# EMOTIONAL MEMORY IN ACTING TECHNIQUE

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AN ABSTRACT

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ABSTRACT

One significant approach to the problem of emotion in acting is the concept of emotional memory or affective memory which suggests that the most effective way for the actor to achieve truthful and artistically successful emotion is to draw on his own remembered feelings by means of special exercises and techniques. Emotional memory is important to the scholar as the central, if not, indeed, the most important section of Stanislavsky's influential ideas on the training and craft of the actor. The purpose of the thesis is (1) to sketch the development of the ideas of affective memory in their application to acting; (2) to explain and collate the various views on the actual technique and process of emotional memory; and, (3) to attempt to evaluate and make clear its possible usefulness to the actor.

The thesis does not attempt to explore the fields of general memory, affective recall, sensory perception, or behavioral or experimental psychology. It restricts itself to outlining the work in psychology which influenced directly and historically the formation of the theatrical concept of emotional memory. No attempt is made to survey all the approaches to the problem of emotion in acting. A third area which is beyond the scope of the thesis is that of audience emotion. Also excluded is the consideration of the Diderot-Archer controversy. The terms emotional memory, sense memory, acting technique, imagination, and fantasy are defined.

The general problem of emotion in acting is considered. A demand for an actor's discipline, for a technique of emotional

experience, is an essential of any acting theory or practice. The influence of the Italian actor Salvini on Stanislavsky is discussed. Stanislavsky's first ideas on affective phenomena came from reading the work of the French psychologist Theodule Ribot. Ribot's work surveyed the revivability of experienced feelings and emotions.

Stanislavsky accepted many of Ribot's conclusions and sought to apply them to a creative discipline. A basic part of Stanislavsky's system was the use of the actor's analagous feelings. The development of the concept of emotional memory after Stanislavsky, up to the present time is traced, including the work of Vakhtangov, Michael Chekhov, Boleslavsky, and Lee Strasberg.

The process of emotional memory is outlined and the distinction made between mere intellectual recall and actual affective experience. The emotional memory "exercise" and the "conditioned reflexes" which develop are explained. The differing uses of emotional memory in acting training, in rehearsal, and in performance are shown, as well as the frequent confusion of these phases of the process.

Criticism of emotional memory by John Metcalf, Joshua Logan, Edwin Duerr, and Theodore Komissarjevsky is reviewed and discussed. Much of the criticism is shown to be based on faulty or incomplete comprehension of emotional memory. The implications of emotional memory to the esthetics of acting, as suggested by John Dewey, are indicated. The conclusion points out the value of the technique of emotional memory, both as an aid in the general training of the actor and as a specialized tool in preparing and performing a role.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## A. Statement of Purpose

Of all the arts of the theatre, one of the most difficult to study is the art of acting. Since the product of the actor's artistry is not something outside himself, like a painted flat or a musical score, but rather a work of art made out of the artist's own psychological processes and behavior, the study of acting is almost always clouded over by the difficulty of trying to view as separate entities the artist, his methods and his results.

Of all the many aspects of acting, one of the most difficult to study is the problem of emotion. Diction, stage movement, make-up, and literary analysis can be recorded and studied at leisure, but emotion is fleeting and difficult to record, whether the actor's own emotions or the emotions he manages to stir in his audience. It is not surprising, therefore, that there should be such wide disagreement among writers and acting teachers on the subject of emotion.

One particularly fascinating and significant approach to the problem of emotion in acting is the concept of emotional memory or affective memory, which suggests (to oversimplify for the moment) that the most effective way for the actor to achieve truthful and artistically successful emotion is to draw on his own remembered feelings by means of special exercises and techniques. The psychological phenomena of affective memory were probably first applied to the art of acting by Constantine Stanislavsky, and the concept has since been

taught, employed, and criticized by many teachers, actors, and directors. But neither those who believe in the value of emotional memory as part of an actor's craft nor those who believe the concept to be worthless and even harmful to the actor have ever set down a full expository treatment of the actual nature and workings of the technique. Indeed, apart from the chapter on emotional memory in Stanislavsky's An Actor Prepares,[1] references to emotional memory in acting texts are almost always incomplete in explanation and seldom exceed a page in length. Yet this absence of extensive published material is not at all indicative of the importance of the subject to the modern study of acting. Emotional memory is significant to the scholar as the central, if not, indeed, the most important section of Stanislavsky's influential ideas on the training and craft of the actor. Stanislavsky himself says that "it is the cornerstone of the modern method of training the actor."[2] The scarcity of material on the subject is partially due to the fact that the teachers, directors, and actors who are its most representative practitioners, actively employed in the theatre and in teaching, are still too busy exploring the further possibilities of emotional memory and similar techniques to write on the subject.

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[1]Constantine Stanislavsky, An Actor Prepares, trans. Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood (New York: Theatre Arts, Inc. 1936).

[2]Lee Strasberg, "Acting and the Training of the Actor," in John Gassner, Producing the Play (New York: The Dryden Press, 1941), p. 144. (Hereafter cited as Strasberg in Gassner).

The purpose of this thesis, therefore, is (1) to sketch the development of the ideas of affective memory in their application to acting; (2) to explain and collate the various views on the actual technique and process of emotional memory; and (3) to attempt to evaluate and to make clear its possible usefulness and significance to the actor. Section II, therefore, will be historical in nature and Section III will discuss in greater detail the process of emotional memory.

B. Statement of Limitation

In any study, it is important that the scope of the inquiry be kept to a reasonable size and that the boundaries of the inquiry be well defined. Four major limitations will be followed in this study. This thesis does not attempt to explore the fields of general memory, affective recall, sensory perception, or behavioral or experimental psychology. It restricts itself to outlining the work in psychology which influenced directly and historically the formation of the theatrical concept of emotional memory. The project of attempting to verify the suppositions of the theatrical artists in the light of modern psychological knowledge is specifically excluded. In order to study emotional memory as a theatrical technique, it has been necessary to go along with the lay formulations of the teachers, actors, and directors who have been concerned with the idea. While such formulations are often phrased in naive psychological terminology, they are for the most part no more than common sense observations of the experiences and behavior of the writers, actors, and students of the theatre, and it will prove more profitable to focus the reader's attention to the development and workings of a theatrical technique than to take issue with the psychological terminology of the theatrical writers.

A second important limitation is that no attempt is made to survey all the approaches to the problem of emotion in acting. To compare the ideas of many different writers on the problem of the actor and emotion and to evaluate the idea of emotional memory by comparative methods might also be a very useful project, but the attempt is precluded by the size of this thesis. References will be made to other methods of achieving emotion in acting only to lend perspective and in order to show the development of emotional memory more distinctly.

A third area which is beyond the scope of this thesis is that of audience emotion. The concept of audience empathy, the notion of dramatic catharsis, the debate between those in favor of a more emotional approach to the theatre and those who preach an intellectual approach, each of these subjects is deliberately excluded. To be sure, the actor's use of a technique of stage emotion is calculated to produce some emotional response in his audience, but attention must remain focused on the means rather than the end.

The fourth subject which must be specifically excluded is a consideration of the historic controversy over whether or not the actor should feel actual emotion, the dispute which centered around Denis Diderot's Paradox Sur Le Comedien and William Archer's Masks or Faces?.[3] Mention of this controversy must enter into any discussion of emotion in acting, but detailed discussion of the arguments is precluded by the scope of this study.

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[3] Denis Diderot, The Paradox of Acting, and William Archer, Masks or Faces? (New York: Hill and Wang, 1957).

## C. Definitions of Terms

### Emotional Memory

So that the subject may be examined with greater clarity, it is well to review several attempts to define emotional memory.

In An Actor Prepares, Stanislavsky says:

> That type of memory which makes you relive the sensations you once felt when seeing Moskvin act, or when your friend died, is what we call emotion memory. Just as your visual memory can reconstruct an inner image of some forgotten thing, place or person, your emotion memory can bring back feelings you have already experienced.[4]

Thus the memory of emotions is similar to the memory of sights, sounds, or odors. But one important distinction must be added for the reader's understanding of emotional or affective memory as something different from these other simple phenomena of memory.

Lee Strasberg explains:

> There is a difference between a mental or abstract memory of a state of feeling, wherein we know the sequence of events and intellectually think of them, and the affective memory of the same experience in which we actually re-experience the entire occurrence. Most people when they say they remember allude to an abstract picture of the event.
> . . . They think conceptually of "heat", "anger", "pain" rather than feel the particular, specific details - where exactly, how much, what kind of pain, all this in terms not of a chart but in terms of the specific part of the body which experienced the pain. . .[5]

Thus, for purposes of this study, the term emotional memory signifies an organic and mental process whereby feelings once experienced can be not only recalled but, to some degree at least, actually re-experienced by the actor when he so desires.

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[4] Stanislavsky, op. cit., p. 158.

[5] Strasberg in Gassner, p. 134.

Sense Memory

Because of the close connection between the ideas of emotional memory and sense memory, the two terms are used by many writers almost interchangeably. For instance, in discussing the training of actors, Strasberg says:

> This is accomplished through the use of affective memory, i.e., sense memory or memory of experience. Every human being possesses not only mental memory (like the memorizing of lines), muscular memory (like the handling of a certain tool or machine), but also sense memory. We experience sense memory when, for instance, we smell smoke without seeing it, or when in coming into a room where something unpleasant had once occurred, we re-experience the original feeling.[6]

But the term sense memory is often used to distinguish the affective recall and re-experience of external perceptions of specific objects and events and the simpler bodily sensations, while emotional memory confines itself to the affective recall of internal, more complicated feelings and perceptions which are called emotions. This distinction between the two terms will be employed in this thesis. In Section III, an attempt is made to explore more fully the relationship between sense memory and emotional memory and how the former is used by the actor as a means of achieving the latter.

Acting Technique

To define the precise nature of the actor's art, his purposes, methods, and goals, is beyond the scope of this study. But for the purpose of discussing the relationship of emotional memory to the actor's work, it is convenient to employ the term acting technique as being composed of and including the three main phases of an actor's work: his preparation and training; his work in rehearsal or in the creation of a specific role; and the methods he must employ in actual performance before an audience.

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[6] Ibid.

Imagination and Fantasy

These two common words are often used in discussions of acting with slightly specialized meanings. The difference between the two is really only a difference of degree. Michael Redgrave explains that imagination in Stanislavsky equals nothing more than the power of recall.[7] Defining fantasy, the Russian director, I. Rapoport says:

> Man is endowed with the faculty of creative fantasy: the ability to combine, unite, different phenomena from life into special new phenomena. It is impossible to imagine, that is, to recall something non-existent, but to unite different parts of the existing into a new whole - creating thereby a new "artistic image" can be done with the help of the . . . creative fantasy.[8]

What John Dolman calls imagination --"the power to draw present sensations out of past experiences and to assemble them in new combinations"[9]--would be called in this discussion by the name fantasy. To clarify and sum up the sense in which each term is used in this thesis, Norris Houghton has written:

> Let me illustrate the difference. Suppose an actor must pretend that he is standing at a street corner watching a funeral procession pass by. He can, no doubt, recall a time in the past when he has done this. So now he recalls his impressions, re-creates the situation in his imagination and reenacts it. But suppose that he must be pretending to climb a palm tree in Northern Africa in chase of a monkey. If he has never climbed a palm tree, never been in Africa, and never chased a monkey, he will be unable to use his memory to reconstruct the situation. Instead he must try to imagine what it would be like to do this. That would be called employing fantasy.[10]

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[7]Michael Redgrave, The Actor's Ways and Means (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1953), p. 57.

[8]I. Rapoport, "The Work of the Actor", in Toby Cole, (ed.) Acting, A Handbook of the Stanislavsky Method (New York: Lear Publishers, 1947), P. 42

[9]John Dolman Jr., The Art of Play Production (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1928), p. 284.

[10]Norris Houghton, Moscow Rehearsals (New York: Harcourt Brace and Co., 1936), pp.58-9

## II. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONCEPT OF EMOTIONAL MEMORY

### A. Emotion in Acting

The general problem of emotion in acting should be set forth before going ahead with an exploration of the history of the concept of emotional memory. The job of the actor is to portray or represent a character in a play, to perform that character's actions as indicated by the author so that the ideas, insights, and feelings of the author are properly communicated to the audience. One of the most effective means used by the actor in communicating the auther's artistic messages is that of causing the audience , by one method or another, to feel certain desired emotions.

The plot of a play may of itself bring about emotional reaction. It is a frequent experience to feel moved at a play even though it is quite badly acted, for no other reason than that the story of the play is appealing or stirring. Not only the story, but also the music and the settings can initiate as well as supplement the emotional reaction of the audience.

But the most important means of provoking emotional response in the audience is through emotion in the actor. Even in supposedly non-emotional, highly intellectual forms of theatre, like Bertolt Brecht's Epic Theatre, the major part of the theatrical effect is a result of the audience's preoccupation with human feelings. Through the process of empathy, the modern audience identifies with the character to a greater or lesser degree and thereby shares his emotions.

If empathy is so vital an element of theatrical expression, then the tremendous importance of the emotions of the character, and of the actor,

becomes apparent. The question is then one of method. If it is important that the audience perceive the appropriate feelings of the character, then what exactly must the actor do to stimulate this perception? This is of course the classic question which is at the root of the Diderot-Archer controversy and indeed at the root of any discussion of emotion in acting.

One general point of view is that the actor need do no more than outwardly represent the recognizable manifestations of the emotion. John Dietrich states, for example, that all emotions are organically and physiologically alike; that is, that there is little actual difference between the usual spontaneous facial expressions and bodily reactions of one emotion and those of another. Hence there is a need, he continues, for stereotyped methods of expressing emotion. It should be the actor's job to learn the agreed-upon archetypal expressions, each set of which represents another specific emotion.[11]

But for many theatre artists, this does not seem to be enough. The philosopher John Dewey points out that " . . . save nominally, there is no such thing as the emotion of fear, hate, love. The unique, unduplicated character of experienced events and situations impregnates the emotion that is evoked."[12] From this point of view, the actor must function not as an obedient executor of conventional gestures but to a greater or lesser degree as a human being actually undergoing experience onstage and manifesting the resultant emotion.

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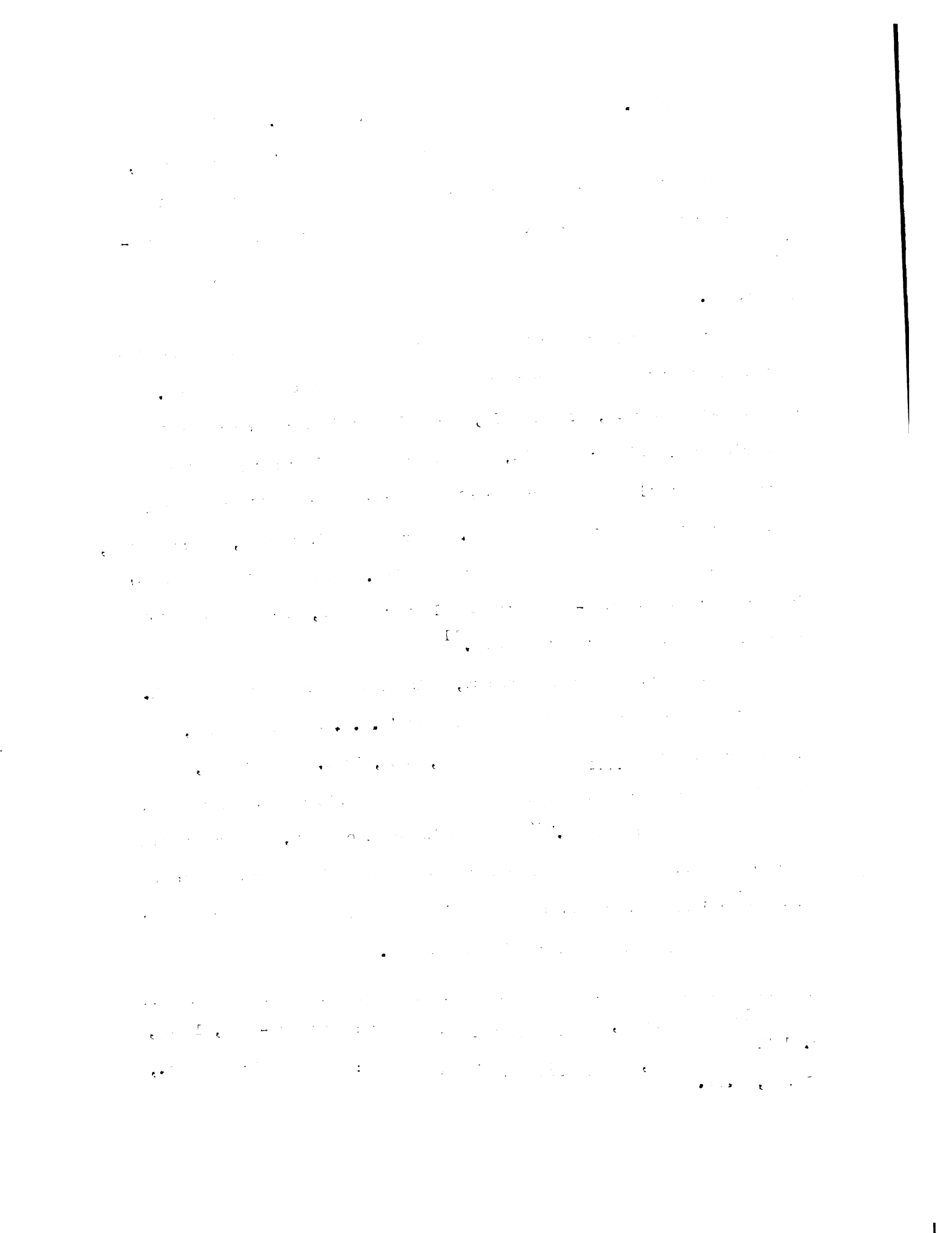
[11] John Dietrich, Play Direction (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1953), p. 162

[12] John Dewey, Art As Experience (New York: Minton Balch and Co., 1934), p.67.



Just as John Dietrich's statement on the expression of emotion through external stereotypes is probably an exaggerated one, the other approach, which suggests that the actor must experience the circumstances of the play, has often been stated in extremes and exaggerations, notably the cliche of "living the part". This type of exaggeration by partisans of both sides of the question probably caused much of the volume of the Diderot-Archer debate. To explain this, Strasberg quotes Felix Vexler:

> Diderot's plea against feeling is in reality directed only against morbid and useless "sensibility", against the show of emotion that bears no relation to the circumstances that provoke it and is barren of pragmatic results.[13]

Strasberg himself explains the matter of "living the part" as follows:

> The actor, however, does not have to create murder by murdering, death by dying, and so on. . He must simply be able to create the mental, physical, sensory, and emotional activities that alone convey the sense of these events. And every human being has either been very ill or has had a nightmare in which he felt he was dead and struggled against it. Everyone has felt the spirit of destruction descend upon him sometimes as response to an object as minute as a mosquito . . . and everyone has at times imbibed something that was "worse than poison." The actor's activity is a result of the imaginative use of his resources for the solution of problems set by the play, and is therefore not simply a question of living the part but one of creating it in terms of experience and imagination.[14]

Between the extremes of stereotyped emotional expression and an exaggerated idea of living the part lies a middle ground in which the actor, whatever his approach or technique, experiences some degree of emotion on stage, with the qualification that a "demand for an actor's discipline, for a technique of emotional experience, is an essential of any acting theory or practice."[15]

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[13] Lee Strasberg, "Introduction", in Diderot and Archer, op. cit., p. xii.

[14] Strasberg in Gassner, p. 150

[15] Strasberg, "Introduction", in Diderot and Archer, loc. cit. .

A disadvantage of a totally intuitive approach to achieving emotional experience on stage is that it would afford the actor little opportunity for careful creative work. It would not enable him to make use of the rehearsal period for careful planning, artistic experimentation or selection, in consultation with the director, of possible alternative emotional qualities to be used in a scene. It is likely, therefore, that actors have always felt a need for something better than an unreliable or strictly intuitive approach for a true "technique of emotional experience". The following parts of this thesis deal with some of the answers found by Stanislavsky and others to satisfy this need.

One general assumption on the problem of emotion in acting is essential to an understanding of Stanislavsky's pedagogical probings and the revisions and qualifications of his followers. It is based on their idea of the nature of the actor's artistry. Summed up briefly, it is that the actor's achievement of stage truth depends on his use of his own resources rather than on his facility at copying the feelings and expressions of others. Joseph Kramm tells of Stanislavsky that "he found over and over again that, consciously or unconsciously, the good actor inquired into himself to learn more of the character he was playing."[16] The raw materials of the actor's art are himself, including all his past perceptions, experiences, and feelings. Therefore, when Stanislavsky confronted himself with the search for a "technique of emotional experience" it was towards the accumulated perceptions of the actor that his attention was turned.

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[16]Joseph Kramm, "Basic Equipment", in The New York Times July 20, 1952, II, p. 1.

B. Stanislavsky's Search For a Technique of Emotional Experience

Constantine Stanislavsky's biographer, David Magarshak, relates[17] that the great Russian teacher of acting did not begin to formulate his "system" until after he had been active in the theatre for about thirty years. Most of the plays whose productions we associate with Stanislavsky and the Moscow Art Theatre had already been staged when Stanislavsky began evolving and maturing his ideas on acting. A turning point in the development of Stanislavsky's thought came during a holiday he spent during 1905-6 in Finland, where he took the time to evaluate his entire career and to assemble all his observations and intuitions on the subject of acting.

> While analysing his past experience on the stage after his Finnish Holiday, Stanislavsky was struck by the fact that in his most successful part of Dr. Stockmann [in Henrik Ibsen's An Enemy of the People] he had unconsciously endowed it with a number of external traits which he had observed in life and kept buried in his memory till the moment came for them to be combined in the delineation of a character with whom he felt a strong affinity. He at once realized the importance of these hidden memories which he embodied in his system first under the name of "affective memories" (he had presumably been reading Th. Ribot's work, Problemes de Psychologie Affective) and later under the name of "emotional memories"[18]

It should be noted that according to this description, Stanislavsky's first thoughts on the use of hidden memories in acting concerned observed external traits. It is implied, but not made clear, in this account that Stanislavsky's thoughts about hidden memories were soon extended to include memories of emotional experiences. It is significant that if the genesis of the theory of emotional memory can be said to have taken place in the mind of Stanislavsky, that it did so out of an acute insight

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[17] David Magarshak, Stanislavsky: A Life (New York: Chanticleer Press, 1951), p. 304.

[18] Ibid.

into an actual creative acting problem. The theory of emotional memory in acting developed from the stage into the textbook and not vice versa. Another of Stanislavsky's own experiences in this regard is worth quoting at length. While rehearsing Chekhov's Three Sisters, he tells us:

> We were all sitting in different corners of the stage, silent and depressed. Two or three electric lamps were burning dimly, the stage was in semi-darkness. I felt that our position was hopeless. My heart was beating fast. Someone began scratching on the bench on which he was sitting with his nails and the sound of it was like the scratching of a mouse. For some reason it made me think of a family hearth; I felt a warm glow all over me; I sensed truth and life and my intuition began to work. It is of course also possible that the sound of the scratching mouse combined with the darkness and the helplessness of my position had been of some significance in my life before that and that I had forgotten about it. Who can say what the ways of the subconscious mind are? Be that as it may, I suddenly felt the scene we were rehearsing . . .[19]

Although Stanislavsky probably made the first important application of the idea of affective recall to the art of acting, no man is completely the originator of a concept, and it is interesting to attempt to reveal those who influenced Stanislavsky's thought on the subject. With Stanislavsky, this is especially difficult since his autobiography[20] shows him as a person who was constantly evaluating and who tried to learn from everyone and every experience. But in regard to the subjects of emotion in acting and affective memory, two undoubtedly important names should be noted: the great Italian actor, Tomasso Salvini, and the aforementioned Theodule Ribot.

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[19] Ibid., p. 221.

[20] Constantine Stanislavsky, My Life in Art, trans. J. Robbins (New York: Meridian Books, 1956).

Stanislavsky has told of being vastly impressed with Salvini, both in performance and in personal talks.[21] While there is no record of the discussions between the two men, one or two things that Salvini has said on the subject of emotion in acting may indicate what sort of influence he had on the admiring Stanislavsky. The words of Salvini, "it is, in a word, the power of feeling that marks the artist; all else is but the mechanical side which is common to all the arts,"[22] might easily be part of the chapter which Stanislavsky was soon to write on emotional memory. The same could be said of Salvini's statement:

> I believe that every actor ought to be, and is moved by the emotion he portrays; that not only must he feel this emotion once or twice, or when he is studying the part, but that he must feel it to a greater or less degree - and to just that degree will he move the hearts of his audience, whenever he plays the part, be it once or a thousand times . . .[23]

Turning from Salvini to another important influence on Stanislavsky's development of the emotional memory concept, the scholar is on clearer ground due to the existence of more written material, notably the actual lengthy writings of Theodule Ribot. In a New York Times article, Joseph Kramm quotes Alexander Koiransky of the University of California on a conversation between Koiransky and Stanislavsky. Koiransky, an artist who was one day sketching Stanislavsky, was discussing a particular acting problem and said:

> Well I don't know whether this will help you or not, but I remember reading a book recently by a French psychologist who said that it was possible for a man in relating certain experiences to relive the original emotion of these experiences.[24]

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[21] Ibid., p. 109.

[22] Tomasso Salvini, "Some Views on Acting" Theatre Workshop (October-December, 1936), p. 73.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Kramm, loc. cit.

Koiransky continued, "Apparently my statement shed light on the matter because they [Stanislavsky's Company] proceeded on that basis to solve the problem."[25]

The French psychologist to whom Koiransky was referring was Theodule Ribot, whose book, Problemes de Psychologie Affective, was probably written in about 1896 or 1897.[26] The book has been translated into English for the Contemporary Science Series, edited by Havelock Ellis, under the title, The Psychology of the Emotions.[27] While this thesis cannot explore in detail the science of affective phenomena in memory and psychology, it may be profitable to examine in detail the pertinent sections of Ribot's work on the subject, with a view toward understanding the applicability of Ribot's conclusions to acting technique.

Theodule Ribot (1839-1916) was a professor of Psychology at the College of France and was editor of the "Revue Philosophique". His book, The Psychology of the Emotions, is valuable for purposes of this study on two levels: as a general definition of the nature and essence of emotions and, secondly, for the specific work done in Chapter Eleven on "The Memory of Feelings". These two levels may be considered one at a time.

At the beginning of his study, Ribot contrasts two opposing points of view as to the actual nature of emotions. He labels these the intellectualist approach and the physiological approach.[28]

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[25] Ibid.

[26] No date is found in the volume, but internal evidence establishes that the date is no earlier than 1896.

[27] Theodule Ribot, The Psychology of the Emotions (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, [?]).

[28] Ibid., p. vi.

The adherents of the former claim that emotion is the result of, and is always accompanied by, an intellectual state or perception. Of this view, Ribot says, "The dominant prejudice which assimilates emotional states to intellectual states, considering them as analagous, or even treating the former as dependent on the latter, can only lead to error,"[29] Thus Ribot would not agree that when we see or hear something of which we know we should be afraid, ~~that~~ it is this intellectual perception of the frightening object which causes in us the emotion which we call fear.

Ribot commits himself to the opposite view, the physiological approach to emotion which "connects all states of feeling with biological conditions and considers them as the direct and immediate expression of the vegetative life."[30] This agrees with the more familiar conclusions of James and Lange, which Ribot summarizes as follows:

> Emotion is only the consciousness of all the organic phenomena (external and internal) which accompany it, and are usually considered as its effects; in other words, that which common sense treats as the effect of emotion is its cause.[31]

Using the same example as above, Ribot would say that when a man sees something which frightens him, his body produces certain physiological responses, more rapid heartbeat, perspiration, a desire to run, etc. ; and that it is the consciousness of these phenomena that is called the emotion of fear.

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[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid., p. vii.

[31] Ibid., p. 93.

Ribot goes on to support this belief that our intellectual perceptions often bring about physiological reactions which are then recognizable as emotions.

> Are there any real proofs that certain perceptions produce, by immediate physical influence, corporeal effects preceding the appearance of emotion? Assuredly. The reading of a poem - the recital of heroic deeds - music - may instantaneously cause a shudder of the whole body, cardiac palpitations, tears. If you scrape one piece of steel against another the whole nervous system is exasperated.[32]

These everyday examples of physiological reactions which precede emotional awareness as such would seem to prove the value of the James-Lange approach to emotion for actors. All that would seem to be necessary is for the actor to perform the physical action which normally results from a given perception in order to cause in himself the physiological manifestations which we call emotion. In other words, he would perceive something dangerous, run quickly away from it, and the act of running plus the other usual physical reactions would in themselves constitute the emotion called fear.

Unfortunately, the nature of most emotional responses is not simple and frequently includes physiological phenomena which cannot be produced at will. Ribot explains:

> If the theory is true, we ought to be able to awaken the emotion itself, by voluntarily producing the manifestations of a special emotion. In the majority of cases, this criterion is inapplicable, for the majority of the organic phenomena manifesting emotion cannot be produced at will.[33]

Thus it may be concluded that the approach to emotion through direct physical action is at best only partially successful. There are nevertheless many instances where it does succeed. "If you remain seated for a long time in a melancholy attitude, you will be overcome by sadness",

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[32] Ibid., p. 96. [33] Ibid.

is one example cited by Ribot[34]. But one cannot by a direct act of will force his body to experience such phenomena as tightness in the pit of the stomach, excessive perspiration, increased blood pressure, or uncontrollable laughter.

In order to continue to follow Stanislavsky's search for a technique of true emotion, it is necessary to turn from Ribot's general observations on the nature of emotions to his more specific work on affective psychology and his chapter on "The Memory of Feelings,"[35] which was first published in October, 1894, as an article in Revue Philosophique. Opening the chapter, Ribot mentions that most of the field of memory has been well explored, but "The question of emotional memory remains nearly, if not quite, untouched. The object of this chapter is to begin its study."[36]

Ribot first establishes that many sensory perceptions and emotional experiences leave memories behind them. "These residua, fixed in an organization, may return into the consciousness; and it is known that images may be revived in two ways - by provocation or spontaneously."[37] Revivability on provocation, or through some external stimulus is a simple enough matter but it is revivability of a spontaneous nature, or through the will, which concerns Ribot. He sums up the basic query of his study as follows:

> But can the images of olfactory and gustatory sensations, of internal sensations, of past pains and pleasures, of emotions formerly experienced, be revived in the consciousness spontaneously or at will, independently of any actual occurrence which might provoke them?[38]

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[34] Ibid.

[35] Chap. 11, pp. 140 ff.

[36] Ribot, op. cit., p. 141.

[37] Ibid. [38] Ibid.

Ribot continues, significantly using an example directly related to artistic expression:

> We know that in some painters, the inner vision is so clear that they can draw a portrait from memory; that, in some musicians, the inner hearing is so perfect that they can ideally hear a symphony just played, recalling all the details of the execution, and the slightest variation in the time. Are there in the order of emotional representations any cases analagous to these? Such is, in its precise form, the question we shall examine in detail. We shall subsequently see that it has a practical bearing, and is not a mere psychological curiosity.[39]

Surely it was this statement of the problem to be considered which must have interested Stanislavsky in Ribot's work. For it can be said that emotion to the actor is what pictorial vision and musical sound are to the painter and composer, and here Ribot was proposing to make clear a way in which past emotion could be drawn upon in the same manner that sights and sounds are remembered.

Ribot's method of study was somewhat remarkable, in view of the infancy of experimental psychology in 1894. He did sixty personal structured interviews, asking a series of questions on sense memory and memory of emotion. He describes his subjects only as "all being adults, of both sexes, and various stages of culture."[40] Before going on to his interpretation of his results, it is interesting to note some of the answers given by his respondents.

On "images of taste and smell"[41], Ribot's prior feeling that there would be little claim to spontaneous or voluntary revivability was proved wrong. Sixty percent of his subjects declared themselves capable of reviving at least some feeling of taste or smell, including twelve percent

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[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid., p. 144.

[41] Ibid., p. 45.

who claimed to be able to revive all, or nearly all, of the feelings at will. In many cases, the olfactory images were accompanied by visual images of the remembered object.

It should be pointed out once more that in these interviews of Ribot, the question under consideration is not the memory in the intellect of the sensation or experience, but its actual revivability, the actual capacity of the subject to re-experience, to whatever degree, the original sensory or emotional perception.

The second classification of experiences used in Ribot's inquiry is composed of what he calls "internal sensations";[42] hunger, thirst, fatigue, and disgust. On the question of the revivability of hunger, Ribot received twenty seven negative answers and only twenty four positive ones. "Thirst is imagined much more frequently and, as it seems, more clearly (Thirty six affirmative to fifteen negative answers)."[43] The word imagination, it should be understood, is used by Ribot, as by Stanislavsky, to mean re-experience, actual recall. On the question of the feeling of fatigue, every one of Ribot's respondents claimed that it could be re-experienced at will, or with slight difficulty in just a few cases. Almost the same response was received on the question of disgust, which only one or two subjects found it difficult or impossible to bring back.

On the third classification, "painful and pleasurable states"[44], Ribot reaches inconclusive and contradictory results since few of his respondents were able to distinguish in their replies between intellectual

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[42] Ibid., p. 147.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid., pp. 148-152

recall of a genre of painful or pleasurable feelings and actual re-experience of a particular instance.

Finally, the fourth category of impressions considered in Ribot's questionnaire is the category of emotions.[45] Ribot distinguishes two types of replies on this score. In the first type, there is an intellectual memory of the experience with only a small amount of emotional coloring sometimes present. "In the affective order these subjects are analagous to those of moderately good visual and auditory memory in the intellectual order."[46]

The second type is made up of those who "recall the circumstances plus the revived condition of feeling. It is these who have the true 'affective memory'; they correspond to those who have good visual or auditory memories."[47] To support this important assertion that a large proportion of people have the ability for affective recall of emotions, Ribot cites several examples.

> Irascible subjects, on hearing the name of their enemy, at the mere thought can revive the rising feelings of anger. /The comic possibilities of this fact of human behavior have been exploited in many a vaudeville or burlesque sketch./ The timid person shudders and turns pale when recalling the danger once incurred. The lover, thinking of his mistress, completely revives the state of love. If we compare the recollection of an extinct passion with the occurrence to the mind of a passion still existing, we shall clearly perceive the difference between intellectual and affective memory, between the mere recollection of circumstances and the recollection of the emotion as such. It is a serious error to assert that only the conditions of the emotion can be revived, not the emotional state itself.[48]

In the next part of the chapter, Ribot begins to interpret his findings.[49]

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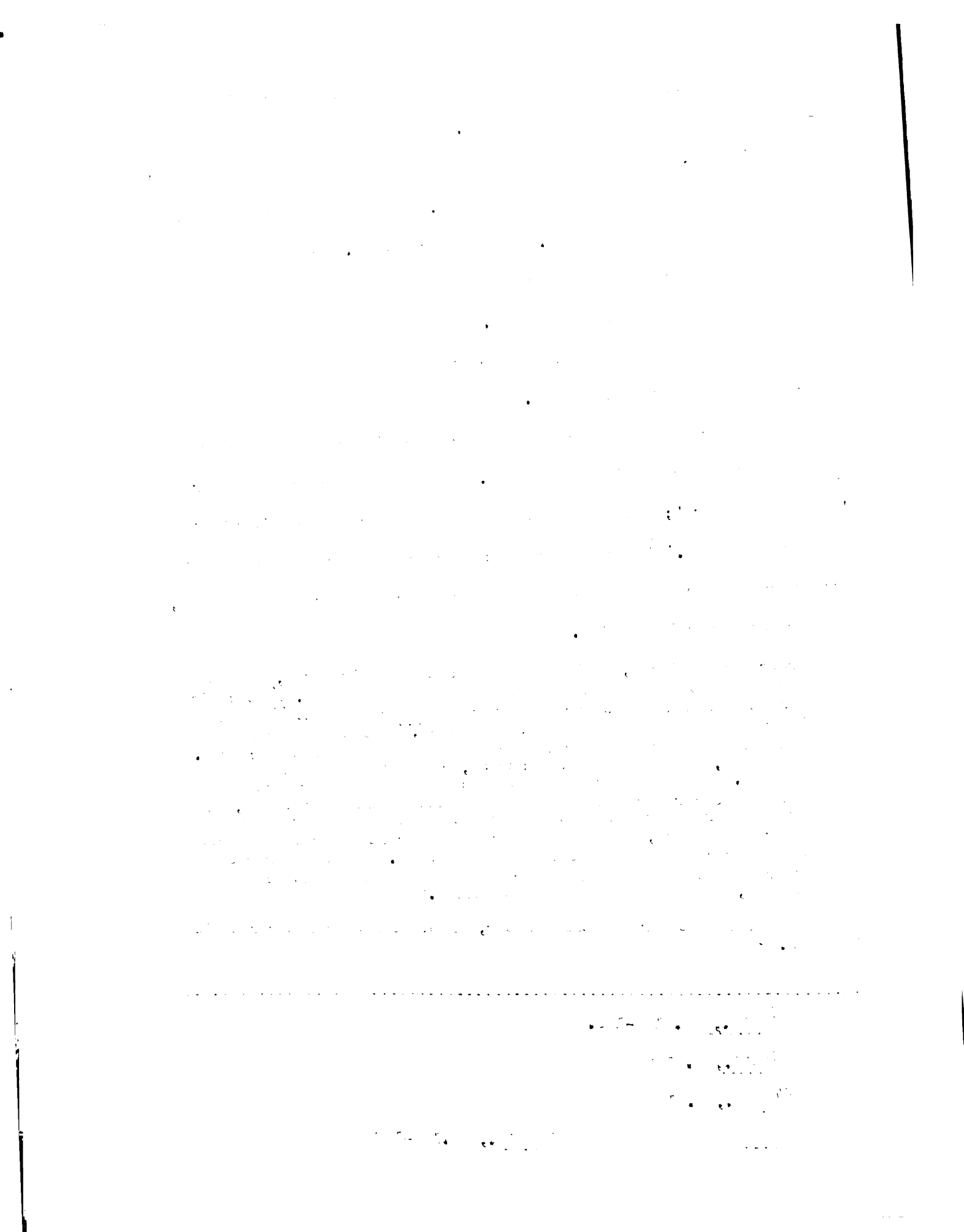
[45] Ibid., pp. 152-156.

[46] Ibid., p. 152

[47] Ibid., p. 153

[48] Ibid

[49] Ibid., pp.156-159



Classifying all possible images, he divides them into two groups: those of direct and easy revivability including, significantly, emotions; and those of difficult revivability, such as tastes and internal sensations.

Then, Ribot asks why there should be such differences and suggests two possible reasons. First, that the "revivability of an impression is in direct ratio to its complexity, and consequently in inverse ratio to its simplicity."[50] In other words, an impression or image which is isolated and not related to any series, or associated with any companion image, intellectual or sensory, is more difficult to recall. This will be significant when, in the next part of this study, the use of affective memory by the actor is considered. The second suggested reason is that the revivability of an impression is in direct ratio to the number of motor elements included in it.[51] Ribot does not continue this line of thought, suggesting that it is only a partial explanation and an unproved generalization.

In the fourth section of the chapter, Ribot poses once more the paramount question: is there such a thing as real revival of impressions? While most psychologists would answer no, that it is only the circumstances of emotion which can be recalled, Ribot feels obliged to state that there definitely is such a thing.[52] He then writes at great length to illustrate the difference between false or abstract emotional memory which recalls only the circumstances of emotion and true or concrete emotional memory which re-experiences the feeling.

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[50] Ibid.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Ibid., P. 160.

Ribot then deals with the greatest potential objection to his view of the extent of actual emotional revivability - the fact that emotional images, unlike auditory or visual images, are "associated with organic and physiological states which make of . . . [them] . . . a real emotion."[53] His reply is that true emotional memory does imply the re-experience of the appropriate organic and physiological states and that anything less is false or abstract emotional memory. He claims again that his findings do show a re-experiencing of physiological phenomena.

> There are all possible degrees of transition from the simple bald representation of the words pleasure or pain, love or fear, to the acute, fully and entirely felt representation of these states. In a crowd of people taken at random, one might . . . determine all the intermediate degrees, from the abstract to the concrete. When the poet says that "Sadness departs upon the wings of Time," his meaning, in psychological language is that the affective memory is gradually transformed into an intellectual memory.[54]

Ribot, then, does not consider the human emotional apparatus as a mechanical thing guaranteed to produce true affective memory of each and every emotional experience at will. The affective qualities of recall tend to fade with time, and indeed, this is probably very fortunate, or people would spend most of their time in agonizing and repetitious remembering of physiological reactions, whereas in many places an intellectual image serves their everyday purposes much more conveniently.

But this whole concept poses even more fascinating questions to be considered in applying these ideas to the art of acting. Are the affective qualities of a recollection which are replaced in time by intellectual remembrances really lost for good or can they be revived by the use of the proper stimuli?

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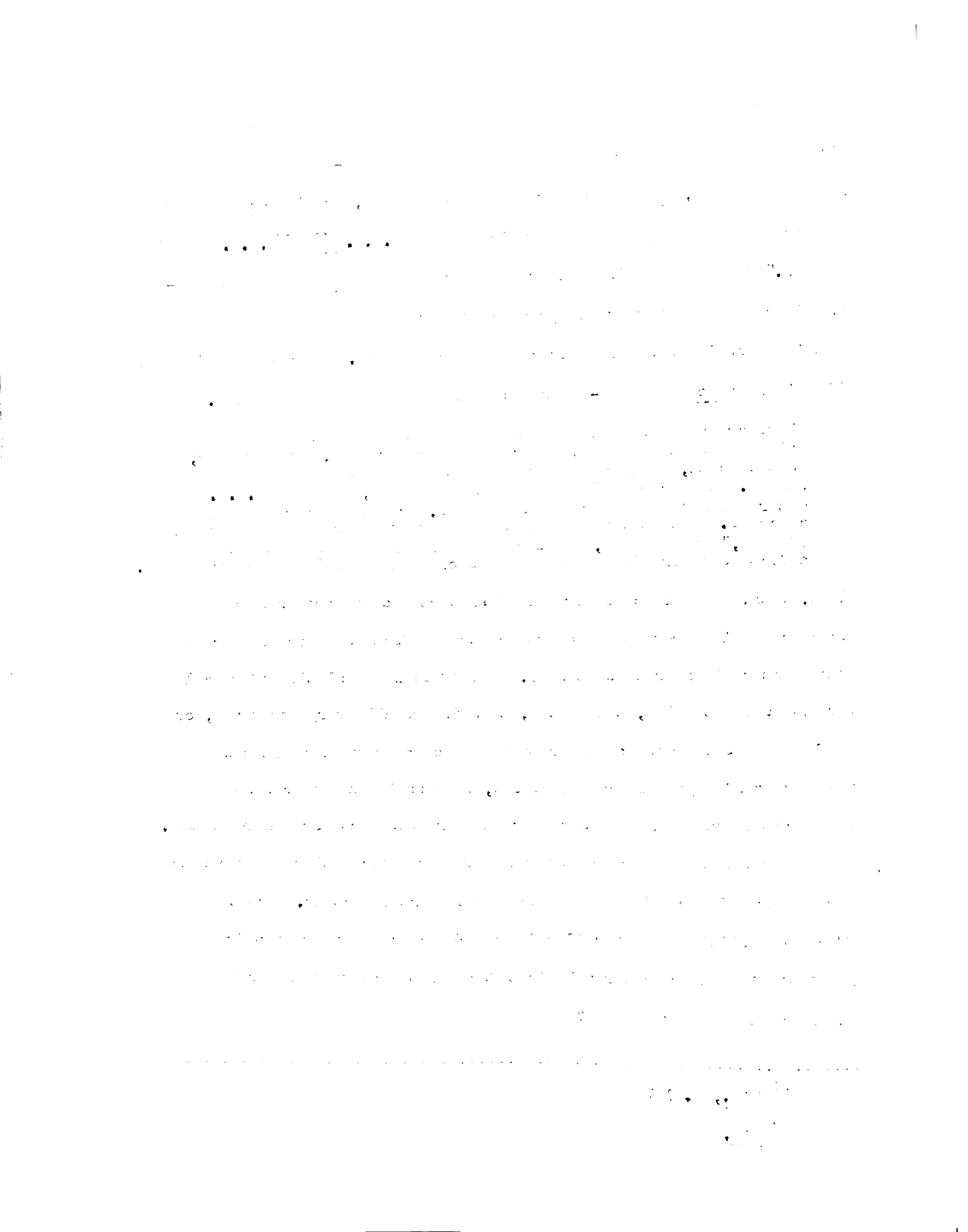
[53] Ibid., p. 167

[54] Ibid.



Ribot goes on to point out that "certain artists, in order to get rid of the memory of a sorrow or passion, have fixed it in a work of art."[55] Does that mean that an affective memory, once used by an actor in a performance or in building a part during rehearsal, is forever intellectualized and can never again be re-experienced?

Questions like these must certainly have tantalized Stanislavsky as he read Ribot. Two years after its original publication as a periodical article, Ribot's essay was included as a chapter in Psychology of the Emotions. In a footnote, Ribot answers several small criticisms which had been published in the interval and restates his conclusion succinctly:

> 1. The emotional memory is nil in the majority of people.
>
> 2. In others, there is a half intellectual, half emotional memory, i. e., the emotional elements are only revived partially and with difficulty, by the help of the intellectual states associated with them.
>
> 3. Others and these the least numerous, have a true - i. e., complete - emotional memory; the intellectual element being only a means of revival which is rapidly effaced.[56]

Stanislavsky took from Ribot not a discovery of a new facet of human behavior but an explanation of the processes which caused certain frequent phenomena. Stanislavsky, whose lifetime of theatre experience had brought him to a search for a technique of true emotion, saw that these phenomena, the re-experiencing of past emotion, constituted just what he was looking for, true emotion as opposed to stereotyped or imitative representations of emotion. He further suspected that the process of affective recall, often in everyday life a spontaneous or accidental occurrence, could be made subject to the disciplined will and could therefore

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[55] Ibid., pp. 163-164

[56] Ibid., footnote, p. 171.

be used as a tool of the artist, in this case the actor -- the artist dealing most directly in human emotional experience.

Stanislavsky not only accepted the applicability of affective phenomena to the technique of acting, he was indeed convinced of the paramount importance of memory to the actor. In An Actor Prepares, the chapter on "Emotion Memory" is one of the longest and most important; and in it he goes as far as saying that "Our whole creative experiences are vivid and full in direct proportion to the power, keenness and exactness of our memory."[57] Norris Houghton, in his survey of the Russian theatre,[58] characterizes the Moscow Art Theatre of Stanislavsky as one whose tradition stresses the individuality of the actor. Stanislavsky's co-director, Vladimir Nemirovitch-Dantchenko, shows how much this idea of the actor's individuality was connected with the use of emotional memory techniques by saying, "For us the individuality of the actor is the immense region of his imagination, his heredity, all that manifests itself beyond his consciousness in a moment of aberration."[59]

The technical substance of Stanislavsky's chapter on "Emotion Memory" will be discussed in the ensuing section, which will deal with the actual workings of the process of emotional memory. But it is worthwhile at this point in our brief historical sketch to make a few observations about Stanislavsky's formulation of the acting concept of emotional memory.

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[57]Stanislavsky, An Actor Prepares, p. 175

[58]Houghton, op. cit., p. 193.

[59]Vladimir Nemirovitch-Dantchenko, My Life in the Russian Theatre, trans. John Cournos (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1936), p. 159

Stanislavsky accepted the observation of Ribot that the quality of emotional memory was something that varied from individual to individual, like any other mental ability or tendency. The fictional director Tortsov in An Actor Prepares spends time testing his pupils and establishing criteria for exceptional emotional memory, good emotional memory, and dormant emotional memory.[60] Thus, unlike other elements of Stanislavsky's system such as concentration, relaxation, and the use of units and objectives, emotional memory was not something which could be demanded at once from the student actor but was an element which had to be tested, evaluated, and more than all the others, coaxed out and trained in the student actor.

In taking Ribot's findings about the phenomena of affective recall and applying them to the problems and special needs of the actor, Stanislavsky made two general points which are of great significance since they are at the core of his entire approach to the art of acting and are the beginnings of two ideas which are main pillars of what came to be known as Stanislavsky's "method". They may be considered one at a time.

Stanislavsky was interested in the idea that through emotional memory an actor could have something of an artistic storehouse, a reserve which could be drawn upon at will. In an article written for the fourteenth edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, he described emotional memory as a "practical method for the artistic education of the actor."[61]

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[60] Stanislavsky, An Actor Prepares, pp. 157-158.

[61] Constantine Stanislavsky, "Direction and Acting," Encyclopaedia Britannica, 14th ed. (1947), Vol. 22. 35-38.

In the same article, he compared the actor's storehouse of affective impressions with the composer's musical scale or the artist's spectrum of colors, and he seemed intrigued by the possibilities of creating infinite new combinations of emotional tones and colors. In An Actor Prepares, he wrote:

> Can you picture to yourself what our emotion memory is really like? Imagine a number of houses, with many rooms in each house, in each room innumerable cupboards, shelves, boxes, and somewhere in one of them a tiny bead. . . . That is what it is like in the archives of your memory. It has all those divisions and sub-divisions. Some are more accessible than others.[62]

Going forward from this notion of the emotion memory as an artistic storehouse, Stanislavsky discusses how the actor must use and draw upon the stores. In so doing, he arrives at a major theorem of his system.

> Another reason why you should cherish those repeated emotions is that an artist does not build his role out of the first thing at hand. He chooses very carefully from among his memories and culls out of his living experiences the ones that are most enticing. He weaves the soul of the person he is to portray out of emotions that are dearer to him than his everyday sensations. Can you imagine a more fertile field for inspiration? An artist takes the best that is in him and carries it over on the stage. The form will vary, according to the necessities of the play, but the human emotions of an artist will remain alive, and they cannot be replaced by anything else.[63]

Next, Stanislavsky has the fictional student, Grisha, ask the inevitable question confronting the student of Stanislavsky's approach to acting. Must the actor use his own feelings, the same old ones, on every occasion, no matter what part he is playing? Stanislavsky's answer deserves lengthy quotation:

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[62] Stanislavsky, An Actor Prepares, p. 164.

[63] Ibid., pp. 166-167.

> What else can he do? Do you expect an actor to invent all sorts of new sensations, or even a new soul, for every part he plays? How many souls would he be obliged to house? On the other hand, can he tear out his own soul, and replace it by one he has rented, as being more suitable to a certain part? Where can he get one? You can borrow clothing, a watch, things of all sorts, but you cannot take feelings away from another person. . . . You can understand a part, sympathize with the person portrayed, and put yourself in his place, so that you will act as he would. That will arouse feelings in the actor that are analagous to those required for the part . . .
>
> Never lose yourself on the stage. Always act in your own person, as an artist. You can never get away from yourself. The moment you lose yourself on the stage marks the departure from truly living your part and the beginning of exaggerated false acting. Therefore, no matter how much you act, you should never allow yourself any exception to the rule of using your own feelings. To break that rule is the equivalent of killing the person you are portraying, because you deprive him of a palpitating, living, human soul, which is the real source of life for the part. Always and forever, when you are on the stage, you must play yourself. But it will be in an infinite variety of combinations of objectives and given circumstances which you have prepared for your part and which have been smelted in the furnace of your emotion memory. This is the best and only true material for inner creativeness. Use it and do not rely on drawing from any other sources.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> The roles for which you haven't the appropriate feelings are those you will never play well, they will be excluded from your repertory.[64] /Italics in the original/

A basic premise of Stanislavsky's system is that the actor must at all times make use of his own analagous feelings, achieved through affective recall, rather than imitated or stereotyped representations of feelings. The logical steps leading to this premise may be recapitulated. It has been shown that before reading Ribot, Stanislavsky felt the need for an actor to experience something as he performed his part. From Ribot he learned that there existed a means whereby the actor's impressions could be re-experienced. The third step was Stanislavsky's common sense realization that this accumulated and stored experience

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[64] Ibid.

was a potentially richer source for creative work than any systematized observation whose purpose was imitative. This was coupled with his realization that under proper discipline and technique, the feelings portrayed organically through emotional recall were truer, stronger, more colorful, and hence theatrically more effective than imitative feelings ever could be. The final step in the evolution of this concept was the pedagogical genius of Stanislavsky and many of his followers in devising techniques and exercises which were necessary to put the theory into practice.

The second important element of the Stanislavskian approach to acting which derived from his work with affective memory has to do with the process of the actor's work. Briefly stated, it is that to achieve results in acting, the actor must not attempt to begin with results, that he must follow a process from its beginning to its eventual results. Stanislavsky knew from Ribot's research and formulations that emotions could not be re-experienced just by trying to remember what they felt like, that the process of affective recall had to be set in motion to achieve the eventual result. The basis of this observation was no arbitrary pedagogical decision on Stanislavsky's part, but an acknowledgement that human mental and physiological processes worked in a certain way.

The exact nature of the process of emotional memory is discussed in Section III, but it may be observed at this point that from the development of emotional memory emerged another of the cardinal points of Stanislavsky's system:

> Never begin with results. They will appear in time as the logical outcome of what has come before . . . beginning with results is like trying to raise flowers without the cooperation of nature, and you cannot do that unless you are willing to be satisfied with artificial blossoms.[65]

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[65] Ibid., p. 175.

An overall study of Stanislavsky's ideas on acting and the training of the actor would probably show that this emphasis on eventual results rather than a directly achieved finished product is common to all phases of his system.

## C. The Development of the Theory of Emotional Memory Since Stanislavsky

It is at this point in the historical sketch of the development of the idea of emotional memory that the scholar's job is most difficult because of the lack of extensive written records. The teachers and directors, disciples and critics who followed Stanislavsky were for the most part practitioners rather than theoreticians and almost none of them has taken the time to write a coherent treatise on his own revisions, amplifications, and interpretations of emotional memory. What are available are a number of tangential references to the subject in the memoirs, textbooks, and technical writings of these theatre artists. From these references, however, certain insights may be derived into the evolution of the concept of emotional memory from Stanislavsky's teachings to its use in the American theatre of today.

American theatre students tend to imagine that the words of Stanislavsky, the best known Russian acting theorist, must immediately have been accepted as truth and practiced ever after in the Russian theatre. But this was hardly the case, Harold Clurman tells us: "No, the Stanislavsky system met with more skepticism and criticism amongst Russians than will ever greet it here and with almost as much ignorance!"[66]

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[66] Harold Clurman, "Founders of the Modern Theatre" Theatre Workshop (January-March, 1937), p. 78.

In the truest sense of the word, Stanislavsky had really no disciples; many of his important students went off on theatrical explorations of their own and had little concern for such details as Stanislavsky's system as emotional memory. But Stanislavsky's close pupil, Eugene Vakhtangov, whose theatrical philosophy was a compromise between excessive naturalism and the extreme theatricalism of Stanislavsky's other great pupil, Meyerhold, was concerned with continuing the pedagogical exploration of Stanislavsky's ideas.

In an article entitled "The School of Intimate Experience",[67] which is actually an excerpt from his diary, Vakhtangov discusses the idea of emotional memory, repeating much of Stanislavsky's reasoning and many of his illustrations, and significantly stressing the paradox that Stanislavsky discovered and which forms the basis for most modern training in emotional memory. The paradox is that while emotional memory is no more than a tool designed to enable the actor to achieve the desired emotional expression on stage, the attention of the actor must never be on emotion. In other words, Vakhtangov stressed the indirect nature of emotional memory technique. "The actor should not be concerned about his feeling during a play, it will come of itself . . . Don't try to experience, don't make feelings to order, forget about them altogether."[68] It is through this emphasis, the direction of the actor's attention to elements that will produce emotion rather than to emotion itself, that most modern training in emotional memory is based. It is interesting to

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[67]Eugene Vakhtangov, "Preparing for the Role", in Toby Cole (ed.) op. cit., pp. 117 ff.

[68]Ibid., p. 117.

contrast this admonition "not to be concerned about feeling" with the now familiar image of the misinterpreting so-called Stanislavsky-trained actor whose sole lament is "I don't feel it".

Another Russian, Michael Chekhov, who was an actor in the Moscow Art Theatre's First Studio and later a teacher of great influence at Dartington Hall in England and in America, tended to stress the physical aspect of emotional memory work. "It is a known fact that the human body and psychology influence each other and are in constant interplay,"[69] he said. The most original contribution of his book, To The Actor, is his concept of the psychological gesture which suggests that the imagination can be stimulated and the process of recall expedited through exercises and improvisations built around physical movement.

The transplantation to America of Stanislavsky's ideas on acting and therefore of emotional memory in acting was largely accomplished by two other Moscow Art Theatre students who became influential American teachers, Richard Boleslavsky and Maria Ouspenskaya. Most contemporary teachers whose curriculum includes the technique of emotional memory are students, either first or second hand, of Boleslavsky or Ouspenskaya. Boleslavsky's fragmentary textbook, Acting, the First Six Lessons,[70] contains some interesting observations about emotional memory.

Boleslavsky tries to show that something resembling emotional memory has always been part of the good actor's craft. "Practically every good actor does it unconsciously when he acts well, and is happy about it."[71]

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[69]Michael Chekhov, To The Actor (New York: Harper and Bros., 1951), p. 1.

[70]Richard Boleslavsky, Acting: The First Six Lessons (New York: Theatre Arts, Inc., 1933).

[71]Ibid., p. 43

In Lesson Two, entitled "Memory of Emotion", Boleslavsky warns that "the subject is delicate"[72] but "you will know when you get it. You will feel the warmth of it and the satisfaction". What concerns Boleslavsky most is the pedagogical implementation of the concept of emotional memory, rather than an explanation of new theoretical frontiers. He does not make any really new discoveries about the potentialities or usefulness of emotional memory, but he turns his attention to the actor's or student-actor's need to train himself properly as an instrument of emotional recall. In the amusing dialogue form in which his book is written, he tells his student:

> You will have to organize and synchronize the self that is within you . . . But you will have to use your imagination, you can never tell where you will find the thing you are after. . . keep those memories in order. You can never tell when you will need them, but they are your only friends and teachers in your craft. They are your only paints and brushes.[73]

It is quite unfortunate that no more detailed records were made of Boleslavsky's classroom and rehearsal use of emotional memory. For among his students in the late nineteen twenties and early thirties were several actors who were later to form the Group Theatre, the theatrical organization which gave the technique of emotional memoryits most extensive exploration and experimentation. Possibly the most important of these students was Lee Strasberg, who became the chief artistic mentor of the Group Theatre and the foremost exponent of the use of sensory and affective work for actors in America.

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[72] Ibid., p. 42.

[73] Ibid., p. 47

It is equally unfortunate that no true artistic diary was ever kept during the summers in which the Group Theatre accomplished the most complete application of Stanislavsky's ideas to acting which had taken place in America up to that time. Scholars are forced to be content with Harold Clurman's memoir of the Group Theatre, The Fervent Years,[74] which is really a story about people and which devotes all too little space to discussing the artistic principles which these people were occupied in using and testing.

On two or three occasions during its life, the Group Theatre spent summers in the country which were devoted to rehearsals and to training classes, conducted mostly by Strasberg, in which the Stanislavsky system as it was then understood (An Actor Prepares had not yet been published in English) was introduced to the actors.

Clurman writes:

> The second, and most striking feature of the system, as we knew it then, was what Strasberg called an "exercise" - short for "an exercise in affective memory." "Affective memory" may be defined as the "memory of emotion" which, historically speaking, is the root discovery that led Stanislavsky to the elaboration of his system.[75]

The explanation of the technique of emotional memory given in Clurman's book is no more than a simplified layman's version of what has already been described here. What is more interesting is its effect on actors and on their work.

> It is necessary to say at once that, besides the hilarious tales that were later recounted concerning these "exercises" - it was reported, for instance, that our actors prayed before going on stage - they can and did provoke much serious theoretical discussion.[76]

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[74] Harold Clurman, The Fervent Years (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945).

[75] Ibid., p. 44.

[76] Ibid.

The fact that these discussions were provoked is of great importance to the development of the concept of emotional memory, since much of the present American training in the technique has its roots in the Group Theatre.

One more historical event remains to be noted to complete the historical sketch and it, too, has its roots in the Group Theatre. Like many new concepts or techniques falling on fertile soil, the idea of emotional memory was at first greeted with overwhelming enthusiasm as the most important key to the art of acting. Clurman describes it:

> The first effect on the actors was that of a miracle . . . Here at last was a key to that elusive ingredient of the stage, true emotion. And Strasberg was a fanatic on the subject of true emotion. Everything was secondary to it. He sought it with the patience of an inquisitor, he was outraged by trick substitutes, and when he had succeeded in stimulating it, he husbanded it, fed it, and protected it. Here was something new to most of the actors, something basic, something almost holy. It was a revelation in the theatre; and Strasberg was its prophet.[77]

But despite the persistence of quasi-religious cultist students of acting, so humorously described by Professor Schnitzler in his article "Truth or Consequences: Stanislavsky Misinterpreted",[78] this attitude toward the technique of emotional memory did not remain unmodified for long.

By the following summer of the Group Theatre's work, Clurman tells us, the enthusiasm had been turned to other aspects of the system: "During the first summer, truth of emotion had been emphasized; now it was theatricality and clarity of interpretation."[79] Thus, even then, the Group Theatre members had realized that emotional memory, while it may well have

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[77] Ibid., pp. 44-45

[78] Henry Schnitzler, "Truth or Consequences: Stanislavsky Misinterpreted" The Quarterly Journal of Speech, (April, 1954).

[79] Clurman, The Fervent Years, p. 87.

been the "root discovery" of Stanislavsky's system, was not an acting method in itself, but one element of an acting method. This realization was confirmed in 1936, through contact with none other than Stanislavsky himself. Stella Adler, a Group Theatre actress and Clurman's wife, had been in Paris and there had met Stanislavsky who was convalescing. She spent several weeks in conversation with the Russian director and her report when she arrived home was quite interesting to her colleagues in the Group.

> The outstanding artistic feature of the summer was the influence of Stella Adler's report on her work with Stanislavsky. To put it bluntly, she had discovered that our use of the Stanislavsky system had been incorrect. An undue emphasis on the "exercise" of affective memory had warped our work with the actor.[80]

Thus, in the later work of the Group Theatre, and undoubtedly in the teaching of those who came out of the Group, the technique of emotional memory is seen in better perspective than when it first overwhelmed the actors with its newness.

It would be misleading if the impression were left that affective memory was the only means of achieving emotion employed by Stanislavsky-trained actors. Although it is beyond the scope of this thesis to deal with alternative approaches to the problem of emotion, it should be mentioned that many modern teachers stress the attainment of emotional experience through creative use of the present imaginative circumstances rather than the conscious use of accumulated past experiences.

Among the many teachers and schools, professional and academic, whose training for the actor is fundamentally based on Stanislavsky's ideas,

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[80] Ibid., p. 139

two major lines of emphasis can be discerned today. In the first, exemplified perhaps best by Lee Strasberg and his Actor's Studio, great stress is still put on sensory and affective awareness and technique, with the belief that work in these areas is the most profitable and effective means for the training of actors and the accomplishment of interesting work on roles. In the second school of thought, exemplified by Sanford Meisner's Neighborhood Playhouse and its graduates who have gone on to teach, there is the feeling that Stanislavsky's work on the memory of emotion is by no means his major contribution to the art of acting and that at best it is a minor, often curiously fascinating, not-always-feasible auxiliary aid for the actor. These teachers certainly do not disown Stanislavsky's work in this field, but they feel that much more important to the actor are such Stanislavskian chapters as the ones in An Actor Prepares on "Action" and "Units and Objectives". [81]

To sum up, it can be said that the technique of emotional memory is something that by now is widely taught and widely practiced in the American theatre. The reader's attention must turn next to the workings of the technique as it is generally understood and practiced, its varying versions, its supposed foundations, and the results it effects.

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[81] Interview with David Pressman, faculty member of the Neighborhood Playhouse and Professor of Speech, Boston University, October 1, 1957.

## III. THE PROCESS OF EMOTIONAL MEMORY

### A. The Psychological Foundation and the Sensory Route

> Life is the storehouse from which the theatre draws its nourishment . . . Even though forgotten, an experience may lie dormant in his memory. All it needs is some other experience to restore it to consciousness.[82]

Thus Aristide D'Angelo, teacher of acting at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts, has summed up the relationship between the two essential elements of the process of emotional memory: the original emotion whose recall is desired and the sensory elements associated with the original emotion which are used to bring about the phenomena of affective recall.

In other words, it soon becomes apparent to the student of acting that any worthwhile emotional recall, especially the actual re-experiencing of past emotions, is not achieved simply by trying to remember the past feelings, but by remembering and recreating the sensory perceptions, sights, sounds, smells, etc., that were associated with the original experience. These specific sensory re-creations will in turn provoke the re-experiencing of the associated emotion. John Dewey says that "emotions are attached to events and objects in their movement . . . in order to become emotions, they must become parts of an inclusive and enduring situation . . ."[83]

Although most actors who employ the technique of emotional memory find it effective to approach emotions through these events and objects, there are perhaps some exceptions. Michael Chekhov asserts, "Some people can do this simply by remembering a feeling. They think how angry they

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[83] John Dewey, op. cit., p. 42

were at a certain time, and a real anger begins to stir in them at the recollection."[84] But then Chekhov goes on to point out the second and, according to most writers, much more likely route to emotional memory:

> It can also be done by concentrating upon the physical details and incidental circumstances which surround a moment of high feeling, until by association, the feeling itself is recreated. Often a mood can be induced by simply stimulating through the memory sensory effects. A sense of lazy well-being, for instance, might be achieved in this way through a sense memory of sunshine sinking in through one's pores.[85]

Why, the student may wonder, has experience shown that the sensory route to emotional recall is more effective than the direct route? An answer to this is provided by recalling Ribot's observation that in one important respect the re-experiencing of emotion differed radically from the re-experiencing of simpler forms of remembered impressions. In emotional memory, he said, there was the added factor of organic sensations which were part of the memory but which were not subject to the will.

In more specific terms, an actor can will himself to re-experience a sound or a melody. Through concentrated effort, he can also see again the visual images stored in his memory, which is exactly what he does when he memorizes the appearance of a printed page. But it is much more difficult, if not usually impossible, to will a more rapid heartbeat or a tightness in the pit of the stomach or excessive perspiration. And since these phenomena are acknowledged to be the actual constituent elements of what is called emotion, the absence of these phenomena precludes the achievement of anything that could be called true emotional recall.[86]

If the act of his will alone will not produce the effect that he desires, the actor must try what director Joshua Logan defines as

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[84]Michael Chekhov, "Stanislavsky's Method of Acting", in New Theatre, Vol. 1, no. 11, (December, 1934), p. 11.

[85]Ibid.

[86]Ribot, op. cit., p. 93

attempting to "set traps for the subconscious".[87] That is, he must do something which will induce the re-appearance of the complete emotion, including the organic sensations unattainable by the will. The work of Ribot, Stanislavsky, and the teachers who have followed suggests that the trap for the subconscious consists of the sensory impressions which were present at the time of the emotional experience and which can either be supplied to the actor or recalled by the actor.

Some examples of this sensory route to emotional memory are not really very complicated. Suppose that at a time of overwhelming grief, a funeral, the dominant sensory impression made on the actor was the smell of the funeral wreaths and flowers. At some later time, the actor may once again chance to encounter that particular smell and find himself, perhaps to his surprise, experiencing to some extent the associated feeling of grief. Having recognized this particular emotional memory with its sensory association, the actor can make use of it in his work either by actually having a wreath of flowers on stage, or if this is inconsistent with the nature or requirements of the play or the director, by recalling the smell and thereby bringing about a newly felt grief, complete with the rush of tears and other organic reactions that he could not have achieved by willing them.

Almost everyone can undoubtedly recall similar examples of sensory impressions bringing on a rush of feeling. The nostalgia experienced upon returning to a once significant locale is perhaps no more than a

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[87] Joshua Logan, "Introduction", in Constantine Stanislavsky, Building a Character, trans. Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1949), p. xix.

series of re-experiencings of past feelings brought about by suddenly returning to contact with the sights, sounds, and smells of the place. To quote John Dewey:

> Moments and places, despite physical limitation and narrow localization are charged with accumulations of long-gathering energy. A return to a scene of childhood that was left long years before floods the spot with a release of pent-up memories and hopes.[88]

But not always does the process take place so simply and conveniently for the actor. In the midst of a moment of great emotion, the actor is no more likely than the layman to whip out a notebook and meticulously record the impressions of his five senses. And to make things more difficult, there is often no single overwhelming sensory impression which, like the funeral flowers, is enough to do the job by itself. People more often do not know that there is a subconscious connection between an emotion they have felt and some sensory impression they have perceived.

In such instances, the actor must employ an exercise such as used in the Group Theatre, in order to discover the sensory keys to some of his own past emotional experiences. The basic nature of such an exercise is simple enough. Suppose that an actor is having trouble with a scene in which he should feel acute jealousy. He can remember intellectually a time in his childhood when he envied his little brother, but he cannot directly will himself to re-experience that envy. In a typical exercise, he would sit down and try to recall the incident in

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[88] John Dewey, op. cit., p. 24

which he felt envy. He might do this wholly to himself or he might actually tell the teacher or class about the incident. Strasberg gives an important piece of advice to the actor retelling the experience: "Just try and remember all the sensory phenomena. . . Don't give a journalistic account."[89] What is important is not that the student actor narrate the event to the class but that he actually survey his memory for the sensory details of the event: the exciting gift his brother had received which made him envious, the texture of the pretty wrapping paper, the sounds and smells of the room, etc., etc., Strasberg continues:

> Make no effort to recapture the emotion itself, but only the object and the event that caused it. If this is followed out, you will find that without any effort on your part, the emotion associated with the particular experience will come back to you and take possession of you.[90]

From such an exercise or series of exercises, the actor establishes for himself a greater knowledge of the sensory approaches to his own past feelings, and deepens the emotional responses of his accidental affective experiences. From this point of view, the training of the actor should include affective memory exercises for most emotional qualities that he is likely to be called upon to recreate on stage.

> Thus little by little the actor is able to bring his own experience and substitute it in the scenes where he needs sudden or strong emotional expression. After a while, the actor becomes so conditioned that he can command himself to experience almost any emotion. He has created new conditioned reflexes for himself. The actor is now able to control his mental, physical, and sensory and emotional behavior. He can even mix them, performing physically an act that looks gay, while he can create within himself the mood

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[89] Strasberg in Gassner, p. 155.

[90] Ibid., p. 156.

of pain or suffering. This phase of the work should be done only with qualified supervision, for the results obtained depend on an understanding of the exact mechanism.[91]

The phrase, "his own experiences", does not mean to imply that the feelings revived and re-experienced by the actor are only those which he has specifically undergone. In the same way, the actor can often make use of vicarious experience or the experience of other people with whom he has been in contact. Naturally, this will be more difficult and less certain of immediate results, but it is nonetheless a valuable resource of the actor. As Magarshak puts it, the actor must in this case be able to transform sympathy into subjective feeling.[92] Stanislavsky even took pains to point out that:

> We must not overlook the question of the quantity of your reserves in this respect. You must remember that you must constantly be adding to your store. For this purpose you draw, of course, principally upon your own impressions, feelings, and experiences. You also acquire material from life around you, real and imaginary, from reminiscenes, books, art, science, knowledge of all kinds, from journeys, museums and above all from communication with other human beings.[93]

It is not too much to expect, Stanislavsky felt, that the actor will often have little or no difficulty transforming sympathetic reaction to someone else's experience into actually equivalent subjective feelings. "That is exactly what happens to us when we are working on a role . . . <u>often this transformation from human sympathy into the real feelings of the person in the part occurs spontaneously</u>".[94]

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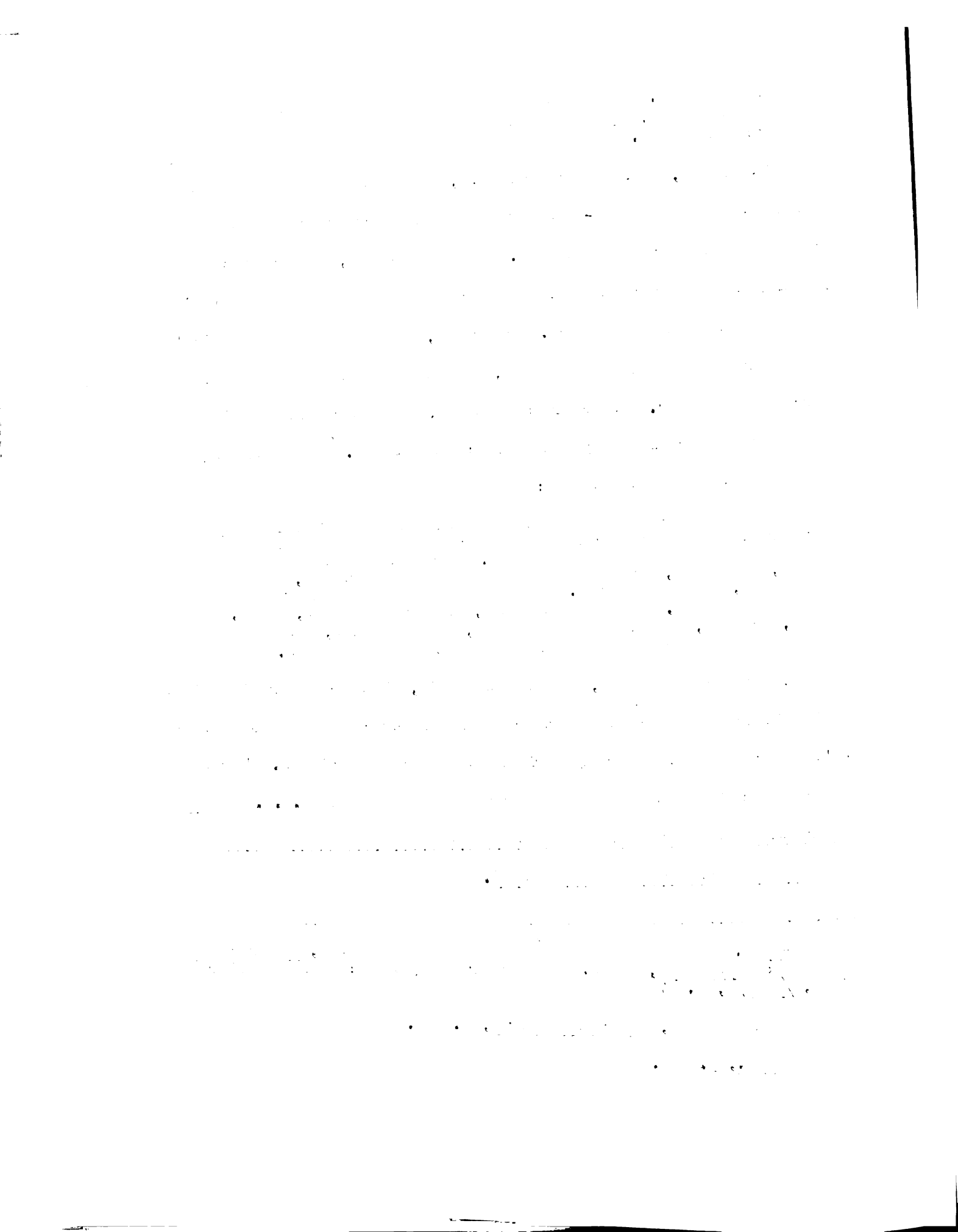
[91]Ibid. [92]Konstantin Stanislavsky, <u>Stanislavsky on the Art of the Stage</u>, trans. David Magarshak (London:Faber and Faber Limited, /1950/), p. 57

[93]Stanislavsky, <u>An Actor Prepares</u>, p. 180.

[94]<u>Ibid.</u>, p. 178.



In using the sensory-impression route to achieve the desired emotional memory, there are undoubtedly differences between actors as to which sensory impressions are the most workable, and the question must probably be left as one of personal taste and inclination. Stanislavsky himself preferred to rely heavily on sight and sound, and said, "Although our senses of smell, taste, and touch are useful, and even sometimes important, in our art their role is merely auxiliary".[95] To other individual artists, on the other hand, the senses of smell and taste may be those most capable of producing vividly retained images. In one of the few American textbooks dealing with emotional memory, Modern Acting: A Manual,[96] the authors lay great stress on kinesthetic sensations and the sense of touch.

B. The Place of Emotional Memory in the Actor's Work

Having established the basic workings of emotional memory through associated sensory impressions, more light may be shed on its process by considering its use and value in the three stages of the actor's work: training, rehearsal, and performance. In so doing, some of the criticism of emotional memory which will be discussed subsequently may be anticipated.

As Henry Schnitzler has so cogently pointed out,[97] much of the confusion and misunderstanding surrounding the interpretation of Stanislavsky's ideas is a result of not realizing that the writings of Stanislavsky pertain mostly to training and not to rehearsal or performance. The title

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[95] Ibid., p. 160.

[96] Sophie Rosenstein, Larrae A. Haydon, Wilbur Sparrow, Modern Acting: A Manual (New York: Samuel French, 1944), p. 5

[97] Schnitzler, op. cit.

of the Russian director's first and most influential text is An Actor Prepares and not "An Actor Rehearses" or "An Actor Performs", Schnitzler reminds us. Harmful confusion has been caused both by Stanislavsky's adherents and his critics by thoughtlessly transposing classroom exercises into stage practices. Thus an actor who brings a public performance to a dead stop for a full minute while he performs an uncommunicative emotional memory exercise is certainly ineffective and has missed the point.

Since the conditions of performance and usually those of rehearsals are rigidly limited in regard to time, the careful, exploratory, repetitive work necessary for the use of emotional recall as an acting technique must be done as part of the actor's training in the classroom with qualified supervision, or in working alone. The actor must begin to explore his own backgrounds of emotional experience in an attempt to discover emotionally full events and incidents. This is complicated work; as Lee Strasberg points out, some incidents from the past are only dimly remembered now, while by contrast, many seemingly trivial events of the past stand out brightly in the memory. Longer lasting emotional experiences are more easily remembered, he continues, and the length of time since the event is of no great matter since "childhood events are among the most powerful."[98]

The real function of the emotional memory exercise is to help the actor transform memories of emotional experiences of which he has only an intellectual remembrance into living sensory images which can bring about actual affective recall of the emotions. In order to do this, the real work of the exercise is to pry out the sensory perceptions which took

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[98] Strasberg in Gassner, p. 156.

place at the time and which were not consciously noted nor actively remembered. For example, an actor knows that once at a party he experienced the emotion of great exhilaration. Yet he does not, to begin with, associate the emotion with any particular sensory detail. In the emotional memory exercise, he attempts to recall the party in greater detail.

He begins by closing his eyes, at least temporarily, to achieve a sense of "aloneness" or freedom from the need to communicate with the onlookers or classmates present. Then he describes, using the present tense to help some closer to the experience, the nature of the party's setting, the people present, the room, the noises and incidents leading up to the feeling of exhilaration. He does not "editorialize", to use Strasberg's term: that is, he does not describe his own subjective feelings. The effect of doing so would be to intellectualize and objectify the feelings and prevent the process of affective re-experience from taking place. If the exercise is a successful one, the actor has begun to re-experience the feeling.[99]

Just as a dancer does not execute a new step perfectly the first time at the exercise bar, so the actor must continue to work on each specific emotional memory problem. The first exercises may only succeed in enumerating what some of the sights, sounds, and smells were, and only later will the actor be sufficiently able to recreate these sensations so that they are vivid enough to cause the affective emotion. At this point, the actor's training in the details of sense-memory work, the theory and technique of which are outside the scope of this thesis, becomes of great importance.

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[99]Observation of an acting class conducted by Lee Strasberg, (New York, April, 1957).

In addition to surveying his life for useful experiences, the actor must do further work on these discovered emotional memories to make them usable and flexible tools. The path that he must follow is primarily one of condensing the stimuli necessary to achieve the affective experience. If at the first exercise, it took five minutes of describing and remembering the sensory impressions to achieve the emotional reaction, the actor must work to shorten the time, to heighten the vividness and clarity of those sensory impressions which work best. He ceases to verbalize the description and lets it be a more and more condensed series of sensory images until he ideally arrives at the new conditioned reflex. At this point, one sensory impression, such as the feel of the confetti flying in the air, which can be re-created instantaneously, is enough to trigger the full emotional response.[100]

In rehearsal, it is of course the actor's job to evaluate the emotional requirements of each scene and to determine if, where, and which emotional memories can be used appropriately. If the actor does not have right at hand an emotional memory which can help supply the needs of a particular scene, he is forced to do as homework the preparation otherwise done in training. On the whole, after the first rehearsals of an exploratory nature, the emotional memory technique employed by the actor must be at a high degree of condensation. That is, the actor must not have to take the time to work repeatedly on the original incident; he must be able to achieve the emotional response from one or two brief stimuli. Not even the director most in sympathy with the actor's use of emotional memory technique will have the necessary patience while the actor

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[100] Strasberg in Gassner, p. 156.

does at east rehearsal what he should do at home.

In rehearsal time, the next important step must take place. Once the actor and his director have made the interpretive decision that a given scene or moment needs a particular emotional quality and once the actor has achieved this quality through affective memory and the other elements of his method, there must be found a way to fix the emotional reaction so painstakingly created so that it will occur at each performance. Strasberg tells that "acting, technically speaking . . . is the ability to respond to imaginary stimuli".[101] If the actor knows that at each performance he will be able to feel the confetti and re-experience the exhilaration, then he is already doing just that. Seen from this standpoint, in the field of emotional expression

> the actor's real problem is not concerned with his reactions but rather consists of training himself to make these imaginary objects or stimuli real to himself as they would be in life so that they will awaken the proper sensory, emotional, or motor response.[102] /Italics in the original/

"To be set on fire by a thought or scene is to be inspired," John Dewey states.[103] In some circumstances, the stimuli which inspire the emotional response need not be wholly imaginary, thus making the job somewhat easier for the actor. If the hypothetical actor, for instance, had to feel the emotion of exhilaration in an actual scene in the play where a party was being held and confetti thrown in his face, he would have no further steps to take. At each performance, the actual circumstances of the play, by fortunate coincidence, would trigger his emotional memory.

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[101] Ibid., p. 145

[102] Ibid.

[103] John Dewey, op. Cit., p. 65.

But it is seldom that the scenes that actors are called upon to play are analagous in significant sensory and emotional details to scenes in their own experience. In most scenes, if concrete rather than wholly imaginary stimuli are desired by the actor, he must attempt to form a new conditioned reflex by fixing the emotional response to a physical act that is part of the play, or a sensory perception that is available on stage. If, during repeated rehearsals, the actor achieves a successful emotional memory of an experienced anger, and each time that he does so he has the business of lifting up his son's picture, before long the lifting of the picture and looking at it will itself provide the remembered emotional response by means of this new conditioned reflex. As Michael Redgrave describes it,

> . . . having found it [the affective response] by some means or other, with increasing frequency the actor is able to tie that feeling to a physical act, no matter what it might be, and that the reproduction of this physical act or sensory perception can automatically bring about the feeling. I say 'can'. It is a question of nothing less than faith.[104]

To the layman, this multi-phase process of achieving true emotional feeling on stage may seem quite far-fetched and impractical, but it should be noted that when properly prepared its action is instantaneous. The advantage of using this new conditioned reflex is that it attaches the actor's remembered and re-felt experiences directly to the circumstances of the play. It is this part of the working process of affective memory that relates the technique to other Stanislavskian approaches to emotion, because of the creative use of actual present circumstances. For the actor,

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[104] Michael Redgrave, op. cit., p. 56.

the son's picture on the dresser in the living room is concrete. It is always there, thanks to the property man, and can even serve to bring an actor back on the rehearsed track during a performance in which he is distracted and having trouble concentrating.

An interesting consequence of the use of this technique is shown by Magarshak when he stresses the importance of allowing the actor to spend a considerable amount of rehearsal time in the actual setting of the play and using the actual props. Through the use of this technique, the settings and props become not merely the local, visual design, and artifacts of the play, but highly important sources of the actor's emotional expression.[105] Actors in the modern theatre, television, and motion pictures, where actual props and settings are used only in the very latest stages of rehearsal, make the best of this disadvantage by using substitutes, especially for hand props.[106] They would undoubtedly be helped by conditions which permitted them a fuller acquaintance with the physical objects and locations of the life they are to portray.

Thus it soon becomes apparent that by the time an actor has begun the third and final phase of his work, the actual performance of his part, not very much of his attention and energy should be taken away from his more immediate concerns and devoted to the intricacies of emotional memory. If rehearsal and preparation have been adequate, the reflexes are sufficiently conditioned and can be depended upon to work at will. During the time that an actor is engaged in playing a role, performance after performance, his main worry as far as emotional memory is concerned is that of keeping the emotional memory process working and, if necessary,

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[105] Magarshak, trans. Stanislavsky on the Art of the Stage, p. 55.

[106] Interview with Miss Kim Stanley, actress and student of Lee Strasberg, (New York, April, 1957).

replacing worn out and no longer workable affective memories with new and fresh ones. As Ribot demonstrated,[107] the strongest of affective memories may be transformed through the passage of time into intellectual memories which are of no artistic use to the actor. The affective mechanism in the human being is not an automatic device which will produce an unlimited number of emotional experiences out of one memory.

This should not alarm the actor, Magarshak quotes Stanislavsky as saying,[108] since it is an almost unavoidable consequence of continual performance of a role. The actor must do the necessary homework to provide himself with a new means of achieving the necessary emotional experience. Magarshak says:

> He need not expect to be able to recover a feeling that has gone for good. He must be content with the things of today and not wait for something he had the day before to come to him again. He must never attempt to hunt after the old head that is irretrievably lost, but every time do his best to achieve a new and fresher inspiration, even if it is weaker than that of the day before. The important thing is that it should be natural and come by itself out of the innermost recesses of his mind. Every new flash of inspiration is beautiful in its own way because it is inspiration.[109]

For the actor who is playing a role and who feels that new emotional memory work must be done on a particular acting problem in order to refresh his performance, there is an additional handicap. Having solved the particular acting problem once successfully, the actor cannot help but be aware of the results desired of his present work. This approach, in terms of the finished product, is likely to hinder the actor by not allowing him the freedom to work with affective memories in the same way that he did in rehearsals when the finished product was still a question mark. He may certainly be tempted to copy the previously achieved emotional manifestations

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[107] Ribot, op. cit., p. 163

[108] Magarshak, trans. Stanislavsky on the Art of the Stage, p. 33.

[109] Ibid.

and end up with no true emotion at all. Magarshak warns the actor of the danger of

> trying to revive a faded flower. Why not try growing a new one instead? How are you to do it? To begin with, forget all about the flower itself, but water its roots or plant a new seed and a new flower will grow from this seed.[110]

C. Criticism and Objections to Emotional Memory

It may be profitable to view as a group a number of statements which are either critical of emotional memory or which contain explicit or implicit warnings concerning its pitfalls or limitations. One or two critics are specifically concerned with emotional memory as part of the actor's craft, the others are concerned more generally with the theatre or with the nature of emotion. From most of the critical material, the student of emotional memory can acquire greater understanding and perspective, although one or two of the critics who attack the use of emotional memory reveal themselves as greatly lacking in proper understanding of the subject.

In an interesting article on the subject of emotion and empathy in the theatre in the Journal of Social Psychology,[111] John T. Metcalf attempts to demonstrate that while the actor must certainly feel the emotion he portrays, he feels a special kind of emotion only.

> If the actor cannot vividly represent to himself in imagination the mental attitude of the character he is to portray, it is hopeless for him to try to represent it to other people.

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[110] Ibid., p. 56.

[111] John T. Metcalf, "Empathy and the Actor's Emotion", Journal of Social Psychology Vol. 2, no. 2, (May, 1931), pp. 235-238.

> The reaction of the actor in playing an emotional scene is not real emotion; it is rather a complex of responses that represent a real emotion. The writer suggests that psychologically this complex differs from a real emotion in that some of its elements - chiefly the organic processes - are imagined instead of sensational."[112]

Metcalf continues with an analogy, distinguishing kinesthetic images from kinesthetic sensations, and saying that there is a similar difference between organic images and organic sensations.

> The imagined emotion, in its organic constituents, differs from the real one in that it does not call into play all the internal reactions that are involved in the latter. If for any reason they are called into play, the actor's emotion becomes a real emotion.[113]

A closer acquaintance with the phenomena of affective recall which unquestionably do occur, and the application of these phenomena to the technique of acting, would probably cause Metcalf to revise his statement that the actor's emotion is never real emotion, inclusive of organic reaction. The distinction Metcalf makes between organic images and organic sensations is precisely that made by Stanislavsky between intellectual recollection of an emotion and the actual sensation of the remembered emotion. Metcalf's analysis is an explanation of what would happen if the actor were to have some way of achieving organically complete emotion and is therefore a justification of Ribot's assertion that real emotional recall must include organic reactions. Even if the technique of emotional memory helps an actor to achieve only a portion of the appropriate organic responses, he has come closer to what Metcalf calls real emotion.

John Dewey, whose work, Art As Experience is extremely illuminating and provocative on the esthetic implications of emotional memory, issues by implication an important warning to the actor who is

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[112] Ibid., p. 237.

[113] Ibid.

making use of emotional memory. Discussing works of art which employ emotion, he says:

> There are other works which are overloaded with emotion. . . . on the theory . . . the more intense the emotion, the more effective the "expression." In fact, a person overwhelmed by an emotion is thereby incapacitated for expressing it.[114]

The importance of this point to the actor is that the emotional memory process is not something which should be set in motion and allowed to take its effect. It is altogether possible that an affective recollection of a strong emotional experience could so overwhelm an actor as to stifle all the rest of his craft. This of course should not be permitted to take place if emotional memory is to be a technique and not just an hypnotic curiosity. In other words, the measure of the successful use of emotional memory in acting technique is not simply the degree of intensity of the recalled emotion but the much more complicated criterion of its usefulness in solving the particular acting problem.

Turning from the words of Dewey, an esthetic philosopher, to those of Joshua Logan, a contemporary stage and film director, the reader comes across a frequent criticism of the use of emotional memory in today's theatre which Mr. Logan articulates so well that it bears quoting in full:

> Groups of actors, led by well-meaning teachers, get together in rooms and work on acting exercises. By recalling some real emotion of their lives: grief felt at the death of a father or mother, pity experienced while watching an accident, fear suffered on waking at night as a child in a strange room in the dark - with concentration these personal experiences can be reimagined until a mood or state of mind is attained which can be used to color the interpretation of a written scene at hand. Acting groups sitting close to the actors have seen tremulous, pulsating, often brilliant performances achieved by the actors experimenting in this manner.
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> However, these same scenes transferred to the theatre, in front of a large audience without the technique of diction or redirection to aid projection, often become jumbles of obscurity.

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[114] John Dewey, op. cit., p. 69.

> Not hearing the words or seeing the faces of these actors, the audience cannot share the thoughts or participate in the story. Boredom suddenly flowers all over the theatre. The actor is so engrossed in his own personal image that he has achieved only self-gratification while his poor audience has achieved only frustration. All such intercourse has been found wanting.[115]

The phenomena described by Mr. Logan undoubtedly do take place on our stages. Among the many possible causes of bad, uncommunicative, boring acting, part of the blame undoubtedly should be put on an incomplete, misinterpreted, or excessive use of emotional memory. But it would certainly be unfair and inaccurate to say that this kind of bad acting is necessarily a result of emotional memory work. If the previously described process of fixing emotional responses has been carried out and the appropriate conditioned reflex has been formed, there will be no need for the actor to be "so engrossed in his own personal image." If the actor is firmly in command of the technique of emotional memory, he will never allow its use to detract from the other elements of his craft which make for communication with his audience.

Mr. Logan is not alone in deploring the inefficient and ineffectual use on stage of techniques which seem to be so powerful in the classroom or studio. In the previously cited article by Henry Schnitzler, the matter is taken up and an interesting explanation of its cause is suggested.[116] Schnitzler points out that Stanislavsky's An Actor Prepares, from which, for example, the exercises mentioned by Joshua Logan are derived, was primarily a book about classroom techniques and not about

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[115] Joshua Logan, "The Art in Yourself" in Toby Cole and Helen K. Chinoy (eds,), Directing the Play (New York: The Bobbs-Merril Company, Incorporated, 1953), pp. 213 ff.

[116] Schnitzler, op. cit., p. 126.

performance before an audience. Schnitzler's thesis is that this distinction has all too often been ignored by Stanislavsky's followers as well as by his critics.

> I am convinced that many of the current misinterpretations of Stanislavsky's System have been caused by the failure, on the part of overzealous readers, to realize the significance of this distinction. If one takes the first part of Stanislavsky's work, in an incomplete version at that, as representing the entire System, one is bound to misconceive the total pattern so carefully planned by its creator. Hypnotized by what Stanislavsky had to say about the actor's preparatory work, which naturally is not concerned with problems of performance, students are misled into being preoccupied with the "Self", while neglecting the all-important relationship between actor and audience.[117]

The implication of this point to the student of emotional memory is one that has been pointed out earlier. The actor cannot, of course, take the time in performance for what is supposed to be done in rehearsal or in preparation. By the time he reaches performance level, the actor should no more dare to be "engrossed in his own personal image" which he used for an emotional memory than a baseball player would dare to stop a World Series ballgame while he performed push-ups that should have been done in spring training or morning practice.

Another criticism of emotional memory in acting technique is that by its very nature it tends to deform the content of the play. The argument states that emotional memory and other comparable techniques of Stanislavsky's approach often disregard the author's meaning and force upon the play the irrelevant experiences of the actor. Professor Edwin Duerr, in an article which completely overlooks Stanislavsky's repeated admonition that is the function of all the theatre artists to serve the play, suggests that techniques such as affective memory do not necessarily further the idea of the play. "Actors can have faith and a sense of truth,

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[117] Ibid.

a belief in their emotions and their actions . . . - actors can be true to nature - and never once serve the idea of the play, never once express that idea except accidentally."[118]

While Professor Duerr's statement is unquestionably true, it does not tell the whole story. Serving the idea of the play is certainly the duty of the actor and director but it is no more than a truism to say that any technique does not in itself accomplish this end. Neither emotional memory nor diaphragmatic breathing nor proper stage posture will necessarily communicate the playwright's meaning, but the manner in which these or any other techniques are employed will determine their appropriateness and effectiveness. Serving the idea of the play consists of making the correct and appropriate artistic choices in each scene, line, and emotional quality. Thus it is a question of which emotional memories are used and which emotional qualities are achieved on stage rather than whether the technique itself is faithful or unfaithful to the play.

This same general line of criticism is carried much further by Theodore Komisarjevsky in his book, Myself And The Theatre[119] and is also found in Komisarjevsky's article on "Acting" in the Encyclopaedia Britannica.[120] While Komisarjevsky much admired the performances of the Moscow Art Theatre, he did so for reasons other than those he understood to be the company's method of acting.

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[118]Edwin Duerr, "Stanislavsky and the Idea", in Studies in Speech and Drama in Honor of Alexander M. Drummond (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1944), p. 37.

[119]Theodore Komisarjevsky, Myself and the Theatre (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1930).

[120]Theodore Komisarjevsky, "Acting: Naturalism", Encyclopaedia Britannica, 14th ed. (1947), Vol. 1, p. 138.

The criticism of emotional memory technique which is found in his book is the longest discussion of the subject to be found outside of the writings of Ribot and Stanislavsky. In the somewhat sarcastic tone of his essay, Komisarjevsky articulates very plainly the most obvious and most frequent objection to the technique of emotional memory. Briefly, it is that in using emotional memory, the actor must necessarily bring into the play elements of his own experience that only intrude and are irrelevant to the play's content.

Many of Komisarjevsky's statements reveal an incomplete understanding of the actual workings of emotional memory technique. This is really to be expected since his book was written in 1930, before many of the important teachers of emotional memory had expressed themselves. All that Komisarjevsky had to go on was hearsay and a hurried talk with Stanislavsky.[121]

Komisarjevsky's discussion begins with a rather serious misconception. He writes: "The great Russian producer Stanislavsky, himself a fine actor, says that the only way in which an actor can be "natural" and sincere is to revive within himself emotional experiences of his actual life and repeat them on the stage."[122] This is plainly not so. Emotional memory was never described by Stanislavsky as the only way to achieve truthful acting. It was always put forward as a tool to be used to solve certain acting problems, as a means of creating emotional qualities on stage which did not arise spontaneously. The implication of Komisarjevsky is that Stanislavsky demanded that his actors use emotional

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[121] Komisarjevsky, Myself and the Theatre, p. 138.

[122] Ibid., pp. 134-135.

memories as a matter of course, as part of any acting job. This is the equivalent of saying that a carpenter must use a special type of screwdriver whether or not the cabinet he is building requires such a screw. An actor might very well play truthfully and fully a part of considerable size without ever feeling the need to make use of the rather difficult and undoubtedly strenuous technique of emotional memory. Komisarjevsky apparently failed to understand that emotional memory was to the actor an available tool rather than a prescribed ritual.

Komisarjevsky's next point presents an even more blatant misunderstanding. He writes that Stanislavsky "Advises the actor 'to discover beneath the lines of the play' what feelings prompted the author to write them, and then to recall his own feelings in similar circumstances and substitute them for those of the author."[123] /Italics added./ If, in writing Macbeth, Shakespeare created a scene in which Lady Macbeth feels the emotions of envy, hate, and sexual desire, is the actress playing the part supposed to concern herself with reproducing these emotions or those of Shakespeare as he sat at his desk composing the scene? Komisarjevsky seems to be sorely confused on this question.

Two other points of Komisarjevsky's should be considered before coming to his main criticism of emotional memory. The first of these is expressed when he writes, "Stanislavsky forgets that the pure recollection of feelings are emotionally very weak . . ."[124] This would be a valid point if Komisarjevsky, like any layman unfamiliar with the process of emotional memory, were speaking only of the intellectual recollection of an emotional experience. Certainly the non-organic, intellectual reminiscence about a past emotional incident would be of little emotional or theatrical value

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123 Ibid., p. 135.

124 Ibid., p. 138

to the actor and would communicate nothing to his audience. But it is another matter entirely to speak of actual affective memory experience which, as Lee Strasberg has aptly shown,[125] is often emotionally more powerful than the original experience. The second point is made by Komisarjevsky as follows:

> Stanislavsky suggests that the objects by which the actor is surrounded, properties, furniture, etc. must be natural and assist him to recall the feelings experienced in his life. But much that is seen when on the stage, footlights, painted flats, etc., have nothing to do with the life of the actor outside the theatre and must act as obstacles to his "remembered feelings."
>
> An imaginative actor needs no naturalistic copies of the environment of his personal life to help him act . . .[126]

It is obviously true that being distracted by the mechanics of the stage or being unable to enter into the make-believe of the play can impair the functioning of the emotional memory process. But the same can be said of any technique of the actor. The answer to such distraction is of course the training and will power required for adequate concentration, a subject which is treated more fully by Stanislavsky than emotional memory. The existence of obstacles to its successful use does not invalidate the technique of emotional memory. Another subject which Stanislavsky treats at great length and which is beyond the scope of this study is the actor's need for imaginativeness. It should be quite apparent that the use of his remembered feelings does not preclude imagination on the part of the actor, but on the contrary, demands extensive use of the imagination.

Komisarjevsky's main criticism of emotional memory, however, is that the emotions remembered by the actor are invariably mixed together with the circumstances that produce them and that in using recalled feelings

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[125] Strasberg in Gassner, p. 137.

[126] Komisarjevsky, Myself And the Theatre, p. 140.

the actor cannot help but bring into the play his own irrelevant, inappropriate experiences.

> Even if such recollected feelings were strong enough for the purpose of acting, it would be quite impossible for the actor to make use of them. Strong resuscitated feelings would carry with them the past "representations" connected with them and would . . . almost certainly dictate actions which would have nothing to do with the play. If I love a woman, that emotion is inseparably connected in my mind with the image of that woman, and I do not want to make any declaration of that love to some lady provided for me by the management, whose image would simply hinder the production of my emotion. If the management were to go to the expense and inconvenience of engaging the woman I love to act with me, I should certainly be ashamed to express my sentiments to her in public. If, by any chance, I succeeded in being so shameless as to forget the audience, I should certainly forget also the fact that I was on stage and probably act in a manner far from that conceived by the author and my performance would develop on lines most undesirable for everyone present.[127]

Komisarjevsky's statement refutes the validity of the technique of using analagous emotional qualities, and thereby condemns affective memory as a corrupting device which the actor should have no right to use. There could be no disputing Komisarjevsky's assertion that any intrusion of the actor's irrelevant past experiences into the play is an artistic wrong, but Komisarjevsky was of course unaware of the nature of emotional memory as a technique which would not allow such a fatal intrusion. It would be worthwhile to examine his argument in its essence.

The fact of supreme importance is that in using the technique of emotional memory, the actor does none of the memory work on stage. The use of material from his own past experiences is something that is carefully selected during rehearsal and preparation and something that should always be under the supervision of the director, part of whose function is to prevent just such intrusions or artistically bad choices

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[127] Ibid.

as Komisarjevsky fears. An actor using emotional memory to achieve a feeling of love in a scene would have a director to observe and delete any connotations in his achieved emotion which were wrong for the play. Komisarjevsky's qualms are unnecessary from still another viewpoint. This viewpoint has to do with the workings of the human being's emotional memory apparatus and suggests that the memory does not record a photographic image of the feeling and its surrounding circumstances, but often a heightened image of the essential feeling involved. Stanislavsky remarks that in addition, the mind often creates one cumulative emotional memory out of a series of repeated experiences.[128] The emotional material used in the affective memory technique can be regarded as one step removed from the actual circumstances which gave it birth.

The passage of time also plays an important role in separating rememberable feelings from the particular specific experiences which caused them. Michael Chekhov describes what happens to feelings which the mind has recorded.

> There, being forgotten by you, or never known to you, they undergo the process of being purified of all egotism. They become feelings per se. Thus purified and transformed, they become part of the material from which your individuality creates the psychology, the illusory "soul" of the character.[129]

Thus the actor is faced with the paradoxical task of having to make stronger the bonds which tie the emotional experience to the sensory perceptions and make weaker the bonds which tie the emotional experience to the personal psychological and social circumstances of the original experience.

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[128]Stanislavsky, An Actor Prepares, p. 163.

[129]Michael Chekhov, To The Actor, p. 98.

Reviewing the discussion of the criticism of and objections to emotional memory, it is of course apparent that little of the criticism is based on concrete and detailed knowledge of the actual process of emotional memory. But even from these occasionally inaccurate and only partially informed critics, the student actor can draw important warnings and advice on the pitfalls of inexpert and careless dabbling with the technique.

## IV. CONCLUSION: THE VALUE OF EMOTIONAL MEMORY TO THE ART OF ACTING

The two previous sections of this thesis have attempted to show the development and the actual process of emotional memory as an acting technique. In the conclusion, it is impossible to reveal any strikingly new observations about emotional memory other than to point out the obvious fact that emotional memory technique has been used widely and has often been found to work. Nor is it at all possible, on the basis of the available knowledge, to pronounce a final evaluation of the technique, either to guarantee its effectiveness or to condemn it as useless or harmful to the actor's work. What remains to be done is to suggest the areas in which the use and study of affective memory will be of value to the art of acting. There would seem to be three such areas.

The first of these is concerned with the role of the subconscious in acting. Although very little is known about this subject, many actors and teachers would agree that, in one way or another, inspired acting or acting that transcends the limitations of ordinary stage behavior is the result of the stimulation of the actor's subconscious mechanism. Magarshak points out:[130] "The whole idea of Stanislavsky's advice to the actor to cultivate his emotional or "affective" memory is that it is the only way in which the actor can influence his subconscious mind."

The statement that affective memory may be the only way for the actor to influence his subconscious mind may be exaggerated, but it is certainly true that emotional memory represents the most fully evolved and practical method thus far developed for the actor's work in that direction. As Stanislavsky said:

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[130] Magarshak, trans., Stanislavsky on the Art of the Stage, p. 86.

> The fourth storey [sic] of our art is the sphere of the subconscious. It can only be reached when the actor has become the master of his technique to such an extent that he need no longer think of it and can give himself up entirely to inspiration and intuition. The wave from the ocean of the subconscious reaches us only occasionally, rolling up to us only in moments of the highest creative enthusiasm, but the actor of the future, having mastered the technique of his art, will be able to bathe in this ocean freely.[131]

The second important area in which emotional memory may be of value to the art of acting is in the esthetics of the art. The use of emotional memory tends to turn the actor-artist to the use of experience rather than imitation as his artistic raw material. The actor, like any other artist, exercises the function of gathering together source material and selecting the appropriate material for the particular work of art at hand. But it has not always been clear of just what the actor's source materials consisted.

Because he has not been trained to do otherwise, the inexperienced actor often uses as his source material a conglomeration of the images he has seen used on stage before. As Stanislavsky criticized his students: "Instead of drawing from your memory of life you took your material from the theatrical archives of your mind."[132] That actors often are reluctant to make use of actual life experience as a basis of their art is not so unusual. John Dewey notes that "usually there is a hostile reaction to a conception of art that connects it with the activities of a live creature in its environment."[133]

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[131] Magarshak, Stanislavsky: A Life , p. 388.

[132] Stanislavsky, An Actor Prepares, p. 156.

[133] John Dewey, op. cit., p. 27.

More than being an art of visual images or spoken sounds, the theatre, and more specifically acting, is the art of expressing human experience.

> Because experience is the fulfillment of an organism in its struggles and achievements in a world of things it is art in germ. Even in rudimentary forms, it contains the promise of that delightful perception which is esthetic experience.
>
> The world we have experienced becomes an integral part of the self that acts . . . How then can objects of experience avoid becoming expressive?[134]
>
> . . . . . .
>
> There are in our minds in solution a vast number of emotional attitudes, feelings, ready to be reexcited when the proper stimulus arrives, and more than anything else, it is these forms, this residue of experience, which, fuller and richer than in the mind of the ordinary man, constitute the artist's capital. What is called the magic of the artist resides in his ability to transfer these values from one field of experience to another.[135]

Even the actor who recognizes that his art must be based on his perceptions of true and not sham existence is often at a loss as to just how this may be accomplished. For the actor who is trying to create rich theatrical images on stage, a vague intention to base his work on general human experience is not enough. What is often lacking is a means by which the actor can use in his work the specific, strongly felt personal experiences which his artist's sensitivity has recorded and stored. It is suggested that the technique of emotional memory is one such means, applicable in one large and important area of acting, the area of emotion.

A final word should be said on the subject of the demands made on the actor by the technique of emotional memory. On the simple technical level, emotional memory is not an easy tool to use. As early as the

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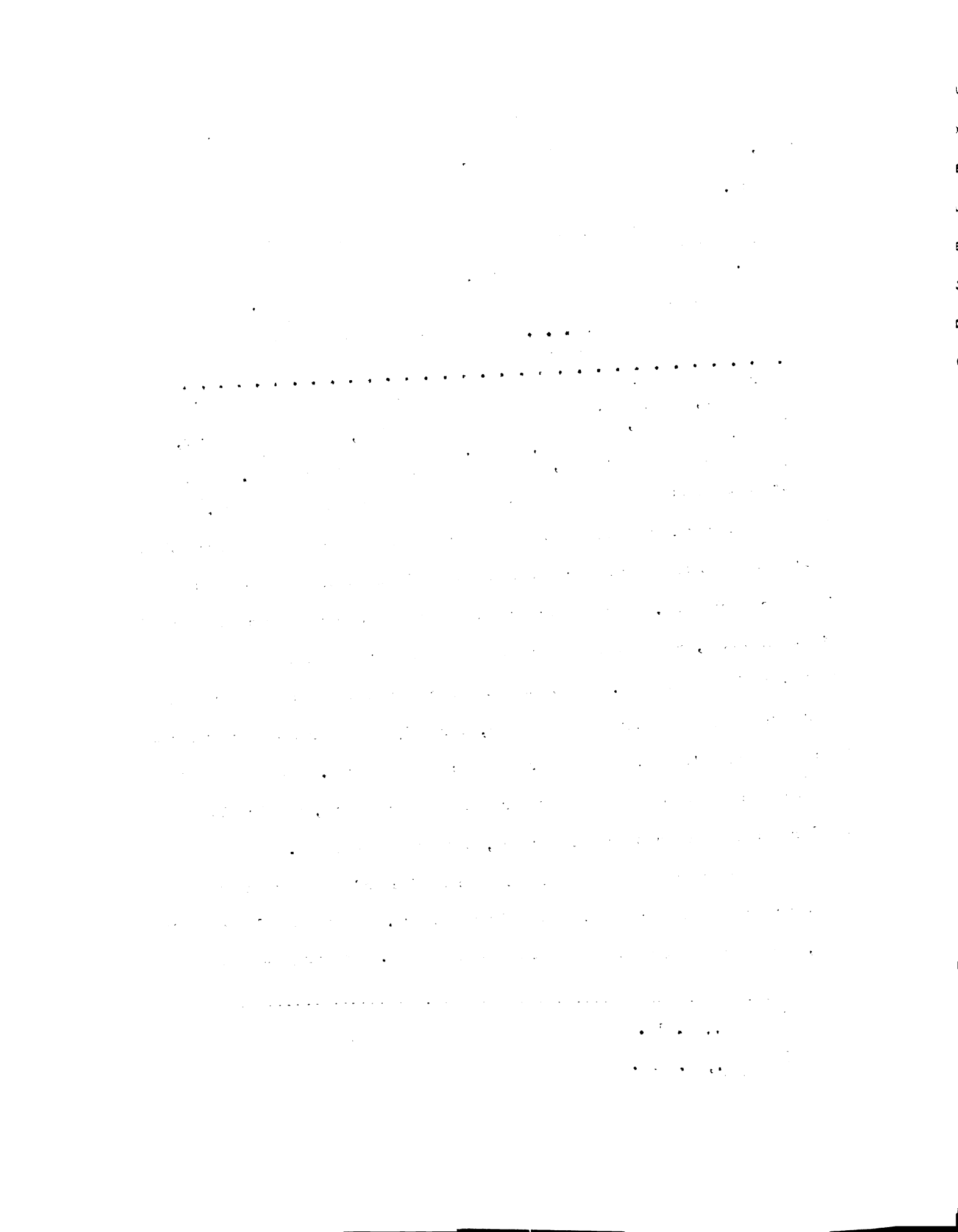
[134] Ibid., p. 19.

[135] Ibid., p. 118.



Group Theatre days, Stella Adler spoke of the great strain it might often impose on an actor.[136] Affective memory is not a beginner's tool because its successful use depends upon a rather high degree of skill and training in such other Stanislavskian techniques as concentration and imagination. Many actors today, including many who are familiar with affective memory and even trained in its use, find it too hard to use and do not make it a regular part of their work on a role except in special instances where a difficult emotional problem is encountered. While it is probably going too far to say, like Robert Sherwood, that the use of such acting techniques requires a "necessary psychological abnormality,"[137] it is undoubtedly true that emotional memory demands of the actor a great degree of patience, concentration, and willingness to explore and relive past experiences that are often disturbing or painful. There are actors who find all this unfeasible and other actors who find the results achieved to be not worth the trouble, but most theatre people who are familiar with emotional memory would probably agree that the technique is a valuable (though perhaps specialized) tool for the actor who can use it. Even those who feel that emotional memory is of limited value as a part of the working actor's craft would agree that it is of great value as a training technique to stimulate the imagination and sensory awareness of the actor.

On a higher level than the technical, emotional memory makes further demands on the actor. It has been shown that the use of a technique like

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[136]Stella Adler, "The Actor in the Group Theatre" in Toby Cole and Helen K. Chinoy Actors on Acting (New York:Crown, 1949), p. 538.

[137]Robert E. Sherwood, "An Actor Prepares", Theatre Arts, Vol. 21, no. 2, (February, 1937), p. 48.

emotional memory as a regular part of the actor's craft demands of him a behavior and general awareness of the true artist.

> The actor, however, can never rely on observation alone to replenish the storehouses of his emotional memory. It is not enough to widen the circle of attention by including in it different spheres of life; he must also understand the meaning of the facts he observes and be able to digest inwardly the received impressions of his emotional memory for his acting to become creative and to represent "the life of the human spirit;" the actor must not only study this life, but take an active part in all its manifestations wherever and whenever possible. Without it, his art will dry up and become artificial. An actor who observes life from a distance, or experiences its joys and sorrows without trying to understand their complex causes simply does not exist as far as true art is concerned. To live for art he must at all costs grasp the meaning of the life that surrounds him, use his brains, widen his knowledge, and constantly re-examine his own opinion. An actor whose views on his art are those of a philistine, will merely succeed in destroying it.[138]

To be sure, the actor who completely fulfills this description is an ideal and rare creature. All too often, the actor's preoccupation with learning and practicing the details of the craft prevents him from acquiring this artist's awareness and causes him to be a narrower person and to develop in the opposite direction from that suggested in the above description. But this unfortunate tendency is not <u>necessarily</u> a consequence of the use of techniques such as emotional memory and is something that can be corrected by more enlightened teaching. It may be that the most important value of the study of emotional memory is in this area of stimulating the artistic awareness of the actor, an awareness that is essential not only to the particular problems of emotion but to every phase of the actor's creative and interpretive work. The training, experimentation, and use of emotional memory may set the actor on the track leading to fulfillment

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[138] Magarshak, trans. <u>Stanislavsky on the Art of the Stage</u>, p. 57.

of Stanislavsky's summation of the ideal function of the actor:

> The ideal of our creative work at all times has been and will be what is eternal in art, what never grows old and dies, and what is always young and dear to people. The actor takes from real or imaginary life all it can give to man. But he transforms all the impressions, passions, and joys of life into the material for his creative work. Out of what is transitory and personal he creates a whole world of poetic images and ideas which will live forever.[139]

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[139] Ibid., p. 58.

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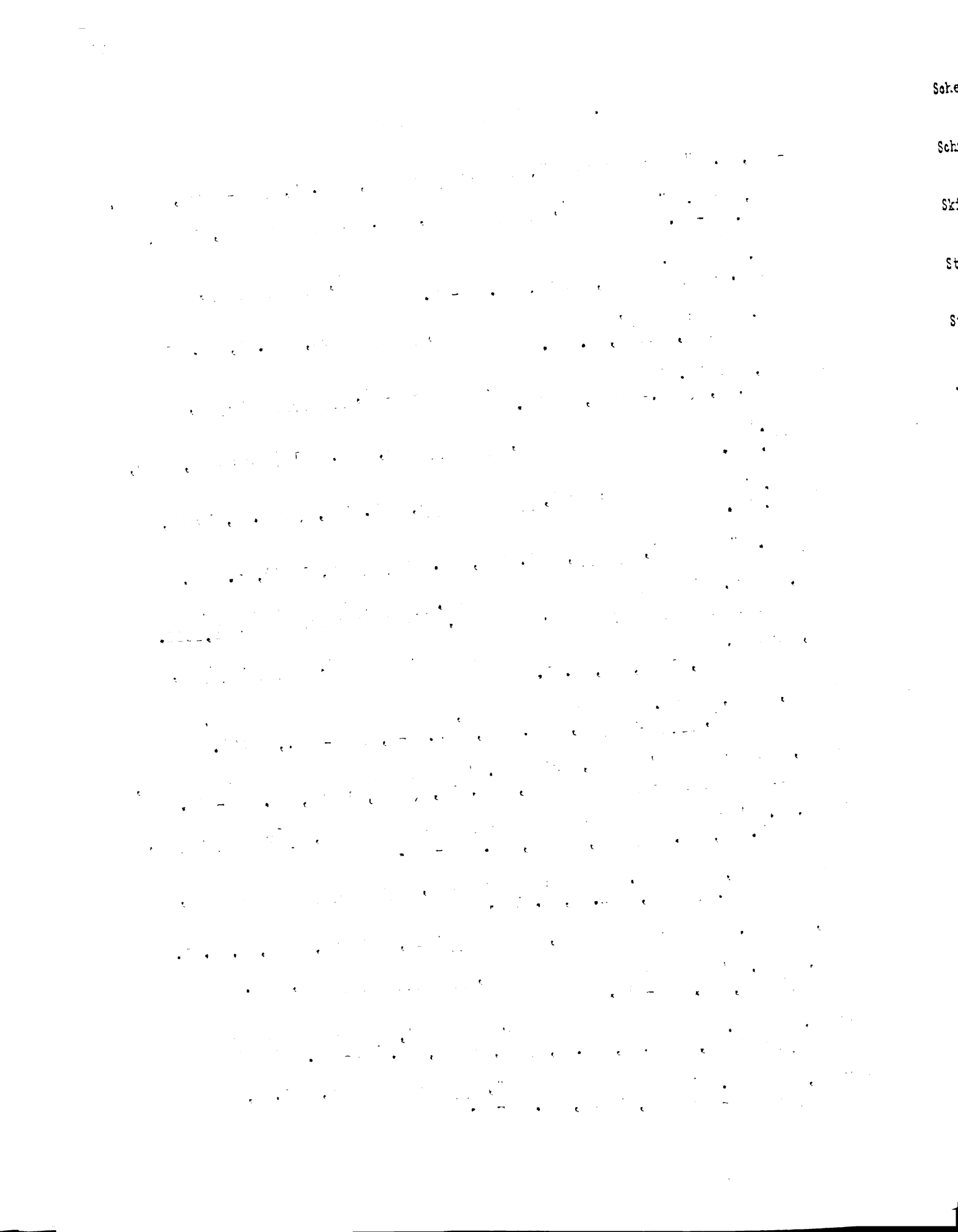

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103