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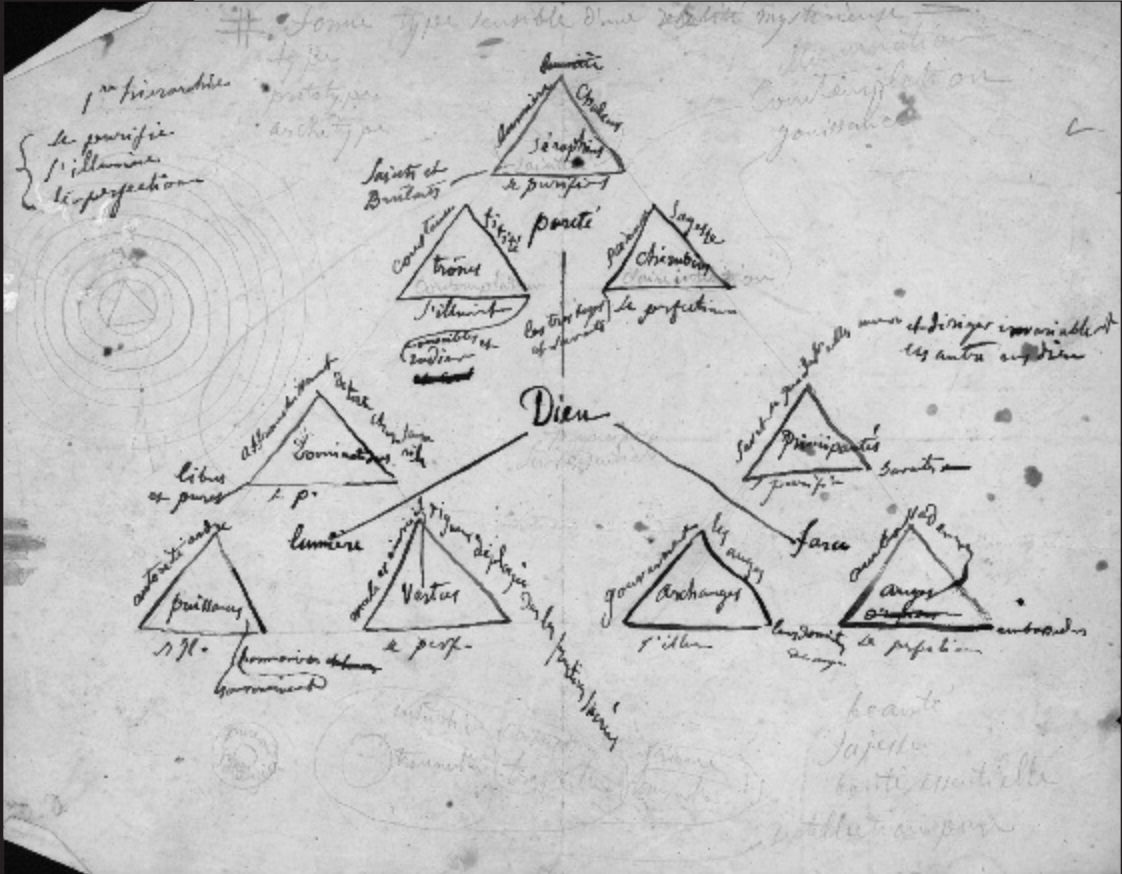
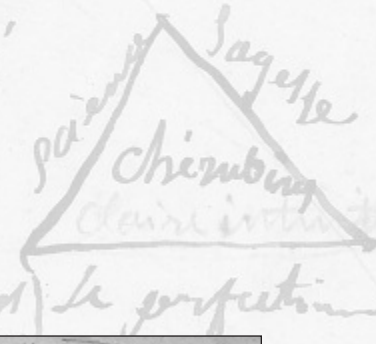
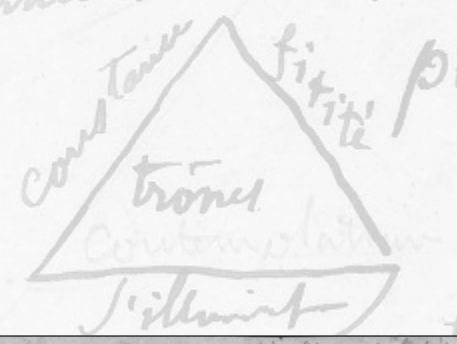
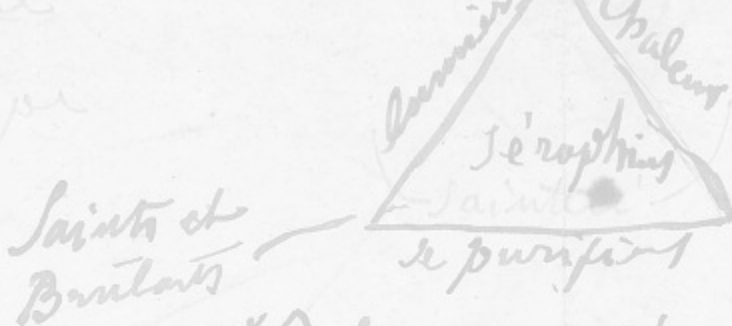
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FRANÇOIS DELSARTE, PRINCE SERGEI VOLKONSKY AND MIKHAIL CHEKHOV

George Taylor and Rose Whyman

In 1913 Prince Sergei Volkonsky, a director of the Russian Imperial Ballet, published two books based on Delsarte's principles which had considerable impact on the Russian modernist theatre. Stanislavsky, Meyerhold and Vakhtangov, all explored the semiology of emotional expression, as did the Russian physiologists Sechenov and Pavlov. Mikhail Chekhov, in particular, developed principles of physical acting, and the article concludes with a comparison between his work and that of Delsarte.

As theatre practitioners both authors of this paper have found the exercises of Mikhail Chekhov extremely valuable when directing and training young actors, and as theatre historians we have been intrigued by the influence François Delsarte had on many late nineteenth and early twentieth century modernist directors. We therefore decided to research whether a direct influence could be found between the theories of Delsarte and the practice of Chekhov, as it seemed that they shared a number of similarities in both analysis and philosophy. For both men gesture was not just a means of semiotic communication or oratorical embellishment but involved an interaction between physical movement, emotional involvement and creative imagination that they both described in spiritual terms.

Drawing by François Delsarte.

Francois Alexandre Nicolas Delsarte Papers, Mss. 1302, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, LSU Libraries, Baton Rouge, LA

In this paper, after considering some of the philosophical implications of Delsarte's work, we describe how both his ideas and his practice were translated into Russian by Prince Sergei Volkonsky (1860–1937), and how these ideas were received by practitioners in the Russian theatre. In particular, we examine the similarities and differences between Delsarte's principles and the creative system of acting developed by Mikhail Chekhov (1891–1955). In some cases it seems as though Chekhov took directly from Delsarte, via Volkonsky; in others the influence of theatre directors Konstantin Stanislavsky (1863–1938) and Evgeny Vakhtangov (1883–1922) and the philosopher/educationalist Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925) is more obvious, though each of these may themselves have been influenced by Delsarte. Finally, by looking in some detail at Chekhov's concept of the Psychological Gesture, we suggest that he, far more than these others, recognized a special connection between physical gesture and internal creativity that is particularly Delsartean.

François Delsarte (1811–1871)

Delsarte believed not only that he had discovered the scientific principles of physical expression, but that he had integrated them into a comprehensive philosophy of Being, accounting for its corporal, mental and spiritual dimensions (see *Delsarte System of Oratory*; and Zorn). Inevitably, however, his theory, centered as it was on the communicative functions of posture, gesture and facial expression, was deeply embedded in contemporary behavioral conventions, and, having no model of anthropology to draw on, Delsarte failed to consider non-European cultures in any detail before declaring that his "laws" were of universal application. His approach was scientific in so far as it was based on methodical observation—though he drew on a very eclectic range of evidence, including works of art and theatrical performances as well as daily behavior—and thus his system provided a means of recording and passing on conventions of expression that may have been lost in the general development of fashion, taste and theatrical techniques. Although this specificity of reference may invalidate many of Delsarte's more grandiose claims for us today, it does help historians access the expressive conventions of his time. In particular, because his professional gaze was directed towards histrionic communication, his observations provide a systematic explanation of a form of acting that is often derided today as melodramatic, but was essentially the "codified" style of classical acting as taught in all the major European conservatories (Taylor 1999).

In the 1880s and 90s the revolutionary “Free Theatres,” specializing in socially committed Naturalism, seriously eroded the pre-eminence of this codified acting, and the development of more naturalistic conventions of performance led to intensification of the theoretical debate that had engaged most theatrical commentators since the publication of Denis Diderot’s essay, *Le paradoxe sur le comédien*, in 1830: whether actors need to actually feel the emotions they are depicting, or how far they should identify themselves with the fiction they are were performing.¹ The leading French character actor of the seventies and eighties, Constant Coquelin (1841–1909), who knew of Delsarte’s work, even if he had not personally been instructed by him, firmly endorsed Diderot’s opinion that the greatest actors imitated rather than identified with their roles (Coquelin). It is unclear where Delsarte would have placed himself on the issue. For many pupils his system was essentially a mechanical one, which prescribed precisely how gestures should be made to demonstrate a particular attitude, emotion or idea. But, in its fullest development, his Law of Correspondence proposed that physical expression was identical to the internal impulse and was produced naturally rather than by intentional artifice.² He would probably have accepted performance historian Joseph Roach’s argument that Diderot’s proposition could be taken as a paradigm for the debate that became central to twentieth century acting, a debate which was less concerned with the feeling of emotions and demonstration of passions than with the very processes of creativity—spontaneity, consciousness and inspiration (195–216).

Delsarte’s Law of Correspondence: “The Outer (matter), with its forms and forces, is type and symbol of the Inner (Psychic),”³ could be interpreted as contradicting the Cartesian duality of the mental and physical and moving towards the theory enunciated by George Henry Lewes, perhaps the most perceptive of nineteenth century English theatre critics, in his philosophic work, *Problems of Life and Mind* (1874–75): “It is the man and not the brain that thinks; it is the organism as a whole, and not one organ that feels and acts” (441). This materialistic explanation of emotion and expression has most often been attributed to the psychologist William James (1842–1910) (see, for example, Zarrilli 73, 89; and Roach 84, 192). That Delsarte also believed that expression and feeling were integral elements of human identity is implicit in his often repeated term “The Expressive Man.” Just as Descartes held that being was defined by thought, and Darwin asserted that it was by instinct, so Delsarte seems to have defined being *as* expression. For Delsarte physical expression was an equal and inevitable part of the triad of body, mind and spirit, no one of which could exist—in this world—without the other. We make the

qualification, “in this world,” because Delsarte’s inclusion of the “Spiritual” in his triad of being can be interpreted more religiously than Lewes would allow. Indeed, it is difficult to reconcile the distinction between the spiritual and the scientific readings of Delsarte’s theory, and this is perhaps the most important question of emphasis and interpretation to be made when comparing the different ways in which the posthumous “Delsarte Systems” were developed in Europe and America. We would contend that in America “Delsartism” tended toward the more spiritual application, in preparing young women for society, pastors for preaching and, according to Moe Meyer (specialist in performance studies), aesthetes for developing “the Self as a work of art.”⁴ In Europe, on the other hand, Delsarte was more exclusively applied to theatrical performance, and it was his “semiotic” analysis of gesture⁵ and his aesthetic Laws of Movement that were used, either as the basis of acting techniques or as a theoretical validation for particular styles of theatrical performance. The ambiguity of whether the System was essentially scientific or essentially mystical meant that it could be taken up for different reasons by a variety of artists in the Modernist period. In Russia, where theatrical innovation was closely connected with cultural, political and ideological issues, the impact of Delsarte’s combination of scientific method and spiritual perception was particularly influential. Here his work was promulgated by Prince Sergei Volkonsky, who was socially, culturally and intellectually well respected and ideally positioned to influence the opera, ballet and theatre, all of which were undergoing artistic transformations during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Prince Sergei Volkonsky (1860–1937) and Delsarte in Russia

Directors of the modernist theatre in Russia were probably the most innovative and serious in all Europe. At the Moscow Art Theatre Stanislavsky, with playwrights Anton Chekhov and Maxim Gorki, had created a subtle and influential Naturalism, in reaction to which the continually experimenting director Vsevolod Meyerhold (1874–1940) moved from poetic Symbolism, before the Revolution, to Socialist agit-prop and the creation of a proletarian aesthetic in the 1920s (see Whyman). Nikolai Evreinov, Sergei Vakhtangov and Aleksandr Tairov with the authors Aleksandr Blok, Andrei Bely and Leonid Andreev explored a range of theatrical forms from the *Commedia dell’Arte* to Expressionism to therapeutic public rituals. Sergei Diaghilev and Sergei Eisenstein were innovators in dance and cinema comparable to those in theatre. In this paper we want to suggest that Delsarte’s theory and the practice, as expounded and developed by his followers in both Europe and

America, was well known to all these artists through Volkonsky's translations, and, more specifically, that the techniques of physical expression and creativity developed by Mikhail Chekhov, who was arguably the finest actor of the period, owed more than a little to the Delsarteans.

While there was an extraordinary flourishing of originality in Moscow and St Petersburg in the last decade of the nineteenth century, Russian innovators usually sought cultural validation from Western Europe and in particular from France. Russian aristocrats and intellectuals had always looked to France to counterbalance the "Asiatic" tendencies of Tsarist feudalism and Imperial expansion eastwards. Social climbers affected to speak French, like Natasha in Chekhov's *Three Sisters*, and although some pan-Russian artists developed forms and styles from the folk art of the homeland, others made frequent visits to France, Italy and Germany seeking a more sophisticated culture. In particular, the Imperial Ballet, based in the Bolshoi and the Marinsky theatres, took the French dance form and developed it to extraordinary levels of technique and splendor. Politically Russia may have been considered as the last stronghold of theocratic despotism, but the leaders of its society wanted to appear as refined cosmopolitans, and, in the extravagance of the Imperial Ballet, with music by some of the finest composers of the age, they had their cultural aspirations fully validated.

From 1899 to 1900 the Intendent of the Imperial Theatres was Prince Sergei Volkonsky, a member of a cultivated noble family whose grandfather had been executed in the aftermath of the Decembrist plot of 1825. He was close to the "World of Art" circle of artists led by Diaghilev and, shortly after his appointment, commissioned designs from Léon Bakst and Alexander Benois for the Moscow Hermitage Theatre. In 1900 he asked Diaghilev, who was attached to the Imperial Ballet as a researcher and publicist, to direct his first production for the Alexandrinsky Theatre, Delibes' *Sylvia*. Unfortunately, the internal politics of the Ballet led first to Diaghilev's dismissal and eventually to Volkonsky's resignation (Benois 205–18). Although the dispute was essentially a power struggle among the royal and aristocratic patrons of the ballet, it led ultimately to Diaghilev's self-exclusion and the creation of the Ballets Russes in France. The affair identifies Volkonsky's standing as a committed patron of modernist tendencies, and this is confirmed by his continuing contacts with innovative artists in the West, and a number of critical articles in the art journal *Apollon*. In 1911, while in Rome, he discussed with Stanislavsky the director's developing system of actor training and offered him some notes of his own on vocal delivery. On their return to Moscow he was invited to share with the Moscow Art Theatre's actors what

he had learned in Hellerau of Émile Jaques-Dalcroze's system of Eurythmics. This led to a demonstration in Moscow by Dalcroze himself in 1912, and in the same year Volkonsky published *Iskusstvo i Zhest*, a translation of a book by one of Dalcroze's disciples, Jean d'Udine, which expounded the synaesthetic principles of the exercises taught at Hellerau.

In 1913 Volkonsky published two further volumes, one entitled *The Expressive Word*, the other *The Expressive Person: a Stage Training in Gesture according to Delsarte*.⁶ Neither book was a simple translation of any one of the existing works on Delsarte, and Volkonsky's bibliography listed most of the French, German and American treatises on Delsarte that had been published, from which he drew exercises and illustrations. He also referenced the Russian lectures on Delsarte that had been given since 1903 in Moscow by Yuri Erastovich Ozarovsky (1869–1924), an actor-director who had developed his own theory of stage speech and who, in 1912, edited a Russian Delsartean journal, *Voice and Speech*. In his foreword to *The Expressive Person*, Volkonsky states that it is not intended as an exposition of Delsarte's system, but guidance for the actor according to Delsarte. It is a practical book and contains little theory, but sufficient, he hoped, to convince the reader that "the whole practical side of the system is based on a scientific foundation [...and] on laws"(5). Several times Volkonsky refers to Delsarte's system as one of signs: "Art is finding a sign corresponding to the essence"(1), with the further definition: "Signs of feeling, received by the external organs of hearing and sight must be classified if we wish to use them as the material of art"(8). The materiality of this concept would have appealed to the socialist principles of theatre director Meyerhold and the film innovators, Eisenstein and Pudovkin, in their experiments with the montage of signifying visual images. However, Volkonsky also argued, more in line with Stanislavsky, that, for the actor, rational analysis should eventually give way to emotional experience, and scientific understanding must become "second nature" in the practice of the actor's art:

On stage do not think of these laws and rules, they must sit in you, they will have value only on condition that they turn into something unconscious....You should think during the time of preparation and in the time of performance you should feel. While you are studying the role you should think how to act, and during the show you should feel. The more you have thought while doing the exercises the less you will have to think while performing.(9)

Volkonsky gave particular emphasis to Delsarte's suggestion of three points of view that could be taken in regard to expressive gesture and relates them to three distinct branches of physical aesthetics:

1. Gesture can be studied from the point of view of expression as an external sign corresponding to a spiritual state: this is Semiotics;
2. It can be studied from the point of view of those laws which govern the balance of the human body: this is Statics;
3. It can be studied from the point of view of those laws which govern the sequence and alternation of movement: this is Dynamics. (61–2)

By defining the application of gestural exercises in this way, Volkonsky gives less emphasis than some other commentators to the correspondences between particular parts of the body and internal thoughts and feelings, which he categorized as part of Delsarte's "Semiotics." Volkonsky emphasized more the "Statics" and "Dynamics" implicit in Delsarte's Nine Laws of Movement: Motion, Velocity, Direction/Extension, Reaction, Form, Personality, Opposition, Sequence and Rhythm. He seems to have been more concerned with the quality of movement than with trying to give a specific meaning to a specific gesture. It was these descriptive and not definitive laws of movement that were closest to the synaesthetics of Dalcroze and the performance conventions of dance and opera, with which Volkonsky had been most involved professionally.

Particularly significant in Volkonsky's emphasis on the aesthetics of physical expression was the number of illustrations in his treatise, most of which were reproductions of classical statues and of the frescoes of Raphael and Michelangelo. Their inclusion suggests that Volkonsky appreciated that in a period of radical change in Russia, just as when French Romanticism had attacked the neo-classical conventions that Delsarte championed, traditional standards needed to be validated by both historical example and intellectual critique. Although he had invited Volkonsky to introduce Eurhythmics to his students in 1912, as a modernist director, Stanislavsky regarded any taxonomy of gestures as a list of clichés. Therefore, when he asked Volkonsky in 1919 to teach in the Bolshoi Opera and the Moscow Art Theatre studios, it was to offer speech and rhythmic exercises rather than Delsarte's semiotics of specific physical expressions. Stanislavsky continued to value Volkonsky's critical opinions, and other directors, who were exploring more self-consciously theatrical styles than Stanislavsky's stage "truthfulness," were excited by the

thoroughness of Delsarte's synthesis of outward expression and internal psychology as expounded by Volkonsky. This aspect of Delsarte could be taken as similar not only to the so-called "James-Lange proposition" that emotions are identical to their expression,⁷ but also to the work of Russian physiologists Ivan Mikhailovich Sechenov (1829–1905) and Ivan Petrovich Pavlov (1849–1936) on reflexes, which was an essentially materialist theory of psychology.

Meyerhold and his sometime pupil Eisenstein were advocates of an almost mechanical semiology of expression and both acknowledged an appreciation of Delsarte's categorization of movement and gesture, though not necessarily accepting all of his ideas as expounded by Volkonsky. In 1913 Meyerhold referred specifically to Coquelin's exposition of the detached performer communicating through consciously adopted theatrical symbols, which, as we have noted, relates to Delsarte's semiology, though it does not necessarily conform to his universal Law of Correspondence (Braun 202). Meyerhold's development of Biomechanics in the 1920s was based on the understanding that expression was socially constructed, in contrast to Delsarte's claims of universality, and he chose to develop expressive stage movement out of a series of task-centered exercises appropriate to a proletarian aesthetic. Volkonsky was vehement in his opposition to Meyerhold's theatrical experiments, and denounced him as a "mountebank" (Volkonsky 1925, 1, 115)—a term which Meyerhold, in the light of his admiration of the "cabotin" or street performer, may well have taken as a compliment.⁸

Both Vakhtangov and Mikhail Chekhov attended workshops at the Moscow Art Theatre while Volkonsky was teaching there and, given the more physically extravagant style they developed at its First Studio from 1915, they would have appreciated his views on the expressivity of both Delsarte and Dalcroze. In 1918, Chekhov had a kind of spiritual crisis or mental breakdown,⁹ which led him eventually to espouse the Anthroposophy of Rudolph Steiner, as a non-religious spiritual discipline that aspires to develop self-knowledge through physical awareness. Steiner's concept of Eurythmy paralleled many of the more spiritual aspects of Delsarte's philosophy of embodiment: "It is possible to transpose into movement inner soul conditions which progress from gesture and mime to the full articulation of a visible language.... The human being reveals himself in his whole being in body, soul and spirit through visible speech."¹⁰ During the early 1920s Chekhov had performed in several remarkable productions—Strindberg's *Eric XIV* under Vakhtangov and Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Gogol's *The Government Inspector* at the Second Moscow Art Theatre (of which he became director in 1924)—in all three productions, Chekhov used grotesque physicalization to convey his original interpretations of the self-regarding characters he was portraying (see Ivanov

145–56). He had little use for the canon of neo-classical gesture as illustrated in Volkonsky's *The Expressive Person*, but his subsequent account of his approach shows close parallels with Delsarte's Laws of Movement. His insistence that he created these characterizations from a sense of "atmosphere" suggests the intangible relationships between outward expression and the internal rhythm or spirit of the roles advocated in Steiner's concept of "visible speech" and Delsarte's "expressive symbols of mysterious truth." Less successful than his acting roles was Chekhov's 1925 production of the symbolist play *Petersburg* by Andrei Bely, who was also an anthroposophist. As an explicit example of the mystical strain in Chekhov's theatrical taste, it was roundly condemned by orthodox Soviet critics. After a similar reception to his production of *The Case* by Alexander Sukhovo-Kobylin in 1927, it was with some relief that he accepted an invitation to Berlin from Max Reinhardt and was given permission to emigrate (Byckling). In 1919 Chekhov had published articles in the journal *Gorn*,¹¹ which indicated that he was already developing an original perspective on the methods he had learnt from Stanislavsky. He wrote of selecting or discovering the appropriate external symbols of a role through an "Act of Incarnation." This seems to have been a process of replacing what he called traditional "stencils" or clichés with movement and gestures that arose spontaneously from the situations in the play's action. To an extent this followed the process of rational "justification" advocated by Stanislavsky, but, as the results were often highly individual, even grotesque, it also involved the sense of inventive "fantasy" that Chekhov found in Steiner's improvised movement to music.

After leaving Russia, Chekhov worked in Germany, France, Latvia, Lithuania, the United States and England, where in 1935 he was invited to set up the Chekhov Theatre Studio at Dartington Hall. Here he invited Volkonsky, who had already emigrated from Soviet Russia to Paris, to give a series of lectures on Delsarte, Dalcroze and Steiner, and workshops on physical and vocal dynamics, rhythm and tempo (Hurst du Prey 162). As Chekhov developed his training methods he began to write them down and by 1942 he had completed *On the Actor's Technique* in Russian, which was the basis for his English version, *To the Actor*, published in America in 1953. Ironically this most expressionistic and imaginative actor spent his later years (1942–55) in Hollywood where he trained a number of film actors, whose style was determined by the naturalistic conventions of the cinema. He developed his technique of "Incarnation," or embodiment, not by excluding the expressive stance and gestures advocated by Delsarte, but by internalizing the impulses generated by large expressive gesture. What he came to define as the "Psychological Gesture" worked exactly as Delsarte had suggested,

that creating an outward, physical expression spontaneously evoked internal sensations. When the extravagance of the gesture was eliminated, in order to adhere to the naturalistic conventions of film acting, the depth of the feeling remained. In Chekhov's techniques, just as in Delsarte's, body, mind and feeling were all activated at the same time, resulting in truthful and communicative performance:

Each gesture, each Action, one makes, springs from a certain Will-impulse. The opposite is also true; the Gesture the actor makes can stir his Will...the better the Gesture is formed, the stronger and clearer it is, the surer it will reach the Will and stir, stimulate and arouse it. A strong Gesture of affirmation, or denial, expansion or contraction, repulsion or attraction, will inevitably agitate the Will, calling forth in it a corresponding desire, aim, wish. (1991, 29)

The Delsarte and Chekhov techniques compared

If we examine in more detail the exercises and processes that Delsarte and Chekhov advocated, we find a remarkable similarity of technique. Although Chekhov did not accept the detail with which Delsarte categorized the various zones of the body as expressive of the Vital (sensations), Mental (thought) or Spiritual (emotion)—for example, the hand expresses thought, the arm physical action and the shoulder is “the thermometer of the Soul”¹²—he did write that:

The head is connected with thoughts, ideas, and spiritual activity. In its round form it reflects the universe (macrocosm), becoming a kind of little world (microcosm)... The chest, arms, and hands are connected with the beating of the heart and rhythmical breathing. This is the sphere of the Feelings.... The Will dwells in the legs and feet. (1991, 52–53)

However, it is in the processes, rather than the meaning, of gestural acting that Delsarte's Laws of Movement more readily coincide with Chekhov's techniques. Delsarte had propounded nine laws as to how movements are made and these were incorporated into what Chekhov describes as the Quality of an Action. Generally, according to various sources, Delsarte's qualities were described mechanically—direction, velocity, sequence, opposition and extension—though he readily provided “readings” of how the nature of a movement corresponded to feelings and intentions. Chekhov, on the other hand, suggests that the actor explores and experiments with the

different qualities of pace, rhythm and energy, which he suggests will evoke feelings—rather than conceiving the feeling *before* choosing a gesture to illustrate it:

The secret lies in arousing the Feelings without forcing them immediately. If we want to lift or lower our arm, we are able to do so without difficulty. We can also do the same movement, let us say, cautiously...a certain psychological tint will come into our movement, namely caution. How did this happen?...It slipped into our movement just because we did not force ourselves to feel caution. We fulfilled our simple movement, our “business,” and that we can always do. Our doing, our action, is always in our will, but not our Feelings...the feeling was called forth, provoked, attracted indirectly by our “business,” doing, action. (1991, 37)

Compare the following descriptions of “pure” gesture, by which we mean movements without any predefined practical purpose. First, an exposition of Delsarte, taken from Moses True Brown’s *The Philosophy of Expression*:

1. Gestures sweeping through long arcs in slow time correspond with poise of the Being. They have dignity, majesty, and strength in composure.
2. Gestures sweeping through long arcs with quick motion add intensity to majesty and strength. They lose in poise and dignity, but gain in power and strength. They show an invasion from the Vital side of the Being.
3. Gestures sweeping through long arcs, and ending in attitudes that draw the body upward along the vertical line, disclose the Emotive (or Spiritual) Being manifesting its highest moods of power and strength.

Thus the Inner corresponds with the outer. The physical agents moving through space in time indicate the quality, amount and intensity of the psychic energy. (192)

The following is from Chekhov’s *On the Technique of Acting*:

Stand still and realize your body is a form. Then ‘walk’ in your imagination, with your attention focused within your body, as if molding it from inside, and also from outside. Realize that each limb of your body is a peculiarly built form. Then start to move your fingers, hands, arms, and so on slightly, realizing that your body is a movable form. This means that motion itself prevents you from being formless at any moment while you are moving.

In everyday experience we are entirely bereft of any Feeling of Form while moving our body. This will not be so for the actor if he wants to increase his expressiveness on the stage. After a certain period of cautious realization of his body as a moveable form he will feel his whole body is stronger, younger, and more obedient to the impulses coming from his inner life. (51)

Although there is a clear difference in how ready the Delsarte method, as propounded by Brown, is to provide a meaning to the gesture, both passages suggest vividly how the inner and outer sensations prompt one another. When Chekhov proceeds to develop specific Psychological Gestures that inform both the specific moment of action and the personality of the dramatic character, he too recognizes that the actor will access appropriate feelings through the exercise of imaginative movements and the adoption of expressive stances:

Imagine that you are going to play a character which, according to your first general impression, has a strong and unbending will.... You look for a suitable over-all gesture which can express all this in the character.... It is strong and well shaped. When repeated several times it will tend to strengthen your will. The direction of each limb, the final position of the whole body as well as the inclination of the head are such that they are bound to call up a definite desire for dominating and despotic conduct.... Thus, through the gesture, you penetrate and stimulate the depths of your own psychology. (1991, 69)

Both men recognize the importance of the "center." One of Delsarte's most fundamental triads is that of the Normal (Center), the Excentric and the Concentric, which can be used to describe the movement of any part of the body, from the direction of the eyes to the posture of the torso.¹³ Thus, Delsarte defined motions from and towards the center and gave them, as well as the poised "centered" stance, particular significations:

1. Motion from a center outwards is excentric (or centrifugal) Motion. It corresponds with our Vital states.
2. Motion towards a center inwards is concentric (or centripetal) Motion. It corresponds with our Mental states.
3. Motion centered, namely, held in balance, is 'at Poise.' It corresponds with our highest Emotive (or Moral) states. (Brown 55)

For Chekhov, too, the open, closed or neutral stance is a basic element of both movement and personality. In a passage corresponding to Delsarte's definition, he is much less prescriptive in what the center signifies, but is equally assured that the awareness of the actor's center evokes feelings, attitudes and personality:

Imagine a Center in your chest from which living impulses are sent out into your arms, hands, legs and feet. Start to move, imagining that the impulse to form that movement comes from the Center. Feel the aesthetic satisfaction that arises in your body.... As soon as the actor moves this Center to another place in his body, the ideal body changes and acquires a defined countenance. For instance, the actor can put the Center in his head, in which case he may feel his mind become more active and begins to play a specific part in his whole inner and outer makeup. (1991, 44, 100–101)

A clear distinction between Delsarte and Chekhov is the freedom the latter allows to the actor's imagination. Typical of his nineteenth century rationality, Delsarte attributes specific feelings and meanings to all the wide range of movements that his system identifies, including their directions, scale, balance and velocity, whereas Chekhov allows far greater scope for individual interpretation of movement—make the movement and see what feeling it evokes. Rather than interpreting the gesture semiotically, Chekhov works with the aesthetics that Volkonsky identified as Static and Dynamic—the stance and centering of the body, the sequence and quality of the gesture. However, the focus of both systems on the power of movement in stimulating and communicating feelings and characteristics, is distinctly different from the psychological approach to acting that became the orthodoxy not only in Russia, when Stanislavsky's system was appropriated to the service of Socialist Realism, but in the mid-twentieth century American theatre and cinema, with the Actor's Studio psycho-analytical emphasis on motivation, objectives and through-lines of character development. This so-called "naturalistic" approach still dominates film (and television) acting, but in the live theatre today, in both Europe and America, there has been a revival of physically based performance. Audiences are now more ready to appreciate the power of extravagant gesture and evocative movement, whether, like Chekhov, they respond to it intuitively and with feeling, or, in a more Delsartean fashion, seek to interpret its meaning by a process of semiotic analysis.

Notes

- 1 Denis Diderot, *Le paradox sur le comédien*, written 1773, was not published in French until 1830. The 1883 English translation by W. H. Pollock started intense discussion of the differences between English and French acting techniques.
- 2 For the origins of Delsarte's Law of Correspondence in the work of Swedenborg, see Mantegazza; and Taylor 1999, 75.
- 3 Cited by Moses True Brown, who redefined the concept more succinctly as "The Soul finds its direct and open correspondence in the Body," pp. 185–86.
- 4 Meyer, "Under the Sign of Wilde," in *The Politics and Poetics of Camp* 81. The emphasis on the Delsarte exercises as a means of developing social poise and a sense of self-identity was mainly due to Steele Mackaye's gymnastic elaboration of Delsarte's methods while acting as chief demonstrator in the old man's final years, 1869–70 (see Percy Mackaye). They were given further "life-style" application by Henrietta Hovey and Genevieve Stebbins, partly in the cause of female emancipation (see Ruyter 1999, especially Chapters 3 and 5).
- 5 The term "semiotic" has been much revived in recent performance analysis (for example, in Elam 1980; and Fischer-Lichte 1992), but for Delsarte's original use of the term, see *Delsarte System of Oratory* 430; and Brown 144. The term is cited by Volkonsky, *Vyrazitel'nyi Chelovek* (The Expressive Person), 61.
- 6 Volkonsky, *Vyrazitel'noye Slovo*, (The Expressive Word) and *Vyrazitel'ni Chelovek* (The Expressive Person). Quotations from these works are translated by Rose Whyman.
- 7 Roach (84, 192) argues that the materialistic theory he attributes to James and Lange was taken up by Theodule Ribot in *La psychologie des sentiments* (1898).
- 8 Meyerhold, "The Fairground Booth" (1912) in Braun 119–128. As Volkonsky had seen the Appia/Dalcroze version of Gluck's *Orpheus* at Hellerau in 1911, together with Stanislavsky and many leaders of European modernist theatre, he may have been unenthused by Meyerhold's production of the opera at the Maryinsky later that year.
- 9 Ivanov discusses how Chekhov's greatest performances drew on the despair and angst of this breakdown. He only briefly mentions the role of Anthroposophy in Chekhov's "recovery," suggesting that its "system of answers" robbed Chekhov's Hamlet of its existential despair (156).

- 10 Rudolph Steiner, cited on The Speech School web-site:
<http://web.ukonline.co.uk/creativespeech>. We know of no evidence that suggests Steiner drew directly on Delsarte, but he was proud of the originality of his own thought and acknowledged few precedents for his techniques or philosophy.
- 11 Chekhov's articles for *Gorn* (The Crucible) are reprinted in Chekhov 1986, 2, 34–64. *Gorn* was published in Moscow.
- 12 Brown 166–7. The thermometer metaphor was shared by most Delsarte commentators and so probably was originally his own.
- 13 Charts illustrating inward, outward and centred poses, gestures and expressions are reproduced, after the diagrams in Delaumosne and Giraudet, in both Ruyter 1999, between 71 and 72; and in Shawn 30, 37, 43, 45, 113, 114.

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