what the play is asking.¹¹

Thus, in order to achieve both 'distance' and 'presence', Brook's rehearsals employed 'exercises' as a methodology whilst avoiding adherence to any particular 'method'. He took the same attitude to Shakespeare's texts, writing that 'there is a healthy double attitude, with respect on the one hand and disrespect on the other'.¹² This 'double attitude' is a necessary condition of experimentation, which must locate authority only

in what can be verified by practice and maintain an attitude which is both optimistic of discoveries and sceptical towards what is discovered or considered to be known.

Brook evidently always considered his 'double attitude' equally applicable to the production of Shakespeare as it was to his more overtly experimental work, and the RSC did maintain a strand of practice that identified itself with Brook's work and thus, indirectly, with Saint-Denis'. That strand has always, however, been seen as a fringe activity of the company. In a memo to Trevor Nunn dated 18 October 1968, for instance, Terry Hands suggested that 'the Brookie lot' might want to take on a play by Charles Wood called *The Plastic Igloo* that he had received, although he added that he thought it would have 'little audience appeal'. Little audience appeal, of course, means little audiences, and this experimental strand of the Company's work has usually been housed at the aptly named Other Place, to which the RSC Studio's tin hut was converted in 1970.¹³ The Other Place had been briefly called The Studio Theatre, which opened for occasional performances, but changed its name in 1974 when Buzz Goodbody became its first artistic director.

In 1973, Goodbody had written a plan for a second Stratford auditorium at the invitation of Trevor Nunn and persuaded the RSC Finance Committee and subsequently the Executive Council of its feasibility. She had five aims for the company, which resembled but did not simply repeat those of TGR:

1. 'To offer good theatre cheaply'
2. To 'challenge our own traditions of proscenium theatre'
3. To build a local audience through 'shows with a specifically local character'
4. To offer 'educational projects for local schools'

5. 'To create a forum where the audience can come into closer contact with the work of the company'¹⁴

Goodbody's first production was *King Lear*, with Tony Church as the king and a reduced cast of nine. It began as an education project, which put extra material alongside the play, including for instance, text about the poor which contextualised Edgar's depiction of Poor Tom, but this was all cut early in the run. Alternative practice was, however, retained throughout the process. Church recalled that Goodbody used techniques which were unfamiliar to him despite his long period with the company.

Buzz was the first director to work with me through improvisation . . . She told me to lie down while she sat by my head and talked me into a dream state where first of all the Earl of Kent, my second in command, saved me from being killed in battle. Next, the Earl of Gloucester, my chief minister, got me out of an appalling political fix. I went on to dream about the mothers of my three daughters. I'm certain the girls each had different mother who all died in childbirth. It all came to me during those dream sessions with Buzz . . . There were a number of extraordinary moments in that production.¹⁵

As Church's memory of his 'dream' discoveries suggests, this *Lear* was most clear-sighted and humane when mad. Colin Chambers points out the parallel on this point with Brecht's *Pantula*, though, since Goodbody was not at the RSC when Saint-Denis directed his production of it, a direct influence on her *Lear* is unlikely.¹⁶ Goodbody was, however, conscious of her debt to Brook and paid tribute to him in the programme. It's easy to see Brook's example, and, indirectly, Saint-Denis' in her use of imaginative exercises, improvisations and physical games in rehearsal, as well as the closing of each

day with a collective discussion about the work in which contributions were encouraged from all members of the company.

Despite Church's lack of experience with improvisation, it is not quite true to say that Goodbody's approach was entirely distinct from the main company. She had, for instance, worked with Nunn on his 1972 Roman Plays season and taken rehearsals when he was ill. The value of her exploration of the plays through improvisation was remarked upon by Nunn himself, who recalled in conversation with Ralph Berry that 'we improvised every single situation in *Coriolanus*, we improvised a lot of *Julius Caesar*, nothing more memorably than the assassination'. Berry remembered that in the production 'the emotional effect came after the killing' and Nunn responded that 'that's exactly what happened at the improvisation' when there was 'a long stunned time when nobody said or felt anything. Then there was pandemonium'.¹⁷ Nunn's description anticipated Goodbody's use of improvisation to develop her staging of *Lear*: exercises in which Tony Church was encouraged to explore the bodies of Lear's daughters led to his forcing apart of Goneril's legs in the production as he cursed her with sterility. The production was also noted for sexually-charged moments, such as Goneril's removal of a stocking for Edmund, which communicated the erotic relationships of the play through resonant actions, again developed through improvisation. It was this imaginative and physical approach to rehearsals – which encouraged the actors to make their own discoveries – that earned Goodbody (who died aged only twenty-eight) the profound respect of her collaborators.

But although Goodbody's work was radically distinct from the usual practice of the RSC, she had not spent any significant time directing anywhere else.¹⁸ She learned to direct *at* the RSC but not *like* the RSC by the creative use of compromise. Understudy

rehearsals, for instance (which Sandy Black had seen as destructive to the Studio) became, in her hands, an opportunity for training and exploration, listed by the actor Geoffrey Hutchings as studio activities alongside classes with John Barton (text), Cicely Berry (voice) and John Broome (yoga and movement). And despite being told by Barton that she would not be promoted as his protégée (as Clifford Williams had been by Hall in 1962), she, like Williams, took every advantage of the indisposition of directors in the company due to illness or over-stretched availability. Coincidentally, one such director was Williams himself, whose 1962 *Comedy of Errors* was revived in 1972, despite his limited availability, meaning that Goodbody and her fellow assistant Euan Smith ran many of the rehearsals.¹⁹

In some ways, Goodbody's unofficial, below-radar development of studio work at the RSC was, however, officially sanctioned. The company's official position with regard to studio work was agreed at a meeting of the Planning Committee on 14 December 1966 when 'John Barton asked what provision had been made for Studio activity and tuition at Stratford in 1967'.²⁰ The following resolutions were made, and seem to have been maintained more or less continuously since then.

1. . . . for 1967, our understanding of "Studio work" should be the availability of help as and when it is needed by actors throughout the year;
2. That John Barton should be the resident Associate to whom actors can always appeal for help;
3. That a full-time voice tutor and a movement tutor should be employed at Stratford throughout the season.
4. That in view of the burden and immense complexity of next year's programme, we should expect that studio activities are limited to the availability of these

tutors to advise on voice and movement, and to the availability of the Associate Directors to help and advise on other problems of professional development.

Of course 'help as and when it is needed' is not a satisfactory definition of Studio work, and nor is the dispensing of advice to individual actors, but the full-time employment of voice and movement tutors does at least create the possibility of something more practice-based than a helping-hand and a few wise words. By its tacit acknowledgement of the stretched availability of the Associate Directors and its explicit acceptance that without support and 'professional development', actors cannot be expected to sustain work at the highest level, this agreement also left the door open for more innovative training and experimental practice, albeit at the fringes of the RSC's activities.

Such opportunities were frequently taken in the years following this agreement, usually by assistant directors such as Mike Leigh (with whom Goodbody briefly planned to establish a community theatre) and by actors of lower status in the company (such as Martin Bax and Hugh Keays-Byrne, known – after Pandarus' description of foot-soldiers in *Troilus and Cressida* – as 'Chaff and Bran'). It was also the only route for women who wanted to become directors, who were only hired by the company as assistants of one sort or another.²¹ Goodbody, for instance, had been hired as Barton's assistant (or, as he said, 'Girl Friday'), with a job description which, according to Colin Chambers, included 'shopping . . . paper work, parking his car, getting his pills, and ironing his shirts'.²² Cicely Berry also joined in a role which was designated female (that of voice tutor), but directed a small-scale production of *Lear* (1989), using rehearsal techniques which were distinct from the company's usual practice. Innovative practice has therefore usually taken place at the RSC in the spaces left by the company's hierarchical structure, and has often been formulated in opposition to the company's central concerns, or, in the

words of Katie Mitchell (who ran The Other Place from 1997-1998), as ‘a counterpoint to the big preoccupation of the RSC of language for language’s sake’, which might even come ‘into conflict with the ideology of the overall organization’.²³

This subterranean tension has continued to characterise the RSC’s relationship to training and experimental work, which it has promoted on the one hand, but limited on the other. In 2001, when Adrian Noble announced that the RSC would be giving up its London home at the Barbican and moving to shorter, more commercially-oriented contracts for its actors, he also announced an ‘RSC Academy’. This venture, led by Declan Donnellan and Nick Ormerod of the theatre company Cheek by Jowl, took sixteen actors selected from the graduating classes of a number of drama schools and worked with them to create a production of *King Lear* which toured internationally in 2002. It was the first and last instance of this project and was in most respects very much like a Cheek by Jowl production, featuring actors who would go on to work with Donnellan and Ormerod more than they would with the RSC.²⁴ It was also difficult not to notice that this company, which fore-grounded the training and development of a group of young, unknown actors, coincided with a time when the company’s ability to develop and train an ensemble was rapidly diminishing and its dependence on the casting of stars was increasing.

After Adrian Noble’s departure from the company, Michael Boyd became Artistic Director. He made much of his ‘belief in ensemble theatre-making’, and contracted a group of actors, known as the ‘RSC Ensemble’, for three years to perform Shakespeare’s two tetralogies of history plays.²⁵ Boyd also reintroduced the ‘RSC Studio’, but in a form very different to Saint-Denis’ vision for it. His studio accepted (and apparently continues to accept) proposals from artists outside the company who ‘have

created or co-created at least three professional productions’, ‘for whom an organic development process is an important part of their working method’ and ‘who are interested in engaging with and developing the RSC’s artistic vision’.²⁶ This project is, in fact, an invitation for external collaborators to pitch proposals to a committee comprising ‘Associate Director David Farr’, the ‘RSC Company Dramaturg Jeanie O’Hare’ and ‘Associate Director Deborah Shaw’, with successful pitches being allocated support for ‘a maximum of four weeks development’. The document makes it clear that this is not a place to send scripts for completed plays, so it evidently is a way of commissioning or attracting new work which is not conventionally scripted. There is no mention of training, or the direct involvement of anyone at the RSC in these projects so, rather than being a Studio in the sense intended by Saint-Denis, this seems to be a way of outsourcing product development.

This new RSC Studio runs counter to Saint-Denis’ and Chekhov’s visions for their studios. Where their conception of creativity was open-ended, this is circumscribed by a tight time-frame and a proposal to develop a particular project; where Chekhov’s and Saint-Denis’ studios were built on the daily collaboration of a committed group of artists, this studio is a virtual space whose activities are governed by a committee; where their studios were intended to function as the hub of a company, this studio involves people who are defined by the fact that they come from outside the company. That company is, in any case, no longer a group of theatre-artists and craftspeople, but a corporate entity that periodically employs such people. In this vein, when Michael Boyd stood down in 2011 after ten years as the RSC’s Artistic Director, he said that ‘now I’d like to spend more time with my actors’.²⁷ A studio requires its directors to spend more time with their actors. It is based on the principle that this is the only way in which the

theatre can be creatively renewed. But is it possible today? Or was the movement charted by this project merely an accident of its time?

¹ This memo was sent by representatives of the Royal Shakespeare Company's Actors' Committee, following consultation with Clifford Williams, John Barton and Tony Church (BL Add MS 81191).

² TGR was started in September 1965.

³ This and subsequent details of TGR's activities are taken from Michael Kustow's 'Report on TGR for the Twelve Months Ending 5 April 1968' (Maurice Daniels Collection, SCLA)

⁴ BL Add MS 81190

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Meeting of Company Committee, 3 February 1964 (BL Add MS 81190)

⁸ BL Add MS 81190

⁹ Brook, 1989, pp. 61, 88

¹⁰ Brook is, in fact, writing here about his 1968 National Theatre production of Seneca's *Oedipus*, but the characterisation of that play as mythic and 'formally shaped' applies equally to *Lear* (Brook, 1989, p. 63).

¹¹ Brook, 1989, p. 66

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 95

¹³ In London, the RSC used the Barbican's Pit Theatre for these productions.

¹⁴ Chambers, 1980, p. 40

¹⁵ Maher, 2009, p. 210

¹⁶ Chambers, 1980, p. 63

¹⁷ Berry, 1989, pp. 73-74

¹⁸ Her adaptation of Dostoyevsky's *Notes from the Underground*, which she directed at Sussex University, went to the National Student Drama Festival, and she worked briefly for a street theatre group as well as directing a Sunday evening performance at the Royal Court, see Chambers, 'Buzz Goodbody' and Chambers, 1980, pp. 10, 13.

¹⁹ Personal Conversation with Roger Howells (retired RSC Stage and Production Manager), 1 March 2012

²⁰ Maurice Daniels Collection (SCLA)

²¹ Penny Cherno and Jane Howells were the only other women directors at the RSC before 1980 (Chambers, 1980, p. 12).

²² Chambers, 1980, p. 27

²³ Adler, 2001, pp. 50-51

²⁴ In Cheek by Jowl's subsequent *Othello* (2004), Othello, Cassio, Roderigo and Bianca were all played by actors from the RSC Academy *King Lear*.

²⁵ These phrases cropped up regularly in RSC publicity materials between 2007 and 2011 in particular.

²⁶ http://www.rsc.org.uk/downloads/rsc_studio_guidelines.pdf accessed on 10 April 2012.

²⁷ Charlotte Higgins, 'RSC's Artistic Director Michael Boyd announces final curtain', *The Guardian* 14 October 2011.

Conclusion The Studio into the Future: Towards a Manifesto

In the years since the mid-nineteen-sixties, theatre practice has sustained the direction of the tide against which both Chekhov and Saint-Denis' practice was swimming. Saint-Denis' colleagues Glen Byam Shaw and Laurence Olivier – both actors – were succeeded in the running of the National Theatre Company and the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre by the non-actor Peter Hall. Since Hall, no Artistic Director of either organisation has been an actor (with one exception, to whom I will return) and nor has any artistic director of the Royal Court since George Devine. Furthermore, in the nineteen-sixties, the phrases 'National Theatre', 'Royal Shakespeare Company' and 'English Stage Company' referred to groups of people, most of whom were actors. Now, these phrases (and 'The Royal Court') refer either to the buildings run by these organisations, or to their corporate identity, their brand. None of these organisations now employs its actors permanently, and all have out-sourced their central function (the production of plays) to artists who are employed as contractors.

It was not of merely coincidental interest that Chekhov and Saint-Denis were actors themselves. It gave them an authority in their studios based upon something other than hierarchical superiority. They were masters of their craft, rather than their actors, and could therefore position themselves (in accordance with Herbert Read's description of the successful teacher) as 'a pupil more advanced in technique than the others, more conscious of the aim to be achieved and the means that must be adopted'. Such a teacher, Read observed, will achieve far superior results from 'co-operation' than are reached 'by a method which is too conscious and deliberate, by a discipline which is imposed from without'.¹ But in today's theatre, the director is the sole arbiter of rehearsal-room practice because there is simply not the time to negotiate through

collaboration more complex, shared models of working such as characterized Chekhov and Saint-Denis' studios. Since those directors are very rarely actors, and artistic directors of large buildings almost never so, their methods come, inevitably, 'from without'.

In Chekhov and Saint-Denis' studios, design and rehearsal were also fully integrated processes. Today, however, the rehearsal room is dislocated, in time, from other aspects of the production because decisions relating to the design of setting and costumes have to be taken in advance of the start of rehearsals to allow sufficient time for their construction.² The actor is therefore effectively excluded from the processes of direction and design of the production in which she must work. This separation gave rise to the introduction, in the nineteen-nineties, of the phrase 'creative team'. Now used everywhere, this term refers to those workers on a production whose jobs are completed at the opening night. It is therefore an extension of the dualistic attitude that the creation of a production is separable from its performance.

The 'creative team' is something of a misnomer, since, for the most part, it does not create, it conceives. Most of its members are designers (of set, costumes, lighting and sound), who are almost invariably self-employed, and the level of their fees requires them to work on a number of projects simultaneously. They therefore operate independently not only of the rehearsal process for the productions of which their design is a part, but also of the making of their designs. Many do not even build their own models, employing assistants or model-makers to do this for them. Therefore, for today's directors and designers the mind which conceives a production is necessarily distinct from the material – and the material processes – in which it will find and take form. Again this runs counter to the basis of both Chekhov and Saint-Denis' studios,

whose explorations began with movement and the material of the human body and its interaction with the environment, and who challenged the notion that an actor's job was simply to repeat words and movements. For them, the actor was an artist, whose autonomy was balanced by her responsibility. By handing over much of that autonomy and responsibility to 'the creative team', the contemporary theatre has diminished the contribution of its actors' artistry.

This pattern in the theatre has mirrored the visual arts, whose recent history has been marked by the rise of the artist-as-brand, designing art in large quantities and often on a large scale, which is produced for them by others. Foremost among such artists in Britain has been Damien Hirst, whose art has been discussed not only because of its controversy, but because it is the *post-hoc* incarnation of an idea. Once the concept 'The Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living' had been matched to the form – a dead shark suspended in formaldehyde – the artist's work was done. There was no requirement for time to be spent engaging with the process of creation: the interaction, guided by skill, by intuition and by reflection between artist, instrument and material. A flash of inspiration would do the trick.

In the theatre, such inspirations are premature depictions of the productions they will generate. They are schematic in form, and the subsequent work of rehearsal is therefore at best only secondarily creative as it consists of building according to a blueprint. These blueprints for production are not, in themselves, bound to disappoint, but they are, more often than not, productive of cliché because they are based upon what is already known. The designer Uitz's 2011 Jocelyn Herbert Memorial Lecture, 'The Politics of Good Taste' addressed this subject by charting the gradual hollowing-out of theatrical forms in the process by which the aesthetics of, for instance, Brecht's Berliner

Ensemble, Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop and Pina Bausch and Rolf Borzik's Tanztheater Wuppertal reappear repeatedly across the theatrical spectrum, increasingly drained of their intellectual, emotional and political content. Hence the 'good taste' of Ultz's title: these aesthetic forms are no longer bearers of their originating content, but merely expressive of their borrowers' *savoir faire*.

Ultz's challenge to the contemporary theatre echoed – probably unconsciously – that of Herbert Read to the educationalists and industrialists of the nineteen-thirties. Read argued that his society needed

a new consciousness of aesthetic form. We must put an end to the inculcation of false and superannuated ideals of beauty – ideals which are largely a superficial 'taste', a cultural veneer inherited from other ages, when the processes of production were entirely different.³

Read's critique of industrialist processes which thoughtlessly repeated aesthetic features once intrinsic to the method by which a good was produced emerged from the central argument of his book *Art and Industry*, which was that society had put the cart before the horse, and that 'the factory must adapt itself to the artist, not the artist to the factory'.⁴ The principles of Read's argument can be applied directly to the contemporary theatre: the application form for the RSC Studio discussed in Section 3.5 above delineates just such a relationship between theatre-factory and theatre-artist. In today's mainstream theatre the word 'studio' designates a place in which the (creative) artist and (producing) factory meet to test potential products.⁵ Such products represent a commercial risk to the producers, even if they are subsidized, because subsidy is justified by popularity and critical approval and is therefore risked by the perception of

failure. Experimentation in such a studio is therefore always held in check by the desire to control financial risk.

Such exposure to risk, whether direct or indirect, inevitably encourages theatres to err on the side of caution and conservatism. Such theatres have sought, particularly in recent years, to off-set this conservatism through collaborations with smaller, independent companies with an innovative approach or aesthetic such as *Complicité*, *Improbable*, *Kneehigh*, *Punchdrunk*, *Sound and Fury*, *Handspring* or *Cheek by Jowl*, and by commissioning plays by writers who have been successful in fringe venues. The artistic directors of smaller theatres often use this fact in order to justify their subsidy, so that, when he was running the Bush Theatre, Dominic Dromgoole argued that ‘places like the Bush are the laboratories, the research and development centres. Through their discoveries . . . they keep the soul of the mainstream culture alive’.⁶ But these theatres operate under straitened circumstances. Dromgoole described himself rehearsing plays ‘in three weeks, at a charge and on a prayer’. This does not convince as a model for the growth of the art of the theatre and nor does it seem likely to produce work which takes account of the whole of a society, since it is more than a little reliant upon those who can afford to work, often, for little or no pay.

Even where a company has evolved a working-method in less compromised conditions, such as *Complicité* or *Kneehigh* (whose approaches emerged respectively from the traditions of the *École Jacques Lecoq* in Paris and of rural community theatre in the West Country), their collaboration with large institutions seems very rarely to sustain the quality of work which first made the company’s name. In fact, as a rule such collaborations produce productions which fulfill the derogation described by Uitz from a form thoroughly expressive of complex content to a mere trade-mark. They also tend to

have been isolated incidents, identified with the work of one director such as Simon McBurney or Emma Rice. While these companies have succeeded in launching and sustaining the careers of those individuals, and a few of their collaborators, they have not yet grown into an evolving tradition of practice. Therefore, while Dromgoole's argument is justified – these 'laboratories' do 'keep the mainstream culture alive' – they don't seem to offer much hope of challenging or altering it, or even enabling it to grow.

Saint-Denis and Chekhov would have seen that while our current model recognizes implicitly the theatre's need for innovation, it is inadequate as a response to that need. They would have seen its flaw as an imbalance towards experimentation and away from training, which provides the means by which materials and ideas may be brought into a dialogue with each other and thereby generate an artistic form. Chekhov described such a process, telling his students that they should use their technique to structure a dialogue between themselves and a play to discover its form, and only then proceed to give it a new form in performance. Without technique, he argued, such a process would be impossible and that, for Chekhov, was the central problem of the theatre of his time:

When we have released the dynamic of the whole scene . . . we can speak our lines and move in the right way. When we have found the form of the play, we can give it any form we like – that is the right of the actor. To find the author's idea and then do as we like with it. That is the right of our kind of theatre. But if we only remain with the outside form and speak the words and move in the first rehearsal as if we are ready to act, it means that we remain always on the surface, on the outside edge. Therefore, at present we have a theatre which exists only for repeating the author's words.⁷

Since the nineteen-thirties, we have added the creative team's ideas to the author's words, but we still have a theatre which exists 'only for repeating' and rarely for creating. It is a consequence of this state of affairs that the Anglo-American theatre is still also confined, predominantly, to naturalism, a style from which both Saint-Denis and Chekhov struggled to escape. The fact that their efforts to supplant naturalism were dependent upon the development of technique suggests strongly that the continuing dominance of this style is due to a deficit of training.

This problem has been exacerbated in Britain by the fact that almost all of the directors of leading theatres have had no professional training in the practice of theatre. Most have come from a literary background, and one consequence has been a heavy reliance on the spoken word as the language of the theatre. For instance, Nicholas Hytner, Artistic Director of the National Theatre, expressed surprise that the trial versions of the horses for the National's production of *War Horse* were able to communicate with the audience without speaking, which of course they did, in an intensely physical, rhythmic and complex language of movements.⁸ Hytner has recently conducted a government review of drama training. Reporting his preliminary findings, he stressed the importance of 'vocational craft training: voice, movement and acting technique', and its 'slow and repetitious' nature.⁹ He was however 'not convinced that time spent on education in theatre theory is time well spent in a drama school,' though he qualified his opinion with the caveat that he spoke 'not as an educationalist but as a consumer of those who graduate from drama schools'. The dualistic attitude which presumes to excise 'theatre theory' from 'vocational craft training' is, of course, symptomatic of the conception of a director as a 'consumer of' rather than a collaborator with actors.

It is striking that Hytner's prescription for training does not differ substantially from that of Herbert Beerbohm Tree, who announced in 1906 that his Academy (the fore-runner of today's Royal Academy of Dramatic Art) would teach 'voice production, elocution, blank verse, Shakespeare, dancing, fencing, acrobatics and mime, gesture appropriate to periods (minuets, the use of the fan) and the acting of plays'.¹⁰ It is perhaps only a coincidence that 'acting' comes last on both men's lists with voice appearing first, but this apparent priority reflects the widespread assumption that acting is a consequence of talent, whereas the voice is a mechanism which can be trained. It also reflects the priorities of men in charge of large theatres. Michael Sanderson notes that 'Tree was a major employer of the products of his own academy',¹¹ and the theatres being built at the time of its opening contained about twenty percent more seats than the theatres of twenty years earlier.¹² Hytner's National Theatre also contains two large auditoria with notoriously difficult acoustics.

The suggestion here of a tension between commercial considerations and the priority given to the study of acting recalls Harley Granville Barker's criticism of Tree's academy. Whilst praising Tree's 'great public spirit' in founding it, Barker criticized the 'standards and demands of the professional stage' for which it provided 'recruits'.¹³ He wrote that 'the modern professional stage does not . . . ask for recruits deeply studied in the art of acting – it has neither the time nor resource to indulge itself in anything so delicately complex'. This state of affairs was symptomatic, for Barker, of the 'danger . . . that the capitalist, measuring the probabilities of success by the amount of money provided . . . has been apt to demand immediate results, financial or artistic, preferably both'. But if we are forced to conclude that the ninety years since Barker published that

criticism have seen training in the English theatre come full circle, it would be wrong to think that they have therefore been wasted.

The sociologist Richard Sennett has recently published two books of a proposed trilogy about *homo faber* (the making man). They are *The Craftsman* and *Together: The Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Co-Operation*. The third of the trilogy will explore 'how cities might become better made'.¹⁴ Sennett's trilogy is therefore grounded in the attitude of Walter Gropius' 1919 manifesto of the *Staatliches Bauhaus*, which urged all artists to 'turn to the crafts'. Christopher Frayling has observed that Gropius' declamation has been widely mistranslated as 'we must all *return* to the crafts' and assumed, therefore, to articulate a Ruskinian vision of return to a (non-existent) pre-industrial state of meaningful and rewarding handicraft.¹⁵ A turn is very different from a return, and Sennett's books propose the former. The first book turns to look at a craftsman as a person with 'the desire to do a job well for its own sake', who can therefore help us to 'understand those imaginative processes that enable us to become better at doing things', give us 'an anchor in material reality' and show us 'ways of using tools, organizing bodily movements, thinking about materials that remain alternative, viable proposals about how to conduct life with skill'. Sennett's second book, *Together*, suggests ways in which these skills can overcome the 'resistance and intractable difference' they will inevitably encounter when taken out of the workshop and into society. The third will explore the construction of such a society.

Sennett's has not been the only 'turn to the crafts' in recent years. In attempting to come to terms with what he calls the 'genuine crisis of confidence in our most prestigious institutions and professions' after the economic crash of 2008, and thereby to construct an account of 'meaningful work' and 'self-reliance', the American

philosopher Matthew Crawford turned not to his academic training, but his experience as a motorcycle mechanic to write *The Case for Working with Your Hands, or Why Office Work Is Bad For Us and Fixing Things Feels Good* (2009). The visual arts have also turned to the crafts recently, with David Hockney's solo show at the Royal Academy, *A Bigger Picture* (2012), proclaiming the fact that its paintings were made by the hand of the artist and (almost without exception) on location in the landscape. At the same time, Grayson Perry's British Museum exhibition, *The Tomb of the Unknown Craftsman* (2011-2012), played on the title of Sōetsu Yanagi's writings about the art of the potter, adapted by Bernard Leach as *The Unknown Craftsman* (1972), by juxtaposing examples of anonymous craftsmanship from across the museum's collection with Perry's own ceramics. None of these were attempts to return to craft: Crawford is not only a mechanic he is also a fellow at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture at the University of Virginia, Hockney did much of his work with the help of an i-pad, and Perry is not an anonymous craftsman, he is a celebrity artist. All, however, turned to the crafts for material, for guidance and for inspiration.

The theatre currently shows little sign of a comparable turn. However, the practice of collaboration between innovative companies and larger institutions could generate such a turn in spite of the fact that, hitherto, it has not. For a change to occur, Herbert Read's policy of the artist leading the factory would have to be instigated from the centre of the large companies. The recent announcement of Gregory Doran as Artistic Director Designate of the Royal Shakespeare Company could prove decisive to this process. Doran is the first Director of the Company to have worked professionally as an actor, and since becoming a director he has actively engaged with scholarship as well. If he, and other leading figures in the theatre, were to decide that turn to the craft is

required, they would be well advised to look to the growing study of theatre practice and actor-training within the academy. Indeed, as the academic discipline of Theatre and Performance Studies emerges from the 'cognitive turn', which has seen a considerably deeper engagement of the discipline with questions of embodied learning and material practice, it seems timely to propose a 'practical turn'. Such a turn might well entail looking to studio practice to find theories which are capable of crossing what is still a gulf between the practice of theatre and its academic study, and then of re-describing that gulf as a space for creative interactions.

Chekhov and Saint-Denis offer ideal though not identical models for such interactions. Chekhov challenged the notion that an actor's role was merely to repeat and showed that, with a coherent and evolving theoretical approach, collective theatrical creation was a practical possibility. To achieve this coherent theory, however, Chekhov could not afford to compromise the principles upon which it was based, and would not even submit to questions from the media at the opening of his studio, for fear of misunderstanding derailing his project. His work was therefore avowedly counter-cultural, but was in constant danger of becoming a hermetic experience which could not find an accommodation with the dominant culture of the time. The only way such an accommodation could be reached either by Chekhov or his students was for actors to separate their own craft from the methods of production in which they worked. Hence Chekhov's role as an acting-coach in Hollywood: crucial to the actor's execution of their performance, but incidental to the process of film-making. This certainly represented an unfortunate diminishing of Chekhov's work: he wrote of the future theatre, not the future actor. Nonetheless, the performances of individual actors such as Beatrice Straight and Paul Rogers and the preservation and teaching of his technique by his ex-

students offer the ideal basis for its expansion from the individual to the ensemble now, because Chekhov's single-minded pursuit of it created such clarity of form.

Such an expansion of craft technique would do well to learn from Saint-Denis. He had his hermetic experiences with Copeau and *Les Quinze* before his move to England, and he was keen to avoid the isolation that they brought. He was therefore always looking for funding and opportunities which would allow him to work his way into the theatre's mainstream. As a consequence, Saint-Denis was much more focused on the building of institutions than articulating his particular perspective. The problem of this approach has been that whereas Chekhov's vision has been overlooked as a consequence of its distinctness from others, Saint-Denis' has suffered from being insufficiently distinct. He worked through dialogue, influence and collaboration and his own vision was inevitably diluted as a consequence. On the positive side, the actors whom Saint-Denis influenced were themselves much more influential, and could therefore turn their consciousness of the traditions upon which they drew and of the social purpose and organization of the institutions in which they worked to concrete ends in shaping significant movements within the Post War Theatre.

In turning to Chekhov and Saint-Denis as examples, however, it is very important that we consider their studios as a whole. There is a clear danger in the study of theatre practice and training, that we thoughtlessly adopt the model of considering the individual theorist, all but a tiny number of whom have been white men. Both Saint-Denis and Chekhov were, in fact, significantly dependent upon the influence and collaboration of others, many of whom were women: Suzanne Bing, Peggy Ashcroft, Margaret Harris, Suria Magito, Marion Watson, Georgette Boner, Beatrice Straight, Deirdre Hurst du Prey and Dorothy Elmhirst (to name but a few), as Stanislavsky and

Copeau had been before them. Their work was also generated in the studio, and therefore was not only designed *for* collaboration, but *by* collaboration. Any turn to practice or craft in the study or practice of theatre needs not only to acknowledge these histories, but think carefully through the directions they suggest: investment in people rather than institutions, for instance, and in groups of people rather than individuals; the funding of investigations into the methods of production rather the productions themselves, and time-scales which enable the sustained and repetitious evolution of work based in training rather than a quick return.

But the history of the studio also teaches us that such initiatives are extremely unlikely to come from the top down. Both Chekhov and Saint-Denis' work began with training because they recognized that genuine, sustained change begins from the ground. Therefore their legacy asks us to think first about the ways in which we teach and train the next generation of theatre-artists. Do we endorse the status quo by teaching only theory to would-be theorists and only practice to would-be practitioners? Do we focus our theatre history on the consideration of *what* the theatre has produced (thereby endorsing the product-oriented thinking that underpins both theatre-work and its evaluation today), or do we focus equally on *how* it has produced (and thereby position ourselves on a continuum with a variety of traditions, whose legacies are ours to shape)? And do we continue to build institutions that maintain the divisions between thinking and doing and between workers and designers which have inhibited the development of fully-rounded artists of the theatre? Or do we attempt to create new models of practice in order to enable, in Chekhov's phrase, 'a new kind of conversation' to develop?

My own response to the challenge posed by this research is that my practice as a director must be inseparably connected both to my teaching and research. It has been somewhat ironic that, in the four years since I began this project, I have directed very few full-scale productions, yet my work has been transformed in a number of ways. First, the opportunity to trace the day-by-day and year-by-year accounts and records of Saint-Denis' and Chekhov's direction and teaching held in their archives has provided a wealth of contextual information which has forced me to re-think my understanding even of those techniques with which I was very familiar before the research began, and allowed me to develop my approach in ways I could not have imagined at the project's start.¹⁶ Second, the imperative to contextualize and critique the practices I have explored in order to generate these narratives has necessitated reflection upon those practices and my uses of them, which has mirrored that modelled by both Chekhov and Saint-Denis (and recorded in Sections 1.1 and 2.3 above in particular). This is an unusual and difficult process for a practitioner, as I have discovered, but of tremendous value, particularly if it can be inculcated during training. This is a clear and concrete example of research- and practice-led teaching that I would not have been able to develop without the spur of this project.

Third, as a theatre-historian, the practical perspective of this project on the work of past theatre-artists has increased my awareness of the tendency of historical narratives to prioritize product over process and therefore neglect the politics of technique and approach. This tendency is particularly significant for this project, because, whereas many of the productions developed by Saint-Denis and his collaborators had a tendency to enshrine somewhat conservative values (his *Cherry Orchard* is notably unconcerned with the question of class in the play, for instance),

their approach nonetheless contained, at the very least, important glimpses of radical practice, which can, as I have discovered, have a transformative impact upon the practice of directing today. For instance, Saint-Denis' emphasis on ensemble and on a shared physical vocabulary for a play which was nonetheless arrived at gradually and collaboratively offers an alternative to the tendency to prioritise speech, and thus the mind, over movement and the body, and to focus both the creation and criticism of productions on leading actors and roles, who are often considered in isolation from their colleagues and other contexts. If theatre-historians limit themselves to the question of what a production did with – or to – a play and its audiences, and turn a blind eye to the means of its creation, then a crucial guide to future practice is lost.

Furthermore, the opportunity to consider Chekhov's technique in particular not merely as a collection of exercises, but an entire training for and theory of performance has reinforced my sense of the divide between theoretical perspectives by which performances are analysed and critiqued and those which are used for their creation. Chekhov's theory of practice is almost unique in its capacity to occupy either side of that binary. This aspect of Chekhov's work has emerged very clearly for me, mainly as the result of the opportunities which I have been given, since beginning this project, to shed light for scholars and theorists on the practices of theatre-making, and for trainee practitioners and mentees on theoretical perspectives which may help them to re-think and refresh their work.¹⁷ This has transformed my approach to teaching most of all, but also to thinking and writing about the theatre and performance as a whole. In short, this project has not merely contributed to my knowledge (and the wider knowledge) of this period and the practice of Chekhov and Saint-Denis; it has also had a transforming effect

on my practice as a director, teacher and scholar, and will shape my work in those overlapping fields beyond the foreseeable future.

¹ Read, 1955, pp. 107-108

² There are, of course, exceptions to this rule. Katie Mitchell, for instance, reports that 'I always try to delay decisions about costume until I have spent at least a week with the actors' (Mitchell, 2009, 83); but this is only 1/8 of her standard rehearsal period.

³ Read, 1934, p. 54

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 53

⁵ The National Theatre Studio on The Cut in London is, however, the only permanent example of such an institution.

⁶ Dromgoole, 2002, pp. 97-98

⁷ 21 November 1936

⁸ *Making War Horse* (DVD)

⁹ 'Nicholas Hytner attacks drama schools producing theorists', *The Times*, 16 February 2009

¹⁰ Sanderson, 1984, p. 42

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 46

¹² The theatres built in London's West End between 1903 and 1907 had, at 1018 seats, an average of almost 170 more seats than those built in the 1880s (Sanderson, 1984, p.33).

¹³ Barker, 1922, p. 39

¹⁴ Sennett, 2012, p. x

¹⁵ Charny, 2011, p. 29

¹⁶ I have recently written an account of some of my directing work over the last two years called 'The Importance of How: Directing Shakespeare with Michael Chekhov', for *The Shakespeare Bulletin*, a special issue on rehearsal, ed. Christian Billing, forthcoming (winter, 2012).

¹⁷ I have given numerous papers and presentations on Chekhov's technique over the last two years, and have articles and book chapters forthcoming which use his work as a theory of performance, grounded in practice. I have also mentored and taught directors and choreographers throughout the period of this project, directly applying both the techniques and theories which have emerged from it.

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