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Stanislavsky's musicality: Towards physicalization

ABSTRACT

This article investigates the musicality of Stanislavsky's theatre practice by focusing specifically on his conceptions of rhythm and tempo-rhythm. It refers to the work Stanislavsky conducted during the 1918 Bolshoi Opera Studio and the 1935 Opera-Dramatic Studio. The article draws on recent scholarship on musicality in theatre in order to propose that although not immediately visible as an 'outcome' of his theatricality, Stanislavsky's musicality was located beyond the limits of music as metaphor to theatrical activity, and was evident in processes of embodiment that Stanislavsky was developing with his actors. This rather broad musical dimension is foregrounded in Stanislavsky's consistent attention to rhythm, and the ways rhythmic awareness affects the actor's presence. This led to the development of the notion of tempo-rhythm. It will be argued that beyond its apparent dualistic nature, if reconsidered as a 'relational dynamic' tempo-rhythm *emerges as a key element of Stanislavsky's musicality. The author concludes that in his quest to promote acting as embodiment, Stanislavsky developed, through musicalized processes, strategies of physicalization of action that promoted acting beyond imitations of scripted texts.*

KEYWORDS

musicality
embodiment
Stanislavsky
rhythm
tempo-rhythm
physicalization

Contemporary theatre and performance scholarship has been, at least for the past two decades, directly addressing issues related to musicality in theatre and its relevance to theatre-making processes. In his framing of musicality as a paradigm for theatre, David Roesner proposes to 'recognise "musicality" as a form of perceiving and thinking on the theatre stage, as a principle of "praxis",

which can be a training, working and devising method, a dramaturgical approach as a perceptive frame for audiences' (2010: 294). Recent scholarship considering the relationships between music and theatre aims, therefore, at venturing beyond the territories of music as an audible phenomenon or as a metaphor for other practices and addresses, instead, musicality in terms of dramaturgical and embodied processes.

The awareness that emerges from these perspectives helps to shed new light on the relevance of musicality in theatre-making processes. Interestingly, this musicality was already evident in the early decades of the twentieth century, when theatre was shifting from a literary to a more performative activity and practitioners were seeking alternative means to promote the idea of the actor as creator. The approaches taken by theatre-makers and their attitude towards music in theatre at that time reveal the complex nature of the music/theatre debate and praxis. This complexity is reflected in Adolphe Appia's (1862–1928) critique of the Wagnerian notion of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* when he argues that in his project Wagner 'neglected the role of the body' (1962: 4). Albeit less broad in its perspective, Appia's critique at the turn of the twentieth century supports Roesner's proposal, at the turn of the twenty-first, of a broader conception of musicality beyond music as an art form. This proposal is reflected in my understanding of musicality in this article.

Developing in the wake of the Nietzschean claim that tragedy, as the genesis of western theatre, emerged from the spirit of music, the turn of the twentieth century was a period of important reforms in theatre-making processes.[1] Konstantin Stanislavsky (1863–1938) was a key player in these reforms. His lifetime investigations of working procedures for actors were manifested in the System – that mode of preparation for actors of which there was, in the history of the European theatre, no real precedent (Milling and Ley 2001: 1). Musicality was to play a crucial role in the development of the System, as Stanislavsky himself attests when he claims that 'stage action, like the spoken word, must be musical' (2008b: 332).

Although references to Stanislavsky's attention to music are numerous, direct and critical investigations of Stanislavsky's musicality are relatively lacking. As Sharon Carnicke and David Rosen claim when discussing Stanislavsky and opera, 'theatre history has tended to overlook his work with opera, favouring instead his directing and acting of spoken plays' (2014: 121).[2] Indeed, Stanislavsky's work on opera and with opera singers forms an important context for investigating the musical dimension of his theatre-making. The lack of scholarly critique of Stanislavsky's musicality is further mirrored in a tendency to refer to music and musical terms as metaphors for Stanislavsky's work on the actor. Robert Leach, for instance, writes that,

> through improvising with his partners, through an *active* analysis, the actor creates a *score*, almost like a musician's score, for his part […]. And as with a musician and his score, the actor is able to go further with this method, and to colour the score differently at different performances.
>
> (2003: 188, original emphasis)

While Leach's observation may aid a better understanding of Stanislavsky's work, one must add that, for Stanislavsky, music and musical elements were not simply metaphors for the actors' work. Statements like Leach's are consequential of the fact that, as Roesner argues, 'for a long time, practitioners

1. Friedrich Nietzsche's (1844–1900) musical perspectivism in *The Birth of Tragedy* was the basis of a discourse, which sought to promote the performative infrastructures of theatrical performance. I discuss this, as well as its relevance to theatre-making processes and embodiment throughout the twentieth century in Frendo (2013: 207–19).

2. Carnicke and Rosen state that the Bolshoi Opera Studio, which I discuss in this article, is 'a mere footnote in many theatre and music histories' (2014: 120). They also argue that 'the reasons behind this neglect are numerous' (2014: 122) and provide a list of reasons they believe led to this neglect.

and theorists of theatre have employed a range of concepts derived literally or metaphorically from music as an art form' (2014: 7).

My aim with this article is to approach Stanislavsky's musicality afresh by focusing on rhythm and tempo-rhythm as elements of the musical dimension of his practice. I will argue first that, through his work on rhythm, Stanislavsky was a key player in the paradigm shift from music as a supportive framework or metaphor for dramatic action to a musicality that is an intrinsic element of the act of theatre; and second that tempo-rhythm was the main focus of this musicality, which led to a physicalization of action in performance. I will start by discussing *how* Stanislavsky locates rhythm at the heart of the actors' working strategies by investigating his work in the Bolshoi Opera Studio of 1918. During the development of the System, rhythm was a nodal element for Stanislavsky and his research on the nature of the actor's craft, which gradually and consistently progressed as a praxis that promoted the performative dimension of theatre. I will then shift my attention to the development of tempo-rhythm within the context of the Opera-Dramatic Studio of 1935, the last of Stanislavsky's studios before his death in 1938. It is, indeed, difficult to entertain the idea that the opera–drama bond was coincidental at this point in Stanislavsky's life. Instead, the Opera-Dramatic Studio, as context of his praxis, was the consolidation of his belief that, 'music and singing would help me find a way out of the blind alley into which my research had led me' (Stanislavsky 2008b: 334). Stanislavsky thus spent the last three years of his life investigating the dynamic relationship between music and theatre in the most direct manner, by working within a context framed around the awareness that the key for an enhanced performative experience was in the music–theatre dynamic. In the process of my discussion I will contest the idea of tempo-rhythm as a dualistic concept and propose, instead, a reconsideration of the term as a 'relational dynamic'.

In the last section of the article, I will investigate the processes that Stanislavsky developed for the actor to embody a role, and argue that beyond the work on rhythm, what marked a breakthrough in his working strategies was the development of tempo-rhythm. In his quest to promote acting as a process of embodiment, rather than just imitation of scripted texts, musicality was to play a key role, with tempo-rhythm emerging as one of the essential elements for the physicalization of action.

RHYTHM AND THE BOLSHOI OPERA STUDIO OF 1918

References to music appear at various points in Stanislavsky's life. However, his research into the musical dimension of theatre, based upon the music–theatre dynamic, took a decisive twist when in 1918 the Moscow Art Theatre was approached by the newly set up State Academic Theatres to work with the Bolshoi Opera. The aim was 'to raise the level of acting in opera at the Bolshoi' (Stanislavsky 2008b: 328). Stanislavsky's collaborator at the Moscow Arts Theatre, Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko (1858–1943), agreed to direct a scheduled opera while Stanislavsky organized an Opera Studio. Under his direction the Studio would train young people as future 'actor-singers' by following a programme devised by Stanislavsky himself. The Studio was divided into different departments including voice, music, speech, movement and dance, and theatre. Important singers, musicians, speech experts and choreographers were invited to direct the classes. Stanislavsky was in charge of the theatre department where the focus of his work would be 'the "system"

and rhythm' (Stanislavsky 2008b: 332). One of the objectives of the syllabus involved 'developing the inner and outer techniques of experiencing and also for diction, movement, rhythm' (2008b: 332).

Stanislavsky's work during the Bolshoi Opera Studio period addressed some of the key issues and concerns that had preoccupied him with respect to the development of a system for actor training. Rhythm, together with the inner–outer concern, was one of these issues. Earlier, as a result of his personal experience as an actor, Stanislavsky had pointed his finger at the inner–outer division as a major hurdle for acting. He felt that unless the inner–outer division was resolved, the work of the actor would always suffer from chronic shortcomings. Within the context of the newly set up Opera Studio, Stanislavsky was able to directly address this division by focusing his attention on rhythm and the rhythmic configurations of the performers' work. The process of moving from the inner to the outer dimension was equivalent to the process of physicalization of emotions that would materialize through rhythmic awareness via respiration. A new understanding of the involvement of respiration in acting was a significant development in view of the physical dimension of respiratory activity. The way this process works for Stanislavsky is bound up with the individual's behaviour in a given situation and characterized by a peculiar respiratory behaviour that is mirrored in the rhythmic framework of the breathing activity. As physical activity, the manoeuvres of breathing are, of course, decipherable and visible from the outside. In the case of the actor this process takes place in full view of the spectators. The relevance of breathing is, therefore, in its direct representation of the human being's body as a living presence. For Stanislavsky, the rhythm produced by an individual 'originates from his breathing and consequently from his entire organism, from his first need, without which life is impossible' (Stanislavsky 1980: 93). Rhythm was essentialized by Stanislavsky because of its being a physical and organic manifestation of breathing and therefore a primary condition for life.

Furthermore, the mind and body would, through this process, be active as a unified unit. Stanislavsky argues that there is analogy between attention and respiration and that 'the one as well as the other function of our "I" is subject to rhythm' (1980: 143). For him, rhythm and the System were thus inseparable. Rhythm was not only addressed as an interface for the intra-relational activity within the actor as self in performance (the inner dimension of the performer), but also with respect to the interrelation between the actors and the environment around them (the outer dimension of the performer). According to Stanislavsky, after grasping the inner rhythm by working with their breathing in relation to their activity, the student-actors will move to the next phase where they acknowledge that 'everything that lives is an eternally moving rhythmic entity. You […] will yourself, as you analyse a part, be able to detect the rhythm of every part and of every performance as a whole' (1980: 144). Rhythm was thus being proposed by Stanislavsky as the matrix of the inner–outer condition of the actors' work in performance through which the actors develop their performative axis. This was an important development because it already hinted at what would become the kernel of the System that Stanislavsky developed during the last years of his life, namely a process intended to enhance the physical dimension of theatre.

In view of my analysis, some might argue that notwithstanding these developments, the elimination of the notion of music as text, i.e. a score composed by a composer that serves as background to dramatic action, was

not thoroughly achieved by Stanislavsky during the Bolshoi Opera Studio period. Indeed, there was never any attempt by Stanislavsky to denude the opera genre of its aesthetic, which included the fact that music in opera had a textual/dramatic function. Rather, Stanislavsky's problem was that music in opera was often considered by singers as the be-all-and-end-all of the work. This was no different from the way actors considered the literary text in theatre. Music was treated by singers as the text of performance or *what* they perform. Stanislavsky's contention with this approach is evident when he comments that the majority of singers 'need sound for the sake of sound, a good note for the sake of a good note' (2008b: 330). What he found relevant, instead, was the multiple dimensionality of opera, which, as a genre, was framed around different layers. These included, first, music as a text but also as a foundation for the actor's behaviour and physical presence; second, the musicality of the text but also of the performers' body via their vocal presence; and third, the theatricality of the music and of the text. The awareness by the singer-actor of the existence of *all* the layers was considered by Stanislavsky as crucial, not only because it addressed the various issues of the operatic dimension, but also because it shed light on the dynamics of acting in theatre, including his inner–outer dilemma and the text-to-performance issue:

> The opera singer has to deal with three arts simultaneously, i.e. vocal, musical, and theatrical. […] The problem is that he has to study three arts in that process but once they have been acquired, the singer has far greater possibilities to have an effect on the audience than we, straight actors.
>
> (Stanislavsky 2008b: 330)

Simultaneity was, paradoxically, problematic but at the same time a condition for the creative and performative state for Stanislavsky. Indeed, Stanislavsky saw the roots of the actor's craft in the opera singer's craft precisely because of the way the opera performer had to integrate different arts into one creative expression.

I argue that the simultaneity issue, as presented here by Stanislavsky, had considerable influence on the text-to-performance shift mirrored, as it were, in the shift from music as a text (in view of its dramatic function) to musicality as a process (in view of its performative dimension). The *what* and the *how* (i.e. the content element and the physical/performative dimension) mutually informed each other and functioned in relation to one another. Stanislavsky discusses the task and explains:

> […] how difficult it is to achieve the complete freedom of the body and all its parts; how long it takes to control and develop one's attention and to learn to transfer it entirely – at one blow – and instantly from one group of muscles to another before you even get to psychological problems; how difficult it is to develop a sense of rhythm in oneself and change it in the most extraordinary way to the rhythm of the music before you even start on your exercises for collecting your energy and distributing it in different directions.
>
> (1980: 161)

Through the music-musicality – therefore text-process – dynamic, the content element and the performative process it entailed were developed into a

mutually inclusive axis for the work of the actor. The quote above refers to the complexity of the whole process. It acknowledges the inner–outer problematic and frames it around the difference between the inner body rhythms and the outer rhythms around and in relation to the performer. Above all it indicates how, in this dynamic, Stanislavsky saw the embodiment of the content that will clearly and tangibly be obtainable through rhythm as the physical interface between dramatic action and its performance by the singer-actor.

Furthermore, the simultaneity issue brought into the equation the relationship between tempo and rhythm, which would constitute the crux of Stanislavsky's research after the Bolshoi Opera Studio experience. Inner and outer tempo and rhythm must be put in relation to each other in the activity of the performer in order to develop the work organically into a whole entity.

TEMPO-RHYTHM AND THE OPERA-DRAMATIC STUDIO OF 1935

During the well-documented Bolshoi Opera Studio period, rhythm was central for Stanislavsky, who often referred to the System and rhythm in one breath so as to indicate the importance of the latter in the development of the former. Tempo-rhythm, however, featured neither as a concept nor as a practical element. The neologism tempo-rhythm was coined by Stanislavsky after 1922, during a time when Stanislavsky's attention continued to drift insistently on the relationship between opera and theatre.

Between 1921 and 1927, Stanislavsky worked directly on various operas including, Massenet's *Werther* (1921), Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin* (1922), Rimski-Korsakov's *The Tsar's Bride* (1926), Cimarosa's *Il Matrimonio Segreto* (1927) and Puccini's *La Bohème* (1927). Between 1924 and 1928 various opera-theatre studios were established until in 1928 the Stanislavsky Opera Theatre was set up. This new interest is worth underlining particularly in view of Stanislavsky's incredulity towards his own earlier methods of theatre-making processes that usually consisted of long periods of prolonged discussions on and readings of the written texts at the start of a rehearsal period. According to his biographer Jean Benedetti, Stanislavsky believed that:

> Too much preliminary discussions cluttered the actors' minds, [and] inhibited their creative energy. Their minds were so stuffed that their bodies could not move. The surest, simplest way into a play was to examine the action, what happens to act out the dramatic situations in sequence so that they could discover what they had to do. Actors thus begin with what they could best control and direct: the simplest physical actions.
>
> (1999: 355)

Although Stanislavsky's work remained within the context of literary dramaturgy, where the kernel of action remains the *fabula*, the actor was constantly being promoted to the level of creator and artist. This further complicates the matter, as actress Maria Knebel explains;[3]

> actors must […] work from their own individualities. That means, analyzing oneself as a human being/actor in the given circumstances of the play. But precisely because these circumstances are not at all those that formed the actor's personality in life […] the actor learns what he must discard, what in himself he must overcome.
>
> (Cited in Carnicke 2009: 203)

3. Maria Knebel together with Vasily Toporkov (also quoted in this article), were among the eleven handpicked actors assisting Stanislavsky at the Opera-Dramatic Studio of 1935. The eleven assistants selected twenty students for in-depth work with the master. The 2:1 ratio between students and teachers is indicative of the intensity of the work conducted by Stanislavsky in this studio.

The importance Stanislavsky gave to *how* the actor develops the given circumstances as put forward by the dramatic text was to be confronted with the 'inner' and the 'outer' dimensions, not on one, but two levels. The first conceived of the actor in relation to the literary text – therefore how the actor 'plays' the story of the author – and the second conceived of the actor as presence – therefore how to address the human being/actor dynamic. Here we are dealing directly with the inner–outer dynamic that is to be approached, among other things, through the tempo and rhythm dynamic which Stanislavsky started to refer to as tempo-rhythm.

This was an alternative approach that acknowledged associations beyond the rational and that would, throughout the twentieth century, develop into a focus on 'a model of the actor's work based not on acting as representation, but on an "energetics" of performance' (Zarrilli 2008: 1). Indeed, the energetics and dynamics of performance through tempo-rhythm were one of the most substantial breakthroughs made by Stanislavsky. All this would develop within the newly established Opera-Dramatic Studio of 1935. The Studio was of extreme importance for the work on the System. What developed within it, namely the Method of Physical Actions and Active Analysis, would remain among Stanislavsky's most important contributions to the actor's craft and to theatre in general, constituting a proper legacy for future theatre practitioners.[4] The Studio was also a breakthrough in the music–theatre relationship. With the setting up of the Opera-Dramatic Studio, Stanislavsky consolidated the totality of his vision which saw a musical dimension – concentrated on tempo-rhythm – informing the aesthetics of the work.

Stanislavsky's intuition was developed into scientific research that would debase any claims of coincidence with respect to his attention to the musical fabric of the actors' work. In his innovative approach, the starting point for the actors would become their own body with which they were to engage in an Active Analysis of the play. Here the source of emotions for the actor was body rhythms, as he insisted that '[e]ach physical action is inseparably linked with the rhythm which characterizes it' (cited in Toporkov 1998: 170). What was emerging in the Opera-Dramatic Studio was a context for praxis that disposed of the boundary between the rhythmic dimension of the action on the one hand, and the actor's physical disposition on the other.

The process of Active Analysis, as developed during this Studio, saw the actors experiencing with their physical presence the situation of the play prior to memorizing and understanding the lines of the text. As Carnicke explains, 'Active Analysis fosters memorisation of a text through a deep experiential understanding of the play's underlying dynamic structure' (2009: 196). Rhythm was the interface of this experiential memorization through the actor's body and was developing into a physical element embodied by the actor. In one particular instance during his work on Moliere's *Tartuffe*, the very last process of work before his death, Stanislavsky commented:

> None of you is sitting in the correct rhythm! Look for the true rhythm. […] I beg each of you, while sitting in your place, to find the true inner rhythm, an agitated rhythm, that expresses itself in small actions. No … no, that is all wrong. Really, can't you do such a simple thing? Where is your technique? As soon as your text is taken from you, you lose everything, I want you, above all, to learn how to act, to act *physically*.
>
> (Cited in Toporkov 1998: 168, original emphasis)

4. The Method of Physical Actions and Active Analysis are working strategies for actors which Stanislavsky developed during the Opera-Dramatic Studio of 1935. There is lack of definite agreement on whether Active Analysis is part of the Method of Physical Actions or a different approach altogether. Bella Merlin and Sharon Carnicke 'agree there is significant difference between the two', while Jean Benedetti 'uses "the Method of Physical Actions" to refer to the play's "active analysis on the rehearsal-room floor" thus combining the two into one' (Carnicke 2009: 192). For an account on the differences between the two approaches see Carnicke (2009: 189–202).

For Stanislavsky finding the 'true rhythm' was not some metaphysical or mystical endeavour, but a purely technical matter, the tools of which the actor must acquire in order to be able to act. He spoke of truth, by which he meant *theatrical* truth, and was concerned about the lack of technique that was evident when an actor was simply trying to reproduce a given text. However, notwithstanding these developments, Stanislavsky was aware that rhythm on its own could still lead to unnecessary shortcomings when dealing with the inner–outer dynamic. Actor Vasily Toporkov explains how rhythm was one of the main issues invoked when addressing the inner–outer problematic:

> I often saw tense moments on the stage achieved by purely outward rhythm, but, if this remained only *external*, it never produced the required effect. The ability to lead the actor to an inner justification of a rhythm is one of a director's most difficult jobs.
>
> (1998: 147, original emphasis)

Rhythm had to be located within a dynamic that would make it effective in addressing the problem. Tempo-rhythm was Stanislavsky's reply.

Various attempts have been made to define tempo-rhythm. Often these tend to be either circular definitions or definitions based on the internal–external/subjective–objective dualism. Both can be problematic in that, as a neologism, tempo-rhythm combines two elements of a different nature. In a musical work, tempo indicates the speed at which a phrase is to be performed, while rhythm is a dynamic manifested in the relationship between notes that make up a phrase. Stanislavsky himself was aware of this musical distinction when he clarifies that: '*Tempo* is the rate at which equal, agreed, single length values follow each other in any given time-signature. *Rhythm* is the quantitative relationship of active, agreed, length-values in any given tempo or time signature' (2008a: 463, original emphasis). Establishing this basic musical difference between the two terms is essential in order to avoid circular and dualistic definitions. Carnicke, for instance, describes tempo as 'internal rhythmic speed' and rhythm as 'external rhythmic speed' (2009: 226), where 'rhythmic' and 'speed' are used to define both tempo and rhythm. Similarly Leach defines 'tempo [as] being the outward time, [and] rhythm the inner time' (2003: 186), where 'time' is used to define both tempo and rhythm. These definitions are also examples of dualistic framings in that both associate tempo and rhythm to either the inner or the outer. Of course, Leach and Carnicke are not alone in establishing a dichotomy between the inner and the outer with respect to tempo and rhythm. Rose Whyman suggests that 'in relation to action onstage, we can think of tempo (speed or pace) of the external movement and action or speech, and rhythm as the internal state' (2013: 126). Similarly Mel Gordon considers tempo as 'a general pace of life' and rhythm as springing 'from specific individual activity' (1988: 196), implying objectivity with respect to tempo and subjectivity with respect to rhythm. Furthermore, what emerges as confusing in these definitions is that Carnicke refers to tempo as internal and rhythm as external, whereas Leach, Whyman and Gordon express a diametrically opposite view when they associate tempo with the outer and rhythm with the inner.

Apart from the fact that these contradictory assumptions do not help to simplify the complexity surrounding tempo-rhythm, associating tempo and rhythm, respectively, with either the inner or the outer is, as a matter of fact, problematic. Firstly, because this exclusivity does not reflect

Stanislavsky's own understanding when he claims that 'to bring music, singing, speech and action into a single whole, you need more than *outer physical tempo and rhythm*, you need *inner mental tempo and rhythm*' (2008b: 332, emphasis added). Secondly, because what constitutes one of Stanislavsky's most relevant contributions to the understanding of rhythm and tempo in theatre-making processes is that he actually associated the two to both the inner and the outer conditions. Stanislavsky's awareness in this respect was, in fact, a key factor in the development of the notion of tempo-rhythm. In view of this, I propose an articulation of tempo and rhythm that acknowledges Stanislavsky's position. Tempo indicates the relation between an event, situation, action, and/or movement, and the time that these take to happen or be executed. Therefore, tempo is not related exclusively to either the inner (subjective) or outer (objective) condition of the performer, but to the two in relation to each other. Rhythm, on the other hand, is a phenomenon manifested as 'differences' that emerge from the relationships between the various elements that constitute an event, situation, action, movement. Therefore, although rhythm may be determined by tempo, it is not ontologically related to tempo.

Notwithstanding its potentially problematic nature as a neologism, the notion of tempo-rhythm can lead to a deeper understanding of Stanislavsky's praxis and concerns with respect to the actor's craft. This is possible if tempo-rhythm is denuded of the context of music in its formalistic sense, and is reconsidered, instead, within a context of musicality, where tempo and rhythm are also related to the actor's somatic experience. Such reconsideration would resonate more with Stanislavsky's struggles to unearth the dynamics between the inner and outer dimensions of the actor's behaviour. In fact, I argue that tempo-rhythm was Stanislavsky's response to this binary. Stanislavsky was interested in the association between the psychic and the physical dimensions of the actor's activity. A 'good' act ought to emerge from this relationship rather than from an imitation of an outer form. With tempo-rhythm the actor could develop a relationship between outer and inner tempos and rhythms of a particular physical action, thus establishing a dynamic relation between the inner and the outer.

It is in response to this analysis that I apply the principle of 'relational dynamics' to tempo-rhythm and contest references to tempo-rhythm as a dualistic concept. By relational dynamics I understand the work on dynamics – therefore processes of change and transformation – that emerge from the associations/links/interstices between different elements. Following this understanding, different layers and/or ideas are not approached individually but rather as relationships, thus transforming binaries into unified phenomena. This principle qualifies tempo-rhythm as *one* dynamic rather than as a dual concept, and puts its two constituent elements in a relationship of mutual benefit to one another. Indeed, the principle of relational dynamics makes even more critical sense when applied to other aspects of Stanislavsky's work. Psycho–physical, inner–outer, Opera–Dramatic, music–theatre, actor as character–actor as self, experience–embodiment, are all binaries that were addressed and more importantly problematized by Stanislavsky. The validity and effectiveness of these 'binaries' is accentuated when approached as relational dynamics, in view of which I argue that relational dynamics were an important characteristic of the work of Stanislavsky on the System. As a relational dynamic, tempo-rhythm emerged from the attention Stanislavsky gave to the inner–outer issue as a psychophysical

process, conditioned, as it were, by the physical rhythms of action. The actor does not work on one aspect of the activity, but on the relationship between the elements that constitute it. The actor works on the liminal dimension of all the elements, including tempo and rhythm, in relation to one another, and how to transform that liminality into a tangible physicalized state.

PHYSICALIZATION

What is of importance for my analysis of tempo-rhythm as a relational dynamic and as a condition for physicalization is how Stanislavsky addressed the inner condition of the actor and shifted from intangible emotions to the actor's inner rhythms that inform a particular activity. But what are these 'inner rhythms' that ought to phase the uncontrollable emotions with the controllable nature of physical actions? Phillip B. Zarrilli explains that 'what Stanislavski meant by "inner action" and "feelings" were not exclusively informed by Ribot's psychology, but also by Stanislavski's adaptation of yoga exercises, principles and philosophy' (2008: 14).[5] From yoga, Stanislavsky borrowed the concept of *Prana*. He explains:

> *Prana* – vital energy – is taken from breath, food, the sun, water, and human auras […]. Pay attention to the movement of *prana* …. *Prana* moves […] the movement of *prana* creates, in my opinion, inner rhythm.
>
> (Cited in Carnicke 2009: 178)

Rhythm is related to energy (*prana*) – an arguably intangible element – through movement – a most basic tangible element. Energy is transformed into rhythm and physicalized through movement. The movement is internal and moves 'from your hands to your fingertips, from your thighs to your toes' (Carnicke 2009: 178). Movement of energy is a tangible element expressed through change and transformation within the body, which establishes, through the tensions created by the changes, an inner rhythm. The actor is aware of these inner rhythms and 'registers' them as physical activity in order to work with them in relation to her/his own tempos and rhythms as a human being involved in an activity.

Focus on rhythm, therefore, aids the actor in addressing the difference between the self and the fictional character he or she plays. Work on rhythm via the movement of energy and the distribution of internal and external tensions transcends this difference without, however, negating it as difference. It would be impossible to solve the problem of the real self against the fictional self by means of working on emotions. As Zarrilli argues, '[t]here is no clear articulation of the distinction between emotional life of the actor-as-person and that of the character. The result can be self-indulgence to the neglect of the physical side of the acting equation' (2008: 17). On the other hand when focusing on the movement (*kinēsis*) of energy, the actor can work on the changes of the movements that establish rhythmic formations. The process here is from internal energy to external physical activity, which leads to the possibility of developing physical actions through direct intervention on one's own body.

Such a process in no way distinguishes between the psycho and the physical dimensions of the actor. It simply avoids the assumption that rational construction is the *only* way to develop action. One understands why rhythm

5. For more information about Stanislavsky and French psychologist Théodule Ribot (1838–1916), from whom Stanislavsky borrowed the term 'affective memory', see 'Emotion and the human spirit of the role: Psychology', while for Stanislavsky's encounters with yoga see 'Emotions and the human spirit of the role: Yoga', both in Carnicke (2009). Stanislavsky himself makes various references to Ribot in his *An Actor's Work: A Student's Diary* (2008a).

remains an important element in the work of the actors when working on an active analysis of the text, in that now it is through physical activity that the actors approach the material they will eventually perform. It involves a sensorial encounter with the text in order to immediately develop a psycho-physical disposition with respect to the text, instead of only developing a rational understanding that will later lead to movement. The energies of the movements outlined in the text are made tangible, or better physicalized and externalized, through rhythmic practices.

Stanislavsky's paradigm gathers even more momentum with the tempo-rhythm relational dynamic. When the actor has established the rhythmic disposition of the activity by becoming aware of every single difference, change, or transformation of movement within himself or herself, the work moves onto another level where rhythm is developed in relation to the tempo of the movement that generated it. At this point of the process, through the tempo-rhythm relational dynamic, the intention of an action starts to develop, not through rational logic or imitation, but through the dynamics of movement itself. Here we are within the realm of kinesis. At another level, not necessarily a chronological one, the actor could also operate within the realm of mimesis, in that he or she works with respect to a given circumstance. Establishing a difference between kinesis and mimesis is important, although it should not be interpreted as promoting a division between the physical and the psychic in the work of the actor. It follows that the association between given circumstances and the work on tempo-rhythm are neither mutually exclusive nor operational in spite of one another. Rather, as Bella Merlin argues, there is 'no *divide* between body and psychology, but rather a *continuum*' (2001: 27, original emphasis). In fact she continues that the task is '*to condition the muscles of the body* in readiness for *expressing the spirit of the character*' (2001: 31, original emphasis).

The 'continuum' argument put forward by Merlin supports my claim that the work on tempo and rhythm when approached as a relational dynamic becomes more akin to a process of becoming rather than a simple imitation of outer rhythms and tempos. This procedure was central for Stanislavsky when attempting to address issues of embodiment. The inner tempo-rhythm could be accessed by the actor through work on the outer tempo-rhythm, not in a chronological order but in simultaneity, as Stanislavsky himself explains:

> I should have talked about inner Tempo-rhythm much earlier when we were studying how to achieve the creative state in *performance*, because *inner Tempo-rhythm* is one of its main features […]. It is much more convenient to talk about inner Tempo-rhythm at the same time as *outer Tempo-rhythm*, because then it is observable in physical actions. At that moment it can be seen as well as sensed rather like inner experiences which are not visible to the eye.
>
> (Stanislavsky 2008a: 463, original emphasis)

The relationship between what is visible (seen by the audience) and what is sensed (not seen but still accessible to the audience) is a crucial node in theatre activity. Stanislavsky's concern for this node was often discussed with respect to theatre's difference from the newer art form, cinema. For him the major difference between the two was 'that contact of feeling that unites actor and audience with invisible threads', present in theatre but absent in cinema. He argued that '[i]n the theatre it is a *living* man who delights us, saddens us,

disturbs us and calms us but in the cinema everyone and everything is *only apparently real*' (cited in Benedetti 1999: 203, original emphasis).

CONCLUSION

Stanislavsky was interested in the somatic dimension of performance as a means to avoid imitation of an outer form and as a means to unleash the creative potential of the actor as a physical presence. This physical presence is at the same time both internal and external, and can at no point in the working process be considered as either one or the other, thus making any dualistic assumptions problematic. I therefore conclude that the idea of working on the inner sensorial dimension and the outer visible dimension via a musicalized process framed around tempo-rhythm as a relational dynamic was an important development and a significant breakthrough for the actor's craft. Early in his career Stanislavsky had told opera singers 'not to sing a single word to no purpose. *Without the organic union of words and music there is no such thing as the art of opera*' (Stanislavsky and Rumyantsev 1998: 24, original emphasis). For him, purpose, or intention of action, was related not only to rational logic but also to musical elements. In the particular situation quoted here, Stanislavsky was talking to performers with direct knowledge of music, who could immediately relate to the actuality of his musical approach. For Stanislavsky it was important to develop this same approach with his actors by establishing an attitude towards musicality that transcended not only technical terminology, a natural hurdle for non-musicians, but more importantly the barrier of treating music as only a support for and background to language and rational processes.

Stanislavsky's shift from music to a process of musicality was instrumental in his research on the nature of rhythm as a formative element in the physical dimension of action. This in turn led to the development of tempo-rhythm as a relational dynamic that informs the work of the actor and directs him or her towards the development of a kinaesthetic dimension that is so central to theatre performance. The only condition that, arguably, kept Stanislavsky attached to the literary dimension of theatre was that for him the ultimate aim of the performance remained the given circumstances created by the author's preconceived *fabula*. Notwithstanding this condition, the breakthrough of tempo-rhythm and the way it directly affects the physicalization of action would constitute a significant legacy for theatre practitioners who, at the turn of the twenty-first century, continue to investigate the ontological relevance of musicality in theatre practice.

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