

RADIATION AND THE TRANSMISSION OF ENERGY: FROM STANISLAVSKY TO MICHAEL CHEKHOV

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In the first volume of his masterpiece, *An Actor's Work on Himself*, Konstantin Stanislavsky cites Ophelia's speech wherein she confides to Polonius that Hamlet's strange behavior has frightened her. She recalls:

He took me by the wrist and held me hard;
Then goes he to the length of all his arm,
And with his other hand thus o'er his brow,
He falls to such perusal of my face
As he would draw it. Long stay'd he so;
At last, a little shaking of mine arm
And thrice his head thus waving up and down,
He raised a sigh so piteous and profound
That it did seem to shatter all his bulk
And end his being: that done, he lets me go.

"Can't you sense within those lines," Stanislavsky asks immediately, "a speech which travels through silent communication between Hamlet and Ophelia? Haven't you noticed, whether in real life or on stage, during mutual communication, sensations of strong-willed currents emanating from you, streaming through your eyes, through your fingertips, through the pores of our body?"¹ Then, Stanislavsky struggles to find a single word to define this "internal, invisible, spiritual"² current of energy, which he deems necessary for actors to transmit during performance either to each other or to the audience. For sending out energy, Stanislavsky proposes the word "radiation" and for receiving energy, he suggests "irradiation."³

Compare the following observation made by Stanislavsky's star pupil, Michael Chekhov, in his own classic text, *On the Technique of Acting*. Also citing *Hamlet*, Chekhov focuses on Act III, Scene 2, in which King Claudius watches, in utter shock, the play that mirrors his own secret murder of Hamlet's father. At the climax of the scene, Shakespeare gives the actor only one line, before a hasty exit, to convey the depth of Claudius' guilt and terror: "Give me some light. Away."⁴ Chekhov explains that the actor playing Claudius faces the formidable task of communicating to the audience a complex internal life that includes "[f]ear, hatred, remorse, a wild impulse to run away and yet not lose his high dignity, thoughts of revenge and hastily formed plots to put [the other characters] off the scent, and the inability to grasp the new situation."⁵ Chekhov then poses the daunting question, "How can [the actor] do all this, with few words of such poor content, and such a primitive action as sudden flight?"⁶ The answer, he suggests, is for the actor to cultivate the ability "to Radiate out of himself emotions, Feelings, Will-impulses, and images while on the stage."⁷ According to Chekhov, the "indescribable, unspeakable things that the actor has accumulated in his soul while working creatively on his part will be conveyed only through Radiation."⁸ He follows up with an exercise, instructing the reader to "look sharply at some point, radiating from your eyes; radiate from your forehead; open your arms and hands, radiating from your palms; radiate while moving your hand from one point in the room to the other; do the same with your glance, with your whole figure, and so on."⁹

In the above, Chekhov echoes with great precision his mentor's perspective on the transmission of energy that occurs between actors when they perform. Not only does he select the same word as his teacher to define the elusive process, but Chekhov, like Stanislavsky, invokes Eastern spiritual philosophy which depicts energy as a transcendent force that a person may either absorb or send out. Chekhov's and Stanislavsky's salient disagreements about

specific aspects of the acting process, however, often obscure the fact that they both recognized in great acting what Chekhov biographer Charles Marowitz calls “something otherworldly, something that our language cannot easily define except by reference to preternatural causes.”¹⁰

The spiritual strands in Chekhov’s ideas, his use of Yoga and his devotion to Rudolf Steiner’s spiritual science of anthroposophy are well known. Less familiar, however, is the fact that Chekhov shared an interest in the spiritual side of acting with Stanislavsky, who is not generally seen as a spiritual thinker. For example, Marowitz continues: “Chekhov’s theories are the only ones that I know of that have actively gone in search of that transcendent quality; that have identified it and attempted to find a practical means of achieving it. . . . For this alone, there is a certain reverence due to Chekhov that cannot be paid to Stanislavsky.”¹¹ In contrast to Marowitz’ claim, in this article I propose to show that Chekhov’s notions of how actors radiate a “transcendent quality” during an inspired performance can, in fact, be traced to his mentor, Stanislavsky.

While Chekhov clearly developed his own, unique theories about radiation, his foundational ideas about the process, like Stanislavsky’s, stem from turn-of-the-century notions about Yoga, thought transference, as well as positivist theories of the times which attempted to explain those phenomena. Furthermore, Chekhov would have learned to adapt and apply those concepts to acting while he was a member of the First Studio of the Moscow Art Theatre—the community in which he received his formative training as an actor. What are the specific points of contact in Stanislavsky’s System and Michael Chekhov’s technique regarding radiation? To what extent does Chekhov borrow from Stanislavsky to formulate his own teachings about actor radiation and his exercises to aid in its development? Perhaps most important, what do Stanislavsky and Chekhov mean by that ambiguous term? In answering those questions, I hope

to clarify an otherwise vague concept in both approaches to acting and to bring Stanislavsky and Chekhov into greater alignment.

Discovering Radiation—Stanislavsky’s Early Investigation

Stanislavsky conducted his most significant experiments in the actor’s transmission of energy during the first decade of the twentieth century, and he traces the origin of his interest in that process to his experiences working on the plays of Anton Chekhov. Stanislavsky records in *My Life in Art* his realization that “their [Chekhov’s plays’] charm is not transmitted through the words, but is hidden beneath them or in the pauses, in the actors’ glances, in the radiation of their inner feelings.”¹² Not until 1907 (three years after Anton Chekhov’s death) did Stanislavsky direct Knut Hamsun’s symbolist play, *The Drama of Life*, in which he made directorial choices aimed at highlighting its inner life and “incorporeal passion.”¹³ His efforts, however, were unsuccessful since he focused entirely on the internal facets of the play and ignored all external forms of expression, including gestures, action, and blocking.¹⁴ As Stanislavsky confesses, his controversial approach forced the actors to suppress their instincts for physicality which, he concluded, resulted in nothing less than committing “violence against nature.”¹⁵

Nevertheless, a year later Stanislavsky directed Turgenev’s *A Month in the Country* and returned to unorthodox, but more specific, rehearsal methods designed to develop the “invisible radiation of creative will and feeling.”¹⁶ He directed the cast, which was composed of both student and veteran actors of the Moscow Art Theatre, to communicate silently and “to ‘radiate’ their mental states.”¹⁷ According to David Magarshack, during rehearsal “the actors never spoke their lines, and if they did address each other, they did not even speak in a whisper but just moved their lips soundlessly,” communicating “not with words but...only with their eyes.”¹⁸ Although the production was an ultimate success, during rehearsals Stanislavsky struggled

against resistance, skepticism, and even fear from the more mature members of the cast. Thus, he turned to Leopold Antonovich Sulerzhitsky (1872-1916), whom he had hired as his personal assistant in 1905, and who had become his most enthusiastic student. In Stanislavsky's own words, Sulerzhitsky "was the first and, at that time, almost the only person who was interested in my research into the field of our art."¹⁹ Devoted to the religious views of Leo Tolstoy and familiar with Eastern spirituality, Sulerzhitsky had been a sailor and also had been imprisoned for his pacifism prior to working at the Moscow Art Theatre. In 1911, he and Stanislavsky founded the First Studio as both a laboratory for testing Stanislavsky's theories and a "spiritual order of artists"²⁰ with a near-monastic devotion to uncovering the secrets of great acting.

According to theatre historian Pavel Markov, the members of the First Studio set out to fulfill the following main objectives: "(1) development of the psychology of creative acting, (2) working on the actor's self-awareness, and (3) rapprochement of the actor and the author."²¹ Although the company investigated numerous methods to achieve those goals, the emanation of thought and feeling were among the most prevalent. Indeed, Markov records that the central acting technique of the First Studio members "became the expressiveness of the eyes, the eloquence of the hands, the barely visible variations throughout the *mise en scène* that revealed the relationships between the actors on stage."²² Furthermore, Markov notes the audience "kept a lingering eye on the intersecting glances" of the actors who "laid bare the meaning of the words and exposed what lay behind them, uncovering the genuine desires and hopes of the heroes."²³ Certainly, the work accomplished in the First Studio productions represents an extension of Stanislavsky's earlier work with energy transmission and, in particular, the radiation of thought and feeling through the eyes. By at least 1916, he draws the following conclusions:

Even the most perfect corporeal apparatus of the actor cannot transfer many inexpressible, superconscious, invisible feelings and experiences. For the transfer of those, there are other measures. The matter is, that experienced feelings are not only transferred visibly, but also through imperceptible means, directly from soul to soul. People communicate through invisible mental currents, through radiations of feeling, commands of the will. This path from soul to soul is the most direct, influential, valid, strong, and suitable for the on-stage transference of the inexpressible, the superconscious, lending itself neither to word nor gesture.²⁴

So what does “radiation” mean for Stanislavsky? Clearly, he regards it as an essential way for actors to convey unspoken communication. As Nancy Anne Kindelan observes, the process of radiation is Stanislavsky’s “primary, but primitive, step in the development of creating the play’s ‘subtext.’”²⁵ Stanislavsky’s supposition, however, that human beings communicate “directly from soul to soul” through “invisible mental currents” is also loaded with spiritual overtones consistent with the intense curiosity about Yoga and Hindu philosophy that prevailed in pre-revolutionary Russia.²⁶ As Sharon M. Carnicke affirms, Stanislavsky and Sulerzhitsky were using exercises from Yoga at the Studio’s very inception, including the invocation of the Hindu concept of vital energy known as *prana*,²⁷ which has a variety of meanings. B.K.S. Iyengar, the renowned teacher of Hatha Yoga, explains that it can refer to “breath, respiration, life, vitality, wind, energy or strength. It also connotes the soul as opposed to the body.”²⁸

In the First Studio, Stanislavsky used that Sanskrit term to define the energy that permeates the human body and that is emitted in the form of silent communication. Studio member Vera Soloviova recalls that:

we worked a great deal on concentration. It was called “To get into the circle.” We imagined a circle around us and sent “prana” rays of communion into the space and to each other. Stanislavski [*sic*] said “send the prana there—I want to reach through the tip of my finger—to God—the sky—or, later on, my partner. I believe in my inner energy and I give it out—I spread it.”²⁹

According to Franc Chamberlain, Sulerzhitsky led exercises similar to the above in which the Studio members “would attempt to channel the prana through their fingertips or their eyes and make contact with their partners, who had their backs to them, through the energy.”³⁰ In that respect, they were taught that radiated energy is palpable, and in order to receive an energy current, to “irradiate,” one need not maintain visual contact with the acting partner. The sharing of vital energy, alone, is enough to establish contact with one another.

Several yogic exercises used in the First Studio, similar to the ones above, come from a particular book entitled *Hatha Yoga; or, the Yogi Philosophy of Physical Well-Being* by one “Yogi Ramacharaka.”³¹ Whether Stanislavsky or Sulerzhitsky first discovered the book is unclear; however, Stanislavsky owned other books by Ramacharaka in his personal library.³² In *Hatha Yoga*, Ramacharaka addresses in detail the wonders of invisible, mental communication, noting casually that “telepathy, thought transference, mental healing, [and] mesmerism...have been known to the Yogis for centuries.”³³ He further claims that a yogi is “able to absorb and control a greatly increased amount of Prana, which is then at the disposal of his will. He can and does use it as a vehicle for sending forth thoughts to others.”³⁴ Through their exercises, Stanislavsky and Sulerzhitsky invoke Ramacharaka’s assertion that *prana* is the underlying energy source which makes possible the transmission of thought and emotion from one person to

another. Thus, for the members of the First Studio, *prana* and radiated energy were synonymous terms.

Although Stanislavsky draws from Eastern mysticism, equally important to his understanding of radiated energy are turn-of-the-century positivist interpretations of spiritual phenomena. In fact, Stanislavsky borrows the term “radiation” from positivist French psychologist Théodule Ribot’s (1839-1916) *The Psychology of Attention*.³⁵ Unlike Ramacharaka, who sees the radiation of *prana* as a vehicle for thought transference, Ribot understands radiated energy to be part of a psychological explanation for one’s ability to direct voluntary attention to an object. Citing English psychiatrist Henry Maudsley (1835-1918), Ribot declares that voluntary attention results from “the excitation of certain nervous currents of ideas, and their maintenance in action until they have called into consciousness, by radiation of energy, all their related ideas, or as many of them as it may be possible, in the then condition of the brain, to stimulate into action.”³⁶ Later, referring to Saint Teresa of Avila’s seven stages of prayer, Ribot endeavors to explain, in psychological terms, the greater level of concentration which leads to higher consciousness and spiritual ecstasy. In the beginning stages of higher concentration, Ribot proposes that human consciousness “tends no longer toward being a radiation around a fixed point, but a single state of enormous intensity.”³⁷

Like Ribot, Stanislavsky sees a correlation between radiated energy and concentration. Stanislavsky, however, does not entirely replace mysticism with psychology. Rather, he combines the two as is evidenced above in Soloviova’s account of exercising concentration through radiating *prana* to her fellow members of the First Studio. So, if the books of Ramacharaka impart to Stanislavsky an Eastern, mystical interpretation of energy transmission, then Ribot’s theories temper Stanislavsky’s perspective with a trace of Western psychology.

Stanislavsky, however, not only borrows terminology from Ribot but his assessment of radiation contains striking parallels to the work of Moscow psychiatrist Naum Kotik who, according to Mikhail Agursky, “conducted experiments in an effort to demonstrate that psychic phenomena were forms of radiation.”³⁸ In 1904, as a result of his research on a girl who could supposedly read the thoughts of her father, Kotik determined:

The thoughts of one person can be transferred to another through N-rays, which proceed from the vocal centers of the first. N-rays may excite the vocal centers of the second person and produce there corresponding audio images.... In our view all humans are linked by invisible threads of N-rays, which play an insignificant role in daily life but may well acquire enormous importance and influence in all mass movements.³⁹

In 1907, Kotik published *The Emanation of Psychophysical Energy*, in which he declares that “[t]hinking is accompanied by the emission of a particular radiant energy.”⁴⁰ Although Stanislavsky refers to the unseen, communal energy as “rays” and not “N-Rays,” he shares Kotik’s assumption that invisible beams of communication have the potential to “influence all mass movements” when he proclaims the following in his notebooks from the time period of the First Studio:

The irresistibility, the contagion of the force of direct communication through the invisible radiation of human will and feeling is very great. By means of it, one hypnotizes people, tames wild animals, or the furious crowd, kills fakirs and again resurrects people; actors fill the entire building of the auditorium with invisible rays and currents of their feeling and captivate the crowd.”⁴¹

With his assertion that radiation is the basis for hypnotic suggestion, Stanislavsky also emulates the thinking of Vladimir Bekhterev, the leading scientist of the times to study the mystical

dimensions of mental processes. Bekhterev claimed that hypnosis could be explained “as a direct transmission of a psychic state from one individual to another...with no involvement of will (i.e., attention) on the part of the recipient.”⁴²

To my knowledge, there is no direct evidence that Stanislavsky read Bekhterev or Kotik; however, his colleague, Maxim Gorky, was enthusiastic about the writings of both and agreed strongly with their assertions that thought transmission could be used to influence the thinking of the masses.⁴³ Also, in turn-of-the-century Russia were an abundance of publications containing explanations of supernatural occurrences.⁴⁴ Therefore, it is most likely that Stanislavsky was aware of Kotik’s and Bekhterev’s positivist theories and saw them as part of a viable technique for actors to reach an audience. In fact, the meaning of the Russian word for “radiation,” *izluchenie*, is not limited to the transmission of spiritual energy. As Agursky points out it can refer to “any other kind of emission or transmission of rays, energy, sound, or electromagnetic waves.”⁴⁵ Hence, Stanislavsky’s terminology itself suggests the interaction of science and spirituality in the theories he and Sulerzhitsky passed on to Michael Chekhov and the other students of the First Studio. Chekhov, however, expands the concept of *izluchenie*, making it a more prominent feature of his own acting technique than does Stanislavsky in the System.

Chekhov’s Understanding of Radiation

Chekhov joined the First Studio in 1912, and what he learned during his membership from Stanislavsky, Sulerzhitsky, and fellow Studio member Evgeny Vakhtangov formed the foundation of his future as an artist.⁴⁶ Chekhov assumed leadership of the Studio when Vakhtangov (who was appointed its director after Sulerzhitsky’s death in 1916) died of stomach cancer in 1922. In 1924 the Studio’s name was changed to the Second Moscow Art Theatre.

Until he emigrated permanently from the Soviet Union in 1928, Chekhov remained the company's leader.

Following his emigration, Chekhov continued to emulate Stanislavsky's enthusiasm for Yoga throughout the years he spent developing his technique. For instance, he includes exercises similar to those used in the First Studio when instructing the actor as follows: "While radiating strive, in a sense, to go out and beyond the boundary of your body. Send your rays in different directions from the whole body at once and afterward through its various parts.... You may or may not use the center of your chest as the mainspring of your radiation."⁴⁷ The important concept to which Chekhov alludes at the end of that exercise—"The Imaginary Center in the Chest"—invites comparison to Ramacharaka's *Hatha Yoga*, to which he would have been introduced during his tenure at the First Studio. As where Ramacharaka distinguishes the solar plexus as a "storehouse of Prana" which "radiates strength and energy to all parts of the body,"⁴⁸ Chekhov recommends that the actor do the following: "Imagine a Center in your chest from which living impulses are sent out into your arms, hands, legs, and feet. Start to move, imagining that the impulse to form the movement comes from the Center."⁴⁹ Chekhov's student, Maria Knebel', recalls being under his guidance and searching for that center "as if there is some kind of creature inside the chest."⁵⁰ Although Chekhov might not borrow consciously from Ramacharaka, the aspects of Hatha Yoga he uses to convey his understanding of radiation are clear.⁵¹

Chekhov further evokes the spiritual work of the First Studio when he asserts that radiation means "to give out everything I have inside."⁵² According to Soloviova, the First Studio exercises in *prana* emanation "involved no words, but we gave whatever we had inside of us."⁵³ According to Chamberlain, Chekhov makes the yogic assumption "that all living things

possess an energy body, or a radiant energy field which is interwoven with the physical body.”⁵⁴ Chekhov’s student, Beatrice Straight, also confirms the spiritual nature of his radiation theories when she describes his radiating exercises as “beaming an aura, sending out qualities, in an almost mystical sense.”⁵⁵ Furthermore, Chekhov links the ability to radiate with an actor’s ability to concentrate, echoing Stanislavsky’s association of the two in the First Studio. Once an actor is cognizant of the power of radiation, Chekhov argues, “he can support and increase it by means of his conscious effort. His habit of concentration will also strengthen this ability.”⁵⁶

Like Stanislavsky, Chekhov considers radiation “one of the strongest means of expression,”⁵⁷ and he was particularly interested in the way actors could radiate during a pause. Andrei Bely, with whom Chekhov collaborated, even ventures to claim that “Chekhov’s acting is derived from pause, not from word,” observing that, for Chekhov, the “body is like lightening; the word is born from the tip of the lightning, like from a burst of energy—the word is the aftermath of everything.”⁵⁸ With that observation, Bely alludes to Chekhov’s enthusiasm for Rudolf Steiner’s art form known as eurythmy, which he used to train actors. As Black explains, “eurythmy aims to make visible the feelings that lie within a particular movement. Steiner felt the character of a movement should originate in the artist’s soul, not in the intellect. Eurythmy is ‘visible speech’ or ‘visible song.’”⁵⁹ Although not identical, Steiner’s concept of eurythmy and Chekhov’s notion of radiation appear to be closely related since both aim to make something that is invisible perceptible to the audience.

For Chekhov, an actor’s ability to radiate encompasses much more than making visible that which is difficult to perceive, for he also claims “radiation means that I am giving myself whether you want to accept it or not.”⁶⁰ Hence, Chekhov suggests that by using radiation, an actor can transmit whatever he or she wishes without overpowering the recipient. Like

Stanislavsky, who views radiation as a hypnotic force by which an actor can “captivate the crowd,” Chekhov, too, sees it as a means by which the actor can command the attention of others in a powerful and engaging way. Chekhov, however, distinguishes radiation from hypnotism more so than Stanislavsky when he claims that, in order to be hypnotized, “[t]he will of one person has to overwhelm the other person. No means in our method ever lead to this. Hypnotism is old-fashioned now and is seldom used.”⁶¹ Nevertheless, both Chekhov and Stanislavsky, propose radiation as an act of the will. Indeed, according to the late Mala Powers—Chekhov’s student, close personal friend and Executrix of the Michael Chekhov Estate—an actor’s will to radiate can be so strong that one “may even consciously ‘radiate’ [his or her] character’s presence onto the stage or set before [making] an entrance.”⁶² Furthermore, Chekhov calls to mind the use of radiation in the First Studio in promoting it as an instrument which enables the actor “to convey to the audience the finest and most subtle nuances of his acting, and the deepest meaning of the text and situations.”⁶³

Even though Chekhov experimented with energy transmission in the First Studio, he seems not to have recognized fully the extent of its power as an acting tool until after his emigration from the Soviet Union. In his memoirs, Chekhov relays in detail an epiphany that occurred during his portrayal of Ivan the Terrible in a Latvian production of Aleksei Tolstoy’s *The Death of Ivan the Terrible*. In the final scene, as the ruthless tsar is dying, Chekhov documents that he, his fellow actors, and the audience experienced the feeling that “in the last two or three minutes before his death, time began to slow down. Not the tempo of the acting, but time, the *sense* of time. It came to a complete halt and stopped entirely for an instant, and everyone knew definitely that Ivan had died. Then, toward the end of the act, time once again

began to accelerate.”⁶⁴ After reflecting on that unique occurrence, Chekhov concluded that the experience was accomplished ultimately:

by a force of radiation emanating from the actor, which does not lend itself to external measurement. Inspired by the dying Ivan the Terrible, I actually radiated into the auditorium both the deceleration of time and its coming to a complete halt. In the moment of inspiration (that is, letting go of his own, small personality) the actor, by means of radiation, can transmit to the audience everything that he, the playwright, and their mutual creation—the character—want to convey.⁶⁵

With his remark that radiation makes possible the artistic expression of the actor, the playwright, and “their mutual creation,” Chekhov indeed acknowledges fulfillment of the First Studio’s third main objective—“rapprochement of the actor and author”—through radiation. In addition, Chekhov’s account recalls Stanislavsky’s theory of radiation as a form of communication with the audience; however, Chekhov also highlights a key difference in their thinking. At the time Chekhov was acting in the First Studio, Stanislavsky understood radiation to be primarily the transference of inner thought and feeling by the actor. While Chekhov would agree, when he describes in the above the pervading ambiance of time slowing down and then accelerating after Ivan’s death, he connects actor radiation to his unique notion of “objective atmospheres.”

For Chekhov, objective atmospheres “influence the character on stage...coming toward him, as it were, from outside, from the *air* surrounding the whole place.”⁶⁶ As Powers clarifies, “both performer and spectator are unconsciously affected as an atmosphere’s unseen waves are absorbed by the actor and Radiated out to the audience. Although they cannot be seen, Atmospheres can be felt strongly and are a primary means of theatrical communication.”⁶⁷ In the

Russian version of his text on acting, Chekhov illustrates atmosphere with the following example:

The actor knows how to evaluate atmosphere and searches for it in his daily life. Every landscape, every street, house, or room has its own particular atmosphere. He goes differently into a library, hospital, cathedral, noisy restaurant, hotel, or museum....

Have you ever noticed how your motions, speech, mannerisms, thoughts, feelings, and moods change involuntarily when you are seized by an atmosphere? And if you do not resist it, its influence over you increases. As in life, so it is on the stage.⁶⁸

For Chekhov the actor, being “seized by an atmosphere,” functions as a kind of creative spiritual medium, channeling the atmosphere and delivering it to the audience through radiation. As Yana Meerzon explains, the actor “not only senses, observes and records the atmosphere of each different life environment or milieu, but also reinvents, reimagines and enacts them on stage in the three-dimensionality of his/her body being in interaction with the set, props, objects, lights and other bodies on stage.”⁶⁹

Stanislavsky, too, believes the atmosphere on stage results from actor radiation, but proposes the inverse process. When actors radiate their inner life, in Stanislavsky’s view, “the inanimate objects on the stage, the sounds, scenery, the images created by the actors, the mood of the play itself and the production are brought to life.”⁷⁰ Thus, for Stanislavsky, the actors generate the atmosphere from inside themselves and invigorate an otherwise inanimate setting. For both Chekhov and Stanislavsky, however, the communication of the on-stage atmosphere to the audience is dependent on the actor’s body.

Stanislavsky and Chekhov also agree that actors can radiate an internal impulse to play an action. In *On the Technique of Acting*, Chekhov offers the following instructions: “Imagine that

invisible rays stream from your movements into space, in the direction of the movement itself. Send out these rays from your chest, arms and hands, from your whole body at once, in the direction in which you have moved. . . . Air filled with radiant light is the element of this exercise.”⁷¹ From Chekhov’s perspective, when actors move, the energy that originates from their “imaginary center” both leads and follows the movement once it is made. In that regard, an actor can radiate the impulse for an action, perform the action, and fill the playing space by letting the action’s energy radiate beyond the confines of the body.⁷²

While Stanislavsky did indeed use the term “radiation” as an early expression for “subtext,” his understanding of the concept appears to have evolved by the last five years of his life in a direction similar to Chekhov’s. Exercises using radiation, generally, are not associated with Stanislavsky’s later work; however, B. V. Zon’s stenographic notes of the rehearsals in the Opera Studio which Stanislavsky held in his apartment on Leontevsky Lane, reveals that he used the concept as late as April of 1933. During a rehearsal of Rimsky-Korsakov’s *The Maid of Pskov*, Stanislavsky gives the following direction to the actor playing Mikhail Tucha who is in love with Olga (Ivan the Terrible’s daughter): “Extend a hand completely to Olga, in order for the hand to call her, in order for it to *radiate* the call (and also, in my direction.”⁷³ Then, Stanislavsky insists that the actor not think about emotion, underscoring the fact that he considers radiation to be more than the transmission of thoughts or feelings.

Like Chekhov, Stanislavsky regards radiation as a method to extend or send an action impulse beyond the body to one’s partner and the audience. Stanislavsky finishes his direction to the actor with the significant statement that radiated energy is “formerly, what we naively called ‘prana.’”⁷⁴ Stanislavsky’s apparent rejection of any association with Hindu philosophy seems to be a self-censoring remark. According to Carnicke, at that time Stanislavsky’s “more

experimental ideas were stifled; any spiritual and psychological techniques that challenged Marxist materialism were either down-played or suppressed.”⁷⁵ Given the context of the period, and since his words are being recorded, Stanislavsky would naturally be hesitant to speak too avidly about Yoga even though his artistic sensibilities still, according to Anatoly Smeliansky, “took shape under the sign of a religious perception of reality as a divine gift which one must attain both externally and within oneself.”⁷⁶

By the autumn of 1934, Stalin had Stanislavsky (who was in failing health) confined to his home under doctor’s orders until his death in 1938. Even during those final years of his life, however, when he was forced to confine all of his rehearsals within the walls of his apartment, Stanislavsky continued to use exercises in radiation. Lydia Novitskaya, who was one of Stanislavsky’s assistants, recounts exercises she observed around 1935 in which actors would transmit internal impulses, thoughts and emotions only through the eyes.⁷⁷ Thus, Stanislavsky, like Chekhov, continued to invoke and evolve the early work of the First Studio throughout his life.

Conclusion

In her autobiography, Maria Knebel’ records that Ophelia’s speech cited at the opening of this article, the speech which Stanislavsky uses to convey the nature of radiation and irradiation, was one of Michael Chekhov’s favorites. When he directed *Hamlet* and played the title role in 1923, Chekhov learned the speech by heart and recited it often. He was particularly fascinated by Hamlet’s “sigh so piteous and profound” to which Ophelia refers.⁷⁸ That Chekhov and his mentor would be attracted to the unspoken communication, to the non-verbal aspects of the same speech should come as no surprise.

Although Stanislavsky and Chekhov diverged on several points regarding actor training, their concepts of communicating through radiation that which cannot be conveyed by the spoken word are nearly identical. While Chekhov refined and expanded his concept of energy transmission to suit the features of his own acting technique, his overall understanding of the concept remained rooted firmly in the First Studio. As Knebel' observes: "In his book, Chekhov makes concrete Stanislavsky's thoughts on 'radiation.'" ⁷⁹ The prominent place he affords radiation in his own system of actor training is an expression of the Studio's heritage, and, to no small extent, Stanislavsky's.

ENDNOTES

¹ K. S. Stanislavskii, *Rabota aktera nad soboi, Chast' I* [*An Actor's Work on Himself, Part I*], vol. 2 of *Sobranie sochinenii v deviati tomakh* [*Collected Works in Nine Volumes* cited hereafter as *CW9V*], ed. O. N. Efremov (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1989), at 338. See also, *Hamlet*, Act II, Scene 1. Translations from Russian sources are mine unless otherwise noted.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Michael Chekhov, *On the Technique of Acting*, ed. Mel Gordon (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), 115. Cited hereafter as *Technique*.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 114.

⁸ Ibid., 116.

⁹ Ibid., 116-17.

¹⁰ Marowitz, *The Other Chekhov: A Biography of Michael Chekhov, the Legendary Actor, Director, and Theorist* (New York: Applause Books, 2004), 270.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Stanislavskii, *Moia zhizn' v iskusstve [My Life in Art]*, vol. 1 of *CW9V* (1988), 288-89. All citations from *My Life in Art* are from the 1926 Russian version that Stanislavsky rewrote following the release of the hastily written American version: Constantin Stanislavski [sic], *My Life in Art*, trans. J. J. Robbins (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1924).

¹³ Ibid., 386.

¹⁴ See ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 387.

¹⁶ Ibid. 406.

¹⁷ Jean Benedetti, *Stanislavski [sic]: A Biography* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 181.

¹⁸ Magarshack, *Stanislavsky: A Life* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), 305-6.

¹⁹ Stanislavskii, *Chast' I: Stat'i, Rechi, Otkliki, Zametki, Vospominaniia [Part I: Articles, Speeches, Commentaries, Notes, Memoirs]*, vol. 6 of *CW9V* (1994), 388.

²⁰ Stanislavskii, *My Life in Art, CW9V* (1988), 1: 437.

²¹ Markov, "Pervaia studiia MXAT [*The First Studio of the Moscow Art Theatre*]" (Sulerzhitskii, Vakhtangov, Chekhov)," in *O teatr [On Theatre]*, 4 vols. (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1974), 1: 368; see also Lendley C. Black, *Mikhail Chekhov as Actor, Director and Teacher* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1987), 16.

²² Markov, 368.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Stanislavskii, *Rabota aktera nad roliu* [*An Actor's Work on the Role*], vol. 4 of *CW9V* (1991), 170.

²⁵ Kindelan, "The Theatre of Inspiration: An Analysis of the Acting Theories of Michael Chekhov" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1977), 135. See also Markov, 368.

²⁶ For a detailed discussion of Stanislavsky's inclusion of spiritual ideology in the System, see R. Andrew White, "Stanislavsky and Ramacharaka: The Influence of Yoga and Turn-of-the-Century Occultism on the System," *Theatre Survey* 47 (2006): 73-92. See also, Sharon M. Carnicke, *Stanislavsky in Focus* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Press, 1998, 138-45.

²⁷ See Carnicke, 141.

²⁸ Iyengar, *Light on Yoga* (New York: Schocken Books, 1979), 43. Hatha Yoga is the physical discipline that focuses on the development of the body and the control of *prana* through rhythmic breathing.

²⁹ Cited by Paul Gray in "The Reality of Doing: Interviews with Vera Soloviova, Stella Adler, and Sanford Meisner," in *Stanislavski and America*, ed. Erica Munk (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), 211.

³⁰ Franc Chamberlain, *Michael Chekhov* (London: Routledge, 2004), 67.

³¹ Yogi Ramacharaka, *Hatha Yoga; or, the Yogi Philosophy of Physical Well-Being* (Chicago: Yogi Publication Society, 1904). See White, 79-80. "Yogi Ramacharaka" was actually the penname of William Walker Atkinson, an American lawyer and proponent of the New Thought movement.

³² See White, 82 and 91, n. 58; and Carnicke, 140, 142, and 212, n. 74.

³³ Ramacharaka, 161.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ See Stanislavskii, *An Actor's Work on Himself, Part 1* in *CW9V* (1989), 2: 507, n. 25.

³⁶ Ribot, *The Psychology of Attention*, (Chicago: Open Court Publishing, 1890), 62. For a discussion of Ribot as a positivist, see Vincent Guillin, "Théodule Ribot's Ambiguous Positivism: Philosophical and Epistemological Strategies in the Founding of French Scientific Psychology," *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, 40, no. 2 (2004): 165-81, EBSCO Host, Academic Search Premier (14 June 2007).

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 98.

³⁸ Agursky, "An Occult Source of Socialist Realism: Gorky and Theories of Thought Transference," in *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture*, ed. Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 247-72, at 250.

³⁹ Cited in *ibid.*, 250.

⁴⁰ N. G. Kotik", *Èmanatsiia psikhofizicheskoi ènergii* [*The Emanation of Psychophysical Energy*] (Moscow: Izdanie V. M. Sablina, 1907), 61. Also cited in Agursky, 251; however, Agursky renders the English version from a 1908 German translation of the text, and the important word "radiant" is lost.

⁴¹ Stanislavskii, *An Actor's Work on the Role*, *CW9V* (1991), 4: 170.

⁴² Cited in Agursky, 253.

⁴³ See *ibid.*, 247, 262, and 265.

⁴⁴ See *ibid.*, 250.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ See Black, 16.

⁴⁷ Michael Chekhov, *To the Actor: On the Technique of Acting* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1953), 12.

⁴⁸ Ramacharaka, *Hatha Yoga*, 158.

⁴⁹ Chekhov, *Technique*, 44.

⁵⁰ Cited in Yana Meerzon, *The Path of a Character: Michael Chekhov's Inspired Acting and Theatre Semiotics* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2005), 213.

⁵¹ As much as Chekhov draws from Hinduism and Yoga, among other religious concepts, he was just as influenced by the theories of Rudolf Steiner and became a devoted student of anthroposophy. He cites Steiner frequently throughout his writing; however, Black points out that “Anthroposophy permeated Chekhov’s system of acting but was a personal belief that was not part of his teaching” (43).

⁵² Chekhov, *Lessons for the Professional Actor*, ed. Dierdre Hurst du Prey (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1985), 141. Cited hereafter as *Lessons*.

⁵³ Cited in Gray, 211.

⁵⁴ Chamberlain, 67.

⁵⁵ Cited in Foster Hirsch, *A Method to their Madness: The History of the Actors Studio* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2002), 347n.

⁵⁶ Chekhov, *Technique*, 115.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 114-15.

⁵⁸ Cited in Meerzon, 215.

⁵⁹ Black, 9.

⁶⁰ Chekhov, *Lessons*, 147.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Powers, “Preface,” in *Technique*, xxxv-xliv, at xli.

⁶³ Chekhov, *Technique*, 115.

⁶⁴ Mikhail Chekhov, *Zhizn' i vstrechi* [Life and Encounters] in *Vospominaniia* [Memoirs] (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 2000), 199.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Michael Chekhov, *On Theatre and the Art of Acting: The Five-Hour CD Master Class with the Acclaimed Actor-Director-Teacher, Lectures Recorded by Michael Chekhov in 1955*, 4 CDs (New York: Working Arts, 2004), Compact Disc 2. Emphasis his.

⁶⁷ Powers in *Technique*, xliv

⁶⁸ Mikhail Chekhov, *O tekhnike aktera* [On the Actor's Technique] in K. S. Stanislavskii / M. A. Chekhov, *Rabota aktera nad soboi / O tekhnike aktera* (Moscow: Artist, Rezhisser, Teatr, 2002), 368-485, at 381-82.

⁶⁹ Meerzon, 103.

⁷⁰ Stanislavskii, *My Life in Art* in *CW9V*, 1: 285-86.

⁷¹ Chekhov, *Technique*, 46-47.

⁷² See Black, 54.

⁷³ B. V. Zon, "Vstrechi s K. S. Stanislavskii" ["Encounters with Stanislavsky"] in *Teatral'noe nasledstvo; K. S. Stanislavskii; Materialy, Pis'ma, Issledovaniia* [Theatre Heritage; Stanislavsky; Materials, Letters, Research], eds. I. E. Grabar, S. N. Durylin, P. A. Markov (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo akademii nauk SSSR, 1955), 445. Emphasis Stanislavsky's.

⁷⁴ *ibid.* The Russian editor's footnote to Stanislavsky's remark reads: "At one time Stanislavsky used this term from Indian philosophy for strengthening the concept of an actor's interaction with his partner."

⁷⁵ Sharon M. Carnicke, "Stanislavsky Uncensored and Unabridged," *The Drama Review* 37 (MONTH? 1993): 22.

⁷⁶ Smeliansky, “The Last Decade: Stanislavsky and Stalinism,” trans. Susan Larsen and Elise Thoron, *Theater* 12, no. 2 (1991): 9.

⁷⁷ Lidiia Pavlovna Novitskaia, *Uroki vdokhnoveniia: sistema K. S. Stanislavskovo v deistvii* [*Inspiring Lessons: Stanislavsky’s System in Action*] (Vseros. teatr. obshchestvo, 1984), 326.

⁷⁸ See M. O. Knebel’, *Vsia zhizn’* [*All of Life*] (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1968), 119. I am indebted to Sharon Carnicke for bringing my attention to this and the following passage by Knebel’.

⁷⁹ Knebel’, “Mikhail Chekhov ob iskusstve aktera” [Michael Chekhov on the Actor’s Art”] in Mikhail Chekhov, *Literaturnoe nasledie* [*Literary Heritage*], 2 vols. (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1995), 2: 5-30, at 24.

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