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THEORY OF ACTING

V

THE BIRTH OF EMOTIONALISM*

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1. *The Dramaturgic Function of Recitation*

In the early eighteenth century the debate on recitation changed completely in both nature and scope, assuming an international dimension. Perrucci's work was published in Naples; Grimarest embodied the cultural dialectics of Paris; *The Life of Betterton* was the first essay on acting to come from Britain, and a little later, in 1727, the *Dissertatio de actione scenica*, written in Latin by Franz Lang, a German Jesuit, was to appear in Munich. Within a few decades theoretical considerations began to be animated by the awareness that European theatre had branched into a considerable variety of acting styles: budding traditions which it was necessary to compare, evaluate, and emulate, or conversely to criticize as the basis for concrete discussion of technical choices open to the actor. Observations on the different nations' styles of acting began to emerge in publications such as Du Bos's *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture*, or Luigi Riccoboni's fundamental *Réflexions historiques et critiques sur les differens théâtres de l'Europe*.

Paris and London theatre, with the animated discussion that often accompanied it, gradually came to form two important points of reference for any reflection on the art of the actor. Essays, treatises, and contributions of varying nature circulated among scholars, men of letters, and actors, and, with the ensuing responses and reactions, developed an intense debate which echoed around the theatres and intellectual circles of Europe. It sought out models on the contemporary stage, filling in its conceptual canvas with biographies, correspondence, and variously-reliable anecdotes while gradually working towards a clear, complete, and rigorously plausible picture of all the issues surrounding acting and the stage.

What particularly marks eighteenth-century acting theory is the covert tension which emerges from Perrucci, Grimarest and Gildon as they sought to apply the doctrine of oratory to acting, a phenomenon which seemed refractory to models applying to general discourse, pleading at the bar, or preaching. They all three found

* Translated by Anita Weston, Libera Università degli Studi per l'Innovazione e le Organizzazioni di Roma. From C. Vicentini, *La teoria della recitazione dall'Antichità al Settecento*, in press (Venezia, Marsilio, February 2012).

it difficult to separate acting from oratory generally, though when they attempted to pinpoint the specific needs of the theatre, found themselves unconsciously following Aubignac's guidelines.¹ Basically, then, they were transforming the theory of acting precisely by assigning increasing significance to the dramaturgic needs of the actor's performance. In Perrucci, performance exceeds the fixed limits of *actio* since the actor has to present a living presence operating in the different vicissitudes thrown up by plot, which inevitably requires a repertoire of gestures considerably broader than an orator needs for static delivery. In Grimarest and even more in Gildon, the definition of a particularly wide range of feelings responds to the need to reproduce the increasingly vast range of expressions for the changing emotions of a character as the play unfolds, while these can be much simpler and more reduced in the case of the orator who simply has to declaim a speech. Lastly, for Gildon the difference between recitation and the other forms of oratory emerges more starkly in comedy than tragedy just because tragedy, as d'Aubignac observes, requires more diegetic declaiming and narrating, and in both of these the actor assumes the features and gestures of the figures evoked in a more muted way than when mimetically presenting the concrete character to the spectators.

In the course of the eighteenth century, the attention paid to the dramaturgic aspects of recitation – the ability to embody a figure living out the imaginary events of the play – was to become an increasingly prominent factor in appraising an actor's performance.² If various barbarously-written plays functioned so well on stage, commented Colley Cibber, one of the leading figures on the English stage in the first part of the century, moving the audience and getting full houses, it was thanks to the plot: the main characters find themselves in situations of strong emotional tension, and a good actor's expressive power can override any number of textual shortcomings.³ Central to their role was the ability to transform into characters different from themselves, almost dissolving their features into those of the character to appear on the stage. In the late 1720s, in London, Luigi Riccoboni was amazed when he realized that an old man with a 'tremulous, broken voice', perfectly presented on the stage of Lincoln's Inn Field, was in actual fact a young actor of no more than twenty. His surprise was so great that he refused to believe it until all the paints, dyes, and make-up time had been explained to him in quantified detail; this capacity for extreme transformation became his benchmark for determining the superiority of the 'true' and 'painstaking' English actors. If 'after forty-five years of theatre I may express an opinion', Riccoboni declared, 'I should dare to venture that the best of Italian and French actors are inferior to the English'.

The anecdote was published in 1738.⁴ Ten years later, the 'total metamorphosis' of the interpreter, and his transformation into 'another person', had become common

¹ See C. Vicentini, 'Theory of Acting IV. The World of Oratory', *Acting Archives Essays*, AAR Supplement 4, April 2011.

² On the distinction between the theatrical, aesthetic, and dramaturgic aspects of acting see C. Vicentini, 'Theory of Acting III. The Early Italian Treatises and the Theoretical Acting Model', *Acting Archives Essays*, AAR Supplement 3, April 2011.

³ See Colley Cibber, *An Apology for the Life of Mr. Colley Cibber* (London, John Watts, 1740), ed. by B. R. S. Fone, Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press, 1968, p. 190.

⁴ Luigi Riccoboni, *Réflexions historiques et critiques sur les différens théâtres de l'Europe. Avec les Pensées sur la déclamation* (Paris, Jacques Guérin, 1738), Amsterdam, Aux Dépens de la Compagnie, 1740, anast. repr. Bologna, Forni, 1969, pp. 134-137.

formulae in English and French criticism of the stage. Garrick, who became the paradigm for much of the European stage, was celebrated for his ability to transform into so many wildly varying characters, of every age, type and appearance, as to be unrecognisable as the same actor.

One night old age sits on his countenance, as if the wrinkles he had stamped were indelible; the next, the gaiety and bloom of youth seem to overspread his face, and smoothe even those marks, which time and muscular conformation may have really made there. Of these truths no one can be ignorant, who has ever seen him in the several characters of Lear, or Hamlet, Richard, Dorilas, Romeo or Lusignan; in his Ranger, Bayes, Drugget, Kitley or Benedick. In a word, there never existed any one performer, that came near his excellence in so great a variety of opposite characters.⁵

Under the entry *Déclamation théâtrale* in volume four of the *Encyclopédie* published in 1754, Marmontel analyses the art of Baron, Molière's famous pupil who returned to the stage in 1720. His skill, he explained, consisted in inducing the spectator to forget the actor, who must completely vanish into the character: a stage character has to be total and absolute, with no residue of the 'foreign body' of the actor whose physique, voice, gestures, and expressions are being used.⁶

The whole of a character, however, has to be more than the sum of these constituent parts, all declaring personality, social position, and nationality. All these must be meshed into a fully-formed new being who has to remain plausible for the entire duration of the play, and react consistently through the varying emotional states of mind. The image produced by the actor, then, is effective and convincing in proportion to the precision and detail with which each single expression reflects the specific situation of the action. Here the seventeenth-century studies of the passions and humours proved invaluable, with their meticulous analyses of simple and complex impulses and their corresponding physical expression, all of considerable help when portraying complex states of mind in their subtlest nuances, not least in vocal inflexion, facial features, and even variations in skin colour.

In an important essay from 1730, Jean Dumas d'Aigueberre praised Baron's acting in that it expressed what is 'particular' to every passion, and managed not only to

⁵ *The Life of Mr. James Quin* (London, Bladon, 1766), London, Reader, 1887, pp. 37-38. This talent of Garrick's was mythical, to the extent that, despite the implausibility, he was taken for the young actor of Lincoln's Inn Fields described by Riccoboni. See Charles Simon Favart's anecdote, in a letter of December 1760, in *Mémoires et correspondance littéraires dramatiques et anecdotiques* (Paris, L. Collin, 1808), 3 vols., Genève, Slatkine Reprints, 1970, I, pp. 119-120. In actual fact Garrick's professional début was in London in 1741, three years after the publication of Riccoboni's account.

⁶ See under *Déclamation théâtrale*, volume four of the *Encyclopédie*, in Jean-François Marmontel, *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris, Belin, 1819-1820), Genève, Slatkine Reprints, 1968, t. IV, p. 315 and p. 317. The actor's ability to morph recognisably into the living character was eventually taken as a general benchmark for a fully successful performance and complete realisation of technical possibilities. In 1753 Clairon tried out a new type of gesturality, first in Bordeaux, then at Versailles, where she played Roxane in Racine's *Bajazet*. Marmontel, in terms characteristic of the debate, declared the results extraordinary, beyond the rosier expectation: 'it was no longer the actress, but Roxane herself, whom the public believed itself to be seeing and hearing' (Jean-François Marmontel, *Mémoires d'un père pour servir à l'instruction de ses enfants*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, t. I, p. 153). An actor was considered convincing, then, if s/he immersed him/herself in the part completely. And if this means relatively little in concrete terms, and is a given in theatre criticism across the ages, the frequency with which it was mentioned in the early eighteenth century signals the specific importance of dramaturgic ability which was beginning to be demanded from the actor.

distinguish it from other passions but to distinguish it in its own specificity, according to ‘the thousand circumstances proper to the characters’.⁷ The precision of expressive detail had to be honed down to capture the subtlest movements of the volume of the voice, the facial muscles, and nuanced shades of skin colour. Colley Cibber launched into an extensive and meticulously-detailed attack against the trend of building bigger theatres; increasing the distance between the public and the actors, he pointed out, made it difficult to catch, for example, ‘a voice scarce rais’d above the tone of a whisper’ which however was indispensable for communicating tenderness or resignation, as effective and essential as the stronger, louder passions.⁸ Du Bos, in his *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et la peinture* deplored the actors’ use of rouge which had become standard over the previous twenty years, since it tended to conceal facial ‘changes of tone’.⁹ In 1747 Samuel Foote similarly observed, of Quin’s and Spranger Barry’s *Othello*, that any thorough analysis was impossible, due to the layer of blacking which blurred the movements of the facial muscles.¹⁰ In reaction, when Ducis put on his adaptation of the play in Paris in 1792 he replaced blacking with a ‘copper’ tone which, he explained, smacked of Africa while concealing nothing of ‘the play of the passions’ over the face of the actor.¹¹

As important as the nuanced degrees of feelings is the enactment of mixed or contrasting motives and states of mind – not least, for Marmontel, the switch from the emergence of a feeling to the impulse to hide it. It is here that the actor’s art reaches the zenith of expressive potential.

When two or more feelings agitate the soul it is right that they be depicted at the same time in the features of the face and accents of the voice, even through all attempts made at dissimulation [...] Fear, modesty, or mischief may occasion the passion to be withheld, yet without concealing it; all must bespeak a sensible heart. And what art is required for these half shades, these gradations of a sentiment which are spread over the expression of the contrary sentiment, most especially in scenes of dissimulation in which the poet supposes these shadings to be perceived by the spectators alone, hidden from the penetrating glance of the other characters!¹²

But the need to render the character in action goes beyond a range of expression unknown to other forms of oratory. It also transforms the application of an essential stage rule: that the speaker must be absorbed by the emotion expressed. While it can suffice other orators to actually feel the emotions, the actor must also adapt them and regulate them to the character portrayed. If, d’Aigueberre observes, in playing the part of a king or hero the actor abandons himself ‘unreservedly’ to the passion tout court, and is intent ‘only on the feeling he would communicate’, ‘forgetting’ the figure represented, then the spectator will recognize neither a king nor a man in the sway of his passions, but merely ‘an actor who seeks to be admired’.¹³

⁷ Jean Dumas d’Aigueberre, *Seconde lettre du souffleur de la comédie de Rouen au garçon de café, ou entretien sur les défauts de la déclamation*, Paris, Tabarie, 1730, pp. 28-29.

⁸ Colley Cibber, *An Apology*, pp. 224-226.

⁹ Jean-Baptiste Du Bos, *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et la peinture*, Paris, Pissot, 1770, III, p. 212.

¹⁰ Samule Foote, *A Treatise on the Passions, so far as they regard the Stage* (London, Corbett, 1747), anast. repr. New York, AMS Press, 1976, p. 25.

¹¹ Jean-François Ducis, *Othello ou le More de Venise, tragédie par le citoyen Ducis*, Paris, André, 1799, p. VI.

¹² Jean-François Marmontel, *Déclamation théâtrale*, pp. 324-325.

¹³ Jean Dumas d’Aigueberre, *Seconde lettre*, p. 27.

In this way dramaturgic needs assumed a central position in the actor's art, gradually becoming the predominating factor in evaluating stage action. The need to represent plausibly and effectively the changing emotional states of the characters justifies breaking the rules of propriety of the gestural code, as Gildon had underlined, to the extent that even in tragedy it became when the character is in the throes of 'fury' or other 'vehement passions'.¹⁴ In the same way, anything not strictly relevant to the personality of the characters and the specific conditions they are experiencing is to be considered spurious or deleterious: any superfluous gesture compromises the plausibility of the performance by revealing a glimpse of the actor beneath the character.¹⁵ Longstanding stage conventions and poetics are here called into question, with a view above all to creating a gesturality which is deft, elegant, and unselfconscious. One such convention was the use of the ubiquitous fans and handkerchiefs which fluttered across the scene of comedies and tragedies alike, and against which d'Aigueberre wields an ironic pen:

An actress would never appear on stage without a fan or handkerchief [...] Electra and Andromaca, who weep unceasingly, must be ever ready to dry their tears, but this is not the case of the princess who is afflicted only towards the middle or even end of the play. Yet we must suppose her to possess a presentiment of pain to come, and to wish to adopt the necessary precautions prior to the catastrophe, while, symmetrically, her confidant likewise prepares for that of which she should be entirely unaware.¹⁶

But fans and handkerchiefs were a minor matter. The new perception of the art of the actor turned a critical ear on the sing-song diction already lambasted by Perrucci and Grimarest.¹⁷ While the rhythms of verse drama invited a lilting and cadenced delivery, it seemed pure affectation compared with normal speech and circumstances, particularly when it became a consolidated technique in seventeenth-century France's declamation of tragedy, which was soon imitated in England and other parts of Europe.¹⁸ Luigi Riccoboni declared that the French cantato 'disfigured' nature, 'disgusted' any foreigners hearing it for the first time, and left any Frenchmen of 'genius and taste' indignant – a harsh judgment which however was quickly to prevail.¹⁹ Baron's contemporaries comment that he 'broke up the measure of the verse' in order to conceal 'the unbearable monotony', and never delivered its

¹⁴ Jean Poisson, *Réflexions sur l'art de bien parler en public*, n.p., n.d. (1717), pp. 31-32.

¹⁵ See Colley Cibber, *An Apology*, p. 73.

¹⁶ Jean Dumas d'Aigueberre, *Seconde lettre*, pp. 68-69.

¹⁷ See Andrea Perrucci, *A Treatise on Acting, from Memory and by Improvisation (1699) by Andrea Perrucci/Dell'Arte rappresentativa, premeditata ed all'improvviso*, Italian text and English translation ed. by F. Cotticelli, A. Goodrich Heck, Th. F. Heck, Laham (Maryland); Toronto; Plymouth, The Scarecrow Press, 2008, p. 40, p. 55 and pp. 72-73 (first edition *Dell'arte rappresentativa, premeditata, ed all'improvviso*, Napoli, Nella nuova Stampa di Michele Luigi Mutio, 1699). See, too, Jean-Leonor Le Gallois de Grimarest, *Traité du récitatif*, Paris, J. Lefèvre et P. Ribou, 1707, p. 85.

¹⁸ Philippe J. Salazar's *Le culte de la voix au XVII^e siècle. Formes esthétiques de la parole à l'âge de l'imprimé* (Paris, Honoré Champion, 1995) remains a mandatory text on sung recitation in seventeenth-century France, as does Sabine Chaouche's *L'art du comédien. Déclamation et jeu scénique en France à l'âge classique (1629-1680)*, Paris, Champion, 2001, pp. 257-359.

¹⁹ Luigi Riccoboni, *Réflexions historiques et critiques sur le différens théâtres de l'Europe*, p. 29. On line delivery and the sense of the sentence, see *Dell'arte rappresentativa* (Londra, 1728), anast. repr. Bologna, Forni, 1979, pp. 42-49.

‘rhythm’ but its ‘situation and sentiment’.²⁰ Mademoiselle Duclos, who was famous for the stylized lilt of her delivery, held sway at the Comédie Française in the first two decades of the century but began to fall out of favour with the rise of Adrienne Lecouvreur and her more natural diction. Years later, the ‘musical’ nature of her performances were to be severely criticized in Dorat’s *Déclamation Théâtrale*.²¹ In England, Mrs Cibber, who appeared with Quin and later Garrick, was initially much appreciated for the almost semicanto, but in time the changing tastes of the public considered the marked, unvaried monotony of her delivery dated and retrograde: ‘when she had once recited two or three speeches’, a contemporary author observed, ‘I could anticipate the manner of every succeeding one: it was like a long and legendary ballad of innumerable stanzas, every one of which is sung to the same time, eternally chiming in the ear without variation or relief.’²² By mid-century acting had lost the declamatory nature once de rigueur for tragedy and as John Hill explained, was no longer ‘a kind of singing’.²³ While fans, handkerchiefs and accentuated verse rhythm were being swept off the stage, any curious and novel detail, even accidental, was immediately appreciated and justified if it harmonized with the circumstances of the action and that action’s reflection on the character’s behaviour. In his first performance of *Macbeth*, Garrick appeared on stage after Duncan’s murder with a button of his waistcoat undone. This was completely accidental, but the critics read it as an extremely effective symbol of the disorder in the murderer’s mind.²⁴ At other times the expressive detail was intentional to the point of being highly contrived. To communicate Hamlet’s terror when the ghost appeared, Garrick wore a special wig, connected to a small pump mechanism. This was operated by pressing his arm, when the hair on his head would stand up straight.²⁵ Some actors would add naturalistic detail to poisoning by chewing China bark and then opening a ‘poison’-blackened mouth in a rictus of agony. Simpler and more common was the trick used to make the actor pale at precisely the required moment, by passing a chalk-impregnated handkerchief quickly across his face, unseen by the audience.²⁶

The examples are, if not always extreme, extremely gauche: but they exemplify the growing tendency to take acting away from simple textual declamation accompanied by the relative expressions of emotion and towards concrete action rooted in the effective situation on which the character is operating. The French stage put up some resistance, and Du Bos, for example, described with horror a scene in which a tragic hero of the status of Scipio was seen smoking a pipe and drinking from a tankard of beer inside the tent where he was studying his battle strategy against the

²⁰ According to Charles Collé’s comments, around 1750, in his *Journal et mémoires de Charles Collé sur les hommes de lettres les ouvrages dramatiques et les événements le plus mémorables du règne de Louis XV (1748-1772)*, ed. by H. Bonhomme, 3 vols., Paris, Firmin Didot Frères et Cie., 1868, I, p. 140.

²¹ Claude-Joseph Dorat, *Discours préliminaire*, in *Déclamation Théâtrale*, Paris, S. Jorry, 1766, pp. 16-17.

²² Richard Cumberland, *Memoirs of Richard Cumberland*, London, Lackington, Allen & Co., 1806, pp. 60-61.

²³ John Hill, *The Actor: a Treatise on the Art of Playing*, London, R. Griffiths, 1755, p. 239. The passage is absent in the first edition (1750).

²⁴ See B. Joseph, *The Tragic Actor*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1959, pp. 94-95.

²⁵ See K. A. Burnim, *David Garrick, Director*, Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1961, p. 160.

²⁶ The ruse of the handkerchief with chalk-dust is cited by, among others, George Sand, *Le château des Désertes*, Paris, J. Hetzler et Victor Lecou, 1854, p. 118.

Carthaginians, although he could console himself with the idea that this was the acting style of a foreign country, far removed from the aesthetic proprieties of French theatre.²⁷ But in time even the Comédie Française fell into the temptation of occasionally introducing often quite singular props suggested by the circumstances of the action. When Marmontel's *Cléopâtre* was staged in 1750 an 'automatic asp' was created which would wriggle like a real snake when pressed to the actress's breast.²⁸

The occasional prop apart (and the French stage in particular used them sparingly), what marked the turning-point in eighteenth-century acting was a considerably increased and more varied gesturality. Baron himself had been criticized as being 'prodigal with embraces', dispensing them 'beyond all reason',²⁹ but it was Garrick in particular whose repertoire of gestures appeared to many as strange and over-insistent.³⁰ The general trend of extending the use of gestures and movements, however, grew out of and was justified by the desire to represent as precisely as possible the combination of circumstances in which the character moved, at every phase of the action. Of interest here is the description (attributed to Macklin) of Garrick and Spranger Barry respectively playing Romeo in the famous balcony scene. Barry enters 'as a great lord, swaggering about his love', and speaks so loudly that the servants of the Capulets, unless 'almost dead with sleep', would have rushed out and 'tossed the fellow in a blanket'. Garrick's Romeo, on the other hand, aware that he is entering enemy territory, 'enters creeping upon his toes', 'whispering his love, and cautiously looking about him, just like a thief in the night'.³¹ Barry is clearly maximising the lines and is interested in nothing beyond communicating the appropriate emotional expression; Garrick models his behaviour, voice, gestures, and movements to the actions of a person in that given situation.

In contrast, then, with seventeenth-century practice which had the actor enter the part only when his turn came to speak, before becoming an indifferent bystander once more, the focus is now on the actor's ability to live within the events of the play, within the actions and reactions of the characters on stage, and interact with what is being said and done. In France, in 1720, it was noted that Baron 'always listens to he that speaks with him', while actors normally pay 'scant attention'; above all, 'his listening is accompanied by such movements of the countenance and body as are demanded by the nature of the speech uttered'.³² Marmontel, in the *Encyclopédie*, extrapolates the following norm: 'each character introduced into a scene must appear interested, all that which interests him must move him, all that which moves him must be seen to do so in his features and in his behaviour'.³³ Garrick, for his part,

²⁷ Jean-Baptiste Du Bos, *Réflexions critiques*, I, p. 445.

²⁸ Jean-François Marmontel, *Mémoires*, p. 115.

²⁹ Elena Virginia Balletti Riccoboni, *Lettera della signora Elena Balletti Riccoboni al signor abate Antonio Conti gentiluomo veneziano, sopra la maniera di Monsieur Baron nel rappresentare le tragedie franzesi*, presumably written in 1720 and published in Angelo Calogerà (ed.), *Raccolta d'opuscoli scientifici e filologici*, Venezia, Cristoforo Zane, 1736, XIII, pp. 495-510. Quote from the digital edition edited by Valentina Gallo in *Les savoirs des acteurs italiens*, Collection numérique dirigée par Andrea Fabiano, Paris, 2006, p. 9 (http://www.irpmf.cnrs.fr/IMG/pdf/Elenia_virginia_riccoboni.pdf).

³⁰ See, e.g., James Thomas Kirkman, *Memoirs of the Life of Charles Macklin*, 2 vols., London, Lackington, Allen & Co., 1799, II, p. 260.

³¹ Henry Angelo, *Angelo's Pic Nic, or Table Talk including Numerous Recollections of Public Characters*, London, John Ebers, 1834, pp. 36-37.

³² Elena Virginia Balletti Riccoboni, *Lettera*, p. 7.

³³ Jean-François Marmontel, *Déclamation théâtral*, p. 325.

was from the start appreciated for the attention paid to every word and gesture of his fellow-actors, and his total absorption in his character.³⁴ Soon after the middle of the century, attention also began to be paid to the expressive potential of the pauses, when the action demands that an actor remain silent. These were found to be effective in proportion to the actor's emotional involvement in his character's reaction to the events on stage. If his attention wanders, the actor tends to fill the pause with empty gestures, such as 'fumbling in his pockets' or with 'a shrug or two of the shoulders'; whereas if he remains concentrated within his character, then 'his feet, his hands, his eyes, his face, his every attitude, would all be full of expression, and give eloquence to silence'.³⁵

2. *Natural Recitation*

In the new perception of the actor's art a definition emerges of the 'natural' nature of the recitation eighteenth-century theorists and critics now appeared to require. Two elements in particular are axiomatic. Firstly, in line with the principle already established by the early Italian theorists, what the actor says and does must seem spontaneous, and in no way rehearsed and prepared.³⁶ Secondly, everything the actor says and does must be consonant with his character, and reflect extremely precisely the situation in which he finds himself. Fans and handkerchiefs waved excessively and inappropriately; a sing-song delivery, where the rhythm of the verse prevails over the sense; glances and greetings aimed at the public; incongruous behaviour of any kind; any lapse in attention towards the situation on stage, and even feelings and passions rendered generically and inadequately: all these make for an unnatural performance and staging.

At the same time it would be a mistake to take this as a movement in favour of realism of recitation. Although a sing-song delivery was criticized, verse drama continued to be written and produced, and the most celebrated actors, well-advanced in old age and infirmity, had no qualms at playing the part of a young hero – with sometimes disconcerting results. The seventy-year-old Baron, playing the part of Rodrigue in *Le Cid*, kneels as required before his beloved Chimène. He then continues to kneel, for long moments, while Chimène implores him to rise, but to no effect; and it is only when the seeming excess of courtesy is recognized as stiffness of joints that two court attendants are sent to help him back onto his feet.³⁷ Garrick, for his part, was still being acclaimed as Hamlet in 1776, when he was fifty-nine; it was only towards the middle of the century that voices began to be more audibly raised against the habit of many illustrious old Thespians of continuing to tread the boards they could barely climb onto. And if Macklin prepared his famous interpretation of

³⁴ See Thomas Davies, *Memoirs of the Life of David Garrick, Esq.*, 2 vols., London, Printed for the Author, 1780, I, p. 57; and *Dramatic Miscellanies*, 3 vols., London, Printed for the Author, 1785, I, p. 102 ff. See also Percy Fitzgerlad, *The Life of David Garrick*, London, Simpkin, Marshal & Co., 1899, p. 42. The original source is the description which appeared in *The Champion*, no. 455 (October, 1742).

³⁵ Roger Pickering, *Reflexions upon Theatrical Expression in Tragedy*, London, W. Johnston, 1755, p. 4.

³⁶ See, e.g., the sixteenth-century treatise by Leone de' Sommi, *Quattro dialoghi in materia di rappresentazioni sceniche*, ed. by F. Marotti, Milano, Il Polifilo, 1968, p. 48.

³⁷ See Joseph de Laporte, *Anecdotes dramatiques*, Paris, Duchesne, 1775, quoted in *La scène en contrechamp. Anecdotes françaises et traditions de jeu au siècles des Lumières*, ed. by S. Chaouche, Paris, Champion, 2005, p. 109.

Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*, staged February 1741, by frequenting the London Stock Market and Jewish community, it was not so much to inject his character with real gestures and reactions as to find a new interpretative slant for a part traditionally played as exclusively comic.³⁸ Any increased realism in eighteenth-century changes to acting was thus an optical illusion, created by the retroactive perception of the stage among the scholars and theatre experts of a later period. Some insight into the real state of things is furnished by mid-century attempts to rethink theatre costumes, introducing interpretative elements which directly signalled the condition, nationality, or period of the character. In a Leipzig production of Gottsched's *Der Sterbende Cato*, in 1741, Caroline Neuber's company of players wore clearly Roman-type tunics, but had covered their legs with pink breeches which created hilarity in the audience.³⁹ In a 1747 Paris production of Nivelles de La Chaussée's *L'amour castillan*, Marie-Justine-Benoît Favart wore Spanish dress, and in 1753, in *Les amours de Bastien e de Bastienne*, a rough woollen peasant dress and clogs, her arms naked; while in *Trois sultanes* her Turkish costume had been made in Constantinople of Turkish fabric.⁴⁰ Her colleague Clairon, in *Bajazet*, appears dressed as a sultana, and in Crébillon's *Electre* as a slave, with an airy chiton-like tunic and her arms chained together.⁴¹

None of these costumes was exactly realistic, however, but, as the documentation shows, all were clever creations in which token references to status and provenance had been stitched into refined and aesthetically-pleasing stage garments. Reference, then, not realism was what mattered: allusions to the period, circumstances, and nature of the events represented. When Voltaire was working on the production of *Orphéline de la Chine* in 1755 he was intent on costumes suited to the setting, and asked his costume designer, Claude Joseph Vernet, to make them somewhat Chinese but also French, with the result that Lekain appeared as Gengis Khan, in the portrait which has come down to us, decked in a turban, earrings, and a rococo lace-collar.⁴²

What these seeming contradictions come down to is the fact that no commentator of the period had any doubt that the stage needed to offer an alternative to reality, or a version of it which was finer, more elegant, consistent and complete, not to mention more decorous. If dramaturgic needs were paramount, aesthetic requirements still needed to continue to exist, and undiminished, which posed the serious problem of revisiting and remodelling them in line with the new sensibility. In some cases it was simple. The importance accorded the imposing, sweeping stage gesture tended to be reduced in favour of a movement which was clear, simple, and precise in detail. In terms of voice, there was unanimous criticism of actors trusting more in lung power than in the modulation of tone and volume in the play's different developments. Other cases presented near-insoluble problems however. A number

³⁸ This account, attributed to the actor himself, of his appearance as Shylock at Drury Lane is given by William Cooke, *Memoirs of Charles Macklin*, London, James Asperne, 1804, pp. 492-93. Garrick too mentions Macklin's visits to the London Stock Market in his *An Essay on Acting* (London, W. Bickerton, 1744, pp. 10-11).

³⁹ See Eduard Devrient, *Geschichte der deutschen Schauspielkunst* (1848-1874), Berlin, Eigenbrödler, 1929, pp. 105-106.

⁴⁰ See Charles Simon Favart, *Mémoires et correspondance littéraires dramatiques et anecdotiques*, I, p. 120.

⁴¹ See Jean-François Marmontel, *Mémoires*, p. 275.

⁴² See M. Angiolillo, *Storia del costume teatrale in Europa*, Roma, Lucarini, 1989, p. 74. See also Voltaire, *Lettre à César Chesneau Dumarsais*, 12 October 1755, in *Correspondance*, 13 vols., Paris, Gallimard, IV (1978), p. 585.

of aesthetic conditions existed, established by traditional poetics, which were seemingly impossible to jettison although clearly in conflict with new dramaturgic requirements – for example dignity and decorum, characteristics of tragic acting which distinguish it from comedy. Slight misgiving and suspicion thus undermined full admiration for the new poetics and the great innovators. Baron’s style came under scrutiny: his acting, while so ‘natural’ even in tragedy, at times appeared ‘not wholly consonant with the subject’.

A king may in some cases give a familiar note to his actions, while however maintaining a majesty of tone in keeping with circumstances and the occasion; and in the theatre it is not the first comportment which should be emulated, but the second; and if we praise a man of low standing when his manners happen to evince nobility of expression, how in the action of tragedy can we debase the hero to the familiar ways of the man of low condition?⁴³

Furthermore, the requirements of tragedy seemed at variance with a more natural and immediate diction:

Monsieur Baron affirms, and many spectators find this a merit in him, that he does everything in his power for the rhyme not to be apprehended. I likewise approve of this, but cannot agree that a tragic actor, while seeking to conceal the rhyme, should also seek not to have the line perceived, by lowering it to the accents of more common familiarity. If the line be one of the aspects of the tragedy, surely conferred on it to sustain the discourse and render it more majestic, thereby distancing it somewhat from the ordinary and over-natural discourse of the vulgar, why then do we wish to hide it, and render tragedy in all things like to comedy?⁴⁴

Some solution began to be looked for, not without difficulty. There are tragedies which centre on the ancient heroes: Achilles, Agamemnon, Pyrrhus, etc., and others which concern figures from more recent periods, such as the Cid, Bajazet, or the Earl of Essex. Less removed from us in time, we perceive them as less ‘majestic’ in status, and thus ‘persons not so entirely tragic’. Baron’s style seemed more suited to this last category, and therefore entirely suited, by the same logic, to comic acting.⁴⁵ Other critics preferred to solve the matter by making a distinction between ‘naturalness’ and ‘simplicity’. The first consists in the full transformation of the actor into the character, with a detailed reproduction of the states of the character’s mind. The second however implies a ‘lessening’ of the ‘gravity of the buskin’ and of the ‘majesty of monarchs’, removing some of the ‘splendour’ of voice and gesture normally attributable to such characters. In Baron, whose acting style it marked, this was not to be considered a fault, but was to be strongly discouraged in all other actors.⁴⁶

⁴³ Elena Virginia Balletti Riccoboni, *Lettera*, p. 8.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 9. Perrucci too considered tragedy ‘the more worthy verse’, conferring ‘more dignity’ (Andrea Perrucci, *A Treatise on Acting, from Memory and by Improvisation (1699) by Andrea Perrucci/Dell’Arte rappresentativa, premeditata ed all’improvviso*, p. 40). Of interest in this regard is Cibber’s insistence on the possibility in specific circumstances of opening tragedy up to comic scenes and situations, and how in that case the actor should not assume excessive austerity and dignity and spoil the amusement of the audience (see Colley Cibber, *An Apology*, p. 72).

⁴⁵ Elena Virginia Balletti Riccoboni, *Lettera*, p. 9.

⁴⁶ Jean Dumas d’Aiguebierre, *Seconde lettre*, pp. 36-37.

Some years later, Garrick's own ability to maintain the dignity of the character in all circumstances began to be questioned. At a number of points in *Hamlet*, while appearing extraordinarily natural he failed to conserve all the young prince's regal dignity.⁴⁷ The extremely perceptive critic John Hill interestingly commented that although Garrick was more than able to maintain the dignity of a tragic figure such as a king or hero, he gave way 'to thoughts of another kind', to the point of frequently compromising this aspect of the character.⁴⁸ It is not hard to imagine of what 'kind' these 'thoughts' were – an awareness of the dramaturgic need to render the characters as they reacted consistently but variously to the ever-changing circumstances of the play: a requirement which then clashed with the need to colour every gesture, movement and intonation, at every moment, with the unwavering "native hue" of dignity: a sort of homogeneous patina which covered the figure of the tragic hero. Precisely as Colley Cibber had observed some time earlier, comparing comic acting with tragic, where the characteristic 'dignity' and 'solemnity' tend to restrict interpretations to a more uniform and less varied standard:

The decency too, that must be observ'd in tragedy, reduces, by the manner of speaking it, one actor to be much more like another, than they can or need be suppos'd to be in comedy: there the laws of action give them such free, and almost unlimited liberties, to play and wanton with nature, that the voice, look, gesture of a comedian may be as various, as the manners and faces of the whole mankind are different from one another.⁴⁹

3. *The Beginnings of Emotionalism*

The traditional comparison between oratory and recitation was beginning to appear irremediably compromised, and within the various tensions outlined above there began to form a fundamental split in theory which, in different phases, was to mark the conception of acting in contemporary thought, from the early eighteenth century until well into the twentieth. At the same period in which recitation acquired an identity of its own in Western thought, as an autonomous object of study, there evolved a contraposition between an emotionalist and anti-emotionalist vision of the stage.

From the Romans on, a principle established by the authority of Cicero and Quintilian had remained fundamental: that the lawyer, the preacher, the politician, or the actor had to actually experience the feelings they externalized in their speech and at the same time use a carefully-studied code of intonations, gestures and attitudes. This emotional empathy immediately gave rise to the appropriate expressions, charging them with special energy and force which projected them onto the audience, empathetically involved in their turn. The code, on the other hand, guaranteed that the passionate impetus behind the different expressions would be restrained and communicated with clarity, precision, and decorum. This emotional involvement and code constituted the two components of *actio*, and the orator's skill lay basically in gauging and merging the two.

⁴⁷ See *The St. James's Chronicle*, no. 1717, 20-22 February 1772.

⁴⁸ John Hill, *The Actor: a Treatise on the Art of Playing*, London, R. Griffiths, 1750, p. 170. The passage is absent in the definitive edition (R. Griffiths, 1755).

⁴⁹ Colley Cibber, *An Apology*, p. 82.

A debate later emerged within the doctrine of oratory between those who ranked spontaneity, directness, and inspiration as the fulcrum of an effective delivery, and those who privileged a more scientific approach drawing on a consolidated technique and the advantage of study and practice. Regarding acting specifically, various ecclesiastical exponents of the anti-theatre polemics had emphasised empathy as the essential component of the actor's art, and the source of irremediable corruption. This was one of Nicole's arguments, later taken up by Bossuet:

Men and women appear on the stage to there represent the passions of hatred, anger, ambition, revenge, and most especially love. It is necessary that these be expressed in the most vivid and efficacious manner possible, nor could they succeed were they not to be excited by those same passions themselves [...] It behoves, then, he who represents the passion of love to feel it while so representing it, and it is not to be thought that this impression, voluntarily aroused, may then be cancelled from the spirit, and that it shall not leave within us a strong disposition towards this same passion.⁵⁰

The importance of emotional involvement had also been foregrounded in the considerations on painting,⁵¹ and had encouraged reflections on techniques available to the orator to induce in him the requisite feelings, i.e. the devices of the imagination as theorized by Quintilian.⁵² This was not limited to evoking, as vividly as possible, images of the events narrated in such a way that they acted concretely, as tangible objects, on the actor's sensibility; he was to re-evoke, within the secrecy of his soul, Le Faucheur explained, real events and scenes which he found particularly touching, however different from the events and subjects treated in his lines:

If touched by a vehement anguish at your ills, or by great pity for those of others, this will bring tears to your eyes. It was for this that the actors of old were at such pains to acquire the faculty of moving their imagination to the point of being able to shed tears in abundance, and succeeded so marvellous well that actors have been seen to leave the theatre with their countenances covered with tears. To this end they used different means, though the most efficacious was to secretly turn their imagination to real

⁵⁰ Pierre Nicole, *Traité de la comédie et autres pièces d'un procès du théâtre* (Liège, Adolphe Beyers, 1667), ed. by L. Thirouin, Paris, Champion, 1998, p. 37. See Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet, *Maximes et réflexions sur la comédie* (Paris, J. Anisson, 1694), in *L'Église et le théâtre*, ed. by Ch. Urbain and E. Levesque, Paris, Grasset, 1930, p. 180. The fundamental importance of 'full immersion' in acting had also been underlined by a pro-theatre author like Georges de Scudéry, *Apologie du théâtre*, Paris, Augustin Courbé, 1639, p. 85.

⁵¹ See, e.g., Federico Borromeo, *De pictura sacra* (Milano, 1624), now in *Quaderni del Seminario di Storia della Critica d'Arte*, ed. by B. Agosti, Pisa, S. N. S., 1994, p. 34. In the early eighteenth century Roger De Piles advised painters to examine the passion to be represented, consider how they would react if they experienced it personally, and once they had embodied it, to put themselves in the place of the person in prey to it (see Roger De Piles, *Cours de peinture par principes*, Paris, J. Estienne, 1708, pp. 165-166). Antoine Coypel advised painters wishing to conjure up in their imagination the gestures to be painted to enact them themselves and then transfer them onto the canvas (see Antoine Coypel, *Discours prononcés dans les conférences de l'Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture*, Paris, Jacques Collombat, 1721, p. 156).

⁵² On the procedure illustrated by Quintilian, see C. Vicentini, 'Theory of Acting I. Acting Theory in the Ancient World', *Acting Archives Essays*, AAR Supplement 1, April 2011. It was reported in detail in seventeenth-century treatises. See, in particular, the meticulous description given by Sforza Pallavicino in *Del bene libri quattro*, In Roma, Appresso gli Eredi di Francesco Corbelletti, 1644, now in *Trattatisti e narratori del seicento*, ed. by E. Raimondi, Milano-Napoli, Ricciardi, 1960, p. 251.

subjects which were close to their hearts, in the place of those fantastical subjects they represented, and which moved them not at all.⁵³

Gildon, for his part, had returned to the Le Faucheur passage and placed it at the centre of his treatise. But apart from attention to emotional involvement, the concept of *actio* as point of convergence of its two traditional components had remained a stable and incontestable point in oratory. Le Faucheur, for example, emphasized the importance of this emotional empathy only after dwelling on the means and external forms of vocal expression, and Gildon considered it essential to state the canonical code of expressions to adopt, to be perfected in front of a mirror.⁵⁴

The slant given in Perrucci's, Grimarest's, and Gildon's new treatises had focused on two basic points of difference between oratory and acting. The actor required a comprehensive series of actions and behavioural attitudes, listed by Perrucci, which had nothing in common with the traditional *actio* code and, as Gildon had pointed out, sometimes actually needed to violate it. He also had to represent such a vast range of feelings, passions, emotions, and states of mind, in such subtle combinations and interactions, as to require an almost infinite series of attitudes and expressions which, as shortly become clear, would be impossible to describe.

It was implausible, then, to put acting and oratory in the same category since the expressive code of *actio* was inadequate, over-general and hardly applicable to the stage. The next inevitable step was to construct a theory of recitation which eschewed any pre-established code of tones, gestures, and movements and based itself around *actio*'s other component, the orator's emotional empathy.

In actual fact the seventeenth century had already attempted to apply emotional involvement not just to produce greater actorly dynamism and spontaneity, but also to define the details and nuances of assumed expressions, a function traditionally attributed to the gestural code. This was again a consideration of Aubignac's. There are three essential inner attitudes the actor has to be able to render when he walks on stage, which vary according to his lines: an attitude which is moderate and 'devoid of emotion', one which is passionate and 'impetuous', and an intermediate one which may be defined 'semi-passionate'. The first two are relatively easy to render: 'moderate' corresponds to the actor's natural state of mind at the beginning of a performance, before entering into the part; the second belongs to the standard techniques of an actor who 'out of experience' knows 'to what degree the voice and gestures may be raised to express strong and violent agitation'.⁵⁵ The third, 'semi-passionate', is no simple matter, exceeding 'natural tranquillity' but stopping short of 'extreme violence'. However a solution exists:

The problem may be solved [...] by resorting to a system I have observed applied by the principle actor of our time, Mondory, who in cases of the kind, before speaking would walk for some time around the stage, as if daydreaming, sometimes seeming

⁵³ Michel Le Faucheur, *Traité de l'action de l'orateur ou de la prononciation et du geste*, Paris, Courbé, 1657, pp. 204-205. The actor maintaining a tear-stained face is a clear reference to Quintilian (*Institutio oratoria*, VI,2,35), as is the use of the imagination (VI,2,31). Le Faucheur, however, suggests applying imagination not so much to imaginary subjects, as to real emotive subjects which concern the person of the actor directly, even if they have nothing to do with the story represented.

⁵⁴ See Charles Gildon, *The Life of Mr. Betterton*, London, Robert Gosling, 1710, p. 68.

⁵⁵ François Hédelin d'Aubignac, *La pratique du théâtre* (Paris, Antoine de Sommerville, 1657), Genève, Slatkine, 1996, pp. 279-280.

agitated, at others letting his head roll about, raising and lowering his eyes and assuming different attitudes according to the sentiment to be expressed. He did so, I believe, to animate himself somewhat and prepare to express appositely a semi-passion, removing some of the natural reserve with which one enters the stage himself applying the necessary brake so as not to be too violently transported.⁵⁶

In d'Aubignac's opinion, then, there exist more obvious expressive attitudes which can be rationally constructed by technique alone, and others which are more mediated and nuanced and can only be adequately produced by the actor's actual state of mind, and which no mere technique or code can supply. Aubignac's treatise simply glances at this, but in the early eighteenth century the function of emotional involvement is suddenly extended, to the exclusion of any study of gestural and expressive codes. In 1710 Steele observed in the *Tatler*, the London review, that for a correct performance the actor had no need to study gestures: 'the behaviour', Steele explained, 'would follow the sentiments of the mind [...] If the matter is well conceived, words will flow with ease: and if the actor is well possessed of the nature of his part, a proper action will necessarily follow'.⁵⁷

The next, decisive step was taken by Jean Poisson, an actor from a celebrated theatre family. In 1709 an intellectual review, *Histoire des ouvrages des savants*, published his short article, 'Quelques Réflexions sur l'Art de parler en public', later extended into *Réflexions sur l'Art de parler en public*.⁵⁸ Poisson began with the customary conceptual acrobatics to strait-jacket oratory and acting into the same definition, while taking care to emphasize the importance of acting. The subject of his article is *actio oratoria* – the use of the voice, the face, and gestures of all those preaching from the pulpit, pleading in court, teaching in schools, speaking in political assemblies or simply reading aloud or speaking in conversation. All these activities, however, Poisson explained, are 'subsumed in theatre', so that the technique they require may be defined *art de réciter*, the expression used among actors.⁵⁹ Indeed, an actor possessing all the skills of his profession constitutes a model for all who need to express themselves through words and gestures.⁶⁰

This art of public speaking requires both physical gifts ('natural graces of the body') and spiritual ('memory' and 'intelligence'), and not everyone possesses them in sufficient measure.⁶¹ Study and practice, however, will at least partly overcome physical defects such as a weak voice, and reinforce the spiritual faculties. But one innate gift can never be nurtured by any amount of practice: 'sensitivity of mind', which confers its own particularly effective grace to orators' and actors' performances.⁶² And, more even than this, Poisson emphasises, lies at the core of the art of acting, gradually eroding the norms of a time-honoured doctrine:

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 281.

⁵⁷ *The Tatler*, no. 201, 22 July 1710.

⁵⁸ Jean Poisson, 'Quelques Réflexions sur l'Art de parler en public', *Histoire des Ouvrages des Savants*, June 1709. The essay *Réflexions sur l'Art de parler en public*, par M. Poisson, Comédien du Sa Majesté le Roi de Pologne, et Electeur de Saxe, was published (n.p., n.d.) in 1717.

⁵⁹ Jean Poisson, *Réflexions sur l'Art de parler en public*, pp. 5-6 and p. 12.

⁶⁰ See *ibid.*, pp. 14-15.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.14 and p. 35.

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 35-36.

All the rules of Cicero and Quintilian, and of the illustrious moderns who have written on declamation are of no avail to the orator, unless he follow the first, namely, to understand what he must say, and feel it vividly himself [...] When touched by the words pronounced, the countenance, voice and gesture all adapt in conformity with the inner movements [...] And only through this, with little searching, is it possible to please and to persuade, which is the only end of eloquence.⁶³

‘Sensibility’ then makes redundant everything in the gestural code defining the external expressions of the different passions: it becomes superfluous to state ‘that the proud man raises his glance while the humble man lowers it; or that the disdainful and the irate turn aside, because it is the very nature of that passion which occasions this, and no advice on this point is needed’.⁶⁴ Norms regarding elegance and decorum remain valid: Poisson lists the usual solecisms (raising the hands above the head, banging the fists, using the left hand without the right, etc.) but adds that these may be permissible in comedy or even tragedy when justified by the nature of the feeling to be expressed, such as ‘fury’ or other ‘vehement passions’.⁶⁵

Having placed sensitivity at the centre of recitation, the maximum attention then went to all psychological obstacles to the actor’s emotional sensors. The major one was inevitably ‘timidity’, or the stage-fright which normally affects those speaking in public. This lessens with experience and habit, but rarely disappears. One practical tip given was to ‘modestly contemplate the listeners’ before beginning to speak, in order to ‘calm oneself, and get one’s breath back, so to speak, thus gaining the time and means of reassurance’. Above all, it was essential to avoid the idea of being at the centre of attention of people gathered there expressly to hear the speaker.⁶⁶ The further fear of forgetting one’s lines could actually cause a physical reaction: ‘it alters the face, disturbs physical action, lowers the voice, and causes the orator to perspire’. No remedy exists, Poisson admits, beyond possessing a sound memory which must be trained from youth and exercised as much as possible.⁶⁷

Psychological tensions and their psychosomatic effects apart, the orator’s/actor’s sensibility can also be compromised by a failure to regulate the emotional reactions towards the text declaimed. An excess of passion means that the voice is ‘suffocated’ or ‘lost’, and ‘memory itself may be disturbed’.⁶⁸ Here a number of specific techniques are required, tricks of the orator’s trade. Often, for example, by declaiming with uncontrolled passion the orator finds himself unable to stop and take breath, and reaches the end of his lung-capacity before the end of his speech. He must then get his breath back through ‘near-imperceptible’ micro-pauses which

⁶³ Ibid., p. 34.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 29.

⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 31-32.

⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 15-16.

⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 17-18.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 25. Quintilian had already observed that when an orator improvises, the emotion aroused by the subject treated can cause loss of control over the voice (see *Institutio oratoria*, XI,3,25). In his *Réflexions sur l’usage de l’éloquence de ce temps* René Rapin recalled a celebrated Parisian lawyer of the period who, when pleading, would become so passionate as to compromise not just the elegance of his speech but the actual clarity of diction, to the point where he became unintelligible (Paris, Barbin et Muguet, 1671, particularly p. 68). Grimarest also touched on the fact that passion actually felt by a lawyer could alter the voice, and anger could undermine the precision of the delivery (see Jean-Leonor Le Gallois de Grimarest, *Traité du récitatif*, p. 118).

enable him to recite a period quickly and seemingly in one breath, with the emphasis of slight end-weight creating ‘a fine effect’ in the theatre, and eliciting the spectators’ applause.⁶⁹

4. *Luigi Riccoboni. Acting by Improvisation*

Poisson’s essay effected a turning-point in the theory of recitation. It questioned the gestural code, jettisoning the part regarding the feelings and maintaining only norms of elegance and decorum, which however could be violated where necessary. He positioned emotional empathy at the centre of the actor’s performance, and emphasized the performer’s inner dynamics, taking the first steps towards an analysis of psychological blocks, the damage they caused, and possible solutions.

The first complete formulation of the emotionalist theory of acting came in the form of a brief treatise in verse by Luigi Riccoboni, alias Lelio, actor-manager who had grown up in the world of the *commedia dell’arte*. Between 1706 and 1715 Riccoboni and his wife, the actress and poet Elena Balletti, alias Flaminia, took the decision to introduce a public used to *commedia all’improvviso* to scripts from the great French tragedians, adaptations of Corneille and Racine. They then moved to tragedies from the Italian sixteenth century, then contemporary Italian playwrights, culminating in the success of *Merope*, written by Scipione Maffei for Elena Balletti and performed in Modena in 1713 and in Venice in 1714.

A similar experiment in comedy had been less successful. After the acclaim which had greeted his Molière adaptations, Riccoboni had wanted to look at a sixteenth-century comic script from Italy, and had opted for Ariosto’s *Scolastica*. But it had been a failure, and Riccoboni accepted the French Regent Filippo d’Orléans’s invitation to bring Comédie Italienne back to the Hotel de Bourgogne eighteen years after the expulsion of the players decreed by Louis XIV. Life was not easy for the Comédie Italienne, however, and Riccoboni left Paris for a spell in London before returning and applying himself exclusively to the study of the European stage and a project of reform for contemporary theatre.

In 1728 he published his essay on acting, *Dell’arte rappresentativa* (preface and six chapters in verse), which followed his *Histoire du théâtre italien*, published in the same year with the *Dissertation sur la tragédie moderne*. Almost a decade later he wrote *Observations sur la comédie et sur le génie de Molière*, published in 1736; *Réflexions historiques et critiques sur les differens théâtres de l’Europe* (1738); *Pensées sur la déclamation* (1738), and lastly *De la réformation du théâtre* (1743). His very important *Discorso sulla commedia all’improvviso*, which he had written, revised, extended, corrected and recorrected for more than twenty years, from 1721 to 1743, only appeared more than two centuries later, in 1973. *Dell’arte rappresentativa* marks the beginnings of modern acting theory independent of any cross-references to oratory. It is intended exclusively for actors: preachers, lawyers, and orators generally are not so much as mentioned, and Riccoboni was at no pains to establish any links or cross-fertilisation of advice. His aim was to give his ‘young and inexpert’ colleagues the rules they were lacking. This,

⁶⁹ Jean Poisson, *Réflexions sur l’Art de parler en public*, pp. 23-24.

he explained, was a completely new venture. Poetics and literary theory had abounded since Aristotle, but the rules of acting had been disregarded.⁷⁰

Riccoboni's perspective is particularly important, and is briefly outlined in the preface which takes up the theses recently expounded in the *Histoire du théâtre italien*. His perspective is dictated by the concrete problem posed by Italian theatre compared with theatre in the rest of Europe; in this way the customary premise of the general decline of present-day stage and the need to improve both acting standards and audience discernment lost much of the tone of generic complaint it had in Grimarest and Gildon, and takes on the contours of a precise diagnosis orienting the theory to be evolved.⁷¹

The basic problem, in Riccoboni's opinion, was the crisis in Italian theatre. The sixteenth century had been able to count on a solid repertoire of scripts of literary value, while the professional companies were equally adept at staging both written texts and improvised.⁷² The invasion of 'bad' Spanish comedies and tragi-comedies in the following century, however, had driven any 'good' ones from the stage, ushering in quite the opposite of a golden age for play writing.⁷³ Tragedy as a genre was unprofitably contaminated, and scripted comedy, 'perverted and reduced to scenarios for acting by improvisation', was left to the special skills of the Italian actors, appreciated in the whole of Europe and in great demand in the most important foreign courts.⁷⁴ Around 1680 however they too seemed to lose their touch, ceding the stage to all the endemic dangers and defects of improvisation, and the professional product on offer ended up having little to recommend it.⁷⁵ The time was thus more than ripe for serious, searching reform, and Riccoboni decided to undertake it. His idea was to look for creditable scripts, tragedies and comedies, and present them to the public in carefully-conceived performances staged according to the criteria elaborated over recent years.

The problem of recitation seemed at this point strictly linked to an evaluation of the various elements of comedy by improvisation, the habits and defects it tended to impose or encourage, and its general influence on actorly practice.

Improvised comedy, as Riccoboni realized, had served the stage well for a considerable period. It required, however, actors who were highly-cultured, with great powers of language and expressiveness – qualities to be shared by the whole company, since the best actor in the world can do little to maintain tension and

⁷⁰ Luigi Riccoboni, *A' Lettori*, preface to *Dell'arte rappresentativa*, n. pag., and chapter I, pp. 3-5. Riccoboni obviously could not know Leone de' Sommi's still unpublished *Quattro Dialoghi*, and seems unaware of Cecchini's works on acting, although he cites his *Brevi Discorsi Intorno alle Comedie, Comedianti, & spettatori* (Napoli, Gio. Domenico Roncaglio, 1616), Grimarest and Gildon. On the other hand he claimed to have read *Della poesia rappresentativa e del modo di rappresentare le favole sceniche* by Angelo Ingegneri, which disappointed him in dealing with scenery, machinery, but with no mention of the actors themselves.

⁷¹ See Jean-Leonor Le Gallois de Grimarest, *La vie de M. de Molière* (Paris, Jacques Lefèvre, 1705), ed. by G. Mongrédien, Paris, Michel Briant, 1955, p. 54; Charles Gildon, *The Life of Mr. Betterton*, p. 15; and Luigi Riccoboni, *A' Lettori*, n. pag.

⁷² See Luigi Riccoboni, *Histoire du Théâtre italien depuis la decadence de la Comedie Latine; avec un Catalogue des Tragedies et Comedies Italiennes imprimées depuis l'an 1500, jusq'à l'an 1660. Et une Dissertation sur la Tragedie Moderne* (Paris, Pierre Delormel, 1728), anast. repr. Bologna, Forni, 1969, p. 45.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 57 and p. 72.

⁷⁵ See *ibid.*, pp. 73-74.

immediacy against a colleague who interrupts at the wrong moment, or misses his cue.⁷⁶ The writing seemed to be on the wall for improvisation, left to its own devices; the only solution was to provide robust performances of valid scripts. Plays tended to be a heterogeneous collection of monologues and *generici*, a repertoire of portmanteau speeches for all occasions, peppered with maxims, with no organic interaction or tenor. Fine and eloquent speeches would often be followed by rather stale and banal improvised lines, in compensation for which the actors would offer up a disproportionate number of stock gags and facetious quips with no bearing on the subject of the play to which, however, it was eventually necessary to return with some strained line or strategy.⁷⁷ Actors used to working like this will inevitably find difficulty when faced with a text which imposes its own lines and specific technical difficulties, as much of the best drama did. Verse drama presented particular problems, as Riccoboni wryly admitted:

Actors no longer possessing the habit of reciting in verse became ridiculous, indeed insupportable, when called upon to do so. Either they exceeded in emphasis, degenerating into a tedious sing-song, or the rhythm was so erroneous that half of the sense was lost.⁷⁸

Once improvisation had lost its remit, however, well-written and effective scripts by competent playwrights were the only way of avoiding the vulgarity and mistakes it produced, and of going some way towards concealing the general shortcomings of the actors.

With their customary habit of performing comedies by improvisation, the Italians are obliged to complete the scene with their own ideas, so that if the player is ignorant, this is immediately apparent [...] When poets offering good, sound plays appear, it will be seen that these actors of modest talent will be replaced by worthy men who most gladly enter a profession which, if it now inspires them with horror, would however attract them by the hope of good pay and good reputation.⁷⁹

But the ability to cover for the actors' ignorance is only one of the virtues of the written script. Even more important is the fact that, if studied and prepared with care, it actually improves and refines the mode of acting. As noted by Pier Jacopo Martello, one of the contemporary playwrights Riccoboni staged, when Lelio and Flaminia selected 'solid, well-constructed' tragedies for their companies, they were interpreted 'in a lively and confident fashion'.⁸⁰

Improvised acting, then, was open to criticism on all sides and could seemingly be buried with few regrets, yet there was considerable ambivalence. 'No-one more than myself', Riccoboni stated in his *Discorso sulla commedia all'improvviso*, 'detested the extraordinary habit of reciting by improvisation, and no-one took more advantage of

⁷⁶ See *ibid.*, p. 62.

⁷⁷ See *ibid.*, pp. 63-66. See, too, his comments on German theatre in his *Réflexions historiques et critiques sur le différents théâtres de l'Europe*. Its 'total' decadence, he notes, may be attributable to the introduction of improvised comedy, following the Italian model (p. 162).

⁷⁸ Luigi Riccoboni, Preface to *L'Artaserse, tragedia di Giulio Agosti*, Venezia, G. Tommasini, 1714.

⁷⁹ Luigi Riccoboni, *Discorso sulla commedia all'improvviso e scenari inediti*, ed. by I. Mamczarz, Milano, Il Polifilo, 1973, pp. 11-12.

⁸⁰ Pier Jacopo Martello, *Della tragedia antica e moderna over l'Impostore, dialogo* (1715), in *Opere*, Bologna, Lelio dalla Volpe, 1735, I, p. 178.

it'. While easily degenerating into vulgarity and generalisation, it had the advantage of training the 'sound and diligent' actor to 'speak well and improve his education'.⁸¹ Moreover, if alternated with the performance of non-improvised plays, it extended an actor's range and offered a repertoire of characters not otherwise accessible.

An Italian company never has more than eleven or twelve actors or actresses [...] Yet when they must recite a tragedy with innumerable characters, everyone takes part, even Harlequin, his mask removed, and all declaim their lines in good Italian: this practice making them able to transmit the most sublime of the playwrights' concepts, and equally to imitate the most extraordinary aspects of nature [...] In the companies of other nations, which never number less than thirty actors, each actor recites only those parts congenial to his natural gifts and his art, and it is exceptional to meet one or two able to interpret works or characters different in type.⁸²

Improvisation also possessed one last, fundamental quality:

The actor acting by improvisation does so more naturally and with more spirit than he who recites a part learned by heart: everyone feels more deeply, and thus pronounces better, that which he himself produces, than that which he borrows from others with the assistance of memory.⁸³

Though the funeral notices were ready, then, the patient stolidly refused to die, conserving two points of strength of great value for the new perception of the actor's art then affirming itself on the European stage. It taught flexibility and the ability to produce any number of totally different roles, and lent all action immediacy and spontaneity, deriving, Riccoboni underlines in a fundamental passage, from the actor's 'feeling' what he is performing, rather than simply repeating words and sentences written by others and learned by heart.

To summarize Riccoboni's position at this point, ideal recitation should, paradoxically, combine improvisation with the use of a written script which alone can purge the method of its inevitable vulgarity, excesses, and shortfalls in performance. The solution seemed clear: if improvisation improves acting skills in eliciting 'feeling' from the actor, and if more 'feeling' produces better acting, then the best of both worlds can be obtained, and the benefits of improvisation can be transferred to acting from a script if the actor's immediate emotional response to the words and actions of the text are placed squarely at the centre of everything done and said onstage. In the light of this principle, Riccoboni set about evolving the theory expounded in his *Dell'arte rappresentativa*.

5. First Formulation of the Emotionalist Theory

Riccoboni starts from a basic premise, already concretely consolidated by the early Italian theorists of the sixteenth century: when acting the actor must remain anchored to 'truth', so as to persuade the audience that what is 'fake' is not, however,

⁸¹ Luigi Riccoboni, *Discorso sulla commedia all'improvviso e scenari inediti*, p. 30. Tessari reads this statement as presenting improvisation as a fluency exercise for the actor (see R. Tessari, *Il teatro del Settecento*, Bari, Laterza, p. 30).

⁸² Luigi Riccoboni, *Réflexions historiques et critiques sur le différents théâtres de l'Europe*, p. 29.

⁸³ Luigi Riccoboni, *Historie du théâtre italien*, pp. 61-62.

‘false’.⁸⁴ This will be impossible, Riccoboni immediately observes, if he draws on gestures and expressions which are studied and calculated, thereby easily becoming excessive and superfluous, producing ‘five or six movements for each word’.⁸⁵

In real life, gestures and movements arise spontaneously, from the immediate situation, and express our state of mind quite naturally, without any calculation of the “natural” position of hands and feet.⁸⁶ On stage the actor needs to proceed in the same way. He must ‘forget’ about his limbs and concentrate solely on ‘feeling’ emotionally what he is acting. Gestures and expressions will follow immediately, enacting the feelings which animate the character.

How is it to be managed, to follow the natural instinct and move spontaneously? It is necessary to forget about our four limbs, and possibly even the fifth, the head, and to attempt instead to feel that which we are saying, and to make believe the matter concerns oneself, and not some other person. If you feel in your heart the pains of love, of indignation, and of jealousy, or even should you be possessed by demons like Orestes, you will feel affinity with that love, indignation, and even with Beelzebub himself, and you will move spontaneously, and with no artifice your arms and legs, feet and hands, and I would dare wager that no-one will be found who would criticize you if you allow your heart to regulate your movements.⁸⁷

In a process of this kind the traditionally-recommended expedients of rehearsing in front of a mirror clearly have no point.⁸⁸ A mirror inevitably encourages a studied and artificial pose, and by scrutinising himself from head to toe, the actor is entirely concentrated on the body and limbs and forgets that it is the centre of the face, head-on, between the chin and the forehead, on which the audience’s eyes are fixed.

Imagine a thread connecting the eyes of each person to the point on which their glance is directed. On which part of the body would we expect it to land? On the face, and on no other part. Stare into the eyes of the audience and you will observe that each of them is hanging on your glance, your eyes, as if rapt by love.⁸⁹

Facial expression and glance are thus the focal point, and must be co-ordinated with the voice, otherwise the spoken word will be to all effects ineffectual and the actor’s silence and pauses lose all effect.⁹⁰ The glance of those on stage has to be able to communicate the entire range of feelings, in all their nuances; and to be successful in this, the actor, again, has only one recourse: truly to feel what he has to express.

You feel fear, and your eyes, timorous, will express it; you feel fury, and it will rage within them: shame will communicate a horror to them, irony a contrived gaiety, which would defy the brush of any painter. Love will confer a sweetness more winning than all other, tedium a melancholy devoid of all pain, indifference an indefinable quality; and all that disgusts or attracts you, whether joy or pain, will, if experienced, be perceived in your glance.⁹¹

⁸⁴ Luigi Riccoboni, *Dell’arte rappresentativa*, p. 17.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁸⁶ See *ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

⁸⁸ See *ibid.*, p. 14.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁹⁰ See *ibid.*, p. 31 and p. 59.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

From gestures and bodily movements – hands, arms, and legs – to facial expressions and flickers of the eye to be co-ordinated with the modulations of the voice, the basic rule, then, is to trust to the immediate, living sentiment. This, Riccoboni underlines in the last line of his treatise, is the cardinal principle, the ‘General Rule’ of acting.⁹² Having placed empathy as the cornerstone of acting Riccoboni then goes on to define the area in which technique, the calculated action and effect, can be desirable or even mandatory. He pinpoints two issues destined to become fundamental in the succeeding debate. True empathy, Riccoboni, is virtually impossible when the actor is required to represent states of mind or characters which are inimical or extraneous to his own personality, as in the case of his extreme example of the devil. Furthermore, while it is perfectly spontaneous, in real life, ‘at home or in the piazza’, to feel the sentiments naturally elicited by the situation, it is less easy to elicit them on the stage, when playing a role before a large public. The actor’s inner empathy can then reveal itself as inadequate, inactive, or non-existent, and in that case, Riccoboni admits, although the ‘great art’ of the actor lies in ‘feeling’, it will here be necessary to draw on ‘external artifice’ and fake it, imitating the characters and expressions we observe in real life.⁹³ Moreover, when conjuring up the apposite appearance, behaviour, and gestures of his character the actor must in any case take into account the immediate theatre conditions and stage requirements, whereby, for example, the volume of the voice and amplitude of gesture will need to be regulated so as to reach the farthest rows while not appearing excessive to the nearest spectators.⁹⁴ And a bottom-line maxim, as Riccoboni states in the *Réflexions historiques et critiques sur les differens théâtres de l’Europe*, is that all ‘action should be slightly overplayed’: ‘totally simple, pure’ nature would be ‘cold’ on the stage:

a statue to be placed at a distance must perforce be larger than natural size, that the audience, however far off, see it in its just proportions [...] English actors possess the art of, so to speak, enlarging the truth, exactly as much as is necessary to make it visible from a distance, so as to make appear as pure truth that which they represent.⁹⁵

Aesthetic requirements then follow. Nature creates imperfect products, hunchbacks and cripples, individuals disfigured from their birth, and human gestures are frequently clumsy, graceless, and excessive. For this reason the stage must not show all that we see in our daily life, warts and all: or, as Riccoboni puts it, if nature mixes ‘gold with mire’, the theatre should remove the mire and reveal a version which is ‘beautiful’, showing its products in perfect and exemplary forms.⁹⁶ In real life, Riccoboni elucidates, a prince may possess a body or bearing ill-conforming with the dignity of his rank, but none of this must appear on the stage, where the character’s aspect must always reflect the dignity representing his condition iconically:

Whether you represent a prince, a king, or an emperor, bear always in mind that you must please the persons of the lowest condition just as those in the highest. Never

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid., pp. 19-20 and p. 33.

⁹⁴ See *ibid.*, p. 26.

⁹⁵ Luigi Riccoboni, *Réflexions historiques et critiques sur les differens théâtres de l’Europe*, p. 135. See also *Pensées*, p. 262.

⁹⁶ Luigi Riccoboni, *Dell’arte rappresentativa*, pp. 6-8 and p. 25.

make the character of such stature that a prince may not see himself therein, or believe at least that he would behave in like fashion, and present him as the plebeian would imagine him, eschewing a form so strange and uncustomary that it throws doubts on the character you are representing.⁹⁷

Let us reveal him as comely, and never deformed. Let the king assume a bearing in conformity with his rank: if a king assume a bearing more debased than is seemly, we yet should reveal him as comely, and never out of keeping with what he should be.⁹⁸

The actor's physical appearance must always, then, be adequate to the part he is playing. In general an actor should be 'well-fashioned in his limbs', to be able to interpret royals or young lovers. If ungainly in appearance, he can at most represent a specific type of person, to comic effect.⁹⁹ He should also exclude all attitudes which, though realistic, are not in keeping with the exemplary physiognomy of that particular character. A king, Riccoboni explains, in a very transparent reference to Baron's over-casual style in tragic scenes, if seated before his counsellors and sentencing his rebel son, can hardly sit with his elbows on his knees and his chin in his hands, nor receive a foreign ambassador sitting with his legs crossed and 'chewing his glove'.¹⁰⁰ And if comedy allows more freedom in interpreting characters and forms of behaviour, tragedy remains 'a lady of great regard', unable ever to forget the 'majesty' which is hers by right.¹⁰¹

In three cases, then, technique can be indispensable to the actor: when the part calls for particular expressions to be conjured up 'in cold blood' – either because the role is too far from the actor's own personality, or because the artificial conditions of the theatre thwart their easy and spontaneous appearance; when, for stage logic, voice and movements have to be calibrated but must still be seen and heard by the back rows without appearing hyperbolic to the nearest; and when gestures and attitudes have to be corrected to meet the aesthetic requirement of presenting nature in its best light, in exemplary rather than average or flawed figures.

Techniques also exist for specific problems: 'fake tears', for example, when a young flirt has to feign distress to fool her lover, and cry in a way which fools him but must appear clearly false to the audience. The solution is to cry naturally, but give some rapid sign such as a glance or hidden smile.

The weeping must appear real to him [the lover] and false to the audience, and the deceit must be perceived both in unison with and distinct from the truth. Yet I have

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 22.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 26.

⁹⁹ Ibid., pp. 11-12.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., pp. 23-24. Riccoboni is alluding to a 'Re della scena': Baron, in Antoine Houdar de La Motte's *Inés de Castro* (IV, 3) and in Corneille's *Rodogune* (III, 5). For an identification of the exact scene see Valentina Gallo's excellent comment in the digital edition, *Dell'Arte rappresentativa*, ed. by V. Gallo, *Les savoirs des acteurs italiens*, Collection numérique dirigée par Andrea Fabiano, notes 14 and 15 (<http://www.irpmf.cnrs.fr/IMG/pdf/dellarterappresentativa.pdf>). Inés de Castro had been identified in the review attributed to Pierre-François Guyot-Desfontaines, *Lettre d'un comédien françois, au sujet de "l'Histoire du théâtre italien", écrite par M. Riccoboni, dit Lelio. Contenant un extrait fidele de cet Ouvrage, avec des Remarques*, Paris, La Veuve del Noël Pissot, 1728, p. 53. Rodogune is cited as the play concerned in Jean-Baptiste Rousseau, *Lettre de J.-B. Rousseau à Monsieur Riccoboni*, Paris, A. Caillou, 1731, p. 20. The letter is published, with the *Réponse de Monsieur Riccoboni à la lettre de monsieur Rousseau*, in the appendix to the *Histoire du théâtre italien* (Paris, A. Cailleau, 1731).

¹⁰¹ Luigi Riccoboni, *Dell'arte rappresentativa*, p. 25.

seen such affected means of conveying this, that the lover could never have been persuaded by the deceit [...] To show that you are false, a glance will suffice, or a sidelong smile, to the public, and then show oneself as true and natural.¹⁰²

By-play also requires careful technical skill. When silently reacting to the words of his interlocutor the actor must limit his expressions, to avoid distracting the audience's attention from the speaker.¹⁰³ Lastly, similar skills allow the actor to carefully gauge the amount of passion a scene requires, and build up to it convincingly:

If from the start you are agitated by great fury, your words will end by having less effect. If then you would have the feeling grow in strength, reduce the rhythm and movements and proceed by degrees.¹⁰⁴

Neither the actor's spontaneous emotional commitment nor technical resources will serve however if the character's behaviour is incongruous in the specific situation. This is often the fault of the actor, as when, Riccoboni explains (repeating a norm which quickly became canonical in the literature of the period), he pays more attention to his public than to the action unfolding onstage.

In the art of acting the first rule is to suppose you are alone even though before a thousand spectators, and that the actor engaged in dialogue with you is the only person you should address.¹⁰⁵

Effectiveness is also lost by a habit passed down from one generation to the next: that of a sing-song delivery resting leadenly on the rhythm of the line. Riccoboni was the fiercest of its critics among contemporary theoreticians. The habit, he observed, grew out of an attempt to emulate ancient tragedians who were believed to have sung the lines to a musical accompaniment.¹⁰⁶ The resulting delivery was 'strange', and destroyed any willing suspension of disbelief, any illusion of real people, and not actors, speaking and moving in front of our eyes. In Italy, where it survives in the academies, 'it kills, enervates, and exhausts' its listener with a 'bewildering concert', of tones, and in France, where, with the honourable exception of Adrienne Lecouvreur, it remains the most common form of delivery in tragedy, it produces 'headache and hiccups'.¹⁰⁷ Not that this means that the delivery of a tragic hero should be that of the common man, Riccoboni quickly adds: tragic characters possess a particular dignity and greatness, and in any case speak in verse. They require a style of acting which is both 'majestic' and 'natural', although it is near-impossible to legislate as to the perfect delivery, which must be entrusted to the ear, to common sense, and to the actor's restraint.¹⁰⁸

At other times, incongruent behaviour by the character depends not on the actor but on the playwright, as when, for example, the character's words are out of keeping

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 35.

¹⁰³ See *ibid.*, pp. 52-54 and p. 57. On by-play see also *Pensées*, p. 258.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., pp. 58-59.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 53.

¹⁰⁶ See *ibid.*, p. 40.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., pp. 42-44. See also *Pensées*, p. 266.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 46.

with the emotional situation. French tragedy, Riccoboni observes, often has a hero who ‘in the turmoil of the most vehement passion’ will think and speak ‘with sentiments of the highest metaphysical nature’.¹⁰⁹ It is then up to the actor to compensate as best he can:

If you must pronounce an elevated sentence, albeit it is not your fault [but the author’s], you must seek to make it adequate through the tone you adopt.¹¹⁰

A further, more serious mistake concerns the range of types of characters and emotional tones, which must be so varied as to avoid all monotony. If tragic characters must all perforce be majestic, with the risk of making them uniform, it is necessary, Riccoboni advises, to make a clear distinction, at least, between the Greeks (great and fierce) and the Romans (great and human), and then further distinguish them on the basis of their rank, nationality, education, and social circle. He returns again and again, and at length, to this point, criticising the habits of French tragedians:

All actors in French Tragedy, be they hero or confidant, speak in the same fashion, and think with equal elevation of thought. Furthermore, on all their Heroes, whether Greek or Roman, do the French confirm the same character, though there be none that does not know the different character of the two nations. Caesar, Alexander, Pompey, Mithridates, Augustus, and Achilles all seem born in the same clime, and raised in the like manner of thinking and living. And I would venture so far as to say that the characters of these most famous Heroes are in no way differentiated by the French Tragedians.¹¹¹

Even though the playwright has failed to make a clear distinction between the characteristics of the different groups and individuals, the actor has to use his expressive skills and attempt to render them.¹¹² And it was not enough to give the general character traits of each: the actor should also be able to flesh out the habits, attitudes, and gestures proper to the varying emotions the character would feel in the course of the play. The character’s individual aspects and the manifestation of various passions are interwoven, then, in a tissue of particularly complex expressive variations, as in the paintings of a ‘wise artist’, in Riccoboni’s comparison, where ‘one feeling of pain’ manifests itself very differently in the hundred figures populating the scene.¹¹³ Riccoboni returns to this meshing of character and passions in his *Dissertation sur la tragédie moderne*, in a detailed and painstaking explanation:

Each man, and most especially each hero, possesses a dominant characteristic, the force behind all his ways of thought [...] If at times there come upon him the passions common to all men, it must not be believed that they are entirely transformed: the same

¹⁰⁹ Luigi Riccoboni, *Discorso sulla commedia all'improvviso e scenari inediti*, pp. 17-18, and *Dissertation sur la tragédie moderne*, in appendix to *Histoire du théâtre italien*, p. 307.

¹¹⁰ Luigi Riccoboni, *Dell'arte rappresentativa*, p. 22.

¹¹¹ Luigi Riccoboni, *Discorso sulla commedia all'improvviso e scenari inediti*, p. 23. See also *Dissertation sur la tragédie moderne*, pp. 301-303.

¹¹² See Luigi Riccoboni, *Dell'arte rappresentativa*, p. 49.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30. Riccoboni like Gildon cites the example of painting and, specifically, a representation of the sacrifice of Iphigenia, observing the very different reactions to the atrocity on the part of the various bystander. The specific painting Riccoboni refers to has not been identified.

passions do not make men alike, but on the contrary the different characters of men do make that same passion unlike in each man: all men may be in love; but each man is in love in his own fashion, and that fashion depends on the character dominant within him, which is altered to varying degrees by these accidental passions, according to whether he be more or less predisposed to resist their influence.¹¹⁴

And there are further nuances to consider. The same passion not only assumes different forms in the various characters, but modulates in different forms and degrees of intensity *within* the same character in the course of the action, so that the series of expressive attitudes to be mastered by an actor is virtually incalculable.¹¹⁵ Gildon's observations as to the expressive range and complexity required is thus taken to their extreme consequences, the radical conclusion to which, within an emotionalist perspective, is elucidated in Riccoboni's *Pensées sur la déclamation*.

I shall not illustrate in detail the immense variety of inflections to which the voice is susceptible [...] I believe it may be in vain to furnish rules since, speaking in general, these inflections are infinite and possess no certain rules, if each individual, following his own natural disposition, serious or light-hearted, vary them in proportion [...] How can it be imagined that one may prescribe certain and suitable tones of voice to so many millions of human beings, each of which possesses his own voice, and uses it according to his own natural disposition?¹¹⁶

The traditional code of pre-established expressions, hitherto mandatory for representing the various passions precisely and vividly, clearly had its days numbered. If Poisson considered it superfluous, for Riccoboni it was simply impossible. The infinite range of characters, inner workings, permutations of passions and attitudes, and variations of intensity and expressiveness which comprise the actor's rendering of a character made it absurd to so much as imagine any regulation possible – even supposing it to be useful in the first place; whereas from the emotionalist perspective, any code could only be harmful, concentrating the actor's attention on his movements and gestures and hindering the free, spontaneous, 'natural' expression of his inner workings.

For this reason Riccoboni jettisoned both the repertoire of expressions corresponding to the different passions and, to all intents, the traditional list of gestures and movements compromising the elegance and style of the acting, simply by not mentioning it, while Poisson continued to observe it. Aesthetic requirements could no longer be guaranteed by objective, specific, and pre-established aims, which ensured the grace and decorum of the performance by including a number of precise and scrupulously-described poses and attitudes, and excluding others. These now depended on the actor's technical skill, guided by his good taste and common sense, all working in conjunction with his immediate emotional empathy to ensure the elegant perfection of the performance on stage.

The above represents the essential core of the emotionalist theory of acting as elucidated in the *Arte rappresentativa*. Ten years later, Riccoboni attempted to extend its principles to the doctrine of oratory, without, however – and this is the most significant aspect of the operation – returning to the canonical comparison of oratory

¹¹⁴ Luigi Riccoboni, *Dissertation sur la tragédie moderne*, pp. 303-304.

¹¹⁵ Luigi Riccoboni, *Dell'arte rappresentativa*, pp. 30-31.

¹¹⁶ Luigi Riccoboni, *Pensées*, pp. 249-250.

and acting. In the *Pensées sur la déclamation* the actor's art is only glanced at en passant, and its autonomy seems guaranteed. Acting is still listed in the long list of forms of public speaking, but the treatise is concerned with the declaiming of 'sacred' and 'profane' orators, i.e. ecclesiastical and civic, and the theatre is only mentioned at three points, as an example, to underline the importance of facial expressions, of adapting voice and gestures so as to reach the entire public, and the need to avoid the mistake, typical of ham actors in tragedy, of falling back on unnatural and forced modes of declamation in the place of a sincere and intimate conviction of what is being said.¹¹⁷

Riccoboni's aim is to establish emotional empathy as the basis of oratory. If the art of declamation requires study and exercise, to the extent of discouraging beginners from exposing themselves in public and advising the setting up of special schools, it is also true that no codes need to be learnt, nor gestures and expressions imitated.¹¹⁸ All expressiveness, the theory goes, lies within us, and is evoked when through deep concentration we slip our moorings, leaving the material world of the senses and entering the state of rapture and 'enthusiasm' well known to the poets, in which the innermost workings of our soul are clear and obvious, with the ways and forms and expressions which will reveal them.¹¹⁹ Only through this kind of concentration can the orator enter the state required to pronounce his speech:

There is no orator who, after greeting his listeners, does not remain for some seconds immobile, without pronouncing a word; frequently he will close his eyes, and is generally believed to be giving his listeners time to settle and compose themselves, the better to attend to him. I similarly believe that the majority of orators does so for this reason, though it is an error on their part. Those moments the orator allows himself must be used solely to collect himself and in a moment to forget nature in its entirety, filling himself only with his subject.¹²⁰

When the orator then re-opens his eyes to begin to speak, he looks at the public but sees no one face in particular.¹²¹ The ability to avoid distraction and concentrate exclusively on what he has to say must be absolute; this is the only way to 'feel that which he is saying' and thereby 'convince his spectators to believe that all that he tells them, he himself believes in that same moment'.¹²²

Riccoboni's whole argument evinces traces of on the one hand the classical platonic theory of Ion, and on the other Quintilian's procedure, taken up by Le Faucher and then Gildon, whereby the orator uses concentration to evoke living images from within himself and produce the emotions needed to animate his expressions. Similarly, in the art of the orator who appears to be saying what has thought in that same instant because he 'feels' it, we apprehend the same effect of immediate spontaneity of improvised comedy, which, in the *Arte rappresentativa*, the procedures of emotionalism manage to introduce into the recitation of the written script.

¹¹⁷ See *ibid.*, p. 244, p. 247, pp. 257-258, pp. 263-264 and pp. 265-269.

¹¹⁸ See *ibid.*, pp. 246-247, pp. 249-250 and pp. 272-273.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 250-253.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 253.

¹²¹ See *ibid.*, pp. 253-254.

¹²² *Ibid.*, pp. 262-264.

The emotionalist principle as applied to oratory is not of course without consequences. Firstly, it allows no recourse to a pre-established expressive code. All expressions not spontaneously produced by a real, present feeling, like any attitude deliberately studied or held in check, inevitably leads to a distortion in its external manifestation. In the case of weeping, for example, if the tears come naturally they should not be checked, whereas if they fail to come, there is no point forcing them and producing a series of alarming or ridiculous grimaces.¹²³ The same applies to variations in facial expressions accompanying the drift of the speech: they come from within or not at all.

Body movements, in particular of the arms, are able to add grace and emphasis to the orator's performance but are generally less important.¹²⁴ Grace in movement, in any case, Riccoboni insists, is a gift of nature, and if not possessed cannot be acquired: 'all the efforts in front of a mirror, and any amount of study, would produce mere affectation' and should be avoided.¹²⁵ The solution is for the orator simply not to worry about his arms, and hold them still. If, then, in the course of his speech he is gripped by real 'enthusiasm', they will move spontaneously, and if the enthusiasm is unable to confer grace, it will at least confer strength, and avoid any hint of contrivance.¹²⁶

The emotionalist position, then, reaches complete definition in Riccoboni's work, from the precise exposition in the *Arte rappresentativa* to the final comments in the *Pensées sur la déclamation*. It originated at the moment when the theory of acting parted company with that of oratory by placing dramaturgic functions at the centre of the actor's art, rejecting an expressive code of pre-established movements, and established emotional empathy as the most effective mechanism for rendering the character in action on the stage. Theatrical and aesthetic requirements then became secondary, the concern of the actor's technical skill guided by good taste and common sense, which should regulate both the extent of gestures and the volume of the voice, rejecting expressions and attitudes which could compromise the beauty and elegance of the character represented. Technique should also be applied to refine gestures, movements, and specific actions such as 'fake tears', and avoid any by-play over-acting; it should also gauge the expressive intensity of feelings according to the requirements of the part.

6. Criticism of Riccoboni. Reform of the Code and Franz Lang's Treatise

The innovatory quality of the theory in the *Arte rappresentativa* was not however appreciated. Initial reactions were all taken up with rebutting the various criticisms levelled at French acting and tragedy in general and Baron's performances in particular by not just the treatise but also the *Histoire du théâtre italien* and the *Dissertation sur la tragédie modern*. Riccoboni, as outlined above, accused French tragedy of using profound philosophical language even for characters working under violent passions; of declaiming with a sing-song delivery which overly foregrounded the metre and rhyme, and of producing basically identical tragic characters; while Baron,

¹²³ See *ibid.*, p. 256.

¹²⁴ See *ibid.*, p. 259.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 259-260.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 257-259.

according to Riccoboni, “demoticized” and socially levelled his tragic patrician figures.

The reactions differed considerably in tone. Levesque de La Ravalière, a man of letters, was briskly proscriptive: ‘No importance should be given’, he decreed, ‘to a short poem in verse, *Dell’arte rappresentativa*, recently published by an Italian actor’.¹²⁷ Guyot-Desfontaines, an important journalist and writer, published an analysis which was as ironic as it was meticulous.¹²⁸ While Jean Baptiste-Rousseau, a talented poet and rather less successful playwright, mixed a number of exquisitely courteous appreciations with some carefully-pondered objections, answered by Riccoboni with equal politeness. The diversity of opinion and tones apart, all the responses are curiously alike, centred on the solution of the identical problem: how to guarantee the aesthetic dimension of acting with respect to dramaturgic requirements, now generally recognized as primary and essential. Here positions varied and solutions were uncertain. Guyot-Desfontaines justified the rarefied register of tragic heroes, even at the height of passion, since ‘there is little worth in having a hero speak if he is to pronounce but common sentiments, such as those we hear every day in the quotidian matters of life’, and what he says must be ‘elevated and noble’, so that the public is struck by the ‘beauty’ of his speech.¹²⁹ He equally defends the marking of rhythm and rhyme since it gives a sort of intimate beauty to the sentence, although he admits that it must remain decidedly ‘intimate’ and barely ‘glimpsed’: all ‘good French actors’ are concerned to ‘cancel it as near as possible from their declamation’.¹³⁰ On the question of the uniform nobility and grandeur of tragic heroes, whom Riccoboni considers may be distinguished by dividing them into two types, fierce Greeks and more human Romans, Guyot-Desfontaines is quick in pointing out how conventional, abstract, and even erroneous the distinction is. Greek history is full of very human heroes, and no evidence is lacking of fierce Roman same; such formal, pre-established sub-categories will then be less than helpful as a distinction.

Rousseau’s observations on Baron as actor are even more interesting. What makes his gestures and attitudes superlatively effective, for all their lack of dignity and majesty, when interpreting regal roles, is the situation the character finds himself in. Having to meet dramaturgic needs influences the norms which should guarantee elegance, beauty, and the aesthetic, ‘ideal’ dimension of the performance in general. ‘The greatest monarch in the world’, Rousseau writes, ‘in such a violent state of mind will have no thought of his dignity’, and the stronger passions remove all differences between king and simple gentleman.¹³¹ Significantly, in his answer Riccoboni uses precisely the same argument to counterattack and repeat his accusations, citing Baron’s many mistakes in the fourth act of *Inés de castro*.

¹²⁷ Pierre Alexandre Levesque de La Ravalière, *Essay de comparaison entre la déclamation et la poésie dramatique*, Paris, La Veuve Pissot et Jean-François Tabarie, 1729, p. 18.

¹²⁸ According to Jean-François-Augustin Janvier de Flainville, the French acting profession asked Guyot Desfontaines to reply to Riccoboni; in return he was to receive various gifts and free entry to their plays (see Jean-François-Augustin Janvier de Flainville, *Lettre d’un comédien de Paris à un de ses amis, comédien en province, au sujet d’un article des “Observations sur les écrits modernes”*, Bruxelles, 1742).

¹²⁹ Pierre-François Guyot-Desfontaines, *Lettre*, pp. 31-32.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 40-41.

¹³¹ Jean-Baptiste Rousseau, *Lettre*, p. 20.

A king in a similar situation is already aware of what is about to happen. We may presume that before entering his council he shall have shut himself up in his cabinet in privacy, and shall have wept, and torn his hair, and lastly shall have succumbed to all the anguish to which nature may force a father; but in that moment when he presents himself in public, he will so far have composed his spirits as to astonish and elicit tears from all his courtiers.¹³²

There is one case, Riccoboni admits however, when a monarch may abandon the majestic composure his position dictates: when taken by surprise, mid-action, by some unexpected and appalling news:

Theseus, who believes in the guilt of his own son, receives the news of his death and his innocence at the acme of his rage against him. I pardon him all the tears to which he abandons himself, and would not know how sufficiently to praise that actor who renders his grief in its most extreme forms.¹³³

The aesthetic dimension of acting, the quality that makes it ‘more beautiful’ than behaviour in normal life, is defended, then, through dramaturgic requirements (if a king may lose control in private, he will obviously recompose himself when in public), and is dropped when dramaturgic conditions substantially change (if a king is taken by surprise, no self-control will be possible). But this is not quite the point. The aesthetic dimension, interpreting the character as an ideal figure, can no longer be guaranteed by a pre-established selection of gestures and modes of behaviour, whether fine and decorous or ugly and indecorous. The same ‘low’ or ‘over-familiar’ action, Rousseau observes, will provoke laughter if performed by an average actor, but where the actor is excellent and able to infuse ‘grace and nobility of delivery’, it will please the eye and heart of the spectator.¹³⁴ In a word, it is simply the actor’s style, and nothing to do with the classification of gestures and expressions he adopts, which guarantees the aesthetic quality of what he does on stage. Categories of gestures and sub-categories of characters now seem irrelevant and ineffective. It was this conviction which marked a swift end to any pre-established code regulating the art of the actor.

All these problems however were marginal compared with the basic question posed by the *Arte rappresentativa*, which, in acknowledging the crisis of the expressive code of *actio* had to all intents sanctioned the autonomy of acting when formulated in emotionalist terms. The need to establish the characteristic features and specific ‘rules’ of acting was more or less consciously surfacing in the theories of the late 1720s. A good example was Pierre Rameau’s dance treatise, *Le maître à danser*, published in 1725 with the declared intent of providing the rules of dance in print, for the first time.¹³⁵ And significantly, in dismissing Riccoboni’s work, Levesque de La Ravalière regretted the lack of texts setting out the norms specific to acting.¹³⁶

¹³² Luigi Riccoboni, *Réponse*, pp. 38-39.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

¹³⁴ Jean-Baptiste Rousseau, *Lettre*, p. 20.

¹³⁵ Pierre Rameau, *Le maître à danser*, Paris, Jean Villette, 1725, p. vi. In actual fact Rameau’s treatise was not the first. Jean Tabourot, Canon of Langres’s *Orchesographie* had appeared in 1589 (Thoinot Arbeau, anagram of Jean Tabourot, *Orchesographie*, Lengres, Jehan des Preyz, 1589).

¹³⁶ See Pierre Alexandre Levesque de La Ravalière, *Essay de comparaison entre la déclamation et la poésie dramatique*, pp. 16-17.

Of significance here are two very different works: Franz Lang's *De actione scenica*, published in Munich in 1727, and *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture*, by Du Bos, published in Paris in 1719 and finished in the early 1730s. Lang was concerned with illustrating the rules of acting, but predicated strictly on the discipline of oratory – unsurprisingly, since he was a Jesuit who taught rhetoric. Lang worked on theatre productions in German schools run by the order, where acting was used to develop abilities in Latin eloquence and to teach students physical presence and elegance of movement and gesturality to deliver a more efficient message.

These physical elements of acting particularly interested him since he considered classical rhetoric to be concerned with voice and inflection at the expense of bodily movements, positions, and attitudes; although a series of norms had been extrapolated by various commentators, these were of no specific relevance to theatre action.¹³⁷ The range of their work needed also to cover physical expressivity as applied on stage.

The treatise therefore extended the frame of reference both to classical authors, particularly Cicero and Quintilian, and to other Jesuit contributions to the theory of *actio*: Cipriano Soarez, Jean Voel, and Nicolas Coussin, down to Joseph Jouvancy's *Ratio discendi et docendi* and the celebrated *Paulus Ecclesiastes* by Father Amedée de Bayeux. He also includes eight engravings illustrating mistakes to be avoided and the correct positions of feet and hands, the use of gloves, stage entrances, the correct way of turning the upper body towards other actors and the face towards the audience, the position of hands, arms and face to express sadness, and the position to assume in dialogue.

This was all part of the attempt to formulate more specific rules of acting to compensate for the shortcomings of *actio* as regarded the theatre, while remaining strictly within the discipline of oratory. This in no way meant opening acting up to movements and gestures other than those used by the preacher or the lawyer, whatever the demands of stage action. Lang is careful to reiterate the canonical norm excluding the use of hands, arms, and body to carry out excessively concrete and material actions such as wood-cutting, digging, hitting an object with a stick, or drawing a bow. All this must be merely alluded to by the actor, as an orator would generally have done.¹³⁸

The gesturality of the actor is basically the expression of passions, emotions, and states of mind. Like the playwright adapting the words to fit the various characters' feelings, Lang elucidates, so the actor shows the inner workings through a measured use of the body. These modes of expression imitate nature but are refined by art, which, fine-tuning their elegance and precision, delights the audience while arousing their emotions.¹³⁹

Terms of the kind obviously considerably erode the difference between the gesturality of the actor and that of the lawyer and preacher, and at first glance the treatise seems to offer relatively few norms specifically concerning acting. Such as they are, they centre on how to make an entrance (with body and face turned

¹³⁷ See Franz Lang, *Dissertatio de actione scenica, cum figuris eandem explicantibus, et observationibus quibusdam de arte comica*, Monachii, Typis Mariae Magdalenae Riedlin, 1727, pp. 5-6.

¹³⁸ See *ibid.*, pp. 35-36. Less conspicuous and more dignified practical gestures such as opening a letter, writing, signing, or counting money were however acceptable (p. 32).

¹³⁹ See *ibid.*, p. 12, p. 16 and p. 51.

towards the audience, to inform them immediately of his state of mind); how to kneel (men falling on one knee and decently arranging their costume, women always falling on both knees), and how to move about the stage (remaining visible to the audience while not upstaging the other actors). It further reminds the actor that he must never let his attention wander towards the audience, but keep it wholly on the dialogues taking place on stage, to maintain the correct reaction to what is being said and done.¹⁴⁰ Then there is the problem of the dialogues themselves, and how the actor can address his interlocutor while keeping face and eyes towards the public to allow them to read his state of mind. Here two solutions are offered: either a single movement of the upper body and head, as illustrated in one of the eight engravings, or a positioning of the two actors on the stage whereby the character speaking is towards the back of the stage, facing both the public and his interlocutor on the forestage, reversing the positions when the other begins to speak. Lastly, when an actor is about to reply he should anticipate in his expression what he is about to put into words, retaining something of it in his features when he has finished speaking.¹⁴¹

Certainly, there is little that is ground-breaking here. Its importance lies elsewhere, in the importance given to the actor's body. The movement of the body in space, movements over the depth of stage, physical positions, and the positioning of the limbs all become the dominant characteristic of acting. Lang is careful to establish the barycentre of dynamic equilibrium in the actor's body, fixing it in the lumbar region, the 'prime seat of movement', regulating all bodily variations and therefore all the figures the body can produce.¹⁴² This throws light on Andreini's observation a hundred years previously, that the difference between actors and other types of orators, such as preachers, consists in their having to operate with the whole body, and not just the upper part, the only part visible from the pulpit.¹⁴³ Lang was in complete agreement: the difference is indeed essential within a perspective which considers bodily movements and their expressive possibilities as the cornerstone of acting.¹⁴⁴

At this remove from a sermon or speech, the characteristics of acting begin more to resemble those of dance. And indeed Lang begins his advice on stage attitudes and expressions with a close study of the starting positions for the feet, then arms, elbow, and hands. A wrong position, he explains, can compromise the dynamics of the action. He then immediately illustrates foot movements which will allow the actor to move as effectively as possible in the confines of the stage: an opening which is singularly similar to the attack launched by Rameau's *Le maître à danser*. Rameau dedicates his first chapter to the base position the dancer must adopt, from feet to head, in order to be ready 'to walk, to bow, or to dance', and the following one to the correct way of taking steps in order to move in the neatest and most correct

¹⁴⁰ See *ibid.*, p. 20, p. 24, p. 27, p. 40 and p. 42.

¹⁴¹ See *ibid.*, pp. 44-47 and pp. 55-56.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 26.

¹⁴³ See Giovan Battista Andreini, *La ferza. Ragionamento secondo contra l'accuse date alla commedia*, Paris, Nicolao Callemont, 1625, reprinted in *La professione del teatro*, ed. by F. Marotti and G. Romei, Roma, Bulzoni, 1991, p. 497. See also Jean Poisson, *Réflexions sur l'art de parler en public*, p. 21.

¹⁴⁴ Franz Lang, *Dissertatio de actione scenica*, p. 11.

fashion.¹⁴⁵ These dance steps, with minimal choreography, correspond closely to the movements with which Lang instructs his actors to move across the stage, from the way of starting, stopping, and proceeding, which he defines the *crux scenica*, with particular instructions for the successive movements of the right and left foot, down to the *passus scenicus*, a tacking movement, three or four steps in one direction, then the other, which Lang suggests be marked on the stage and visible to the actor.¹⁴⁶

After this advice as to improving the general aesthetics and grace of stage movement Lang then moves on to proscribe not only gestures imitating concrete actions, but any which might appear gross or inelegant: and not just the more obvious – the actor should avoid examining his hands, cleaning or rubbing them together, cleaning his nails, and scratching his head or any other part of the body – but even gathering the fingertips towards the thumb, as if writing, or stretching the fingers out too widely.¹⁴⁷ A description then follows of permissible gestures, accompanied by an extremely detailed analysis of possible positions and movements of the different parts of the body, one by one: how to use them, stretch them, and position them, from the feet to the knees, loins, arms, elbows, hands, fingers, head, face, and eyes. Each part has its own expressive potential, so every detail should be visible, and masks, sumptuous costumes, and even gloves, Lang explains at exhaustive length, are decidedly to be avoided: the actor should not even hold them in his hands.¹⁴⁸

What emerges is a clear and precise manual of how to stage-manage emotions, states of mind, and passions in the most elegant and efficient way possible. Revisiting Coussin, Voel and Amedée de Bayeux, Lang illustrates, for example, the positions and movements of the hands to express admiration, anger, repulsion, supplication, pain, exclamation, blame, disapproval, encouragement, interrogation, repentance, and fear. But the total expression of the different feelings is produced above all by the combination, in movement, of the different parts of the body, limbs and face. Anger, to give an example, requires the use of the forehead, lips, teeth, hands, and fingers, all painstakingly described by Lang; sorrow, illustrated in an engraving, involves the actor's hands, fingers, head, face, and arms.¹⁴⁹

Obviously, the clearer and more precise the expression to the public, the more they will be emotionally involved, although acting is not to be reduced to the acting out of a catalogue of predefined poses and gestures. The actor's emotional involvement in the feelings to be expressed is mandatory, and his immediacy and spontaneity can suggest further variations. The tears streaming down his face, for example, can be the product of 'nature' or of 'art', and both are acceptable. There also exists a gamut of feelings like joy, love, and desire which express themselves simply through spontaneous buoyancy and happy chatter requiring no particular technique and therefore, Lang opines, no detailed explanation.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁵ See *ibid.*, par. 4, and Pierre Rameau, *Le maître à danser*, chaps. 1-2 (*De la manière de se poser le corps* and *De la manière de bien marcher*). Rameau's work, it should be remembered, appeared in 1725, the year Lang died. Lang's treatise was published posthumously two years later, making any direct influence virtually impossible.

¹⁴⁶ Franz Lang, *Dissertatio de actione scenica*, pp. 18-25.

¹⁴⁷ See *ibid.*, p. 38.

¹⁴⁸ See *ibid.*, pp. 31-33.

¹⁴⁹ See *ibid.*, pp. 36-37 and pp. 49-53.

¹⁵⁰ See *ibid.*, p. 49, pp. 51-52 and p. 58.

In illustrating the rules of acting, then, Lang is actually substantially revising the code of *actio*. Beginning with a detailed analysis of the parts of the body and their movements, he goes on to provide a highly-specialized definition of increasingly complex forms of expression, and prepares the ground for a theory of acting based on the possibilities of the actor's body and its physical equilibrium and displacement on the stage, in relation to the dynamics of the emotions and feelings to be embodied and represented.

7. Jean-Baptiste Du Bos. *Réflexions Critiques*

For all its significance, Lang's treatise was read by a limited public, while Jean-Baptiste Du Bos's *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture* rapidly became famous. Three sections of the first of the two volumes published in 1719 looked at problems of recitation; the third volume, published in 1733, contained a much more detailed series of considerations.¹⁵¹

Du Bos was the first scholar to contextualize acting within a more eclectic treatise covering painting, music, and poetry, thereby awarding the actor's art full aesthetic and cultural status; similarly, the acting concretely observed in contemporary theatres, with its very specific and exclusive properties and demands, took its place in the official pantheon of the arts, as an indispensable instrument for correctly understanding a significant part of the cultural world of antiquity.¹⁵²

His eye as regards actorly styles and techniques is particularly wide-ranging and perceptive. As early as 1719 he had noted the co-existence of the different countries' styles. Du Bos appreciated and defended the sing-song recitation of French tragedy, understood the limits of the Italian approach, which barely differentiates between the acting styles of tragedy and of comedy, and noted the excesses of another country's tragic actors in alternating 'furious tones' with 'grim and morose arrogance' and 'flashes of fury'.¹⁵³ He was among the first to emphasise the importance of specific details and technical nuances, such as variations in skin colour, or the way pallor should spread over the face; his, too, the fundamental observation that audience-perception of the actor is in reality a compound of visual perception contaminated by the imagination. 'Imagination', Du Bos writes, speaking of the use of the mask in classical theatre, 'supplies all that is concealed from us; and when we see eyes which burn with choler, we believe that we see the entire face illuminated by the fire of this passion', so that 'we are moved as if we did truly see it'.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ Jean-Baptiste Du Bos, *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et la peinture*, 2 vols., Paris, Jean Mariette, 1719, then 3 vols., Paris, Jean Mariette, 1733. Sections XLII-XLIV of the first volume of the 1719 edition deal particularly with acting. The third volume of the 1733 edition reprises and develops sections XLII and XLIII. The quotation is taken from the seventh edition, Paris, Pissot, 1770.

¹⁵² Indicative of this is the reversal effected in section IX of the third volume of *Réflexions*. While reconstruction of Greek and Roman theatrical forms had long been the benchmark in any discussion of modern theatre production, Du Bos maintained that 'to understand those passages wherein the ancients speak of their theatre performances' it would seem necessary to 'be aware of what is happening in modern theatres, and consult persons professing those arts having at least some connection with those of the ancients, the practice of which has been lost' (Jean-Baptiste Du Bos, *Réflexions critiques*, III, p. 158).

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, I, p. 445.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, III, p. 213.

Even more particularly, though, Du Bos has managed to rearticulate the entire grid of theoretical references of which acting is a part. On the one hand he is firmly anchored to the classical referents of oratory, Cicero and Quintilian, who appear in scores of quotations. On the other, however, rather than applying them to the developments of seventeenth-century oratorical theory, he cross-references them with another classical thinker, Aristides Quintilianus, thereby transferring acting within a different system, that of music.¹⁵⁵

Du Bos drew on the musical doctrine of the ancients to elaborate a theory of recitation founded on the intimate co-penetration of voice and gesture: a very natural combination, he points out, as can be perceived in the immediate reciprocal effects. It would seem impossible, he notes, ‘that the gestures of those who speak a language the pronunciation of which has become lively and accentuated should not likewise become more vivacious and frequent’; it is dictated by ‘the organisation of the human body’.¹⁵⁶ And music as conceived and used in antiquity ‘teaches to regulate not merely all the possible inflections of the voice, but to regulate likewise the movements of the body’, setting them, as it were, ‘to a precise measure’.¹⁵⁷

As theorized by Aristides Quintilianus, music, Du Bos explained, subdivided into a series of techniques covering the production of instrumental effects, vocality and gesturalty. The overall artistic effect was then the result of the co-ordination of sound, instruments, song and body movements. This co-ordination was guaranteed by the ‘rhythmic art’ which gave the same beat to the instrumental sounds and all vocal and bodily movement.¹⁵⁸ The composing of such a complex musical product, though, required forms of ‘writing’ or ‘notation’ to set down a full ‘score’ of sound effects, vocal effects, and the actors’ physical movements. The ancients possessed such a form of notation, and had compiled what were virtually ‘dictionaries of the gesture’ which allowed ‘specialists’ to formulate the exact definition and succession of a work’s various elements in their reciprocal relations.¹⁵⁹ The Romans had a professional figure responsible for ‘composing the declamation of works for the theatre’, as demonstrated, Du Bos points out, by the directions in Terence’s plays where, with the names of the playwright and manager of the company which had staged them, was also listed the name of the person ‘who had composed the declamation’.¹⁶⁰

This was what lay behind Du Bos’s proposal to reprise a figure of the kind, to perfect the acting by assuring perfect onstage co-ordination of tempo, tone, and gesture. It was not impossible, Du Bos guaranteed after consulting ‘several musicians’, to find a form of notation to ‘score’ the intonation to be applied. Inevitably it would initially be difficult to find people able to read ‘this quasi-music’ and ‘properly intone the notes’, but such figures could be trained. Fifteen-year-old youths ‘taught this system of intoning for six months would master it’, assisted by the

¹⁵⁵ Aristides Quintilianus, variously collocated between the second and fourth century CE, author of the treatise *On Music*. Du Bos knew the Latin version of the original Greek work by Marcus Meibomius, *Aristidis Quintilianis De Musica libri tres, Marcus Meibomius restituit, ac notis explicavit*, Amstelodami, Apud Ludovicum Elzevirum, 1652.

¹⁵⁶ Jean-Baptiste Du Bos, *Réflexions critiques*, III, p. 179.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, III, pp. 8-9.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, III, pp. 10-12 and p. 22.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, III, p. 136.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, III, pp. 154-159.

fact that their organs would adapt ‘to this fashion of pronouncing the notes without singing them, as they adapt to the intonation of the notes of our music’.¹⁶¹ A method of ‘scoring’ the necessary gestures could similarly be elaborated. The ancients had managed to find notes and characters indicating all the bodily attitudes and movements; and the present day, Du Bos pointed out, referring to Feuillet’s *Chorégraphie* published in 1700, had found a way of indicating dance steps and figures: ‘to learn from notes what gestures are required is no more difficult than learning from notes what steps and figures are required’.¹⁶²

With these problems solved, every play would have a quasi-score by a *compositeur de déclamation* whose job it would be to transcribe an account of rhythms, gestures, and movements. Mediocre actors could then perfect their part, or at least improve it, removing ‘a tenth of the mistakes they make in getting the wrong tone’, destroying ‘the specific effect of the lines’, or when they ‘fill with pathos steps which are unsuited to it’. A fixed score by an expert would also ensure co-ordination among actors. If each actor were able to compose the declamation of a tragedy ‘exactly as a master of that art’, the general declamation of a score composed by a single individual would inevitably be ‘better conducted and better pondered’ than one ‘wherein each actor plays his role as he sees fit’.¹⁶³

Du Bos’s proposal, then, is clear: to construct a code of expression for the actor by combining the teachings of oratory with the musical doctrine of the ancients. Its shortcoming is that the basic characteristic of recitation seems reduced to the administration of tones, tempo, and measure. Instead of basing the new code on actual gestures from daily experience combined with a reasonably convincing theory of expression of the different passions, Du Bos opts for an abstract and formal system of reference which privileges the aesthetic dimension of acting rather than its immediately dramaturgic aspects. What becomes important is that the actor move and declaim *comme il faut*, following rules which guarantee the precision and co-ordination of gestures and vocalization and carefully-studied effects.

While Du Bos is at pains to demonstrate that recitation is to be read as ‘song’ in a very different sense from our general usage, since the ancients used the term to include the declaiming of a public speech or proclamation, he is however appreciative of a diction which evokes the seduction or characteristics of what we commonly intend by ‘song’ in standard usage, even if it makes for a more ‘laboured’ recitation compared with the simple, direct reproduction of natural conversation. For this reason he defends the characteristic style of French tragedy, which is not only ‘more elevated, grave, and sustained’, but assumes the sing-song aspect so fiercely criticized by any number of theorists,¹⁶⁴ with particular praise for actors who, ‘when the sense permits’, choose the style of ‘declamation which is closest to musical song’.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, III, p. 164.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, III, p. 254. Various methods for transcribing dance choreography had been elaborated in France at the exhortation of Louis XIV. Pierre Beauchamps’s method, published in 1700 by Raoul-Auger Feuillet, was particularly celebrated (*Chorégraphie, ou l’Art de décrire la danse par caractères, figures et signes démonstratifs*, chez L’Auteur, Paris). See, à propos, F. Pappacena, *La danza classica*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2009, p. 15, *passim*.

¹⁶³ Jean-Baptiste Du Bos, *Réflexions critiques*, III, pp. 333-336.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, I, pp. 440-441.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, III, p. 146.

Perfect and functional recitation is not, then, the ability to produce onstage a perfectly realistic action. The major pleasure produced by acting is not a matter of ‘illusion’, Du Bos is quick to explain. Nothing we see and hear in the theatre, from the playwright’s lines to the staging and scenery and declamation of the actors, is aimed at producing in the audience the impression of taking part in ‘the event itself’.¹⁶⁶ A major statement endorsing a departure from the canonical rule of the theatre, established in the earliest Italian treatises, whereby the actor’s ultimate task was to produce in the audience the mimetic illusion that the ‘fake’ action onstage was actually real.

Du Bos’s revolutionary proposal was however extremely fragile. Louis de Cahusac began the three volumes of his *Danse ancienne et moderne ou traité historique de la danse* declaring that Du Bos’s conclusions on music and dance in the classical world were completely unfounded.¹⁶⁷ But it was his concrete ideas on recitation which appeared particularly sterile, seeming to privilege the aesthetic dimension of acting precisely when dramaturgic requirements were becoming predominant. They also posited the formulation of a code indicating accents, and vocal and gestural nuances to be elaborated by a ‘specialist’ charged with scoring the texts so as to produce directions for staging which were fixed and unequivocal. And at a time when the theory of recitation, fuelled by the nascent emotionalist movement, began to consider as impossible any exhaustive description of the infinite means and forms of expression available. When Riccoboni dismissed the possibility of prescribing ‘certain and suitable tones of voice’, given the ‘infinite variety of inflections to which the voice is susceptible’, the reference to Du Bos was unmistakable.¹⁶⁸ Consensus to the objection was unanimous, from treatises on recitation such as Rémond de Sainte-Albine’s *Le comédien*,¹⁶⁹ a cornerstone of emotionalist doctrine, to erudite studies like Charles Duclos’s ‘Mémoire’, which addresses the issue in its conclusions, consigned to the *Académie des Inscriptions*.

Having established that declamation and gesture were inseparably linked, Duclos deduced that it was never necessary to conceive the art of gestures as a separate, specific art. If the vocal expression is right, the right gesture will follow. But the declamation, he went on, follows the ‘affections’ or modifications of the voice when, moving from tranquillity to agitation, the soul is moved by some passion or sentiment: ‘involuntary’ modifications of the voice which accompany both the natural emotions and those the actor experiences onstage when entering empathetically into a situation. In any case, Duclos concluded, a scoring-system of declamation ‘would have not the most minimal utility which choreographic annotations possess’. Even granting it were possible to express the tones of declamation through signs, these ‘would constitute so vast a dictionary that it would require several years of study’; and then, a procedure of the kind in studying

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., I, pp. 451-452; III, pp. 268-269.

¹⁶⁷ Louis de Cahusac, *La danse ancienne et moderne ou traité historique de la danse*, 3 vols., L’Aia, Jean Neaulme, 1754, I, p. v.

¹⁶⁸ Luigi Riccoboni, *Pensées*, pp. 249-250. See also *Dell’arte rappresentativa*, p. 40.

¹⁶⁹ See the chapter *De la vérité de la Récitation* (pp. 158-159) in Pierre Rémond de Sainte-Albine, *Le comédien*, Paris, Vincent, 1749.

recitation could only produce actors who were 'cold', damaging the expression the sentiment could inspire.¹⁷⁰

¹⁷⁰ Charles Duclos, 'Mémoire sur l'art de partager l'action théâtrale et celui de noter la déclamation qu'on prétend avoir été un usage chez le Romains', *Mémoires de l'Académie des Inscriptions*, 1747-1748, now in *Oeuvres complètes*, 3 vols., Paris, A. Belin, 1821, I, p. 612, p. 618 and p. 622.