

Dance, body, and emotions: Discussing ballet reform in 1600-1780

punctum.gr

BY: **Sergei Kruk**

*To the memory of Vladimir Shklyarov,
the principal dancer of the Mariinsky Ballet*

ARTICLE INFO:

Volume: 12

Issue: 01

Summer 2026

ISSN: 2459-2943

DOI: 10.18680/hss.2026.0011

Pages: 207-233

Lic.: CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

KEYWORDS:

Ballet

Body

Emotion

Nonverbal communication

Jean-Georges Noverre

Gasparo Angiolini

Ballet d'action

ABSTRACT

The brain has several areas responsible for understanding the intentions and inner states of others through the non-verbal information conveyed by the body. This information is processed through either the rational cognitive pathway or the visceral perceptual pathway. For ballet spectators, the former leads to a propositional attitude and the latter to an intuitive emotional attitude toward the character. In the 17th and 18th centuries, intellectuals and professionals developed their ballet reform ideas in the framework of these two paradigms. All reformers advocated a narrative ballet that staged actions and emotions, but defended different forms of bodily motricity that can imitate real life. One group proposed imitating certain aspects of real motricity, describable as discrete signs and notated in the choreographic score. Another group favored holistic bodily expressions of emotional states resistant to any analytical description and notation; the dancer had to find the appropriate bodily signs of emotions by feeling into the role. Embracing differing viewpoints, the two principal ballet reformers, Jean-Georges Noverre and Gasparo Angiolini, were set against each other. Still, their ideas are perfectly compatible in narrative ballet and can be treated as elements of the nascent semiotics of ballet. The paper analyzes the evolution of these ideas for two centuries.

Introduction

We can all understand the inner states of others by observing their bodies. Empirical neuroscience has identified two pathways for processing visual information about bodies in the brain (Kruk 2024). A cognitivist pathway involves the frontal lobe, which is responsible for the propositional representation of the body. The spectator can identify a gesture or movement and interpret it as a reflection of the character's inner state. Emotion may follow the cognitive evaluation of information. A perceptualist pathway involves subcortical areas, which processes information at a visceral level as feelings. The dancer's bodily signs evoke a feeling that the spectator experiences as a simulation of the inner state of the other and develops an emotional attitude for the character. Perceptual representations of holistic bodily signs are difficult to verbalize in a rational manner (Kruk 2022). The cognitive paradigm dominant in ballet studies only recognizes discrete signs of motricity and their analytical interpretations, thereby relegating this visceral emotional experience to the background (cf. Martin 1939; Langer 1957; Hanna 1979; McFee 1992, 2011). In the 17th and 18th centuries, scholars and professionals discussed ballet reform in the framework of both paradigms, but the inability to distinguish between them led to misunderstandings and conflicts that culminated in an exchange of acrimonious comments between Gasparo Angiolini (1731-1803) and Jean-Georges Noverre (1727-1810).

This article analyzes the conceptions of body language and the expression of emotions in theater and ballet as they appear in works published in the 17th and 18th centuries, primarily in France, but also in Italy, England, Germany, and the Netherlands. The use of neuroscience as an analytical framework is justified for two reasons. First, by explaining the connection between visceral feelings and emotions, it acknowledges the validity of the subjective and poetic reasoning of ballet reformers who, like Noverre, were unable to express their thoughts in logical language. Second, the outlines of a theory of emotion that were developed during this period anticipated modern neuroscience. The influence of these theoretical considerations can also be found in the works of ballet reformers. To highlight the evolution of the reformers' ideas, their publications are examined chronologically. The terms 'passion,' 'sentiment, and 'emotion,' while possessing different connotations, are used interchangeably to refer to inner states and their bodily expressions.

1. In the beginning was the word

Reading the remarks of Hypolyte-Julius Pilet de la Mesnardière (1639: 235-254) on theater, it can be assumed that, at that time, actors merely recited the text and were unable to use their bodies to represent the characters. Playwrights do not know human behavior in different situations or do not have the ability to describe the diversity of emotions experienced by individuals under different circumstances, Mesnardière wrote. He does not formulate universal rules for writers and actors because it is impossible to describe all the real situations that could be represented on stage. Mesnardière merely suggests that dramatists rely on their own observations to imitate the movements of people of different social groups and professions and to represent behaviors specific to a particular inner state. François Hédelin d'Aubignac gave his work the ambitious title *La pratique du théâtre*, but in it, he only instructed playwrights about the discursive representation of passions (1657: 426-444). He did not consider the actor's body language to be a sufficient means of expression.

Body and emotions were frowned upon in Western civilization. For ancient philosophers, the moral ideal was in the ability to control your impulses and desires through the exercise of reason. Self-control and moderation prevailed in aesthetics. Plato criticized poets, actors, and spectators who identified with vicious characters whose sentiments they sought to express and who took pleasure in the gestures or melodies of wickedness because, by imitating them, they contracted those same vices (1993: 396a-397e; 2015: 656a-b). Aristotle had a more positive opinion about emotional bodies. He did not separate the body from the soul and maintained that the body expresses the affections of the soul. Therefore, affections do not constitute a purely bodily function; they also have a cognitive component (2011: 403a16-34). The imitation of vicious passions, particularly in the theater, can have a positive cathartic effect, as it allows spectators to free themselves from their harmful inclinations. In the 17th century, scientists rediscovered the Aristotelian paradigm, and artists and dancers strove to reintroduce emotional acting to the stage.

2. Body and emotion rediscovered

It is no exaggeration to say that the pursuit of emotion in the arts and sciences was the spirit of the 17th century. 'Hereby we may conclude that passions well used, may consist with wisdom against the Stoics; and if they be moderated, to be very serviceable to virtue,' wrote the English Jesuit Thomas Wright¹ (1601: 18) in the opening pages of his treatise on the passions. The French theologian Nicolas Coeffeteau outlined a theory

¹ All translations are mine unless noted otherwise.

of adaptive function of emotions. Negative passions are essential because, without delay, they signal the danger of the present situation: 'The movements of the passions override reason and precede all human deliberations' (1620: 67). Passions leave their mark on the body so that even the fiercest adversaries of passions pale in the face of danger is how Coeffeteau describes the function of what we know as the autonomic nervous system. Being natural reactions to the environment, passions are independent of virtues: 'giving us a man who is not moved by any passion is truly to strip him of his humanity and make him a rock or a god' (1620: 63). Coeffeteau rejects mind-body dualism, which offers a simplified image of reason and sensuality.

Marin Cureau de la Chambre further developed this paradigm. The soul expresses its spiritual qualities externally, so the body becomes a natural sign of inner states by which people can be known. Bodily alterations are the effects of passions. All parts of the body participate in the expression of emotions: face, gait, hand gestures, and posture. The entire body expresses air, grace, and demeanor. Body language is holistic and it is problematic to describe it as composed of discrete units.

It is much more difficult to say what *bodily characteristics* consist of... It is clear that every passion brings a certain *je ne sais quel* air to the face; that virtue makes a certain grace and a pleasing demeanor flow in its actions, which is not found in vices. However, since it has always been called the *je ne sais quoi*, it seems that the intention has also been to teach that you cannot say what it is. (1640: 7)

By locating the soul in the pineal gland, René Descartes (1637, 1649) severed its direct link with the sensitive body. For Coeffeteau, passions illuminate reason about the external world, while for Descartes, they are detached from it. Passions are confused ideas, provoked, reinforced, and sustained by the movement of animal spirits originating from primitive emotions: wonder, love, hate, desire, joy, and sadness. Due to the nerves connecting the soul to the body, passions are externalized as natural movements, but they are devoid of informational value since they can be imitated by both machines and animals. Independent of thought, passions exclusively belong to the body, and their nonverbal expressions are inferior to speech. Strong men must tame the passions and master the bodily movements that accompany them.

Cureau de la Chambre (1664) opposed Descartes, arguing, following Aristotle, that the soul resides in different parts of the body. Some produce bodily movements, while others are detached from matter and perform intellectual operations. This means that the soul receives information from the environment and externalizes passions, which the observer can perceive as a reflection of inner states.

The physicist and mathematician Marin Mersenne claimed to provide a scientific basis for the Platonic ideal of dance. In a book *Des Chants*, he formulated the purport of *ballet de cour*.

The perfection of the body consists in perfect health and in its prompt obedience to the spirit it serves; therefore, dances that bestow these qualities upon it should be considered the most perfect of all possibilities. Health-enhancing walks are also part of these dances, so that you can compare all the exercises of human life to a ballet, which consists of all kinds of movements and positions. (Mersenne 1636: 159)

Ballet reformers, in turn, drew inspiration from Aristotle. Guillaume Colletet envisaged dance as a means of expression of actions and emotions. The formal *ballet de cour* reflected the Platonic idea of the representation of world order through ‘measured and perfectly coordinated dances,’ Colletet observed and contrasted it with the Aristotelian ideal that: ‘dance is a living image of our actions and an artificial expression of our secret thoughts’; for spectators, ballet is ‘like a pleasant Panacea that an ancient poet derives from the head of Apollo to heal all the wounds that melancholy brings forth in souls’ (1632: 3, 4, 6).

In an instruction on *ballet de cour*, Saint-Hubert (1641) was already thinking about dramatic action. Dancers should not dance uniformly but rather choose the typical steps of the characters they represent; their actions on the stage must enable the audience to understand the story. The idea of narrative ballet was gaining popularity in France under the influence of Italian opera of the 1640s (Paquot 1957), the aims of which were more in line with the Aristotelian paradigm. ‘Dance is an active metaphor that signifies, through gesture and movement, inner affections or outward human actions,’ Emanuele Tesauro (1654: 488) reiterated in his interpretation of Aristotle. The Jesuit priest and choreographer Claude-François Ménéstrier corrected Tesauro: Ballet simultaneously expresses inner states and outward actions. ‘Passion must be mingled with action as much as possible in the same *entrée* to make it more pleasing’ (1658: 54). This is a strong argument in support of the future *ballet d’action*. Later, however, Noverre and Angiolini would separate the expression of emotions from that of actions, each addressing one or the other of these aspects of dance. For Ménéstrier, the expression of passions constituted the crowning achievement of art, ‘for you must know their nature perfectly, and since they possess inner principles of which we see only the effects, it is difficult to express them’ (1658: 53). However, dancers do not directly imitate passions and inner states. They interpret them by involving every part of their body.

In 1662, Louis XIV created the Royal Academy of Dance with the mission of preserving ballet from the irreparable ruin that ignorant and incompetent people could bring about. He recognized that, for the ancients, the movements of the body expressed the secret sentiments of the soul and that contemporary dance could reveal the nature, condition, state, and passion of the people it represented (Louis XIV 1663: 39, 45). The royal decision contributed to the development of the concept of emotional expressiveness in dance.

3. Plutarch's Table Talk on dance

In 1665, Plutarch's *W* was printed in French. This translation by Jacques Amyot had already appeared in 1572, but only the second edition attracted the attention of ballet specialists. In the last dialogue, the Greek philosophers had a brief but fruitful exchange of ideas about dance. Michel de Pure (1668) and his followers relied on their authority to support the ballet reform, but errors in translation and a misunderstanding of the Greek terms prevented a coherent and convincing semiotics of ballet.² The polysemy of the terms used by Plutarch does not allow for a precise interpretation of his nomenclature of dance movements, and it is doubtful that it was a comprehensive conception of ancient dance (Lawler 1954). My interest is not in semiotics of ancient dance, but rather in the appropriation of Greek discourse for the purpose of reforming ballet. In the following summary of the talk, I rely on Plutarch's explicit descriptions and examples of dance motricity in their translations into Latin, French, Italian, and English (Plutarchus 1570; Plutarque 1572; Plutarco 1598; Plutarch 1657, 1694).

In the ninth book of *Table Talk* (747a–748b), the philosopher Ammonius, the protagonist of Plutarch's work, identified three basic elements of dance. Φορά refers to movement itself, the motricity. The movement ends in σχῆμα, which is the static pose, as an iconographic representation of the character. Unlike σχῆμα, δειξίς does not mimic objects. It designates them directly or by convention, which may also originate from poetry.³

Incidentally, Plutarch wrote that motricity, φορά, can be ἐμφαντικόν, that is, expressive of actions and inner states: πρᾶξις, πάθος, and δύναμις.⁴ Plutarch does not explain these terms and provides no examples. To make sense of the terminology, I rely on the dictionary of ancient Greek (LSJ 2013-2026) and the personal experience of ballet as a spectator. Dancers mimic some aspect of motricity that is typical of professions, social groups, bodily states (e.g., sleep and drunkenness), and animal behaviors. Such imitations of real-life motricity constitute πρᾶξις – actions, manner of acting, practices, and behaviors. The bodies reveal the inner states of their characters, which spectators

² The English choreographer John Weaver was perhaps the most fervent professional to draw inspiration from ancient texts. He stated unequivocally that restoring imitation through pantomime would improve contemporary ballet (1728:2).

³ Plutarch cites these verses as material for visualization in dance: 'Revered Themis and quick-glancing Aphrodite, And Hera golden-wreathed and beautiful Dione.' Poetic metaphors denote the characteristics of mythical figures: reverence, vigilance, pride, and beauty. Choreographers and dancers can find concrete movements to visualize these metaphorical characteristics. Variations in classical ballet offer many examples. In *Sleeping Beauty*, the Diamond Fairy beats her legs together in midair and sharply raises her palms with the fingers spread out. Just as in how educated readers of poetry can decipher metaphors, experienced ballet goers with vivid imagination can interpret these movements as indicative of scintillating light of sparkling facets of a diamond. Therefore, the δειξίς are indices and symbols rather than icons as the σχῆμα. Plutarch does not insist that these signs must be static like the σχῆμα.

⁴ I will maintain this classification, as I consider it related to Peirce's categories of Thirdness, Secondness, and Firstness, respectively. This question deserves to be explored further in another article.

then cognize as motifs and intentions or feel viscerally as emotions (Kruk 2022). This is *πάθος* – affection and passion. Every movement can be executed differently by applying more or less power. This is *δύναμις* – strength, power, and the ability to do anything. In Latin, Guilielmus Xylander translated this term as *facultas* (Plutarchus 1570: 749), which means capability, possibility, power, means, opportunity, skill, and the ability to do anything easily (Lewis and Short 1956: 718). The Italian translator Antonio Gandino (Plutarco 1598: 280) highlighted similar connotations by using the word *arte* – the ability to execute and apply a method to achieve a goal (TLIO 1997-2025). The same logic underlies John Weaver’s (1712) classification of motricity, distinguishing between brisk and grave movements. The variation in execution is due to the address of the body. At that time, the English ‘address’ had a similar connotation as the Italian *arte*: dexterous carriage in the management of a business (Kersey 1708). Noverre maintains that motricity can vary along three dimensions: acute/grave, slow/prompt, and light/strong (1807: 137). Rudolf Laban (1948) conceives of four: free/bound (flow), sustained/sudden (time), light/strong (weight), and indirect/direct (space). Their combination constitutes the Effort, which can be considered as an expanded version of *δύναμις*.

4. De Pure and Ménéstrier call for reform

In the 17th and 18th centuries, authors neglected these three aspects of motricity, which, I would argue, capture the essence of their reformist ideas. Even if they did not refer to Plutarch, all of them insisted that dance movements should be expressive of (*ἐμφαντικόν*) real life. Some emphasized behaviors (*περὶ ἔξω*), while others focused on emotions (*πάθος*) and still others evoked both of those without distinction. Almost all of them encouraged dancers to add a personal touch to standard movements of ballet – *δύναμις* would be an appropriate term for this aspect of dance. Instead, they sought to squeeze this elegant triad into the inappropriate framework of *σχῆμα* and *δείξις*.

De Pure explains the *σχῆμα* as ‘the grace and beauty of dance’ (1668: 281), which is more in line with the Platonic definition of dance as the objectification of the harmony of the world. De Pure also misunderstood the *δείξις*. Plutarch’s examples suggest that these are gestures and movements by which the dancer points at a thing or displays some characteristics of the embodied person. The dictionary mentions several pertinent connotations of *δείξις*: display, exhibition, calling up, and reference (LSJ 2013-2026). Amyot translated it in French as *la montre*. The noun derives from the verb *montrer* – to show, to point out (*L’Académie française* 1694: 83). However, Amyot then specified the meaning by two more words: *indication* and *démonstration*. While the first respects the purport of *δείξις*, the latter adds a new connotation: mark, testimony of an inner state or intention such as friendship, malice, anger, resentment,

sadness, etc. (*L'Académie française* 1694: 84). De Pure established *démonstration* as the principal feature of ballet, as opposed to simple ballroom dancing. *Démonstration* allows ballet dancers to express, paint, and bring before our eyes the things they intend to convey through dance. It allows them to show something more than mere movements: vigor, strength, liveliness, lightness, and temperament. This 'something' is a faithful imitation of the character's motricity.

Arguably, de Pure substituted ἐμφαντικόν for *démonstration*. It was not a serious error for the nascent narrative ballet, but the terminological eclecticism generated some confusion in the conceptualization of the new genre and a semiotics of ballet for decades afterward. De Pure discussed the expression of emotions and actions in another chapter, *Du Pas de ballet* (1668: 243–251), which was inspired by Cureau de la Chambre more than by Plutarch. Emotional expression is 'based on natural movements that flow from the body according to the disturbances and various agitations of the soul,' and the body 'signifies, despite ourselves, the inner movements that we try to hide and keep secret' (1668: 250). Motricity can represent professions and social ranks. Without these expressions, 'the step is nothing but a convulsion of master and dancer, a senseless and aimless oddity, and ultimately a defective dance, made up of perilous leaps that signify nothing and have no more meaning than the one who created and invented them' (1668: 251). De Pure was convinced of the communicative potential of non-verbal signs. Ballet is a silent spectacle where gestures and movements signify what could be expressed by words, and spectators can understand body language without a program. If something cannot be shown by movement, it is not the subject of ballet. To find the appropriate bodily expressions, the dancer must understand the role and the character of his persona.

The contemporary stage was far from the testimonies found in Greek books (cf. Vossius 1673: 135), but a vivid description of the sarabande (Pomey 1676: 22) proves that at least some dancers conveyed emotions on stage, and the spectators perceived them. Storytelling and emotions were becoming the essential criteria to evaluate ballet. Simple dance did not express anything, while ballet expressed actions, habits, and passions, Ménestrier (1682) reiterated. Like de Pure, he misinterpreted the term σχῆμα, translating it as *figures*. For de Pure, the *figures* were poses and movements, whereas Ménestrier referred to the spatiotemporal coordination of the dancers. He used the word *démonstrations* for δειξις and respected Plutarch's definition of the term, but the hectic explanation that followed confused the terminology. *Figures* and examples of expressive dance became *démonstrations*. Like de Pure, Ménestrier considered δειξις to be the principal criterion that distinguishes ballet from simple dance. He then modified the terminology once again, arguing that the basic elements of ballet are *portements de corps, représentations, and gestes pour l'imitation*, but the examples of dancers' movements mentioned correspond to the category of ποῶσις (1682: 167).

Like de Pure, Ménéstrier devoted a separate chapter to passions and actions, which he called *les expressions*. He attributed the notion to Aristotle, although, in a chapter devoted to Plutarch, he referred to similar movements as *démonstrations*. In any case, the terms *πρᾶξις* and *πάθος* more accurately describe two types of *expressions*. Actual actions are represented on stage by their kinetic features; passions are ‘imitations based on the impressions which the soul naturally leaves on the body and on the judgment of the customs and inclinations of people on the basis of these exterior movements’ (1682: 160; trans. 2018: 541). The imitation of passions is more difficult because it is a complex set of movements of body parts. Their convincing coordination is a crowning achievement of the art, ‘because one needs to know their nature perfectly in order to express them well’ (1682: 161; trans. 2018: 542). Music facilitates motor coordination: simultaneously producing movements in the soul and in the body, and it harmonizes both.

The terms *πάθος*, *πρᾶξις*, and *δύναμις* allow us to clearly distinguish the different aspects of movement that de Pure and Ménéstrier considered essential to ballet. However, their reading of Plutarch only served to confuse the nascent semiotics of ballet. For example, Ménéstrier argued that simple dance was limited to body movements, while ballet necessarily required *démonstrations*. He made an exception for the sarabande, which could be danced in the Spanish style with expression (1682: 159; trans. 2018: 537). Plutarch, for his part, asserted that any dance motricity can be expressive of (*ἐμφαντικόν*) emotions.

5. A cognitivist turn

In France, the political and artistic climate changed in the 1680s, with conservatives strengthening their hold on the court of Louis XIV (Becq 1984). Emotions are now under suspicion again. In special literature, a technical description of nonverbal expressions as discrete codes proliferated. Encouraged by Cureau de la Chambre’s statement that portraits can show the person’s air (1640: 9), the painter Charles le Brun gave a series of lectures in 1668, explaining the drawing of emotional faces. His illustrated instructions for painters were published posthumously in 1698. A kind of dictionary of body language compiled by Giovanni Bonifaccio was published in Italian already in 1616. Andrea Perrucci (1699: 110-143) followed this example, giving dramatic actors advice on the use of gestures, facial expressions, and gait as codes for sociodemographic characteristics, everyday behaviors, somatic states, and theatrical conventions. Jean-Léonor Grimarest, a French polygraph author, harshly criticized actors for their inability to use gestures, but lacked Perrucci’s professional stage acting experience to resolve this issue. He only taught actors the vocal expression of emotions (1707: 119-192).

Regarding dance literature, Raoul Auger Feuillet (1700) and Pierre Rameau (1725) developed classifications of body postures and movements. The Neapolitan choreographer Giovanni Battista Dufort (1728) wrote a similar work for amateurs wishing to improve their performances at public balls. No one addressed passions and actions. Gabriel Le Jay argued that dramatic dance should imitate reality to arouse admiration and pleasure (1727: 515) – note that this is not about conveying emotions. Through body movements and gestures, dancers show the things, demonstrate, and imitate manners and affections so that the spectator can understand the silent performer, Le Jay continues. As an example, he mentioned imitations of real-life actions such as this characteristic of country people: They ‘strike the ground with a heavy, slow step, and use crude and clumsy movements, fruits of the country’s lack of sophistication’ (1727: 534). This is what happiness looks like on stage: ‘The dancer must be quick and agile, propelling his feet with repeated jumps so that he seems to barely touch the ground, snapping his fingers, and jumping lightly with his whole body’ (1727: 534). Fifty years earlier, Ménéstrier was not concerned with such discrete codes but encouraged dancers to imagine the inner state of a person in love and to fully experience it during the performance: ‘Love requires enthusiasm and tenderness, a gentle and serene face, which nevertheless clouds over occasionally and which takes on as many forms as there are movements of the heart that can disturb it’ (1682: 161; trans. 2018: 542).

6. At the crossroads of cognitivism and perceptualism

In his manual for actors published in London, Charles Gildon (1710) devoted several pages to ballet. He asserted that the movements of the body parts had certain natural meanings, they arouse emotions and impress the mind stronger than words. Actors must adapt their movements and facial expressions to the subject of the story and the emotion that the character being portrayed is to feel. The English dancer and choreographer John Weaver had the same opinion. Motion of all parts of the body creates positions, gestures, and movements which represent passions, manners, and actions so that in a skillful representation of any character the spectator can understand the subject of the story and distinguish passions⁵ (1712: 160-161).

The purpose of Pierre Jean Burette’s (1717) research on the history of ancient dance was the rehabilitation of emotional dance. Dance imitates various actions and passions through gestures, postures, movements, and facial expressions. In antiquity, pantomime actors used their bodies to reveal the deepest thoughts and feelings of the soul.

⁵ SWeaver (1728) claimed to have composed the first narrative ballet in 1702; a 14-year hiatus ensued before regular production began. The program (Weaver 1718) suggests that the narration was achieved through a gradual development of events, but there is no description of scenes revealing the emotions, the inner states of the characters as Noverre would do 40 years later.

The representation of passions plays a positive role in society, as it awakens feelings of piety, compassion, courage, and generosity in the spectators. Burette concluded that dance can be as instructive as it is enjoyable.

A proponent of John Locke's sensualism, Jean-Baptiste Dubos strove to rehabilitate the human faculty of the senses. Passions provide both pleasure and pain; but people fear the boredom that follows inaction even more, 'and they find in the activities of life and in the intoxication of the passions an excitement that keeps them occupied... Thus, by instinct, we run after the objects that can excite our passions' (1719: 9-10, 11; trans. 2021: 98). He distinguished real passions from their artistic imitations. Artists present imitations of objects that can excite true passions, but, however strong they are, imitation is incapable of causing real pain and real affliction. Even if an artist happens to create a positive representation of vice, the fault must be attributed to their dishonesty or ignorance rather than to art.

Augustine's distinction between artificial and natural signs has shed light on the communication of passions. Spoken words are arbitrary signs instituted by society, and their meaning must be learned. Natural signs are instituted by nature itself to signify passions. They indicate surprise, joy, and pain, and they are similar in different cultures. By using natural signs, painting puts nature before our eyes. Dubos does not hide his interest in visual communication. 'Instinct, reinforced by experience, gives the soul more trust in sight than in the other senses. The soul checks the reports of other senses against the sense of sight when the soul suspects that these reports are inaccurate' (1719: 375; trans. 2021: 297). However, Dubos does not recognize ballet as a medium of visual communication capable of conveying emotions. He reduced natural signs to gestures and mimics, but even manual gestures seemed imperfect to him because their meaning depend on context. Dubos tended to perceive nonverbal signs as simply accompanying speech. Only affects, such as a headache, have unambiguous natural signs.

Dubos underestimated the expressive potential of the entire body. He considered bodily signs as *démonstrations*, without, however, defining the term or providing examples. The word appeared most often in the enumerations next to 'gesture.' In this expression, it designates body language in general: 'steps, bodily attitudes, gestures, and, in short, all the *démonstrations* [translated in English as 'actions'⁶] that ordinarily accompany the speaking part, or which sometimes help them make their sentiments known without speaking' (1719: 507; trans. 2021: 737). Dubos did not address the communication of emotions in ballet. This was probably not his objective. The point is that he considered the translation of the Greek word ὁρχησις and the Latin *saltatio* as

⁶ English translators missed the meaning of the term altogether: for them, *démonstrations* are 'actions' (Dubos 2021:737), 'body language' (742), 'demonstrations' (742), 'signs' (752, 770), 'movements' (751, 752, 753, 771), 'eye-catching gestures' (772), or 'motions' (772).

‘dance’ to be erroneous. The ancients did not dance; they merely imitated behaviors through gestures and movements; their ‘dance’ might have been limited to the recitation of a poem. This is why contemporary ballet can learn nothing from the past, not even the expression of emotions (1719: 506–508). Not surprisingly, Dubos was rather pleased with the *ballet de cour* of his time.

An inconsistent approach to emotions is a characteristic of Jacques Bonnet (1723). This is clear in his presentation of the Greek nomenclature of ballet *movements*. In fact, this text is not even his own: He plagiarized the chapter *Les Mouvements* of Ménéstrier’s book, making a few modifications regarding emotions (cf. Bonnet 1723: 58ff with Ménéstrier 1682: 153ff). Ménéstrier introduced his chapter by asserting that the imitation of things and actions, affections, and customs, is essential to ballet (1682: 153). Bonnet in the first lines recalled, following Plato, that dance was a means of cultivating morality (1723: 58). He omitted Ménéstrier’s reference to Aristotle on the importance of emotions. However, he did retain a reference to Theophrastus, who maintained that imitation of vices produced no harmful effects. Elsewhere, Bonnet asserted that emotional states could be communicated through nonverbal expressions, without, however, conceptualizing them. Bonnet cited these examples of body movements, which Ménéstrier mentioned as expressions of inner states, alongside imitations of the kinetic properties of actions. Bonnet relegated a more in-depth discussion of emotions to the final chapter, *Parallèle de la peinture et de la poésie*, devoted to Le Brun’s lectures. Even a static pose of a sitter can express all the passions of the soul, Bonnet emphasized. If reasoning consists of inferring one thing from the knowledge of another, this is also possible in painting. From the poses and expressions represented in the painting, the viewer can infer the inner state of the people depicted. Only one step remained to reveal the emotional potential of the dancers’ bodies, but Bonnet did not take it.

Franz Lang (1727), a German playwright, also developed technical instructions for actors. He advocated a cognitive conception of emotions: actions must be observed, reflected upon, and mentally constructed before being assimilated by the actor’s body and voice. The bodily expression of emotions is natural, but in the theater, it must be cultivated to better communicate meaning. From these natural expressions, Lang sought to distinguish combinations of discrete signs from all parts of the body, which would then indicate various inner states.

In contrast, the playwright and actor of the Italian theatre in Paris, Luigi Riccoboni (1728), was a perceptualist. To achieve fidelity on stage, the actor must follow his instinct, forget his limbs and head, and strive instead to feel the thing being represented, to make the audience believe that the hero’s concerns are their own. Then, the body will act spontaneously. No one will criticize the actor who guides their actions with their heart, Riccoboni assured his readers.

7. Perceptualists win the readers' minds

In the mid-17th century, book dealers offered many scholarly works on the communicative potential of the body. The physician and philosopher Julien Offray de la Mettrie (1745) formulated a theory of emotions within the paradigm established by Aristotle, Coeffeteau, and Cureau de la Chambre. La Mettrie conceived emotions to be a mechanism that maintains the balance between the organism and its environment. What we now call the autonomic nervous system ensures interaction with the environment by transmitting responses to external stimuli, thereby modifying the somatic state. Blushing, blanching, increased breathing, etc. are the bodily signs that are the reactions to a change in the environment. We do not know the causes that trigger passions in others, but we can explain them as we observe the body, La Mettrie contends.

The perceptual theory of emotions received support from the philosopher Étienne Bonnot de Condillac who rejected the Cartesian primacy of discourse. Condillac distinguished between three types of signs (Condillac 1746: 65; trans. 1947: 19):

1. Accidental signs or objects linked with some ideas in some circumstances;
2. Natural signs of feelings of joy, fear, pain, etc.;
3. Institutional signs arbitrarily related to the ideas.

It is tempting to interpret accidental signs as imitations of real-life behaviors and institutional signs as gestures specific to cultural codes. However, since Condillac did not write about ballet, I will not dwell on it here. Natural signs are more interesting for us because they explain the communication of emotions. These are the automatic effects of specific desires upon our bodies. Being similar in all human beings, desires produce similar sentiments and bodily expressions, which, in turn, cause others to feel something similar. Bodily expressions were the first signs that enabled the communication of thoughts. Speech succeeded the language of action that Condillac called the 'dance of gestures.' Furthermore, dance as such, the 'dance of steps,' originated in these movements. It served to express certain states of the soul, especially joy. Bodily expressions that are natural signs are more ardent than discourse and consist of institutionalized signs because the former are direct products of imagination that had not been weakened by artificial signs yet. 'Indeed, for those familiar with it, a single gesture often amounts to a long sentence' (1746: 78-79; trans. 2001: 141).

In 1723, Jacques Bonnet began his reflection on ballet by formulating the educational objectives of dance; twenty years after him, the philosopher Charles Batteaux asserted that 'the aim of the arts is to move the soul' (1746: 255). Like Dubos, Batteux distinguished between institutionalized and natural signs. The former are words; the latter are tone of voice and gestures (body movements and postures) that refer to the inward operations of the mind. Both types of signs lend themselves to

the communication of ideas and emotions. Unlike Dubos, Batteaux had much more confidence in the communicative potential of nonverbal language. Tone and gesture occur more naturally and express more than verbal language, they 'go straight to the heart, without any detours' (1746: 254). Therefore, the primary objective of music and dance should be the imitation of passions. There is no necessity to translate passions into propositions, since the heart possesses its own intelligence, independent of words. Given the difference between institutionalized and natural signs, Batteux distinguished the functions of actions and passions in theater and ballet. In poetry, passions prepare and produce action. In dance, action is a kind of framework that is designed to carry, support, arouse, and connect various passions.

Regarding the actor's work on stage, Batteux aligns with Lang. Stage passions are artificial because their bodily expressions are merely signs. Art does not create expressions; it only regulates, reinforces, and polishes them as signs. In real life, gestures are regulated by instinct, but dancers must not live through the sentiments that they express because they must respect artistic rules, adapting their expressions to musical rhythm, movement, melody, and harmony. Batteux left a question unanswered: How can actors isolate an instinctive expression of a passion as a distinct natural sign and 'polish' it, still not making it an institutionalized sign?

The playwright Pierre Rémond de Sainte-Albine, in his turn, is a devoted perceptualist. Facial expressions, gestures, postures, and body movements must accompany the sentiments, giving an impression of truthfulness, he explained in a manual for actors, *Le Comédien* (1749: 139). Sainte-Albine preserved Batteaux's distinction between natural emotions and artistic representations: 'Nature must first sketch the actor. Art must then complete their training' (1749: 16). However, contrary to Batteaux's advice, actors must be capable of experiencing different passions in their souls if they want to be convincing on stage. Sainte-Albine was categorical on this matter: 'If you cannot lend yourself to these metamorphoses, do not venture onto the stage' (1749: 33).

Clearly, Antoine-François Riccoboni emphasized the importance of body language by declaring in the opening pages of his manual: 'I will begin by talking about gestures, and this may seem strange to you' (1750: 4). However, unlike his father (Riccoboni 1728) and Sainte-Albine, he sided with Batteaux's cognitivism. The goal of nonverbal communication is to convey emotion to the audience. To do this, the actor must know the natural expressions of others and imitate them harmoniously using all the parts of their body, not just their arms: 'Voilà le grand art' (1750: 41). Actors must develop a mechanical habit of appearing in an emotional state, but they must not be genuinely affected by the emotion they are portraying.

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing had promised to translate Sainte-Albine's *Le Comédien* into German, but, finding only 'empty words for concepts' instead of 'a system of rules' in the book, he abandoned the project (1754: 265). He reiterated Lang and

Batteux. In real life, the body spontaneously expresses the inner constitution of the soul, but in the theater, the audience wants to see emotions expressed in the most perfect way. To achieve perfection, the actor must first learn bodily expressions, then imitate the external marks of an emotion, and 'then his soul, by the impression made on it by the senses, will automatically place itself in a position that will allow its movements to be expressed according to gestures, positions, and intonations' (1754: 209-210). It is a mechanical learning process, Lessing concedes, but it is based on immutable rules.

The English painter William Hogarth (1753) adopted a middle ground. He argued that action could 'perhaps' be learned through some type of 'grammar rules.' Kinesis is one example: each character possesses particular lines of movement. For example, barbarian dances consist of 'wild skipping, jumping, and turning round, or running backward and forward, with convulsive shrugs, and distorted gestures' (1753: 150). Knowing the general principles of kinesis, the actor can reinforce, modify, and adjust the movements of the real life that they intend to imitate on stage. However, actions intended to enforce the sentiments or raise the passions 'must be left entirely to the judgement of the performer' (1753: 151).

In France, the idea that natural signs convey genuine emotions became a criterion of theatrical performance. Denis Diderot placed such importance on nonverbal communication that he used earplugs in the theater: 'To judge gestures and movements fairly, one must consider the actor, without listening to the words' (1751: 64-65). However, the terms 'passion' or 'sentiment' did not appear among the keywords that define ballet in the *Encyclopédie*. Louis de Cahusac, the author of the entry "Ballet," wrote a technical definition: the representation of an action through gestures, steps, and body movements; a kind of mute poetry that speaks without saying anything (1751: 42-46). Still, he criticized the authors of *L'Europe galante* – an innovative narrative spectacle in the new opera-ballet genre – for ignoring the expressive potential of the dancers' bodies. Cahusac lamented that dances were not linked to the narrative by specific actions and that the different nations were represented by uniform steps rather than by movements specific to their culture.

Three years later, Cahusac wrote a much more scathing critique of contemporary ballet. He categorically opposed Dubos, whose arguments rested on 'the supposed perfection of the dance of his time' (1754, vol.1: xviii). Cahusac called for a renewal of ballet through imitation of nature. Condillac's theory reinforced the conviction of the communicative potential of nonverbal language. 'The word is not more expressive than the gesture' (1754, vol.1: 135). The gesture is even more precise than speech, 'several words are necessary to express a thought; a single movement can paint several thoughts and sometimes the most intense situation' (1754, vol.1: 150). The various affections of the soul are the origin of gestures. All parts of the body must be involved

in the portrayal of emotions. Their coordination solely depends on the mind. Dancers must study people and their passions in depth, be able to perceive with great precision the nuances that distinguish passions, and to know how they are reflected in the body. Unfortunately, dancers and composers know only the technical aspect of ballet. Therefore, a theory of the artistic aspect is needed, and it is possible indeed because the steps and postures are ‘the letters and words of ballet,’ Cahusac maintained (1754, vol.1: xxxix). Dancers, in turn, must learn the discovered rules that Cahusac promised to formulate: ‘Nature provided the positions, while experience provided the rules’ (1754, vol.1: 17). Up to this point, in the first volume, Cahusac had shown himself to be a cognitivist; in the third, he abandoned his attempt to cognize the ‘letters and words’ of ballet and turned toward perceptualism. From its origins, dance has served as an expression of the affections of the soul, and it must express, represent, and capture them, Cahusac contended (1754, vol.3: 114-115). How should dancers use their bodies to express, represent, and capture? Cahusac offers no answer. The rule he formulates is as simple as it is abstract:

Nature must be the guide of art in all things, and art must seek to imitate nature in all things. Moreover, it is always up to talent alone to bring to fruition in practice what the precepts of theory can only outline. (1754, vol.3: 166)

The choreographer and dance master are absolved of all responsibility, since the dancer alone is the creator of the role.

Accustom your soul to feeling, and your gestures will soon harmonize with its expression. Then, immerse yourself, to the point of enthusiasm, in the subject you are to represent. Your overflowing imagination will bring to life diverse situations in striking images. Draw them yourself, following your imagination: We assure you in advance that they will be an imitation of the beauty of nature. (1754, vol.3: 168)

For the Encyclopedists, a lack of analytical precision was not a flaw in art criticism. On the contrary, Jean-Le Rond d’Alambert (1751) warned against the overuse of rigid analytical reasoning on sentiment. The logic of passion is entirely different from ordinary logic, and it is impossible to analyze sentiments precisely, he explained. Diderot even claimed that detailed rules could not help actors express their passions: ‘there is something else, more immediate, intimate, obscure, and certain, which guides and enlightens them [artists]’ (1757: 104-105). Jean-Georges Noverre approached ballet reform from this intellectual perspective, while his critics saw it as a serious shortcoming and strove to develop an analytical approach.

8. Complementary antagonists Noverre and Angiolini

Noverre, drawing on Batteaux, offered an elegant explanation of the difference between theater and ballet. Theater relies on verbal communication, which allows cold, calculating reasoning. Ballet is nonverbal communication; bodies cannot reason, but they can convey emotions. Therefore, the classical rules of theater are not applicable to ballet, its purpose being to express passions and sentiments powerfully (Noverre 1772: 6). Emotions have somatic expressions.

Gesture is the countenance of the soul, its effect must be immediate and cannot fail to achieve its aim when it is true... The passions are the springs which actuate the machine; whatever movements result from it, they cannot fail to be expressive. (1760: 265-266, trans. 1966: 100)

Even if emotions are biological processes, their theatrical expression is not so simple. Observable bodily signs are complex; it is not easy to identify the most important element of expression that would perfectly represent a particular emotion. In drama, it is the choice of words, the prosody that allows emotions to be differentiated. How can you find the right bodily sign to faithfully express emotion in ballet? That is the task of the dancers. To find the right expression, they must feel into the role: Study the character of the figures portrayed and put themselves in their place. Verbal instructions are of little use for dancers. 'A man of intelligence will draw excellent programs and furnish a painter with the most noble ideas [a story], but the merit lies in distribution and execution' (Noverre 1760: 397; trans. 1966: 143). As a rhetoric figure, 'distribution' means the division and enumeration of the qualities of a subject in an orderly manner (Diderot and D'Alembert 1754: 1062b). Noverre undoubtedly keeps in mind the division of a story into distinct scenes or *tableaux vivants* in which the character would reveal some inner state. 'Execution,' in turn, refers to the faithful representation of the corresponding emotion. In describing his ballets, Noverre is less interested in the succession of actions than in staging situations where the actors reveal the inner states of their characters. The spectators can infer the meaning of events from the evoked emotional reactions. The scene of the nymphs fleeing the fauns is an example of this. To develop the plot, it would suffice to depict two groups of dancers running: women and men, but Noverre stretches the action to demonstrate the different psychological reactions of the pursuers and the pursued (1757; 1760: 9-14, 404-419).

Furthermore, by the word *action* I do not mean that which consists merely of moving about, exerting oneself, making efforts, and tormenting oneself like a madman in order to jump, or to display a soul one does not possess. Action in dance is the art of transferring our sentiments and passions to the souls of the

spectators by means of the true expression of our movements, gestures and features. (1760: 262; trans. 1966: 99)

Instead of giving precise instructions on movement, Noverre describes what Konstantin Stanislavski would call 'given circumstances.' Immersing themselves in the scene, the actors seek to feel into the role and find appropriate and natural bodily expressions.

The *maître de ballet* must continually rehearse a mimed scene until the performers have arrived at that moment of expression innate in mankind, a precious moment that is revealed with both strength and truth when it is the outcome of feeling. (1760: 122; trans. 1966: 52-53)

Such living pictures must be expressive in all their details, because the faithful imitation of nature masks illusion from the spectator and transports them to the spot where the action has taken place. The illusion of reality helps the audience perceive the dancer as a close other, a necessary condition for considering bodily expressions as signs of an inner state. A vibrant performance depends more on the emotional commitment to the role than on the verbal instructions. 'When dancers are animated by their feelings, they will assume a thousand different attitudes according to the varied symptoms of their passions' (1760: 122; trans. 1966: 52-53). Then, even technical dance can acquire an expressive color. In the entrées, the leading soloists must combine the grace of their bodies with ideas, writes Noverre (1760: 180, trans. 1966: 72).

Having established that nonverbal emotional reactions possess communicative potential, Noverre rejected the rules of verbal dramaturgy: Ballet is brother to poetry, it cannot be restrained by the narrow rules of drama. Dancers convey the plot through the reflection of psychological states in contrasting emotional expressions from which the audience can infer the events.

Noverre avoids cataloging discrete signs because bodily expressions are holistic, and each emotion has accents and gradations depending on the people and situations.

I will not attempt to analyze it. This subject is so delicate and fleeting that I will leave it to those who have the art of finding words that are capable of developing the correct idea that you can form of these momentary accents. The words 'grave' and 'acute,' 'prompt' and 'slow,' 'soft' and 'strong,' offer only very imperfect definitions. (1807: 137)

The last sentence mentions nothing more than the three dimensions of Laban's concept of the Effort: flow, time, and weight. It can be stated that Noverre clearly distinguishes here between δύναμις and πάθος.

The dancers' bodies are different, and this is why the same movement appears slightly different depending on the dancer performing it. It is up to the dancer to find an expression appropriate for their body, and thereby they become the creator of the ballet. 'This sublime intonation, these accents, and this cry of nature that brings tears to the spectators' eyes and transports them to the sweetest and most heart-rending illusions, fully testify to the merit of the performer' (Noverre 1807: 137). He emphasizes that verbal descriptions do not allow you to understand the ballet: It must be seen, and not just once (1757; 1760: 9-14, 404-419). Moreover, the body can tell much more than words. Noverre makes a distinction between pantomime and *ballet d'action*:

There are undoubtedly many things that pantomime can only hint at, but in the realm of passions, there is a degree of expression that words cannot reach, or rather, for which words no longer exist. It is then that dance in action triumphs. A step, gesture, movement, and an attitude convey what nothing else can express: The more intense the feelings are that are to be depicted, the fewer words there are to render them. Exclamations, which are the ultimate expressions of the language of passions, become insufficient and are then replaced by gesture. (Noverre 1803: vii)

Giovanni-Andrea Gallini (1762), director of dances at the King's Theatre in London, praised Noverre's ideas and explained them in a clearer and more distinct language. Gallini approves of the rejection of classical dramaturgy. Dance, like painting, can only present situations to the eye; the choreographer's task is to extract the most picturesque situations that reveal the character's personality. To express the emotion of a character on stage, dancers must study the slightest nuances of passions, 'which nothing but a nice eye can perceive and which easily escape a superficial observer' (1762: 259). On stage, the dancer should diffuse expression throughout the whole body; every movement of every limb down to the fingertips should convey meaning. To give life to bodily movement, dancers must experience the represented emotions themselves – then, the eloquence of the body will produce a strong emotional effect and the charm of the moment because the viewer can quickly grasp its meaning.

Noverre's critic, Gasparo Angiolini, conceives of the action as an intelligible discourse. While Noverre compares the ballet to painting, Angiolini resorts to linguistic analogies. 'These movements, which these gestures were meant to form, so to speak, a continuous discourse: It was a kind of declamation, made for the eyes, the understanding of which was facilitated for the spectators by music with varied sonorities, according to whether the mime wanted to express love or hate as well as fury or despair,' Angiolini explains in the preface to his new production (1761: 4).

Angiolini became aware of Noverre's programmatic statements in 1773 and immediately wrote a critical letter. His displeasure was caused by the disregard for classical rules of dramaturgy, the refusal to clearly describe the movements of the dancers and, consequently, the disregard for notation. Angiolini felt that his colleague was incompetent in matters of nonverbal communication, since he insisted that the audience could not do without printed programs. Angiolini rejected the 'painting' of scenes. Painting is overloaded with detail, it is lifeless, weak, and monotonous; whereas the progressive succession of ideas transforms pantomime into a lively, varied, and captivating dance. Ballet is a 'danced drama': Dancers tell the story by showing a logical sequence of events and, therefore, the performance must be extremely simple. Divertissements must not interrupt the main action and, as a result, break the dramatic unity. Describing his own ballets, Angiolini lists sequences of cause-and-effect actions, but he is not interested in illustrating the psychology of the character. He avoids the words 'passion,' 'soul,' and 'to feel,' which are so abundant in Noverre's writings. Noverre relies on the depiction of emotional states: Since human beings experience similar emotions and their bodily expressions reflect this, the audience can understand the emotions represented and infer the events. Angiolini considers the *ballet d'action* to be the imitation of some aspects of real-life behaviors. He cites as an example the choreography of his mentor, Franz Hilverding, who, well before Noverre, in 1742, replaced the masks of the *commedia dell'arte* with 'natural characters of grain threshers, charcoal burners, Hungarian gypsies, Tyrolians, Moravians, etc., and each of these dances was represented by a short action adapted to the habits, customs, and condition of these characters' (1773: 12).

Like Noverre, Angiolini (1765) also addressed the emotional competence of dancers, which he called 'expression' or 'the art of speaking through dancing.' To express passions, dancers must be deeply moved by what they want to represent and convey these emotions to the audience. Angiolini, who always demanded clear instructions from Noverre, did not explore this subject in depth. Moreover, he only expected this emotional competence from the principal dancers, while Noverre required all the dancers on stage to paint the characters.

Indeed, Angiolini was unaware of the nonverbal cues that might indicate emotions. This conclusion emerges from his analysis of choreographic notation. Noverre maintained that emotions are distinguished by certain momentary accents that cannot be named, much less notated. Here, notation is not only useless but also a source of confusion and deception, since it is impossible for a dancer to decipher hundreds of codes. For Angiolini, the motricity of ballet is a combination of invariant movements, differing only in how they are executed by the body. A modification results from the morphology of the dancer but does not alter the dance. The notation records the invariant, 'and all this varies in a thousand ways and in a thousand ways it is linked to

taste, chance, and the spirit of the music' (Angiolini 1773: 56). However, bodily signs created by taste and chance cannot express emotions intentionally, in accordance with the dramaturgical rules so dear to Angiolini.

Another point of contention concerns the use of the programs. Angiolini (1775) argues that pantomime can convey complete information about the action, whereas Noverre insists on textual explanations. Indeed, the interpretation of the bodily expressions so abundant in his productions depends on the contexts of interaction, which can be made explicit in the program.

In developing their concepts of *ballet d'action*, Noverre and Angiolini considered the different meanings of the word *action* (see Diderot and Alembert 1751: 120-121). Noverre likely drew on the common definition in oratory: The speaker's outward appearance, eloquence of the body, through which they convey feelings and passions to the audience. Angiolini based his approach on the definition current in the literature: The plot and events that constitute the subject of a poem. Both kinds of action are relevant to *ballet d'action*. It is just that Noverre writes about the *πάθος*, and Angiolini favors the *πρᾶξις*. Disagreements in choreographic notation reveal the various approaches to the expressive potential of the *δύναμις*: For Angiolini, it is simply a random token of the *φορά* as the type; for Noverre, these subtle differences constitute distinct types that tell something about the character.

Conclusion

The designation *ballet d'action* refers to the goal of the ballet reformers, but they conceived of 'action' in different ways. Cognitivists envisioned a progression of events represented by imitations of some aspects of motricity characteristic of social, demographic, and professional groups as well as of somatic and psychological bodily states. In Plutarch's typology, this is *πρᾶξις*. Scholars strive to describe movements as discrete signs that choreographers compose in meaningful actions and convey through notation to the dancers who follow the score. Perceptualists envisioned a sequence of the inner states of the characters embodied by the dancers; the spectators inferred the meaning of the action from their own emotional experience. This is the *πάθος*. The holistic bodily expressions of emotions defy any detailed description and cannot be fixed by choreographic notation. To find the appropriate signs, the dancers must feel into the role within the given circumstances. In doing so, they become co-creators of the performance, and the particularities of their unique embodiment of the role are not constrained by the notation. As to the *δύναμις*, cognitivists conceived of the variations in executing of the poses and movements as tokens of invariant types; for perceptualists, it had potential meaning. The main differences between the two approaches to ballet are summarized in the following table.

	Angiolini	Noverre
Action	Plot	Body eloquence
Choreography	Dramaturgical sequence of events	Scenes revealing the characters' inner states
Nonverbal signs	Discrete	Holistic
Individual execution	Does not change the meaning	Can change the meaning
Dance score	Possible	Not possible
Dancers	Perform the score	Create the characters
Character creation	By learning the rules	By feeling-into the role
Programs	Unnecessary – the sequence of movements shows the events	Necessary – text aids in understanding the context of isolated scenes

Angiolini and Noverre, emblematic figures of the cognitivist and perceptualist paradigms, should not, however, be considered bitter adversaries. The different bodily signs that they describe do not make two different semiotics of ballet, and in the *ballet d'action*, they are perfectly compatible. However, as Valeria de Luca observes, semiotics has only begun to address the passion and body aspects of meaning 'in recent decades'; moreover, the semiotics of dance has only marginally touched upon this issue due to the challenges encountered in its analysis (2017: 57). De Luca's overview of contemporary dance semiotics suggests that researchers have primarily focused on the *πρᾶξις* and *δύναμις* aspects of dance, which are reducible to discrete and analyzable signs. Indeed, Noverre has been criticized for his inability to explicate his version of the *ballet d'action* and provide clear instructions to the dancers (e.g., Blasis 1828; Goudar 1773). The communication of emotions disappeared from analysis until German scholars of art proposed the concept of *Einfühlung* or 'feeling-into' (Vischer 1873; Lipps 1903). In English, it was introduced as 'empathy' (Titchener 1909). The American ballet critic John Joseph Martin applied this concept to ballet under the name 'metakinesis,' which 'comes not by intellectual planning but by "feeling through" with a sensitive body' (1933: 59). Kinesthetic sympathy allows spectators to mirror the dancer's muscle work, and metakinesis allows intentions to be inferred from movement, as the spectator compares the observed movement to their

own experience and retrieves the interpretation from memory, Martin explained. However, in a later work, Martin (1939) abandoned the notion of metakinesis. In Russia, the idea of the bodily expression of emotions found greater success. *Einfühlung*, literally translated as *vchuvstvovanie*, became the core of the acting method developed by director Konstantin Stanislavski (1938). The Russian ballet school remains faithful to this tradition of emotional expression. Scholars and critics writing in Russian are very attentive to the feeling-into the role, but they also lack the conceptual apparatus for an analytical description of emotional dance.

What was once called *πάθος*, *Einfühlung*, empathy or *vchuvstvovanie* is now conceptualized as ‘embodiment.’ These new theories are the subject of many criticisms (De Luca 2017). Neuroscience distinguishes between more specific processes of perceiving the bodies of others. It does not claim that meaning is biologically predetermined. It merely shows that we can perceive bodies as holistic signs and that emotions and actions constitute their interpretation, which defies any exhaustive verbal description. Ballet reformers took this for granted, but contemporary dance semiotics has yet to develop a conceptual framework for analyzing emotional bodies.

References

- Angiolini, Gasparo 1761. *Le Festin de pierre*. Vienne: [s.n.].
- Angiolini, Gasparo 1765. *Dissertation sur les ballets pantomimes des anciens*. Vienne: Jean-Thomas de Trattner.
- Angiolini, Gasparo 1773. *Lettere di Gasparo Angiolini a Monsieur Noverre sopra i balli pantomimi*. Milano: G. B. Bianchi.
- Angiolini, Gasparo 1775. *Riflessioni sopra l’uso dei programmi nei balli pantomimi*. Londra: [s.n.].
- Aristotle 2011. *De Anima*. Trans. by M. Shiffman. Newburyport, MA: Focus Publishing.
- Aubignac, François Hédelin de 1657. *La pratique du théâtre*. Paris: Antoine de Sommaville.
- Blasis, Carlo 1828. *The code of Terpsichore: Practical and historical treatise on the ballet, dancing, and pantomime; with a complete theory of the art of dancing*. London: James Bulcock.
- Burette, Pierre Jean 1717. Second mémoire pour servir à l’histoire de la danse des anciens. In: *Histoire de l’Académie royale des inscriptions et belles-lettres Avec Les Mémoires de littérature tirés des registres de cette Académie*, Tome I. Paris: L’Imprimerie royale, 117-135.
- Cahusac, Louis de 1751. Ballet. In: D. Diderot and J. D’Alembert (eds.) *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, Tome II. Paris: Briasson; David; Le Breton; Durand.
- Cahusac, Louis de 1754. *La Danse ancienne et moderne ou Traité historique de la danse*. La Haye: Jean Neaulme.
- Coeffeteau, Nicolas 1620. *Le Tableau des passions humaines, de leurs causes, et de leurs effets*. Paris: Sebastien Cramoisy.

- Colletet, Guillaume 1632. Préface. In: *Le grand Ballet des effets de la nature*. Paris: Jean Martin, 3-7.
- Condillac, Étienne Bonnot de 1746. *Essai sur l'origine des connaissances humaines*. Première partie. Amsterdam: Pierre Mortier.
- Cureau de la Chambre, Marin 1640. *Les Caractères des passions*. Paris: P. Rocolet et P. Blaise.
- Cureau de la Chambre, Marin 1664. *Le système de l'âme*. Paris: Jacques d'Allin.
- D'Alembert, Jean-Le Rond 1751. Discours préliminaire. In: D. Diderot and J. D'Alembert (eds.) *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, Tome I. Paris: Briasson; David; Le Breton; Durand, i-xlv.
- De Luca, Valeria 2017. Gesture as a device for converging of sensory and semiotic modes and levels. The case of Argentinian tango. *Punctum* 3(1): 57-75.
- Descartes, René 1637. *Discours de la méthode*. Leyden: Ian Maire.
- Descartes, René 1649. *Les Passions de l'âme*. Paris: Henry Le Gras.
- Diderot, Denis 1751. *Lettre sur les sourds et muets à l'usage de ceux qui entendent et qui parlent*. [s.l.]: [s.n.].
- Diderot, Denis 1757. *Le Fils naturel, ou les épreuves de la vertu*. Amsterdam: Marc Michel Rey.
- Diderot, D. and J. D'Alembert (eds.) 1751. *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, Tome I. Paris: Briasson; David; Le Breton; Durand.
- Diderot, D. and J. D'Alembert (eds.) 1754. *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, Tome IV. Paris: Briasson; David; Le Breton; Durand.
- Dubos, Jean-Baptiste 1719. *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture*. Première partie. Paris: Jean Mariette. Trans. by J. O. Young and M. Cameron 2021. *Critical Reflections on Poetry and Painting*. Leiden, Boston: Brill.
- Dufort, Giovanni Battista 1728. *Trattato del ballo nobile*. Napoli: Felice Mosca.
- Feuillet, Raoul Auger 1700. *Chorégraphie, ou L'art de décrire la dance, par caractères, figures et signes démonstratifs*. Paris: Gilles Paulus du Mesnil.
- Gallini, Giovanni-Andrea 1762. *A Treatise on the art of dancing*. London: R. and J. Dodsley; A. Nicholl.
- Goudar, Ange 1773. *De Venise. Rémarques sur la musique et la danse, ou Lettres de Mr. G... à Milord Pembroke*. Venise: Charles Palese.
- Grimarest, Jean-Léonor 1707. *Traité du Récitatif*. Paris: Jacques Le Fevre; Pierre Ribou.
- Hanna, Judith Lynne 1979. *To Dance Is Human: A Theory of Nonverbal Communication*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Hogarth, William 1753. *The analysis of beauty*. Written with a view of fixing the fluctuating ideas of taste. London: J. Reeves.
- Kersey, John 1708. *Dictionarium Anglo-Britannicum or A General English Dictionary*. London: J. Wilde.
- Kruk, Sergei 2022. Watching and feeling ballet: neuroscience and semiotics of bodily movement. *Semiotica* 248: 351-374.

- Kruk, Sergei 2024. Areas of the brain that process visual information about ballet dancers' bodies. *Journal of Neurology and Neuroscience* Vol.15 No. S10:001.
Doi: 10.4172/2171-6625.15.S10.001
- Laban, Rudolf 1948. *Modern Educational Dance*. London: MacDonald and Evans.
- Lang, Franz 1727. *Dissertatio de actione scenica, cum figuris eandem explicantibus, et observationibus quibusdam de arte comica*. Munich: A.-M. Riedlin.
- Langer, Susanne K. 1953. *Feeling and Form. A Theory of Art*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.
- Lawler, Lillian B. 1954. Phora, Schéma, Deixis in the Greek Dance. *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 85: 148-158.
- L'Académie française 1694. *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, Tome II. Paris: Jean-Baptiste Coignard.
- Le Brun, Charles 1698. *Conférence de Monsieur Le Brun, Premier Peintre du Roy de France, Chancelier et Directeur de l'Académie de Peinture et Sculpture sur l'expression générale et particulière des passions, Enrichie de figures gravées par B. Picart*. Paris: E. Picart; Amsterdam: J. L. de Lorme.
- Le Jay, Gabriel François 1727. Liber de Choreis dramaticis. In: *Bibliothecae rhetorum. Liber dramaticus*. [Ingolstadt]: Sumptibus Joan. Andreae de la Haye, Bibliopolae Academici Ingolstadii; Monachii: Typis Mariae Magdalenae Riedlin Viduae, 502-536.
- Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim 1754. Auszug aus dem *Schauspieler* des Herrn Rémond von Sainte Albine. In: *Theatralische Bibliothek*, 1. Stück. Berlin: Christian Friederich Voss, 209-266.
- Lewis, Charlton T. and Charles Short 1956. *A Latin Dictionary*. Oxford: The Clarendon Press.
- Louis XIV 1663. *Lettres patentes du Roy, pour l'établissement de l'Académie royale de danse en la ville de Paris. Vérifiées en Parlement le 30 mars 1662*. Paris: Pierre le Petit.
- LSJ 2013-2026. *Liddell, Scott, Jones Ancient Greek Lexicon*. <https://lsj.gr/>
- Lipps, Theodor 1903. *Grundlegung der Ästhetik*. Hamburg, Leipzig: Verlag von Leopold Voss.
- Martin, John Joseph 1933. *The Modern Dance*. New York: A. S. Barnes.
- Martin, John Joseph 1939. *Introduction to the Dance*. New York: W. W. Norton.
- McFee, Graham 1992. *Understanding dance*. London: Routledge.
- McFee, Graham 2011. *The philosophical aesthetics of dance. Identity, performance and understanding*. Alton, Hampshire: Dance Books.
- Ménestrier, Claude-François 1658. Remarques, Pour la conduite des Ballets. In: *L'Autel de Lyon, consacré à Loys Auguste, et placé dans le temple de la gloire. Ballet dédié à Sa Majesté en son entrée à Lyon*. Lyon: Jean Moulin, 50-56.
- Ménestrier, Claude-François 1682. *Des ballets anciens et modernes selon les règles du théâtre*. Paris: René Guignard. Trans. by A. Klapper, P. Maercker, and K. Seidler. *Images d'action*. Leiden: Brill, 2018.

- Mersenne, Marin 1636. *Harmonie universelle*. Paris: Sebastien Cramoisy.
- Mesnardière, Hyppolyte-Jules Pilet de la 1639. *La Poétique*. Paris: Antoin de Sommaville.
- Noverre, Jean Georges 1757. *La toilette de Vénus, ou les ruses de l'amour, ballet héroï-pan-tomime*. Lyon: Aimé de la Roche.
- Noverre, Jean-Georges 1760. *Lettres sur la danse, et sur les ballets*. Lyon: Aimé Delaroche. Trans. by Cyril W. Beaumont. *Letters on dancing and ballets*. Brooklyn, NY: Dance Horizons, 1966.
- Noverre, Jean-Georges 1767. *Lettres sur la danse et sur les ballets*. Vienne: Jean-Thomas de Trattner.
- Noverre, Jean-Georges 1772. *Agamemnon vengé. Ballet tragique en cinq actes*. Vienne: De l'imprimerie des de Ghelen.
- Noverre, Jean-Georges 1803. *Lettres sur la danse, sur les ballets et les arts*, Tome I. St. Pétersbourg: J. C. Schnoor.
- Noverre, Jean-Georges 1807. *Lettres sur les arts imitateurs en général, et sur la danse en particulier*, Tome I. Paris: Léopold Collin.
- Paquot, Marcel 1957. La manière de composer les ballets de cour d'après les premiers théoriciens français. *Cahiers de l'Association internationale des études françaises* 9:183-197.
- Perrucci, Andrea 1699. *Dell'arte rappresentativa, premeditata, ed all'improvviso*. Napoli: Michele Luigi Mutio.
- Plato 1993. *The Republic*. Trans. by R. Waterfield. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Plato 2015. *Laws*. Trans. by S. S. Meyer. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Plutarch 1657. *The philosophie, commonly called the Morals written by the learned philosopher Plutarch of Chaeronea*. Trans. by Philemon Holland. Newly revised and corrected. London: Printed by S. G., 655-657.
- Plutarch 1694. *Plutarch's Morals. Translated from the Greek by several hands*. Vol. 3. Second edition. London: Bradill, 512-515.
- Plutarchus 1570. *Plutarchi Chaeronensis Moralia*. Trans. by Guilielmus Xylander. Basileae: Thomas Guarin, 748-750.
- Plutarco 1598. *Opuscoli morali di Plutarco Cheronese, filosofo, et historico notabilissimo, parte seconda. Tradotti in volgare dal sign. Marc Antonio Gandino, et da altri letterati*. Parte seconda. Venezia: Fioravante Prati, 279b-280b.
- Plutarque 1572. *Les Œuvres morales et mêlées de Plutarque, traduites du grec en français, par Messire Jacques Amyot*. Paris: Michel Vascosan, 438v-439v.
- Plutarque 1665. *Les œuvres morales et mêlées de Plutarque*. Trad. par Jacques Amyot. Paris: Frederic Leonard.
- Pomey, François-Antoine 1676. Description d'une sarabande dansée. In: *Le Dictionnaire royal augmenté. Quelques descriptions*. Lyon: A. Molin, 22.
- Pure, Michel de 1668. *Idée des spectacles anciens et nouveaux*. Paris: Michel Brunet.
- Rameau, Pierre 1725. *Le maître à danser*. Paris: Jean Villette.

- Rémond de Sainte-Albine, Pierre 1749. *Le Comédien*. Paris: Vincent.
- Riccoboni, Antoine-François 1750. *L'Art du théâtre*. Paris: C. F. Simon.
- Riccoboni, Luigi 1728. *Dell'arte rappresentativa*. Londra.
- Saint-Hubert 1641. *La manière de composer et faire réussir les ballets*. Paris: François Targa.
- Saint-Mard, Toussaint Rémond de 1741. *Réflexions sur l'opéra*. La Haye: Jean Neaulme.
- Stanislavski, Konstantin 2008 [1938]. *An Actor's Work. A Student's Diary*. London: Routledge.
- Titchener, Edward B. 1909. *Experimental psychology of the thought processes*. New York: Macmillan
- Tesauro, Emanuele 1654. *Il cannocchiale aristotelico*. Torino: Giovanni Sinibaldo.
- TLIO 1997-2025. *Tesoro della Lingua Italiana delle Origini*. <http://tlio.ovi.cnr.it/TLIO/>
- Vischer, Robert 1873. *Ueber das optische Formgefühl. Ein Beitrag zur Aesthetik*. Leipzig: Hermann Credner.
- Vossius, Isaac 1673. *De poematum cantu et viribus rhythmici*. Oxonii: Theatro Sheldoniano.
- Weaver, John 1712. *An essay towards an history of dancing*. London: Jacob Tonson.
- Weaver, John 1718. *The Fable of Orpheus and Eurydice*. London: W. Mears; J. Browne; W. Chettwood.
- Weaver, John 1728. *The history of the mimes and pantomimes*. London: J. Roberts; A. Dod.
- Wright, Thomas 1601. *The Passions of the Mind*. London: Valentine Simmes.

AUTHOR

Sergei Kruk Professor of Communication, Riga Stradiņš University, Riga, Latvia.

