

## From the gestural and phonetic sign of everyday life to the actor's sign: aspects of François Delsarte's system

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Delsarte maintains that gesture, like any other language, does not necessarily mirror the inner dynamics of the person that makes it. In the world of Origins the situation was different because man's feelings and thoughts turned *immediately* into action, which was thus the non-mediated reflection of the inner self. That vocabulary, in primitive man not yet corrupted, had the nature of universality: everyone expressed the same feeling, emotion or thought through the same gesture. However, even the modern man most tied to gestural signs not characterized by "truth" would, unbeknown to himself, preserve at least one genuine element. Delsarte undertakes to retrieve the vocabulary of that ideal primitive language and to build the parts assigned to those he is training to become players on that vocabulary and not on the corrupted language of everyday life. Elena Randi also shows that the Delsartian method of the actor's art explores the intentions to be attributed to the characters and she underlines the importance of following a single well defined perspective when interpreting a character.

François Delsarte maintains that human beings have three inner faculties: the soul, the sphere of affect and emotions, life, that is the force through which things are impressed on us through the senses, and the spirit, the abode of the intellect. According to a romantically revisited module of the medieval Mysticism, he sees the first as the most elevated. Starting from the notion that the body and the inner world are correlated and are neither separate nor separable entities, gesture, which Delsarte believes to be the means to translate the soul, is consequently on the highest step of an ideal hierarchy of languages, while words, which have the task of most directly conveying the spirit, and *phoné*, that is the distinctive instrument of life, are placed at a lower level (cf. Randi 1996)<sup>1</sup>.

The thesis of gesture as an idiom able to efficiently express feeling and affect can be found, albeit sometimes only as a sketchy outline, in a number of authors before or more or less in the same years as Delsarte: philosophers such as Diderot or Schleiermacher, poets such as Vacquerie or Lamartine, choreographers such as Noverre, actors such as Talma or Morrocchesi. However, a more direct reference source of the relationship between psyche and body expression is *idéologie*, one of whose privileged issues of investigation is also favoured

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1 The main, and irreplaceable, instrument used to examine François Delsarte's method has been the Delsarte Collection, conserved at the Hill Memorial Library of Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge (Louisiana). It comprises a considerable collection of Delsarte's manuscripts, as well as some of his students' notes and summaries of his lectures, English translation of his writings, texts elaborated by the first owners of the collection.

by Delsarte: the connection between expressive signs and inner activity, the influence of habit on body language and intellectual abilities, the examination of relationships between the *moral* and the *physique*.

Delsarte shares with the “orthodox” *idéologie* (Cabanis and Destutt de Tracy, above all) the idea of the unshakable correlation between body and psyche. However, Cabanis’s and Tracy’s conviction that intellect and emotions become a corporeal organic entity and dissolve in it, that they are matter, is not shared by Delsarte<sup>2</sup>. As regards the nature of the *intérieur*, he is closer to the positions of Degérando and Maine de Biran, who, initially faithful to the *idéologique* creed, later break away from the original school. In particular, they abandon its materialistic view. The *intérieur* becomes an intangible force and ontologically differentiates from the *physique*, albeit maintaining an intense correspondence with it. Such a perspective leads them to open to new issues.

Especially one point of the Biranian philosophy seems to offer Delsarte food for meditation: if *sensibilité*, the faculty by which the phenomenal remains impressed on us, is passive, then – Biran observes – the *intérieur* self is an active instrument of knowledge. In order to recognize a sensation, transform it into perception or into an idea and not abandon it to the unconscious, an active inner force needs to intervene.

Thus, Delsarte accepts on the one side the thesis of a correspondence between inner and outer world, and, on the other, the revision, offered by the *idéologique* “heresy”, of psyche as an immaterial force and thus of the presence within us of two poles, one passive and unconscious, and the other dynamic and conscious. Maybe starting also from this suggestion, Delsarte begins to observe the existence of voluntary and involuntary body movements, study their relationship with the individual’s inner disposition, and examine the connections between the gesture controlled by the intellect and the one not rationally controlled.

The Biranian suggestions seem to combine in Delsarte’s thinking with those brought about by the *querelle* of the late 1700s between physiognomics and pathognomics. As I have argued elsewhere, after an early closeness to physiognomics, Delsarte abandons some aspects of it and in his maturity he seems to combine some of Lavater’s theses (the existence of a universal reading key of the body) with others from pathognomics (only body *dynamics* and not statics carries inner meanings). The result of this blend is that in Delsarte’s theory both Lavater’s and Lichtenberg’s theses are modified. Indeed, Delsarte maintains that in the world of Origins here existed a non-mediated relationship between the psyche and gesture (understood both in its strict sense and as a phonetic sign), and that mimic language – because of this necessarily “truthful” – was characterized by universality. In other words, all human beings expressed the same feeling through the same gesture. In the course of history, this ideal Adamic language supposedly became contaminated and man started to use corrupted gestures: sometimes lying by calculation, sometimes unconsciously obeying “false” habits acquired over time by him or his ancestors. Beneath this congerie of artefact cyphers, however, smoulders the memory of the primordial language, which leaves traces, hallmarks, glimmering signs in the face of our own awareness.

L’humanité est comme *estropiée*, la beauté n’existe que *par fragments*, elle n’est *nulle part sur cette terre*. Les types ne se trouvent pas, ils sont dans l’intellect, ils *ne sont pas dans la nature*.

2 Not by chance, when Delsarte makes reference to the *idéologues*, he only does it in very negative terms. Cf. D.C., 12. 86: 116. Porte 1992: 120. On the *idéologues*, cf. also D.C., 11. 40: 54. The *idéologues* are mentioned again in *Traité de la raison*: Porte 1992: 251.

La beauté n'est *nulle part*, il faut par conséquent qu'elle soit constituée par l'artiste par un travail synthétique (D.C., 12. 86: 18)<sup>3</sup>.

L'homme porte en lui les *traces* indéniables d'une grandeur foudroyée, car il n'a pu sortir ainsi *mutilé* des mains de son créateur et Dieu n'a pas pu *mutiler* son œuvre *en estropiant* ainsi sa ressemblance [...]. L'homme a-t-il pu sortir ainsi *estropié* des mains de son créateur ? Dieu n'a-t-il pu suffire à son œuvre de prédilection ou bien a-t-il voulu *dès le berceau* de la création *mutiler* sa ressemblance ? S'il en était ainsi, Dieu ne serait pas seulement un maladroit ouvrier, mais il serait encore le plus dur, le plus injuste et le plus cruel des êtres. Tout cela n'est pas admissible. Cependant l'homme *porte indéniablement les caractères d'une grandeur foudroyée* (D.C., 1. 26 b. 10: 8–9. Porte 1992: 240).

In confirmation of the merely fragmented presence of “truth” in everyday gesture, we can read some pages written by the French master on some sample movements made in the “real” space. For instance:

Si quelqu'un veut exprimer de la surprise et que cette surprise ne soit pas précédée d'une titillation [de l'œil], vous pouvez être assurés que la surprise est simulée. Si m'attendant à la visite d'une personne je feins de l'émotion à sa vue, vous pouvez dire “C'est faux parce qu'il n'y a pas eu de titillation dans le regard” (D.C., 12. 86: 174).

Body dynamics then (in this case that of the eye) can successfully lie: an observation that shows how at least some parts of the body can express a feeling other than that actually felt.

Delsarte defines as “extérieurs” (D.C., 12. 86: 140) the gestures that do not correspond to inner dynamics and judges them negatively; sometimes he calls them “gestes d'acteur” (D.C., 12. 86: 140) (not *done by an actor*, but *typical of an actor*, that is, the work of a “faker”).

Despite the overall falseness of gesture, each one of us would in any case retain at least one detail, albeit minute, in which the soul would unaffectedly show through (an invisible muscle contraction, the tiny shift of a nostril, a subtle vibration of the voice). There would always be a micro-gesture, a hint of the original language, the “true” hallmark of the inner life that, unbeknown to us, shines through even in the least genuine body. In other words, the body vocabulary, within a perspective that recalls the neo-platonic theories, would change with history, but it would always be possible to find in its folds the marks of an archetypal language that only at the dawn of mankind was expressed in all its pristine purity, free from decay and contaminated residues<sup>4</sup>.

An additional detail: Delsarte maintains that if most gestures are corruptible, some, far less numerous, are not susceptible to adulteration: the involuntary movements. The ones susceptible to adulteration are those mimic elements that may not be the immediate result of an inner impulse, given that reason can get between the inner impulse and its outer result, and reason is a too human faculty, not subjected to the authority of the Artifex. Delsarte maintains that a shrug belongs to incontrollable mimicry. Without a doubt, he does not refer to the normal action that involves together the shoulder blade, the humerus, and the collarbone, but to the

3 Not very different are several other statements in the Delsartian manuscripts. For example: « Examinons de nouveau l'homme dans ce qui constitue essentiellement son être. Je veux parler des trois puissances pour lesquelles Dieu l'a fait à son image [...]. Ce qui me frappe d'étonnement, c'est la *dissonance* où elles se trouvent. C'est l'état d'*inégalité* où elles sont tombées » (D.C., 1. 26 b. 10: 8. Porte 1992: 240).

4 The neo-platonic influence of the notion of history as decay of the Ideal is stated by Delsarte himself, for example in D.C., 12. 86: 104–106.

much more refrained movement caused by the reaction of the diaphragm to an intense emotion.

From what has been said so far it is implicit that considering Delsarte's poetics as realistic, as often has been done, is completely wrong. This is shown in several interventions of his, such as *Positivisme dans l'art*, a written work in which he observes that when art has taken the features of "un cabinet de naturaliste", "s'est desséchée, momifiée", it has transformed itself into "une relique à l'usage des antiquaires [...], un ossuaire étiqueté d'où s'échappe une odeur de mort et devant lequel on sent le froid du sépulcre" (D.C., 1. OS 36 b. 22bis: 5r. Porte 1992: 244. D.C., 8. 147. 5: 1v). The realistic reading of the Delsartian thinking is doubtlessly triggered by the erroneous interpretation of some data: the French master devotes forty years of his life to examining the phenomenal and drawing from it a vocal and mimic vocabulary, pointing out the inner meaning of each of its terms (the head moving towards the examined object would indicate sensuality; lifting the shoulders would give the measure of passion and sensitivity, signalling the degree of intensity of an emotion). Such a vocabulary had to be used by players to make up the sequence of gestures and vocal inflections of the character they were asked to play. The sequence aimed to express what, in the player's own view, was hidden behind the words of his /her part. We, therefore, seem to be facing a realistic perspective of the actor's art.

However, Delsarte does not wish to include in his vocabulary all the phonetic and gestural signs observed in everyday life, but only the positions, the body movements, and the vocal inflections which he believes correspond to those of the ideal Adamic language. I will not attempt to explain how he believes he can distinguish between genuine and "affected" signs, also because it is one of the least effective points of his thinking. In any case, Delsarte is convinced that the vocabulary he collected restores the archetypal idiom, not the corrupted language of everyday life. If the player needed the vocabulary accumulated – as said above – to make up the phonetic-gestural score of the character to be interpreted, the curtain was to open on a fragment of Heaven, on a portrait of the life existing before the corruption brought about by history and not, as according to a realistic provision, on a *tranche de vie*; it should not have been the imitation of the ordinary, but the copy of the archetype. Delsarte writes:

L'art n'est pas comme l'on dit l'imitation de la nature; il en est la représentation idéalisée.  
C'est le rapport synthétique des beautés éparses de la nature à un type supérieur et défini.  
L'art est ensuite et surtout la tendance de l'âme déchue vers sa pureté primitive ou sa splendeur finale.  
L'art, en un mot, est la recherche du type éternel<sup>5</sup>.

But, how can this actually apply to the actor's art? In none of his writings does Delsarte expound his method in an orderly and complete manner. However, it is possible to reconstruct it by comparing the contents of a number of manuscripts of the Delsarte Collection in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. It is a hypothesis, but I believe the margin for error is not high (cf. Randi 1996).

First of all, the players' task is to define the sequence of gestures and vocal inflections of their part by applying to the character to be played the phonetic and gestural vocabulary

5 In 1855 Delsarte gives ten lectures in Paris in Quai Malaquais. Nine of them are transcribed by an attendee and are now kept at the D.C., 12. 86; the first one, which is missing in that manuscript, can be found in another transcription of the Quai Malaquais lectures, owned by the Delsarte heirs, and of which Alain Porte has kindly given me a transcription of his.

acquired during training. Then at rehearsals they will have to repeat it enough times to become able to execute it “without thinking” (“Il faut que l’acteur n’ait pas même à penser à ce qu’il fait; il faut que la chose ait été tellement étudiée qu’elle coule de source, ce, sans qu’on y pense”, D.C., 12. 86: 2; the context assures us that with the word “chose” Delsarte means the part to be enacted). After reaching automatic fluency of the part, a condition of emotional involvement would blossom in them determined by that phenomenon thanks to which the soul is activated by the gesture as much as physical actions are generated by the soul. This is a principle already known to others and called the *Campanella effect* in memory of an anecdote about the Italian philosopher told by Burke, and recalled by Dugald Stewart, Albert Lemoine, and William James, according to which when Campanella wanted to know another person’s mood, he imitated that person’s position and facial expression and then “listened” to his own emotions. Between the Eighteenth and the Nineteenth century the idea of gesture as the engine of the soul appears not only in Lessing, who mentions this issue in the pages dated 8 May 1767 of the *Hamburgische Dramaturgie*, but also in later authors, such as Darwin, Archer, Stanislavskij (cf. Drouin 1995: 133). Delsarte maintains that, thanks to the mechanism by which mimicry brings emotion into being, the initially “unemotional” and coldly technical players not yet involved in the expressed feeling begin to deeply sense what was earlier a mere outer shell. Once the emotional bond has been sparked, involuntary body movements like sobbing and blushing would be triggered in them.

The method, then, is articulated over three phases. First the players define very precisely their gesture score based on the text interpretation done earlier; then they repeat it so many times as to make it flow “automatically”; lastly, emotional involvement is triggered, which allows the execution of involuntary gestures. Taken this proposed description as accurate, Delsarte, then, would have invented a technique thanks to which the players would really feel the emotions of their character and feel them on demand, in a “scientific” non-random way. Nothing at all to do with the inspiration of the moment – despised by Delsarte – which cannot be started scientifically and when needed.

The system proposed above allows the simultaneous presence of self-awareness and production of involuntary gestures, which, as such, cannot be controlled by reason. Therefore, it allows the coexistence of two seemingly irreconcilable categories (cf. Randi 1996: 85–121).

Delsarte also devises a method for the player to define a personal interpretation of the assigned part, and he/she does so by starting from the premise that a text can be read in countless ways. As Maurice Descotes shows, players’ trend had been, for centuries, to follow the ways of recitation that had been enacted by the first player. For example, if Augustus in Corneille’s *Cinna* had been played in a certain way at its debut, later actors had kept by and large that same way for the following two centuries (cf. Descotes 1957, 1962, 1972, 1974, 1976). Not so Delsarte, who, on the contrary, looks for original, sometimes even paradoxical perspectives to read the characters and then represent them. As an example, here is the paradoxical interpretation of *Le chêne et le roseau* by La Fontaine proposed by Delsarte:

La tradition ne prête-t-elle pas au chêne une attitude orgueilleusement tendue et hautaine, n’enfle-t-elle pas démesurément sa voix [...] ? D’un autre côté n’attribue-t-elle pas au roseau une attitude humble, une expression à la fois douce et résignée ? Or, ces attributions sont radicalement fausses et tout à fait contraires à la plus simple donnée physiologique [...]. C’est diamétralement le contraire qu’il faut attribuer à ces deux types : la condescendance et la bonhomie sont le fait du chêne, tandis que le roseau ne laisse transparaître, sous son orgueil

blessé, que la haine et l'envie. En deux mots, le chêne est un brave homme dont la faiblesse est de tenir peut-être un peu trop à l'estime du roseau ; le roseau, au contraire, est un impertinent coquin qui exterminerait volontiers le chêne, dont la grandeur l'offusque (D.C., 1. 36 b. 6: 15).

The notion that multiple interpretations of a text exist and the tendency to choose an original one are rather innovative. The same can be said for the Delsartian conviction that, if there are a thousand exegetical possibilities for a text, the player must however choose *one* hermeneutical slant and follow it from the beginning to the end of the part, without ever betraying it. In order to reach the needed result, Delsarte conceives a fairly detailed method through which the desired perspective unicity can be achieved. After reading the whole part, the artist will have to pick out a predominant word or expression. For example, Delsarte chooses the term “maître” with reference to the character of Augustus in Corneille’s *Cinna* (cf. D.C., 1. 36 b. 6: 6). Then the actor will go on to define the identifying sentences of each scene in which Augustus appears and the expression “maître” will have to be included in them. For instance: “Je suis maître de moi, comme de l’univers”, or “Soyons maître de nous” (D.C., 1. 36 b. 6: 6). Lastly, he will have to determine the sense underlying each single line, writing beside each one the sentence that “translates” it, and each one will have to include the chosen key-word. Thus, the actor will find himself with an *elliptic translation* of the part (today we would call it a *sub-text*), characterized by a solid *unicity* and pivoting around *one* dominant concept radiated over multiple and variegated nuances (cf. Randi 1996: 123–153).

Delsarte was never a *metteur en scène* and so he never dealt with the overall performance; however, his actor’s art method anticipates, albeit in a small scale, the unifying feature of the performance, which is one of the pivots of stage direction.

If a system of character construction built on an explicit unitary instance is new and if the Delsarte’s method can actually infuse the character with the desired unity, that does not mean that before Delsarte the player did not explore the intentions to attribute to the *dramatis persona* and thus, in a more or less profound way, did not elaborate some sort of sub-text. As an example I will examine some ways of character elaboration used by Isidore Samson (1793–1871), at the time not only *valet* of the Théâtre-Français, but also the most important teacher at the Conservatoire. The Conservatoire was the most prestigious school in Paris, where many players of the Comédie had been groomed and, if that was not enough, Samson also “trained” many successful players – for example Mademoiselle Rachel – when they were taking on a new part. We are now going to examine some aspects of the *Art théâtral*, a kind of manual written by the educator in the mid-1800s. Rather than a *method* he describes the interpretation of some sample characters. From what can be evinced from this volume, Samson, unlike Delsarte, does not supply his pupils with the instruments to define by themselves their view of the character to play, but rather gives a pre-defined solution that the player will have to perform. It is the same procedure that Delsarte describes when he talks about the teachers he had in his youth when he attended the Conservatoire (cf. Battaille 1866: 114–122). Even if Delsarte’s and Samson’s teaching methodologies radically diverge in that regard, Samson too envisages a “sub-text”, that is a “translation” of the meanings hidden “behind” or “beneath” the surface of the dramatic score.

An example can be the interpretation of Racine’s Phaedra suggested by the *Art théâtral*. Pervaded by a “sombre langueur”, her weak body devastated “par la douleur” (Samson [s.d.]: 56) and the fasting, she appears pale, psychologically exhausted, deaf to Oenone’s supplications. When she hears the name Hippolytus, she visibly starts. Prostrated and devoured by “un remord incessant” (Samson [s.d.]: 56), she shakes while moving closer to the man she

loves and his voice causes her “un léger frisson” (Samson [s.d.]: 56). When talking about Hippolytus to Theseus, she either tries to lock on his glance, tempted to relieve her feelings by confessing her forbidden love, or carefully avoids it, a gesture that reveals her struggle to keep to the imperative order of guarding the secret. But then passion explodes: Phaedra's eye – “curieux, enflammé” – ends up by contemplating “avec bonheur” (Samson [s.d.]: 56) her beloved, and her sense of decency capitulates. The woman lets herself be lulled by “un songe enivrant” (Samson [s.d.]: 57). Hippolytus, however, reacts with words of repugnance and with a “regard plein d'horreur” (Samson [s.d.]: 57), which makes Phaedra tragically aware of her mistake. She then bursts uncontrollably into tears and stares at the youth, feeling hate towards herself; she humiliates herself, she trembles, she begs. Lastly, she turns to Oenone for help and asks her to bribe Hippolytus trying to rouse some sense of ambition. The attempt fails and Phaedra's shame and terror are expressed through a statuesque pose: awesomely calm, she stares into space with a blank gaze, “raide, froid, immobile” (Samson [s.d.]: 58). This motionless dismay is followed by a stabbing pain, conveyed by a wandering glance. Phaedra's language – Samson significantly adds – must be a “langue divine” (Samson [s.d.]: 57), radically different from the “glapissante” “langue bourgeoise” (Samson [s.d.]: 57).

In his description, Samson lingers sometimes on the folds of the character's psyche, sometimes on the gestures, actions, vocal inflections through which they have to be expressed, and writes his notes in a poetic manner. Rather than offering a “structured” method, he seems to propose a suggestive climate which captures the player's imagination, dragging him/her into an atmosphere. Phaedra, then, is proposed as “plaintive et tremblante” (Samson [s.d.]: 57), “effrayée” (Samson [s.d.]: 59), devastated by shame or by a “mortelle peur” (Samson [s.d.]: 58). These definitions of her psyche sometimes find confirmation in a description of the gestural and phonetic signs to be used to convey them. Especially interesting is the choice to convey terror not through violent or sweeping gestures, but, on the contrary, through a “frozen” immobility.

The *Art théâtral*, then, provides a definition of the characters' intentions, but it does not seem implicit that the text can be interpreted from different perspectives: the only conceivable reading must aim to respect the thoughts of the author, whose intentions Samson considers accessible and recognizable. Also, there does not seem to be a precise interest in searching for the character's unity, which is instead found in Delsarte and also in the stagings of the 1830s by some playwrights such as Hugo, Dumas *père* or Vigny. To be more precise, those playwrights-stagers are not satisfied, as Delsarte was, only with infusing unity to the character; they direct all the stage components, each of which obeys only one perspective: that of the playwright-stager, who significantly requires rehearsals for at least one, two or three months.

As an example we can take Alfred de Vigny's *Chatterton* staged for the first time at the Comédie-Française in 1835. I think it is a clear instance of staging in which all the stage components obey the unity of conception given by the playwright-stager. Let's observe especially the positions, the actions, the gestures of the characters played by the actors, which we can, at least partly, reconstruct thanks to the stage directions of the prompter's promptbook and of the *princeps*, the *livrets de mise en scène*, the reviews, the correspondence between Vigny and Marie Dorval, etc.

Each character presents a peculiar mimic and psychological feature. A *Leitmotiv* of Kitty/Marie Dorval's mimic score is made up of a sort of suspension or immobility aiming to convey an almost sacred dimension of her personality, a dominant spiritual aspect, pure and transcendent. Indeed, a number of documents attest that now and again she adopts mystic,

contemplative, ecstatic postures. Another recurrent theme in Kitty's dynamics is especially good at showing her inner state: she falls, she slumps, she drops objects, thus anticipating, in miniature, the final *dégringolade* of the third act. Kitty's gestural architecture is not simply an empty shape: the gesture of falling, mirroring an inner state, expresses Kitty's fragility. Every aggressive, violent, painful, emotionally intense event shakes her and the backlash felt inside shows on her body in the form of a fall. The restlessness, the agonizing inner unrest of Chatterton played by Edmond Geffroy emerges in his continuous moving from room to room, his shifting from one position to another and, in turn, with different rhythms: one moment he goes slowly down the stairs, then he bounces jerkily, then he sits calmly only to suddenly leap up afterwards in turmoil. Till the end of the drama his part has a discontinuous rhythm, one moment slow, the next hectic. Joanny's Quaker mainly remains sitting not only because of his elderly age, but also because that position is the result of the inner balance and stability that seem to distinguish him. The existence of a gestural and psychological dominant motive, evident in each character in the first staging, shows the presence of a design made up by each player according to a unifying overall perspective in the construction of the part, surely agreed upon with Vigny (cf. Randi 2009: 173–184).

If stage directors force the *comédiens* to find a unitary vision of the *dramatis persona* they have been assigned, in a sense Delsarte gives them the instruments for training a player "suitable" to be directed. The origin of the art of stage direction, as I believe I have shown in my former studies, dates back to the 1830s (if not even earlier) and so is more or less contemporaneous with the first elaboration of the system by the master of Solesmes and does not date, as is often said, to the 1870s (cf. Randi 2009).

Another aspect underlines the agreement between stage direction *in statu nascendi* and Delsarte's method of actor's art. According to several Italian theatre historians, acting lines are linked to conventional standardized recitation. More precisely, the acting lines system would favour the rooting and the development of specific acting stereotypes in the several character categories, so that each acting line would include its own "repertory" of gestures, tics, postures, etc. applied by the great majority of actors playing that given acting line. Such repetitive schemes would be the mirror of an interpretation "reduced to a common denominator of traditional genericness" (Tofano 1965: 43) essential in a theatrical system like the Italian one in which "harmonization" between and among players was done over a very limited rehearsal time.

If this may be true for the Italian context, and also for the minor French theatres, the thesis is far more debatable with reference to the major *troupes* in Paris, at least when they put on a performance that follows the same criteria as those of stage direction. Indeed thanks to specialization in an acting line (without a doubt existing, as proven for example by the many engagement contracts conserved at the Bibliothèque de la Comédie-Française), the *comédien* of the most prestigious Parisian theatres can achieve supreme interpretative subtleties. Although playing the same category of individuals throughout one's career, or in any case for a long part of it, may lead some to a sort of mental laziness – in other words to apply the same scheme over and over again to every *dramatis persona* – it allows others, who are less inclined to routine, to analyse every detail and more easily dig up all the character's facets, thus differentiating each character played from any other character belonging to the same category. Or, at least, such a thing happens when some playwrights-*metteurs en scène* are in charge of rehearsal.

There is no doubt that also Delsarte's pupils, once they have become professionals, have been engaged as the players of a specific acting line. The weight Delsarte assigns to the



analysis and in-depth knowledge of the character and to the way to convey it – an in-depth knowledge that must not bend to usage or tradition – shows a significant harmony with the attention a Vigny, a Hugo or a Dumas reserved to their work on interpretation done together with the *comédiens* they stage directed. In short, the players trained by the master of Solesmes use the acting lines according to criteria similar to those of the first instances of stage direction: not to make their own work easier by bending the character to be played to existing *clichés*, but, on the contrary, to delve deeply in the hidden folds of the character. I wish to repeat what already written above: the Delsarte's system in some aspects seems significantly in harmony with the founding principles of stage direction. Much more than the Conservatoire school, Delsarte provides the nascent *mise en scène* with a method of training for players, which is singularly in agreement with it.

## References

### Manuscripts

The manuscripts quoted are all but one (*Traité de la raison*) conserved in the Delsarte Collection of the Hill Memorial Library of Baton Rouge in Louisiana (here abbreviated as D.C.). They are placed in a numbered *box*, in a numbered *folder*, and are often identified by an *item* number. For example, a manuscript may be kept in *box* 1, *folder* 26, *item* 8. The reference in our article will then be: D.C., 1.26.8, followed, when necessary, by the paper or page number (for example: 1.26.8: 5).

1. 26 b. 7 – Cf. 1. OS 36 c. 2

1. 26 b. 10 – *Esthétique. Conférence à l'École de médecine*, in D.C., *box* 1, *folder* 26 b, *item* 10. It is a manuscript of notes Delsarte used to prepare for a lecture he gave, according to Alain Porte, in 1867. Cf. Porte 1992: 233.

1. 36 b. 6 – A manuscript certainly by Delsarte, entitled *5<sup>ème</sup> Point. Préliminaires de l'histoire de mes Découvertes*, conserved in D.C., *box* 1, *folder* 36 b, *item* 6. Delsarte says in it that he has been teaching for forty years (p. 8) and this dates the manuscript around the end of the 1860s.

1. OS 36 b. 22bis – *Positivisme dans l'Art. Conférence*, kept in D.C., *box* 1, *folder* OS 36 b, *item* 22bis. It is a manuscript containing Delsarte's notes possibly for one of a series of lectures he gave around 1865. In two handwritten pages whose *incipit* is *Temple de l'art* (D.C., *box* 8, *folder* 147, *item* 5) we can find almost identical notes to those found in *Positivisme dans l'Art*, which makes us think the pages are about the same lecture.

1. OS 36 c. 2 – *Mes Épisodes Révélateurs, ou Histoire d'une Idée appelée à constituer la base de la Science et de l'Art*. This unfinished handwritten text by Delsarte is kept in D.C., *box* 1, *folder* OS 36 c, *item* 2. Only the first two paragraphs of the text are found in the first two pages of *box* 1, *folder* 26 b, *item* 7. The manuscript dates back to the years 1869–1871.

8. 147. 5 – Cf. 1. OS 36 b. 22bis

11. 40 – Handwritten notebook entitled *Esthétique Appliquée. Cours de F. Delsarte. Exposition en neuf leçons de l'Art de l'Orateur, du Peintre et du Musicien*, conserved in D.C., *box* 11, *folder* 40. The notebook includes notes taken by Alphonse Pagès on a series of lectures given by Delsarte in 1859. There are notes and corrections by Delsarte.

12. 86 – Lectures given by Delsarte in 1855, whose content is transcribed by hand in a document entitled *Cours de Mons. Delsarte*, conserved in D.C., *box* 12, *folder* 86. We learn the year and place of the lectures from Alain Porte, who was able to consult another transcription of the same lectures belonging to the Delsarte family and made by a certain Degard.

*Traité de la raison* – It is a manuscript of 1870 that Alain Porte found in the private archives of the Delsarte family and published in Porte 1992: 247–257. The handwriting is not Delsarte's, but very likely the content is.

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