

Introduction

TECHNOLOGIES FOR INTUITION

It is deep December in the center of Moscow. A dozen acting and directing students in sweatpants or tights sprawl across a wooden floor in a studio at the top of the central building of the Russian Academy for the Theatrical Arts. The central campus occupies a block on a quiet, tree-lined street that curves off a central artery to the Kremlin, across from stately prerevolutionary neighbors, an embassy, an elementary school, and a theater. That morning students had cleaned the herringbone parquet with thin lengths of grey muslin, but now it is afternoon and dusty again. Facing the dozen at work sit senior and junior instructors, interns and apprentices, this author, and the other half of the class; many of us take notes in quadrille journals. Some sit on the floor, back to the wall, legs curled, or on the wide ledges of double-paned windows that reach from hip toward the ceiling, laced by frost.

We have just finished a morning of stage movement (*tsenicheskoe dvizhenie*), in which we carried each other on our backs, loping in a circle (a eurythmic drill attributed to Émile Dalcroze), and then practiced falling backward in chairs. The students now face a deceptively simple task: merely to establish “contact.” For months they have progressed through techniques to establish communication with partners—*partnerstvo*—working multiple sensory channels through contact improvisation and mirroring drills, playing physical and verbal games to build collective tableaux and narratives, games familiar from the playground and culled from psychology books, games like Mafia, Ant Wars, Freeze, Die, and Come to Life. Today a new game is taking place: one student waits in the corridor while those remaining in the room agree on a simple command. “Close the *fortochka*,” they decide. Even with the cold out on the street, someone has opened a *fortochka*—a little window

FIGURE 1.1. Opening the *fortochka* may seem like wasting steam heat, but it also saves on the electricity and maintenance for localized thermostat systems—and moreover allows fresh air to circulate high across a room without creating a draft, balancing values of efficiency with those of comfort and health.



within a window, set high in the top frame. Central Moscow buildings are snug, well-warmed by hot water flowing to radiators through pipes in the walls supplied by larger pipes that run under and over city streets. The water temperature is set by region, not building: one opens a *fortochka* when a room becomes too warm. People are always opening or closing the *fortochka*, asking each other whether they ought to open or close this little point where outside and inside make contact, even in winter.

“Think that exact phrase,” an instructor advises them. “Think: ‘Close the *fortochka*.’” The classmate returns from the corridor, and we quietly watch him stand still, head tilted, trying to intuit our collective wish. He regards the other students watching him, then the instructor who watches us watching him. He expounds advice, techniques for becoming more receptive to wordless contact: “Relax, listen . . . then take an action . . . listen to your body, even the silliest little thing . . . take that first impression.” He tells the others to “concentrate with the chosen words. Relax, so there is no muscle tension. No analysis, no fighting within yourself.” All efforts fail; the window stays open. They try again with a new command and a different classmate . . . and succeed! On the third attempt, they fail again. No matter, reassures the instructor; learning to balance principles of relaxation *and* concentration, this is hard work, a lifetime’s work, this work of making a channel, opening up, making contact. They will labor at this for some part of every single day, for five years, running through an arsenal of what I call technologies for intuition.

Technologies for intuition are sets of techniques and tools designed to catch and to act on those signs, tells, information streams, vibes, and so forth that sentient beings emit without meaning to, or that we try not to express. These techniques include familiar mundane skills of interactional attention, the kind a schoolteacher might use to assess who is engaged and who is bored, that a waiter might use to decide when to approach a table. They

might include specialized psychological skills, such as reading shifts among facial micro-expressions, or occult means to sense vibrations in the ether.

In some social settings, to discuss another's expressions (not to mention one's fleeting micro-expressions) or to point out lack of attention is considered awkward or rude, but these acting teachers insist on it—the profession demands undoing earlier social training in speech etiquette to develop active sensitivity for all those stray signs that spool out alongside more explicit words or acts.

At this point I want to define my usage of *channel* to refer to real or imagined conduits that afford communicative contact. They combine material media, persons, and structures. A channel can ride a single material medium or link multiple media: a phone call to a secretary, who sends a memo. Conversely, a medium like television can carry more than one channel along a single transmission, usually perceived as interference. Channels might also be thought of as constituted by materials and structures that together afford the very possibility for contact or communication without themselves being taken up as the main media for messages (although they can also be interpreted as messages, as can their blockages: a closed window, a roadblock, a first-class airplane cabin).

On another morning, the instructor has students face each other in parallel lines. Those in one line silently select targets from the other, and then “without words or external signs, only in your mind” call their targets, whose task is to intuit who is paying attention to them. Everyone concentrates; this time, most guess correctly. The teacher asks: “How can you explain this?” They call out words and phrases like “*Tjanet!*” ([She/he/it] pulls), “*Glaza!*” (The eyes!), or “A whole sum of minute things.” The teacher recollects learning the same drill under Maria Osipovna Knebel', stage director and student of Stanislavsky (and main rival to Mikhail Kedrov, more often in the United States considered Stanislavsky's heir because he headed the Moscow Art Theater), who had learned it under Mikhail Chekhov (Stanislavsky's most theosophical student, who left the USSR in 1928). In her autobiography, Knebel' reminisces about early 1960s student reactions, posing the same questions as did her former student in 2003:¹

How did the students guess, surprising those who saw this exercise for the first time? Telepathy? No. Each student did it differently . . . One got it because his selector behaved too casually, another seemed suspicious, another did not meet his eyes, another caught the shadow of a quickly hidden smile. They noticed the subtle, barely discernible. And if sometimes they did not guess, still the process of attention was all the same creatively sharpened, and after the exercise evoked, for most,

thoughts and examples of lively observational skills and sensitivity. And is not sensitivity, the ability to penetrate that which lies on the surface, the obligatory quality of a director? (1967, 546)

Actors trained by Knebel' and her colleagues yielded captivating performances: quirky, clever, and still beloved by fans. Brilliant ensemble work is marked by exchanges of glances and gestures even among the extras in Soviet-era comedies like *Carnival Nights* (1968) and tragedies like *King Lear* (1971).

INFORMATION WARS: FROM *DRACULA* TO RUSSOPHOBIA

Around 1961, both superpowers invested in developing the sensitive "ability to penetrate," increased funding for telepathy research. Sources on both sides credit a specific moment when French journalists reported that a research team aboard an American submarine, the USS *Nautilus*, had successfully received mental images from a remote location in Virginia while under ice and water. The *Nautilus* was the world's first nuclear-powered submarine and the first sub to reach the North Pole wholly submerged—a deep sea counter to the first cosmic satellite launched by the USSR in 1957. In *Military Psychotronics: The Science of Enchantment*, Popov writes: "[A]s the "beep-beep" of Sputnik-1 rang over the world like a bell, leading American scientists decided it was time to move in all directions . . . in this way, the quests to conquer the planets and win human minds reached out their hands to each other" (2006, 2). Some call the press reports about the *Nautilus* a hoax, old school fake news that spun out spirals of mirrored rumors. All the same, the press reports attending to ongoing lab work increased, as did internal government reports suggesting that telepathic phenomena had military potential (see declassified and unclassified reports for the DIA, such as those prepared by the Air Force Systems Command in 1978 or by the Army Medical Intelligence and Information Agency in 1972). In 1973 a report prepared by the RAND corporation asserted that the superpowers had devoted equal resources to extrasensory perception (ESP) and paranormal research, commenting that "if these phenomena do exist," the "Soviets would be ahead" (Van Dyke and Juncosa 1973).

Why the Pentagon and the Kremlin cultivated paranormal science as a militarized technology for intuition is a question well masticated in the popular literature and film. The usual answer is to emphasize intelligence or military ends, strategic and paranoid motivations. Such motives are clearly part of the story. All the same, to focus only on such ends and motives can distract us not only from other motives, but also from the myriad and unintended outcomes of those experiments and discourses about them. To

understand decades later how people deployed the techniques and the media spun around Cold War era events and institutions (and even rumors) requires that we cast our gaze more broadly, and farther back.

Cold War paranoia appears to some to have begun only after World War II. However, the outlines of that anxious discourse, and in particular the appeal to tropes of mind control, go back to the nineteenth century, to British suspicions of sabotaged imperial communication and enemy intelligence. Literary historian Jill Galvan reads Bram Stoker's *Dracula* as its contemporaneous readers might have, through the filters of reports of British conflicts in India and with Russia in Asia during the so-called Great Game. Regarding Britain's Indian holdings, "The most sensational rumor to this effect was that the Indians had sent messages to each other by way of native telepathic abilities, sometimes known as the 'Hindu Secret Mail,'" an occult channel for spreading mutiny (Galvan 2015, 446). Galvan argues that Stoker played on fears about Britain's imperial conflicts, from stories of both Indian rebel communications and Russian military intelligence: *Dracula*, exerting mesmeric power across great distances, collects intelligence on his prey better than any military spies. British Russophobia, Galvan notes, had already intensified after the Crimean War (1853–1856), increasing throughout the competing empires' struggles to control pieces of Central Asia. Reports of events there built "collective memory of a vigorous conflict between Eastern and Western realms of information" and "extreme investment in information and in depicting warring orders of information" (Galvan 2015, 449).

In *Dracula*, the narrative of British victory over the Orient is vexed in still another way, as the book emphasizes the Occident's practical informational weaknesses relative to the mysterious other, weaknesses improbable and unnerving for a nation aspiring to champion modernity (Galvan 2015, 458). *Dracula*, written during the decade after Frederic W.H. Myers coined the term *telepathy* in 1882,² parallels efforts of the Society for Psychical Research in England to catalog "native systems of communication that outpaced Western devices," perhaps, as Luckhurst notes, as "a mechanism of projection where anxieties about the fragility of colonial rule and scanty communication conjured occult doubles that mysteriously exceed European structures" (2002, 157–58). The British Society for Psychical Research involved itself with reports from all over the empire and beyond; one of its first acts, in 1884, was to send a member to India to investigate some of Elena Blavatsky's psychic claims.

By the time of the Russian Revolution, the ground was well prepared for continuing accounts of Soviet Russia that obsessed about deciphering the

Russian mind: *The Mind and Face of Bolshevism: An Examination of Cultural Life in Soviet Russia* (Fülöp-Miller, Flint, and Tait 1929); *New Minds, New Men? The Emergence of the Soviet Citizen* (Woody 1932); *Mind and Spirit in the Land of Soviets* (Lyons 1947); *The Soviet Mind: Russian Culture under Communism* (Berlin and Hardy [1949] [2004]); *The Country of the Blind: The Soviet System of Mind Control* (Counts and Perlmutter 1949); *The Mind of Modern Russia; Historical and Political Thought of Russia's Great Age* (Kohn 1955); *The Revolt of the Mind: A Case History of Intellectual Resistance behind the Iron Curtain* (Aczél and Méray 1959); *The Russian Mind* (Hingley 1978); and *The Russian Mind since Stalin's Death* (Glazov 1985).

These titles do not describe brain activity so much as they signal a need to figure out the aims of the state, a need for intelligence, often by triangulating the words of intellectuals and artists for their relation to the state. The reference to the Russian mind signals worries about what might befall those who fail to read it. On October 1, 1939, Winston Churchill famously remarked over radio: "I cannot forecast to you the action of Russia. It is a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma." Churchill's words still ring like an incantation, even though he went on, in fact, to predict what the USSR would soon do (perceive German expansion as aggressive). The cliché that Russia poses *special* and inscrutable puzzles lives on.

During the Cold War American scholars approached the hermeneutic puzzle allegedly posed by Russians by projecting it inward, into Soviet and Russian national character. Right after World War II, the Rand Corporation commissioned anthropologist Margaret Mead and others to conduct a study that led to a collection of essays, *Soviet Attitudes Toward Authority* (1951). The authors interviewed Soviets who had immigrated during and just after the war and argued that Soviet social life was shaped by the ways Soviet people were uniquely paranoid about deceptive enemies within, paranoid that "every individual maintains the capacity for complete betrayal of all those values to which he has hitherto shown devoted allegiance" (197).³

Mead and her colleagues named fear of internal enemies as alien to "the Western mind" (an odd claim, given that they had just lived through McCarthy's purges). While they acknowledged that the refugees entered interview situations conducted by officials and scholars representing the state that was granting asylum after a devastating war, they did not reflect on how such conditions primed identification of paranoia. Anthropological thinking about interview methods and contexts prompts me to consider how such research conditions resembled discursive genres such as interrogation,

thus priming themes like betrayal.⁴ This is not to deny the existence of discourses of betrayal in the USSR; as discussed previously, historians have amply illuminated forms of Soviet unmasking and *samokritika* ("self-criticism") in show trials, at work, in schools, and in diaries. What I do deny is the radical alterity of a "Soviet mind." I mistrust claims of a specifically Soviet "culture of dissimulation" (Shlapentokh 1984; Sinyavsky 1991) and ask whether such claims are not themselves products of circuits *for* suspicion, channels charged by their functions and closures during imperial and then Cold War conflicts, because those functions and closures, their points of contact, extended beyond the borders of either state.

Paranoia and attention to others' paranoia are both precipitates of conditions such as diplomacy and war (but see also Ngai 2005). Conditions shape demands for particular kinds of truth as useful intelligence; interview situations in service to aims of diplomacy or war strictly manage the channels for contact and structures for communicating.⁵ In 1998 the head of the Russian Academy for Theatrical Arts declared, in an official pamphlet describing the departments and admissions, that theater aims to make holes in the "defensive structures" of the audience (GITIS 1998); perhaps such aggressive metaphors for theatrical communication reverberate with previous painful encounters across political rifts.

GEOPOLITICAL PARANOIA AND INTUITION

During the years when Knebel' ran telepathy drills for Soviet acting students, Americans were firing up related enchantments with intuition. The nineteenth-century movements of spiritualism and theosophy, the allied genres of gothic and science fiction, had moved into the mainstream by the 1960s. Themes of mind reading and mental control proliferated in American and British television series and films (*The Prisoner*, *Doctor Who*, *Star Trek*), as through New Age philosophy and popular publications on ESP experiments. Skeptics, too, redoubled public demonstrations to debunk ESP; belief in telepathy became a symptom of mental illness, as in the figure of the schizophrenic who receives FBI broadcasts by brain wave or claims psychic contact with aliens.⁶

In 1972 a report prepared for the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency by the Army Medical Intelligence and Information Agency enumerated the practical military applications of extrasensory powers in ways that echoed Knebel's words on developing sensitivity and attention within technologies for intuition: "In view of [animals'] perceptive processes, it has been difficult to differentiate between those sensory processes which are merely

sharpened or highly honed, and those that are extra or super-normal. Certain military advantages would come from the application and control of these perceptive processes. For example, such application and control could be used in the detection and identification of animate objects or humans through brainwave interactions, mass hypnosis or mind control through long-distance telepathy, thermal receptors, and sensitivity to changes in magnetic electrical gravitational fields" (Army Medical Intelligence and Information Agency 1972, 26). Distant acting academies and military researchers converged to suggest that matters like intuition may not emerge naturally, that structures of governance or education can improve intuition, even to make contact in new ways via "thermal receptors." In all their work about and on intuition, they could not but also effect changes across commonsense and theoretical models of communication.

American-style Cold War technologies for intuition engaged paranoia early on, later exemplified by anxiety about Madison Avenue subliminal barrages and musical messages embedded backward on vinyl, but originally over the wiles of foreign communists. The enemy seemed to spread propaganda through ever less detectable channels: How could we shut them out or even detect their invasive touch and influence? Looking back to 1962 from 2002, television critic Lee Siegel (2004) proposed "reading" the classic film *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962) as John Frankenheimer's arch commentary on Cold War paranoia that linked media to mind control. In the opening scenes, North Korean communists inject American war prisoners with psychopharmaceuticals to program them with classically Freudian associations to mechanical cues: this playing card will remind you of your mother and trigger an urge to kill. Siegel, with an eye to the director's other works critical of American-style propaganda, reads the film as subtly mocking those who during the McCarthy purges of the late 1940s rabidly accused Hollywood actors and directors of allowing ideological infiltration. They had demonized not only commie ideas—the semantic *contents* of mental influence—but also the diabolical *means* for making contact to implant ideas, techniques that were powerful because they came without words, seemingly hidden. A corrupted Hollywood would implant impulses in audiences through acting techniques, recruiting with a stage kiss:

In the original movie, there was something suspiciously familiar about the way the Commies manipulated American minds by playing on their buried emotions. Somewhere in the depths of Manchuria, we see Soviet and Chinese spymasters implanting new memories and associations

into their [American] captives' subconscious. The film's central assassin is driven to murder by exposure to a queen-of-diamonds, which is intended to remind him of his powerful, threatening mother. The Communists in *The Manchurian Candidate* have developed a diabolical method of mind control based on memory's emotional power. It is an ingenious method. It is a highly effective method. It is, in fact, the Method. The Method style of acting, that is. Developed in Moscow by Konstantin Stanislavsky in the early 20th century, the "System," as it was first known, was composed of several principles. Chief among them was relying on "emotional memory" to play a role. . . . If the character is feeling shame, the actor might recall a humiliation in her own past that occurred in high school. . . . The Method soon became the most influential acting technique in the country. . . . At the white hot zenith of the Cold War, when Russian missiles were being aimed at American cities, tens of millions of impressionable American adolescents were learning how to walk, talk, smile, court and kiss from American actors who had been trained by left-wing, socially adversarial disseminators of the acting ideas formulated by a Russian theoretician who had had Lenin's esteem and Stalin's twisted admiration. (Siegel 2004, 17)

Siegel was onto something: the belief that acting could influence through wordless, bodily technique—*the way* a hand turns a playing card, *the way* eyes meet before a kiss. Like theories of ideology on the left, from Adorno through Bourdieu, Cold War paranoia about mind control and influence sought the forces of inculcation right here, in what comes and goes without saying.

The Manchurian Candidate foregrounded anxiety that channels not usually suspected of mediation—playing cards, gestures—might bear suspect content. Theatrical and film genres themselves could stir more such worry than could even socialist pamphlets. Even while the latter directly challenged the system in words, they rarely attracted large groups in public to read them aloud. In the theater, by contrast, all those implicit hints about "how to walk, talk, smile, and court" reached large, flesh-and-blood audiences gathered together, a visceral crowd exposed not only to foreign ideas *about* society, but also to moves that might rearrange social means for making connections.⁷

Social restructuring was, after all, the aim of avant-garde and conceptualist art and performance; its makers believed that rearrangements of forms and media, from color to architecture, could bring people into contact not only as audiences, but also as interlocutors and as actors themselves. Of course one man's fantasy of the people discovering their agency is to another the nightmare of the masses, especially when they are mesmerized by demagoguery. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Theodor Adorno, Hannah Arendt,

Sigmund Freud, Bertolt Brecht, Georg Lukács, Jacques Rancière—all have warned of and lauded the theatrical for its effects on thought and social action.⁸ Siegel suggests that McCarthy-era politicians mobilized similar logics to other ends: to rationalize blacklisting even actors, as avatars of mental penetration from Moscow.⁹ Meanwhile, politicians manipulated xenophobic anxiety around unwitting contact with the Soviet in ways that fed fears of “mixing” classes or races.

CIRCLES IN CIRCLES

Scholarship on nineteenth-century European or American interest in the occult and the paranormal typically reaches beyond state borders to ask how such fascinations articulated worries about and hopes for new infrastructures and media for travel, exchange, information, and communication: the trains, steamships, and telegraphs that conquered and connected colonies. Newly mechanized means of crossing great distances along rails and wires or over the air posed new problems and possibilities. If *Dracula* expressed paranoia about military intelligence and colonial governance from the perspective of one empire’s center, spiritualists and theosophists joined international movements, the struggles for abolition, suffrage, and colonial independence. Scientists and artists reforged eighteenth- and nineteenth-century formations of mesmerism and hypnosis in the crucible of industrial and colonial extractions of labor and shaped a “modern occult” of telepathy and clairvoyance just when the first European nation-states were carving their borders.

Despite scholarship recognizing movement, it is rare for discussion of the Russian paranormal to cross borders. Other Russian and Soviet topics, like film and theater, have long received transnational treatment. The traces are easier to discern: the products and their makers and performers traveled, and so left tracks, allowing scholars to follow editing techniques from Sergei Eisenstein to Alfred Hitchcock, to see where MGM producers studied the Soviet avant-garde (Eagle 1992). To be fair, transnational approaches to almost any other Soviet or Russian phenomena are rare.¹⁰

Anglophone media typically depict “Russian fascination” with the occult as homegrown. British journalist Marc Bennetts wonders “where Russia’s eternal passion for the paranormal and the occult will take it?” (2012, 8). Decades earlier, researchers for the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) similarly summarized intelligence on Eastern bloc paranormal research. Even while allowing that “investigation of paranormal mental phenomena generally began during the latter part of the 1800s in various countries,”

and even after crediting imperial scientific luminaries Dmitry Mendeleev and Naum Kotik for studying “thought transmission” in order to “separate natural phenomena from mysticism,” the DoD researchers nevertheless fell back on asserting that “the Soviet public in general has always appeared open to mystical type phenomena, an openness that was somewhat officially acknowledged by Czar Nicholas II and his family’s association with the highly controversial Rasputin” (Air Force Systems Command 1978, 11).

Reference to Rasputin and the imperial family finds its way again and again into documentaries, articles, and books anchoring mysticism to the Russian soul and soil, imposing the myth of the nation-state over a world whose powers were constituted in imperial circuits. Consider the circular knots of imperial kinship, the aristocratic matches that linked European capitals while bringing rulers to rule in places far from where they were raised. The last tsar, Nicholas, was first cousin to Britain’s King George V and to three other European monarchs (Christian X of Denmark, Constantine I of Greece, and Haakon VII of Norway). The tsarina was born Alix of Hesse and by Rhine, in Darmstadt, then part of the German Empire. A granddaughter of Queen Victoria of Britain, she was already related to her husband as a second cousin (both were great-grandchildren of Princess Wilhelmina of Baden). Alix came to Russia at age twenty-two and was given the name Alexandra Feodorovna upon being received into the Russian Orthodox Church, but unlike Catherine the Great, she never learned much Russian. The last tsarina kept close company with the monk Rasputin, having brought interest in spiritualism with her.

American scholars and journalists may be adept at linking local American problems to distant causes (e.g., the loss of jobs to foreign industries, loss of votes to foreign meddling), but we are less motivated to see such links elsewhere, asking “Why are Russians given to mysticism?” without registering the extent to which “Russian mysticism” is also the product of diplomacy and conflict, and neglecting all the skeptics in Russia who have influenced our own skeptics. We will get further if we also ask: How did we learn to pose such questions in terms of inherent dispositions or national traits rather than historical entanglements? Who asks them, how, and to what ends?

Points of foreign connection are more apparent in Russian-language sources than in texts created by the DoD. Here is an example: in a Russian documentary titled *Telepatija (Teorija Neverojatnosti*, October 23, 2006; dir. Baxrusheva), a female engineer recounts her career path to becoming a leading paranormal expert during Soviet times. In the 1960s she had worked at the Institute for the Study of Information Transfer in Moscow, where she

did not herself work in one of the telepathy labs, “but got a whiff of them in the *kurilki*.” The Soviet “smoking corner” nested divisions of public and private—stairwells near a *fortuchka*, balconies, little nooks for conversation which, like talk around the kitchen table, some treated as if outside the system even as the system built those spaces for contact in the first place (see also Humphrey 2005). In this case, the smoking corner for telepathy tales was tucked within an institution itself sustained in order to communicate about communication.

Many institutions like this one extend across borders, and for scholars to trace lines through them, instead of within state boundaries, loosens the hold of exceptional claims. This book juxtaposes and connects moments of encounter that cross specifically Russian (or Soviet) and U.S. borders. It attempts to do so concretely and symmetrically—without assuming either position as neutral or standard (Latour 1993; Chakrabarty 1995)—while also suggesting how a history of implicit comparisons has led us astray.

Rather than staging closed, site-based comparisons, the chapters juxtapose and connect among places, encounters, and texts through a filament running across their terrains, through problems of *contact*. This book thus aims to serve as an analysis of the historical grounds and categories for contact and failures of contact, whereby mediations, be they through words and gestures, broadcast and print, or even by telepathy ray, are recognized as more or less material, more or less subsumed into both contact and its obstacles.

BATTLE OF THE PSYCHICS

One fascinating site for seeing these issues brought into explicit discussion is the Russian-language *Bitva Ekstrasensov*, or *Battle of the Psychics*, a reality show first developed in Sweden and the United Kingdom, then picked up in Israel, Ukraine, Bulgaria, Mongolia, the United States, and other places.¹¹ An entire book could compare the variants. The formula adapts the form’s magic shows and demonstrations of occult debunking going back a long time. In the 1970s *The Amazing Kreskin!* was broadcast from Canada, inviting guests to discuss the paranormal or demonstrate their skills. In 1972 Kreskin invited the authors of *Psychic Discoveries Behind the Iron Curtain* to discuss famous Soviet telepaths such as Wolf Messing and footage they had brought back demonstrating telekinesis, and to banter about how they had been “banned in Russia”—because sections of the book were read on the air by Radio Liberty, the American organization broadcasting to the Soviet bloc since World War II.

The U.S. version of *Battle, America's Psychic Challenge*, lasted only half a season in 2007 (the Russian was past its seventeenth season by 2017). We cannot credit its cancellation to American sophistication regarding the occult; U.S. media are saturated with supernatural plots, talk shows with mediums, and ghost-seeking reality shows (Bastien 2010). On the contrary, cheery confidence in magical forces suffused *America's Psychic Challenge*: the game host, the voice-over, and even the musical sound track all introduced each scene with breathy, hushed expectation. By contrast, the Russian *Battle of the Psychics*, ranked number one for several years running, poses tests of extrasensory detection and telepathic contact after which experts debate, evaluate performances, and eliminate losers. Dramatic conflict sets wishful psychics against each other and their skeptics. In the American version, neither the host, the narrators, nor any formal elements indicate the slightest note of skeptical challenge. As Lamont (2013, 228) notes, psychics commonly blame their failures on interference from a hostile or skeptical audience, and the American show's producers made sure nothing like this disrupted the action. Bright, optimistic affect ruled tone and tempo, even when the host had to tell a contestant that she had earned only 12 of 25 points. In *America's Psychic Challenge*, all participants were perfectly groomed and styled, always smiling, never tired, never worn out. And there was no discussion of how or why contestants failed, no accusations of faking or psychic weakness; points alone were added to calculate success, without additional review.

The Russian version, in contrast, frames each scene with questioning rigor. A few times per episode, a narrating voice stresses that "this is just an experiment," that viewers are free to judge—"decide yourselves"—whether the phenomena on display are real. Multiple frames jostle, cuing the viewer to recognize frames within frames, as layers of experts talk about how the psychics make telepathic contact or communicate with another dimension. This editing strategy attracts engagement—as comments testify on fan websites devoted to judging how the judges do their judging. Viewers watch skeptics and experts set up double-blinds and controls, watch the crew position multiple cameras. In one episode, before the psychics search for a plastic bomb hidden in an empty stadium, the crew times a search dog and a platoon of soldiers—the dog finds it quickly, and the platoon needs a bit more time, but only one of the psychics comes close.

We watch people whom the producers have hired to be observed while observing: a psychologist who claims to have worked in military ESP labs in the 1960s and three young magicians, brothers "who sniff out any tricks," because their very "profession it is to fool the public." All of these

differently skeptical experts trail behind each psychic, checking procedures, adjusting boxes and blindfolds, asking questions, and setting limits as the host reminds viewers that the tests are modeled after laboratory science, to follow protocols for randomization and double-blind. These experts also monitor video screens (sometimes alongside participating civilians), commenting throughout: “She is feeling the rails, she’s just using deduction”; “He’s studying her eyes for a reaction.” In this way, even apparent successes become failures as the experts deconstruct *how* the deeds are done: “too much talk,” “using too many senses.”

The expert panel format is familiar to the genre everywhere, as well as to telepathy shows on variety stages in the Soviet and Russian imperial eras. We might compare them to U.S. shows like *Project Runway*, for its public shaming, or *MythBusters* for its debunkings (see also Hanks 2016). This makes the American version something of an outlier, as it does not even attempt to stage controls—the contrast also undermines any claims that Americans are less prone than Russians to magical thinking. Although back in the 1970s Johnny Carson brought professional magician James Randi onstage to unmask Uri Geller, and magicians like Penn and Teller make entertainment of debunking others on stage, in the twenty-first century such skeptical shows are at least equaled in America by shows that amplify the mystical without question. They achieve this amplification by technical means and collective efforts to focus perception of contacts and communication. Mentalist John Edwards, for example, performs for audiences who do not see the panorama of facial expressions from which Edwards, observing from the stage, can choose (and for broadcast, the cameras avoid capturing this view). His viewers lack access to a range of minute details that performers from the stage can see to select among (better to choose more mobile faces for easier readings).

As a number of anthropologists have argued, spirals of skepticism themselves enchant magic, the occult, and the paranormal.¹² Indeed, the number of contestants who complain in interviews, blogs, or biographies that others cheat seems only to have increased viewership. One of the show’s experts even recounted how, during the first season, a contestant arranged to take her turn at a test last, to gain time to glean information from the crew. Another former contestant countered similar judgments against him, claiming in a number of forums that the show’s editors manipulated video cuts to make the contestants look like charlatans. To trick people into believing that someone else has tried to trick them seems indeed to incite involvement, to have further developed into a rewarding spiral upon which to capitalize.

COLD WAR CONTACTS

Technologies to intuit “the shadow of a quickly hidden smile” compete across specific tangles of institutional relations and geopolitical interests, in conflict even as they connect. Relations of conflicted connection—and connection across conflict—are difficult to articulate even under the best of conditions. For decades anthropologists and historians have tried to follow social networks and circuits for ideas and techniques across geopolitical borders, through boardrooms and shipping lanes, mapping points where goods and bodies, words and images, government structures and corporate franchises touch ground across borders.¹³ Despite their work, relations across borders are rendered subversive and unpatriotic—or invisible, incoherent to the story of a nation. To account for affiliations across borders that involve people or things tagged as belonging to a geopolitical opponent is even more problematic.¹⁴

Barriers and broadcast points built or maintained during the Cold War retained force even after walls came down. Some barriers transcend any particular conflict: State Department rules forbid diplomatic staff to fraternize with locals and refuse security clearance to people who maintain too many foreign contacts. Such practices aim to regulate borders by delimiting not just spaces, but also channels for communication, constraining certain kinds of contact in ways that affect the imagination of possible social bonds, that project the purposes of communication or imagine its futility. As Vincent Rafael has argued regarding communication during military conflicts, “war bears some relationship to the movement of translation that leads not to the privileging of meaning but to the emergence of the untranslatable . . . translation in a time of war intensifies the experience of untranslatability” (2007, 8; see also Galison 2012).

All the same, even at the height of the Cold War, science fiction writers fashioned characters who breached Cold War walls—and *not* to manipulate minds or wills, but to share discoveries, usually discoveries to do precisely with breaches in conventional barriers to communication or to travel. Soviet science fiction writers especially sowed texts with footnotes to foreign publications, sending scientist protagonists to conferences in New York or Tokyo.¹⁵ Science fiction heroes sought contact beyond the bounds of planet—never mind the the bounds of nation. In real life, Soviets aspired to this future in ways that fewer Americans cottoned to; the USSR educated not only the most literate population, but among the most multilingual, who read and listened to media in more languages than did most Americans.

In regard to telepathy science alone, Soviets commanded more detail about experiments conducted in the West than was true the other way around (Ostrander and Schroeder 1970, 9). Late Soviet newspapers followed the labs of Dr. Rhine at Duke University and the exploits of Dutch psychic detective Gerard Croiset. Soviet citizens understood paranormal science much as they did film, literature, and theater: as simultaneously cosmopolitan and homegrown.

With this in mind, consider the insights of communications scholar John Peters, who has masterfully argued that European anxieties about communicative contact took shape as new media confronted people with new problems, which we projected onto more familiar ways to communicate: “[L]ost letters, wrong numbers, dubious signals from the dead, downed wires and missed deliveries have since come to describe the vexations of face-to-face converse as well. Communication as a person-to-person activity became thinkable only in the shadow of mediated communication. Mass communication came first” (1999, 6). Peters rightly suggests that dreams for perfect *communitas* came into being mainly when means and materials for communicating multiplied: “The history of thinking about our mutual ties, as well as the history of modes for connections, from writing to the development of electrical media, shows that the quest for consummation with others is motivated by the experience of blockage and breakdown” (268).

Communicative infelicities and broken contacts *are* ubiquitous. For this book, the next question to ask is: Whose experiences of breakdown, of downed wires or radio static, do we have in mind? Experiences differ less because of inherent qualities in either people or in media and more because states and localities differently organize relations among media, differently politicize genres and situations for communication, and differently rank and separate those who can broadcast, publish, and stand at the microphone from those whose access to channels is more limited. Channels for speaking, writing, and acting are historically configured not only by the material affordances of media, but also through divisions of labor and authority, separations in time and space. The sound of static only *partly* defines an experience of failed radio contact. A person trying to tune a shortwave radio in mid-twentieth-century Perm’ encountered disturbance differently than did the person in Omaha. The static may have sounded different through jamming, for one thing. Moreover, ideologies *about* media in each place, similar in some ways, differed (Gershon 2010). They differed increasingly—or claimed to—by mirroring and reversing relations imagined on the other side of the so-called Iron Curtain, the cold war a spectacular display of what Gregory Bateson (1936) called *symmetrical schismogenesis*:

the process of differentiation through competitive and dyadic mirroring (in his case, to exaggerate the differences among genders).

Certainly local experiences and events also determine access to media and affect ideologies about them. World War II, for example, destroyed Soviet infrastructure and communications in ways that most Americans cannot imagine. The sheer number of dead compounded a loss akin to that of post-Civil War America, under devastation of which spiritualism found a welcome among those who were missing kin. A twenty-first-century Russian documentary titled *Telepatija* opens with such loss, with specific mortalities from that war, not vague superpower paranoia, including a woman recounting her mother's intuition that her father had not been killed at the front, as a telegram had informed the family. Years later the state released the records—indeed, her father had died not during the war, but in a prison camp in 1947.

So rather than assuming a generalized historicism under which to explain modern worries about contact, this book both contrasts and connects specific events, texts, situations, and institutions, following them across state borders when that is where they point. From archives and ethnography it tracks how, for example, accusations of radio jamming or book burning paralleled expressions of longing for romantic communion and fantasies for telepathic connection or interstellar contact. In the end, neither U.S. nor post-Soviet anxieties and dreams about communication and contact can be understood purely in local terms, in relation only to local ideologies or media ecologies. Anxieties about communicative intuition, about one's own capacities to read through what we are taught are barriers of radical alterity, run up and down scales: worries about courtship (American men puzzling over e-mails from Siberian brides) morph into myths of diplomacy (Can the president divine the mind of a counterpart?). In the laboratory, on the stage, in broadcasts to outer space, and "in the heart,"¹⁶ people draw from other situations and scales, from story and from experience, in efforts to make and break channels to communicate—or even to intuit more subtle rays of contact, as thought, as feeling, as impulse.

Several anthropologists have argued that inclinations to imagine the thoughts of others are not universal—that some peoples simply regard the minds of others as opaque. Others counter that to avoid claims about others' thoughts need not indicate belief that they are unknowable. Linguistic anthropologist Niko Besnier (1992), building on Schieffelin (1990), argued that where he did fieldwork, people avoided bald conjectures about others' inner states—but they also devised covert ways, through prosody, tempo, and volume, to shade quotations of others' words in ways that conveyed

opinions about motives or goals. Others have since agreed that people may well wonder what someone else is thinking, yet refrain from speculating out loud,¹⁷ in deference to ethical and hierarchical sensibilities about good and appropriate ways to speak and to be silent.

Imperatives to read or to avoid reading others' minds divide along with other communicative and emotional labors: *some* people are charged to represent the thoughts or emotions or motives of certain others, exhorted to aspire to do so; others are not. Some face consequences for misreading the boss's wishes; others do not. Talk about others' minds emerges in historical, social, and geopolitical conditions that figure such talk as dangerous and strange, or as important and coherent.

Anthropologists have long attended to the ways people take interest in others' perspectives, minds, and judgments. Nancy Munn, in *The Fame of Gawa* (1986) theorized chains of labors through which Gawans invested in being well-thought-of as a collective, in trying to shape others' future memories and return words and actions. It troubled people that despite all their labor, they might yet be unsure about others' present and future judgments, whether they would value and remember the luster of gifts or heartiness of meals. Similar uncertainty plays out in American advertising and election campaigns—similar but not the same, for the creative ad maker works in a world in which fame and accumulation and hierarchy connect differently than they did in 1970s Gawa.

Feminist, postcolonial, and race-critical scholarship is useful here. Histories of race and class inequalities and violence set material infrastructure and social conditions for the situational politics that hinder or encourage speaking at all, let alone speaking about others' communications or thoughts. Scholars such as Henry Louis Gates, for example, theorize how people "signify on" others' unstated purposes or assumptions indirectly, through verbal style, prosody, and other means (see Morgan 2002), and link this indirectness to histories of slavery. Scholars of gender have outlined social institutions that discourage men from wondering what others are thinking even as they press women with the imperative to anticipate others' thoughts or feelings (Hochschild 1983; Ochs and Taylor 1996). In this light, we can begin to ask what conditions motivate searching for others' "Theory of Mind" or that find that they lack one. To understand this would require some sociohistorical accounting for how theories are made.¹⁸

The linguistic anthropologists and other scholars I have just cited arrived at many of their insights about the ways social and political relationships condition the possibilities of speaking through analytical tools developed by Russian scholars—specifically Valentin Voloshinov and Mikhail Bakhtin in

1920s Moscow. That they were empowered to do so just as the twentieth-century Cold War peaked and waned tells us something about the politics of translation, conversation, and connection across rival borders that we have yet to understand.

POINT TO LINE

Our starting point in this chapter, from which we trace further circles and rays, was the Russian Academy for Theatrical Arts. Established in 1878 as the Shestakovsky Music School, it was renamed the Musico-Dramatic School of the Moscow Philharmonic Society in 1883, becoming a conservatory in 1886. In 1934 it reformed as the Lunacharsky State Institute for Theatrical Arts (GITIS). Renamed after 1991 the Russian Academy for Theatrical Arts (RATI), it remains known as GITIS. The largest and oldest theatrical arts academy in Russia, with a student body of about fifteen hundred, GITIS competes with a handful of academies in other cities and teaching studios affiliated with theaters, such as the studio at the Moscow Art Theater (MKhAT), the Schepkina (Maly Theater), and the Schukina (Vakhtangov). GITIS was the first to devote training to stage directors after the Revolution, and in the 1960s it began training special actor groups within each directing cohort, giving them acting students with whom to practice communication. Each cohort now brings together eight to ten aspiring directors with about twenty actors and actresses. I conducted fieldwork in that department from 2002 to 2003 and in 2005.

GITIS aspires to combine styles, to draw teachers and directors from across the country's theaters: Maria Knebel', for example, directed at the Children's Theater in Moscow. Even under the hegemony of socialist realism, each school was said to develop a trademark style: the studio at the Kamerny began with principles of ballet, the Maly with mimetic etudes. GITIS stands apart also through breadth: it encompasses all aspects of stage work, accommodating faculty in choreography, stage diction, circus management, variety production, dramatic criticism, theatrical history, costuming, set design, and so forth. The faculty for stage movement occupy their own low building, furnished with a magnificent, polished hardwood and a sprung dance floor, surrounded by risers and gymnastics equipment, where one can learn everything necessary to choreograph and perform elaborate combat scenes without leaving campus (since 2009 the campus has expanded to include a grand new facility across town). By the time students leave, they are expected to have forged enduring professional contacts—and later to find just the person to create the effect of soft rain on moss, or to play a theremin.

GITIS is a dense node of cultural and social production, condensing and concentrating resources and networks, admitting some while evicting others. In coldest winter at GITIS, someone had opened the *fortochka* to release excess heat. Such steady delivery of heat is not always the case across Russian territory,¹⁹ but we were in the center of the center, near the avenue carrying government cavalcades each morning to the Kremlin. Few in the room were native to this place; more than half had come from afar, thousands of kilometers away, from Irkutsk, Ekaterinburg, Rzan', Surgut . . . and a handful from still other, farther cosmopolitan centers—Doha, Seoul, Paris, Stockholm. Small groups from America visited for a week or so. Many teachers hailed from the provinces, having settled in Moscow decades before. Now the cohort I know best has dispersed, working in Vladivostok and Riga, on film sets in ja Siberia or in South America; some return triumphantly to Moscow openings. Several have become stars, gone to Cannes or Broadway, choreographed in Hollywood. Some are not (yet) famous, but work steadily in television and theater, and some supplement this work with acting lessons for businessmen. A few have left the profession. But back then, in that studio, biographies from beyond the moment submerged, reemerging only in short bursts as we focused on making contact with each other here and now.

A *fortochka* works with a building's system of *kommunikatsija*, its networks of cables, pipes, and wires carrying water, electricity, sound, and data (the analogous English usage of "communications" can be found among U.S. building professionals). The Russian word *kommunikatsija* can be used to talk about human communication,²⁰ and metaphors about communication as infrastructure abound (Stalin likened language to railway tracks), to inflect the ways material conditions in Russia are ideologically burdened.²¹ Russian pipes built above summer bog and winter ice, over and under streets, come under foreign critique as ugly, too visceral. Such criticism demonstrates disregard for sound reasons to build above marsh and permafrost; fuel and water pipes rupture underground, as America is learning, and we might learn better. Russian communication, too, comes under too quick criticism. In this light, a telepathy lesson that opens a *fortochka* is bound to be misread unless we cross borders drawn during the Cold War.