

## ***Michael Chekhov in the Twenty First Century: New Pathways Research Project Short Report 2017***

### **New Pathways**

New Pathways is a major multi-institutional research project that involves Goldsmiths University of London, the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, Queen Mary University of London, the University of Kent, the professional organisation Michael Chekhov UK ([www.michaelchekhov.org.uk](http://www.michaelchekhov.org.uk)) and The Chekhov Collective. The lead researchers are Dr Cass Fleming (Goldsmiths, University of London, MCUK, TCC) and Dr Tom Cornford (Royal Central School of Speech and Drama and MCUK).

This long-term project started in 2013 and culminated with a series of Research Events at Goldsmiths, University of London in September 2016. The outcomes of the project will be discussed in the forthcoming publication *Michael Chekhov Technique in the Twenty First Century: New Pathways* (Bloomsbury Methuen Drama 2019), edited by Dr Cass Fleming and Dr Tom Cornford.

At this stage we would like to share an overview of the inspiring work that has been done under the auspices of the project, which demonstrates that Chekhov's ideas and approaches are becoming increasingly relevant and central to contemporary practice, both in theatre practices and beyond.



Participants at the Research Events, September 2016. Photographs: Katerina Kotti

## Why?

Since the late 1980s interest in Michael Chekhov's (1891-1955) Technique has grown rapidly in the UK and has been recognized for its innovation and accessibility. Exploration of Chekhov's imaginative techniques has primarily been limited to acting and actor training practice in the twentieth century. There were some useful preliminary explorations of other uses of Chekhov Technique but we felt strongly that this needed to be taken further and into new areas. This innovative project brought together professional practitioners and scholars from different disciplines to investigate new uses of Chekhov's techniques both within and beyond the theatre in the UK.

**The genesis of this project** was an exchange, and subsequent series of edited interviews, within Michael Chekhov UK about the work in this field and how we could explore new pathways for this practice in the future (Cornford, Fleming and Rushe, 2013)<sup>1</sup>.

## What questions did we ask?

***The central research question we posed in this project was: How can Chekhov's techniques be used in contexts other than actor training designed for the interpretation of existing dramatic literature in a 21st Century context?***

Each strand of the project has drawn on the rich archival materials held on the work of the Chekhov Theatre Studio at Dartington Hall and has explored how it could be used in relation to different contemporary practices.

This overarching research question was split into five key areas:

1. **Chekhov Technique: Processes of Theatre Making.** Exploring the possible uses of the technique in devised theatre-making, systems of catalyst direction, and for collaborative writing practices.
2. **Chekhov Technique: Beyond Acting.** Considering the possible uses of the techniques for the training/performance by teachers of Dance and Movement, Theatre Design and Voice Work.
3. **Chekhov Technique: Beyond the Theatre.** Experimenting with the possible uses of the technique for applied theatre and therapeutic practices.

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<sup>1</sup> "The Michael Chekhov Centre UK Past, Present and Future: An Inter-Generational Dialogue,' an edited selection of interviews with Sarah Kane, Graham Dixon and Martin Sharp by Tom Cornford, Cass Fleming and Sinéad Rushe in Franc Chamberlain and Andrey Kirillov (eds), 'Michael Chekhov in the 21st: New Sources, New Contexts, New Perspectives,' *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training*, Special Issue 4.2, Routledge, 2013.

4. **Chekhov Technique: Cross Currents.** Investigating what new uses of Chekhov Technique are developing in other parts of the world and facilitating ways to share experiments and findings with international partners.
5. **Chekhov Technique: Past, Present and Future.** Identifying ways that contemporary practitioners/scholars can use the historical materials as a 'living archive'.

### With whom?

A related aim of the project was to extend and diversify the existing Chekhov community by outreaching to new groups of practitioners from different disciplines. Consequently the project was designed to offer completely free and inclusive events to a range of practitioners who had little, or no, prior experience of Chekhov Technique. These events enabled participants from different fields, for example therapists, theatre designers or teachers of voice, to try a methodology that was new to them and not currently included in training and provision in their sectors.

At the same time we hoped that these new exchanges with newcomers to the technique would help us interrogate the practice in fresh and innovative ways and help us consider the potential for further cross fertilisation with other methods, approaches and disciplinary practices. We also wanted to discover what this wider group of practitioners felt held potential in their respective professional disciplines, and why. On reflection, we feel that this research project has fulfilled these aims and are excited to now be considering a number of new developments and debates.

### How?

To do this Dr Cass Fleming and Dr Tom Cornford brought together a group of scholars, researchers, therapists, clinicians, social/applied practitioners, theatre practitioners, designers and performance pedagogues to explore, interrogate and valorize Chekhov's work in a twenty first century context. Each strand of the project drew on the rich Dartington Hall Trust archival materials.

### Early Outreach and Research Events

- **Workshop in Chekhov Technique for Catalyst Direction, National Theatre Studio (2013).**  
A workshop, led by Dr Cass Fleming, was the first inclusion of emerging directors into the outreach of the project.

- **Launch of The Chekhov Collective, Goldsmiths, University of London (2013- Ongoing).**

After preliminary experiments related to this project, the Collective met bi-weekly to undertake work on the practice-based research strand of this project exploring the use of the technique in relation to Devised Theatre Making and Catalyst Directing. This led to the development of the practice-as-research work on Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince*, continuing to use and explore archival material from Dartington.



The Chekhov Collective led by Dr Cass Fleming, Goldsmiths University of London. Photograph: Katerina Kotti

- **Workshop series exploring Chekhov with Linklater Technique for Voice, Royal Central School of Speech and Drama and Actors Centre (2014-15).**

Led by Darron Oram and Sinead Rushe, these workshops explored questions of presence and the audience through the voice. This research was subsequently synthesised into the curriculum for the BA Acting (Collaborative and Devised Theatre) at Royal Central School of Speech and Drama.



Chekhov and Linklater Workshop led by Daron Oram and Sinéad Rushe, Royal Central School of Speech and Drama. Photograph: Matther Churcher.



- **Practice-as-research performance: *Demons*, adapted from Dostoyevsky's novel, University of York (2015).**

Dr Tom Cornford and Dr Hannah Davies carried out extensive practice-as-research relating to their strand of the Research Project on Chekhov Technique for Collaborative Writing. This project was inspired by Chekhov's adaptation of the same novel in the early twentieth century, and related archival materials, but considered from a twenty-first century perspective.



*Demons*, a collaborative writing project developed by Dr Tom Cornford and Dr Hannah Davies (Playwright). Photo: Timothy Kelly

- **Presentation at Performance Research Forum Dis-Play [24], Goldsmiths College (2015).**

Fleming, Cornford and Mitchell, with five actor-devisers from The Chekhov Collective, gave a paper discussing two strands of the New Pathways Project to artists, academics and students from across the UK.

- **Workshops and Talks for Young Director's Program at the Young Vic Theatre (2016)**

Run by Fleming, Mitchell and the Chekhov Collective, these very successful and popular events with emerging directors will be followed up by a Masterclass in 2018.



Dr Cass Fleming and members of The Chekhov Collective with directors from the Young Vic Genesis Project. Photograph: Katerina Kotti.

- **Practice-as-Research performances: *The Little Prince*, Queen Mary (June 2016), and Goldsmiths, University of London (September 2016).**

The Chekhov Collective presented their practice-as-research, using archival materials and Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince* as a stimulus



*The Little Prince*, The Chekhov Collective directed by Dr Cass Fleming, Goldsmiths University of London. Photograph: Katerina Kotti.

## Outputs I

This diagram outlines the research project structure, the different phases, the range of outputs and the impact.

<b>Project Partners</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Goldsmiths, University of London</li> <li>Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, University of London</li> <li>Queen Mary, University of London</li> <li>The University of Kent</li> <li>Michael Chekhov UK</li> <li>The Chekhov Collective</li> </ul>	<b>New Pathways Explored</b> Chekhov Technique for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Devised Theatre and Catalyst Direction</li> <li>Collaborative Writing</li> <li>Theatre Design</li> <li>Voice and Singing</li> <li>Movement Training and Dance</li> <li>Community Contexts, Drama Therapy, Psychotherapy and Health Contexts</li> </ul>	<b>Phase one: archival and practice based research and early outreach events</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Intergenerational exchange within the MCUK leading to edited interviews published by Routledge.</li> <li>Archival research carried out by Dr Cass Fleming and Dr Tom Cornford.</li> <li>Longer term PaR starts: Dr Cass Fleming launches The Chekhov Collective at Goldsmiths Dr Tom Cornford starts PaR with Dr Hannah Davies (playwright). Paper given at Dis-Play at Goldsmiths.</li> <li>Dr Cass Fleming runs workshops for directors at the RNT Studio and, with The Chekhov Collective, for the Young Vic Theatre Director's Program.</li> <li>Daron Oram and Sinead Rushe lead two workshops on Chekhov and Linkater Technique for voice at Central and the Actors' Centre.</li> <li>Dr Roanna Mitchell carries out PaR on Chekhov Technique for Dance and Choreography with various independent practitioners.</li> <li>Zoe Brooks uses the technique in her work as a Dramatherapist and Martin Sharp uses the technique in his work as a Psychotherapist.</li> </ul>	<b>Outputs I</b> Research events for over 120 participants at Goldsmiths September 2016: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Workshop for non actors</li> <li>Praxis-Symposia for each of the six key areas explored</li> <li>Research &amp; Development sharing on the two longer term PaR projects</li> <li>Papers</li> <li>Academic Respondents</li> <li>Plenary</li> <li>Cross Currents International Exchange</li> <li>Social Networking events</li> </ul> <b>Outputs II</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Project Report, 2017</li> <li>Publication of the book based on the project and related digital resources, 2019</li> <li>Follow up events run by The Chekhov Collective ongoing</li> <li>Selected New Pathways taken further in a second round of research projects 2018-2019</li> </ul>	<b>Impact</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sharing material held at Dartington more widely to create a <b>living archive</b>.</li> <li><b>Experimental uses</b> of the technique in new contexts both <b>within and beyond the theatre</b>.</li> <li>Finding new ways of using the technique for <b>different participants and groups</b>.</li> <li>Discovering and discussing <b>new blends</b> with other methods and approaches.</li> <li>Developing <b>new critical knowledge</b> about the use of the technique in a contemporary context.</li> <li><b>Extension and diversification of the UK Chekhov Community</b> in the cultural sector, academia and conservatoires and in broader community and health contexts.</li> <li><b>Improved international exchange</b> on work in these and other new pathways.</li> <li><b>A new methodological approach to PaR</b> which has now influenced a series of new research projects in the sector.</li> <li><b>Trickle down impact:</b> participants involved in the events further share the techniques and ideas.</li> </ul>
<b>Collaborators and beneficiaries:</b> Academic Researchers; Applied Theatre Makers; Collaborative Theatre Makers; Choreographers; Devised Theatre Makers; Directors; Drama Teachers; Drama and Movement; Movement and Dance Teachers; Movement Directors; Performers from different fields; Post-Graduate Students, Psychotherapists; Theatre Designers; Voice Teachers and Writers. <b>International Partners</b> in the US, Canada, Israel, Hamburg and Holland. <b>Colleagues from the arts and cultural sector:</b> Actors' Centre; Royal National Theatre and The Young Vic.				

## Research Team

This diagram shows the full research team and how they each contributed to the project and different events.

### The Research Team

**Lead Researchers:** Dr Cass Fleming (Goldsmiths, University of London) and Dr Tom Cornford (Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, University of London)

- **Chekhov Technique for Devised Theatre and Catalyst Direction** – Dr Cass Fleming (Goldsmiths University of London), Dr Roanna Mitchell (University of Kent) and members of The Chekhov Collective
- **Chekhov Technique for Collaborative Writing** – Dr Tom Cornford (Royal Central School of Speech and Drama)
- **Chekhov Technique for Theatre Design** – Sinéad Rushe and Aldonna Cunningham (Royal Central School of Speech and Drama)
- **Chekhov Technique in the Community, Drama Therapy, Psychotherapy and other Psychotherapeutic and health contexts** – led by Dr Caoimhe McAvinchey (Queen Mary University of London), Martin Sharp (MCUK) and Zoe Brooks (Bazooka Arts)
- **Chekhov Technique for Voice Training and Singing** – led by Daron Oram (Royal Central School of Speech and Drama), with Christina Gutenhunst (E15) and John Gillett
- **Chekhov Technique for Movement Training for Actors and Dancers** – led by Dr Roanna Mitchell (University of Kent) and Juliet Chambers (Guildford School of Acting)
- **Chekhov Technique for Non Actors** – Graham Dixon (Michael Chekhov Studio London/MCUK) and Julia Krynke (MCUK).
- **Research and Development PaR Event** – Dr Cass Fleming and The Chekhov Collective presented R&D material on Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince* drawing on archival materials. Dr Tom Cornford presented on his collaboration with playwright Dr Hannah Davies that led to their performance of *Demons*, in response to Chekhov's original adaptation.
- **Academic Auditors** – Professor Franc Chamberlian (University of Huddersfield) and Dr Caoimhe McAvinchey (Queen Mary University of London)
- **Plenary** – Chaired by Dr Cass Fleming (Goldsmiths University of London)
- **Short Papers** - Zoe Brooks (Bazooka Arts), Dr Roanna Mitchell (University of Kent) and Ulrich Meyer-Horsch (Michael Chekhov Europe/MICHA)
- **Cross Currents International Exchange** – Chaired by Gretchen Egolf (MCUK/MICHA) with MICHA faculty including Joanna Merlin and Ragnar Friedank in the USA and Marjolein Baars in Holland.

### Archival sources taken from:

- Michael Chekhov Theatre Studio, Deirdre Hurst du Prey Archives, held by the Dartington Hall Trust.

## The Research Events September 2016

We were delighted to host over 120 participants from a wide variety of fields at the major research event at Goldsmiths. The first day saw a very successful workshop for non-actors, which enabled many of our participants to try the technique for the first time. In the evening the two longer term Practice-as-Research projects were shared with an audience and followed by a post-show discussion considering the specific questions and archival materials that were being explored. The six Praxis-Symposia sessions that were held on the Saturday and Sunday included sharing and exploring selections of archival material and a consideration of the practices that were developed at Dartington by Chekhov and his collaborations in the 1930s. Chairs and contributing practitioners/scholars shared the ways in which they were using and blending Chekhov Technique in the new pathway areas through both practical exercises and tasks, and discussion of their work and experiments. Other participants shared their own experiments, experiences and reflections on the use of the technique. The ideas and methods were unpacked, debated and considered in relation to new uses, new participants, and in an twenty-first century context. Blends with other approaches and techniques were shared, aspects of the technique or terminology critiqued, methods and principles highlighted as having the most potential for new uses and for different purposes. The broader socio-political and critical issues were discussed along with developments in the many different fields that were represented at the events.

On the Sunday afternoon, participants gathered together for the feedback from the Academic Respondents who had audited all the sessions. This was followed by a dynamic Chaired Plenary addressing many of the issues and ideas that had come up in the sessions and debates that had been noted by the Respondents. Later that afternoon two short papers were delivered on the use of Chekhov Technique in new areas. For the final Cross Currents event we were fortunate to be joined by one speaker from Germany in person who delivered a short paper on inspiring work in other parts of the world, and this was subsequently opened out to a Chaired discussion with international friends in the USA and Holland via Skype. In addition to the formal events, there was a great deal of dynamic discussion at the lunches and the evening social events over the three days. Connections were made, ideas were hatched and the community grew and diversified.



Participants at the Research Events, September 2016. Photographs: Katerina Kotti



## What now? Outputs II

A longer project report on the project will be published later this year and the forthcoming book, *Michael Chekhov Technique in the Twenty First Century: New Pathways (Bloomsbury Methuen Drama)*, edited by Dr Cass Fleming and Dr Tom Cornford, will be published in 2019.

We will also be further developing our work on a number of the strands explored in, and aims of, the project. This will include:

- A follow up impact survey with participants of the various events.
- A future project on our work on Chekhov Technique in the Community, Drama Therapy, Psychotherapy and other Psychotherapeutic and health contexts. See [www.michaelchekhov.org.uk/michael-chekhov-in-the-twenty-first-century-new-pathways/](http://www.michaelchekhov.org.uk/michael-chekhov-in-the-twenty-first-century-new-pathways/)
- Daron Oram will be developing further workshops for voice teachers.
- The Chekhov Collective, led by Dr Cass Fleming at Goldsmiths and Dr Roanna Mitchell at Kent, is offering a new series of events for 2018-2019 which has thus far included:
  - Dr Roanna Mitchell and The Chekhov Collective worked with Juliet Chambers and the Labanarium to run a further research and exploration session on the crossovers between Chekhov and Laban in January 2018 and have been invited to run a follow-up in Athens, July 2018.
  - Sian Clarke led a session exploring her uses of Chekhov Technique 'Solo Comedy and Writing: Learning to collaborate with yourself'
  - Tom Bostock of GRUFF Theatre Company ran a session on 'Chekhov The Grotesque and the Fantastical'
  - Dr Cass Fleming worked with Amy Russell, Founder and Pedagogic Director of Embodied Poetics, to run a public workshop exploring the synergies between Chekhov Technique and Lecoq Pedagogy in 2018.
  - Director Rebecca Frecknall ran a session for directors on 'Chekhov and The Chorus' in June 2018.
  - A panel discussion was held at the Jerwood Space – 'Directors as Collaborators: On hierarchy, empowerment and kindness in the rehearsal process'.
  - Gretchen Egolf (MCUK) will be leading a session on 'Chekhov and Musicality in Performance' in July 2018.
  - See the website for details further details <https://www.cassfleming.com/chekhovcollective/>
- Continuing to grow and diversify the New Pathways Network in the UK.
- Continuing to nurture our relationship with international colleagues.

## Impact and cross fertilisation

Our project design and methodological approach to Practice-as-Research has in turn inspired various other projects since 2013 and we hope that it will add to the development of this field of research, professional and academic practice.

**To join the New Pathways Network** please email us at [chekhov.new.pathways@gmail.com](mailto:chekhov.new.pathways@gmail.com) and give us your name, your area of practice, your related company/institution, and a telephone