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From a Rhetorical to a ‘Natural’ Art of Acting: What the Networks of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries Achieved

Ever since the twentieth century, we have become used to regarding innovations in acting – and the concomitant novel acting styles – as inventions of particular individuals, such as Stanislavsky, Meyerhold, Brecht, Copeau, Artaud, Grotowski, to name just the most prominent ones. It is indeed true that they also drew on the ideas of others, sometimes even heavily, including the experiences of Far Eastern masters concerning acting as well as theories of Western scientists, such as psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, and physiologists, which they applied – or exploited – in order to support and substantiate their own ideas on acting. However, it is justified to give credit for these innovations first and foremost to the individuals.

By contrast, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, i.e. before the proclamation of the autonomy of art, ideas on acting and corresponding practices and theories were developed in certain networks. In the seventeenth century the most efficient network was that formed by the Jesuits all over Europe and even beyond. It included theoreticians and practitioners of the different arts as well as philosophers and scholars of antiquity. A similar network was formed during the next century by philosophers, theoreticians, dramatists, and actors, among them most prominently Aaron Hill, John Hill, David Garrick, and Henry Siddons in England; Raymond de Sainte-Albine, Antoine-François (or Antonio Francesco) Riccoboni, and Denis Diderot in France; and Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Georg Christoph Lichtenberg, Conrad Ekhof, Friedrich Ludwig Schröder, and Johann Jakob Engel in Germany. In a sense, one could even include physiologists such as Louis Lacaze, Claude-Nicolas Le Cat, and Albrecht von Haller in this network.

At the center of the discussions in both networks was the question of the most efficient representation of a feeling or sentiment – preferably called affect in the seventeenth century – and of its capacity to trigger this very feeling in the spectator. Some of the most important differences between these two networks can be found (1) in their conceptualization of feelings, (2) in the sources they referred to in order to determine and describe the most efficient representation of each feeling, and (3) in their understanding and definition of the aims of the art of acting and theater in general.

One of the major aims of the Jesuit theater of the seventeenth century was to fight the Reformation. The performances strove to strengthen the Catholic faith of the spectators by ridding them of their doubts and returning them to the bosom of their Church. This purpose was best served by transforming the spectators into *virī percūsi* – deeply moved men – and was achieved through a corresponding dramaturgy coupled with a particular kind of acting, which was developed with the help of traditional knowledge on affects. The latter were not conceived as forces located within an individual but as afflicting a subject from the outside – he or she was seized and moved by the affect the same way a marionette is by the puppeteer. According to the traditional knowledge dating back to antiquity, there were only between eight and eleven affects. In his considerations on how music expresses and conjures affects in listeners, for example, the Jesuit music theorist Athanasius Kircher identifies eight such affects: “(1) Love; (2) Sorrow or pain; (3) Joy; (4) Anger or outrage; (5) Sympathy; (6) Fear or dejection; (7) Boldness; (8) Wonder.”¹ Kircher assumes that there is both a compositional technique and a gesture suitable for portraying each affect to the listeners/spectators and, in turn, for triggering that affect in them.

In developing such gestures, the Jesuits referred to ancient books on rhetoric, in particular to Quintilian’s works. On the one hand, this led to the creation of a repertoire of gestures that attributed to each affect one or several gestures as their perfect representation. On the other, it listed the gestures for the actor’s initial stance for all roles – the *contrapposto* stance for the torso, arms, and legs, combined with the *crux scenica*, i.e. positioning the feet at a 90° angle to each other. This position was seen to represent a strong ego exercising complete self-control. If the dramatic character was, say, a martyr suffering for the Christian faith, the actor was not supposed to give up this basic stance: whatever the character was going through, s/he was never to be seized by the resulting affects to such an extent as to lose self-control; when portraying such a character, the actor always had to follow all the rules determining the representation of the affects. In the case of a weak dramatic character surrendering to the attack of the affects without being able to resist them, the actor was permitted and indeed required to give up the *contrapposto* stance and to break all the rules. The gestures relating to the *contrapposto* or the *crux scenica* were thus employed to represent the ego. In the following, my focus will be on those gestures that intended to represent the eight to eleven affects.

¹ Athanasius Kircher. *Musurgia universalis sive ars magna consoni et dissoni*. Rome: Corbeletti, 1650, p. 258.

In 1727, i.e. in the first decades of the eighteenth century, when the acting rules developed by the Jesuits over the course of the seventeenth century no longer held complete sway, although they were still dominant, the Jesuit priest Franciscus Lang published a book entitled *Dissertatio de Actione Scenica* in which he laid down these rules in order to emphasize their validity and authority, which were being challenged by new ideas. This book remains one of our main sources on the acting style developed and propagated by the Jesuits all over Europe. Lang proceeded from the common assumption that

the stronger, more lively, and just gripping the art of acting of the person speaking on the stage is, the more powerful the affect triggered in the spectator will be. The senses are after all the gate to the soul, through which the appearances of things now also enter the chamber of affects.²

The perfection and strength of the representation is the condition for the represented affect to be aroused in the spectator. In accordance with the dominant notion of contagion, it was assumed that the represented affects would be transferred from the body of the actor to that of the spectator via their perception. The rules for such a representation of affects, for example, read as follows:

1. We *admire* by lifting both hands and bringing them close to the chest with the palms facing the audience.
2. We show *disdain* by turning the face to the left and, with extended and slightly raised hands, repel the object of our disdain, pushing it away from us. When showing that we despise something we do the same with the right hand alone, but slightly towards the wrist and simultaneously shooing, using a repeated shooing and defensive movement.
3. We *implore* either by raising or lowering or linking both hands with the palms turned to each other.
4. We suffer *anguish* or *grief* by folding the hands together like joined combs and either raising them towards the breast or lowering them to the waist. The same is conveyed by moderately stretching out the right hand while at the same time turning it towards the breast [...].³

The representation of these affects by an actor was seen to release certain forces within his body, which in that very moment of perception through the spectator invades the latter's body and transforms him or her. By way of a calculat-

² Franciscus Lang. *Dissertatio de actione scenica: Abhandlung über die Schauspielkunst*, translated and edited by Alexander Rudin. Bern: Francke, 1975, p. 200.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 186 f.; Ronald Gene Engle. "Franz Lang and the Jesuit Stage." Dissertation, University of Illinois, 1968, p. 107.

ed and continuous attack of alternating affects, the spectators were to be transformed into *virī percūsi* and so driven to renew and strengthen their faith.

The tight and yet far-reaching network of the Jesuits guaranteed that wherever they exerted some influence on theater – i.e. at the courts and at schools – this style of acting was used even well into the eighteenth century.

Their relationship to the courts and their schools for young noblemen suggest that it was not only the predominance of the Catholic faith that was at stake here, but also a certain kind of courtly behavior. When we look at the rules of acting laid down by Lang we find some striking parallels to the sociogenesis of seventeenth-century court society as described by the sociologist Norbert Elias in his study *The Civilizing Process*. Elias notes that for the formation of this new society the individual was required to learn self-discipline, the calculation of future aims and purposes, and to control not only one's feelings but also one's whole body:

In tracing the sociogenesis of the court, we find ourselves at the center of a civilizing transformation that is both particularly pronounced and an indispensable precondition for all subsequent spurts and counter-spurts in the civilizing process. We see how, step by step, a warrior nobility is replaced by a tamed nobility with more muted affects, a courtly nobility. Not only within the Western civilizing process, but as far as we can see within every major civilizing process, one of the most decisive transitions is that of *warriors to courtiers*.⁴

It need scarcely be said that, as Elias notes, “there are widely differing stages and degrees of this transition, this inner pacification of a society,” but gradually a more complex social order for expressing power and controlling behavior develops:

Competition for prestige and royal favour is intense. ‘Affaires,’ disputes over rank and favour, do not cease. If the sword no longer plays so great a role as the means of decision, it is replaced by intrigue, conflicts in which careers and social success are contested with words. They demand and produce other qualities than did the armed struggles that had to be fought out with weapons in one's hand. Continuous reflection, foresight, and calculation, self-control, precise and articulate regulation of one's own effects, knowledge of the whole terrain, human and nonhuman, in which one acts, become more and more indispensable preconditions of social success.⁵

The codes and proprieties of the required social behavior coincided with those promoted by the contemporaneous art of acting. Thus, the comportment of the

⁴ Norbert Elias. *Power and Civility: The Civilizing Process*. Translated by Edmund Jephcott with some notes and revisions by the author. New York: Pantheon Books, 1982, vol. 2, p. 259.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 271.

actor could be presented and perceived as a generally acknowledged model to be copied.

The actor responded to this ideal of behavior in courtly society. Accordingly, the character presented by the actor who followed the rules was clearly marked as an ideal. Should the actor break those rules by running across the stage, falling down and rolling on the floor, lowering his hands below the waist, or keeping his feet parallel, he indicated to the audience that the character he embodied had a weak ego, as in the case of a fool, madman, or tyrant. Undoubtedly, the tyrant and the madman served as negative examples that were not to be emulated; the fool was meant to grant the spectators a feeling of superiority, to relieve them – at least temporarily – of the enormous pressures caused by the rigorous demands of self-control. Theater thus assumed the cultural function of conveying an ideal behavior pattern which individuals then had to internalize and practice in order to adapt to the challenges of everyday life at court.

The eighteenth century saw the rise not only of new ideas about sensibility and feelings but also of a particular social class – the bourgeoisie. The new ideal of 'natural behavior' propagated by its members set up a sharp contrast to the artificiality of the noblemen at the courts. Accordingly, the main purpose of theater and the role and function of sentiments within it changed. Human beings were now defined as sentient beings spanning the whole range of positive as well as negative feelings. One of theater's purposes was to endorse certain positive feelings. In a letter to Friedrich Nicolai in his correspondence on tragedy, Lessing explains:

The meaning of tragedy is this: it should develop *our ability to feel empathy*. It should make us so empathetic that the most tragic character of all time and among all people overtakes our emotions. *The man of empathy is the most perfect man*, among all social virtues, among all kinds of generosity, he is the most outstanding. A person who can make us feel such empathy, therefore, makes us more perfect and more virtuous, and the tragedy which moves us makes us this – or, it moves us in order to be able to make us this.⁶

To be able to do so on stage required a new kind of acting – one that would take into account these new ideas of sensibility and feelings. Particularly after 1750, the idea gained ground that sentiments and feelings arise *within* people. Much physiological research during the eighteenth century centered on the relationship between body and soul. Leading physicians of the time such as

⁶ Gotthold Ephraim Lessing. "To Friedrich Nicolai." Nov. 1756. *Werke*, edited by Herbert G. Göpfert. Munich: Hanser, 1973, vol. 4, p. 163.

Louis Lacaze, Claude-Nicolas Le Cat, and Albrecht von Haller all agreed – despite diverging in other aspects of their theories – that the body was directly influenced by mental states.⁷ They came to the conclusion that there was a *natural law of analogy* according to which people’s bodies are naturally active and changeable. Bodies are suited to expressing inner states and processes, especially feelings, and making them perceptible.

Around the same time (ca. 1750–1780), a fierce debate on acting ensued in England, France, and Germany.⁸ The question at stake was how the actor could achieve a ‘natural’ portrayal of feelings. Should the actor conjure a feeling internally and then – according to the principle of analogy – automatically express it in ‘natural’ gestures (Aaron Hill, Sainte-Albine, John Hill)? Or should the actor study feelings precisely and then, following the principle of analogy, present them without actually feeling them (Diderot)? Lessing offered a middle ground. To Lessing, the principle of analogy functioned in two directions: “modifications of the soul that bring about certain changes in the body can in return be produced by those changes to the body.”⁹ Lessing assumes a psychosomatic interplay between the body and soul.

The historical parallel between physiological research and the debates of philosophers and theorists of theater might suggest that the philosophers and theorists were responding to the physiologists. However, the debate on the appropriate portrayal of feelings began before the first publications by physiologists. It is more likely that the changes in the art of acting that had already begun to occur were not simply stimulated by this scientific research. Yet there are many cross-references in the debates. In this sense, one could regard the physiologists as part of the network.

⁷ See Louis Lacaze. *L'idée de l'homme physique et moral*. Paris: Guérin & Delatour, 1755; Claude-Nicolas Le Cat. *Traité des sensations et passions en général, et des sens en particulier*. Paris: Vallat-La-Chapelle, 1767. 3 vols.; Albrecht von Haller. *Mémoire sur la nature sensible et irritable des parties du corps animal*. Lausanne: Bousquet, 1756–1760. 4 vols.; see also his *Bibliotheca anatomica: Qua scripta ad anatomen et physiologiam facientia a rerum initiis recensentur*. Zurich: Orell, Gessner, Füssli und Co., 1774–1777. 2 vols.

⁸ Important works resulting from these debates include Aaron Hill, *The Prompter: A Theatrical Paper* (1734–1736); Raymond de Sainte-Albine, *Le Comédien* (1747); Antoine-François Riccoboni, *L'Art du Théâtre* (1750); Denis Diderot, *Paradoxe sur le Comédien* (1769–1778); Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Hamburgische Dramaturgie* (1767–1769); and Georg Friedrich Lichtenberg, *Physiognomische Fragmente zur Beförderung der Menschenkenntnis und Menschenliebe* (1775–1787).

⁹ Gotthold Ephraim Lessing. “Third Essay.” *Hamburg Dramaturgy*. Translated by Wendy Arons and Sara Fical, edited by Natalya Baldyda. MediaCommons, 2012, mcpres.media-commons.org/hamburg/essay-3. Accessed 11 June 2018.

The English actor David Garrick (1717–1779) played a key role in the writings of English, French, and German theorists, including Diderot and Lichtenberg. In fact, his acting style was used to prove both sides of the debate. Diderot's accounts of Garrick's acting may clarify why this was the case. In his letter to Madame Riccoboni, Diderot describes a dispute over pantomime that took place during Garrick's first visit to Paris in 1751. In this dispute, Garrick argued that a person could make a great impression without words, a position that no one had anticipated. When others contradicted him, Garrick became animated. He grabbed a pillow and said:

“Gentlemen, I am this child's father.” Thereupon he opened a window, took his cushion, tossed it in the air, kissed it, caressed it, and imitated all the fooleries of a father playing with his child. But then came a moment when the cushion, or rather, the child slipped from his hand and fell through the window. Then Garrick began to mime the father's despair [...]. His audience was seized with such consternation and horror that most of them could not bear it and had to leave the room.¹⁰

Garrick's facial expressions, gestures, and movements captured a father's despair and elicited strong feelings from the spectators. They perceived these expressions, gestures, and movements as the manifestation of a deep despair. Nothing in this passage contradicts the idea that the actor may actually have felt a flash of despair.

In *The Paradox of Acting*, Diderot refers to one of Garrick's drawing-room circles in Paris to argue that the actor does not need to feel strong sentiments in order to trigger them in the spectators:

Garrick will put his head between two folding doors, and in the course of five or six seconds his expression will change successively from wild delight to temperate pleasure, from this to tranquility, from tranquility to surprise, from surprise to blank astonishment, from that to sorrow, from sorrow to the air of one overwhelmed, from that to fright, from fright to horror, from horror to despair, and then, he will go up again to the point from which he started.¹¹

This sort of quick transition from one feeling to the next is only possible through the controlled and intentional portrayal of facial expressions, gestures, and movements that are perceived as the complete expression for each sentiment. It would be impossible for the actor actually to experience such a range of feeling at will.

¹⁰ Denis Diderot. “To Madame Riccoboni.” 17 Nov. 1758. Quoted in Jean Benedetti. *David Garrick and the Birth of Modern Theatre*. London: Methuen, 2001, p. 188.

¹¹ Denis Diderot. *The Paradox of Acting*. Translated by Walter H. Pollock. London: Chatto & Windus, 1883, p. 63.

Garrick's art of acting does not prove or disprove whether the actor *must* or *need not* experience a feeling in order to portray it. Whatever his technique, Garrick had a strong effect on audiences. Since Garrick inspired both theorists of theater and everyday theatergoers, his acting provides us with a suitable case for exploring how the debates on the art of acting in the second half of the eighteenth century and the development of scientific knowledge about feelings not only went hand in hand with but cross-pollinated each other.

In this context, the change in key concepts is quite telling. In English, the terms *sentiment*, *affect*, and *passion* were all used in the seventeenth century, but the word *emotion* was not used at all until the middle of the eighteenth century. The concept of emotion first appeared in David Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739–1740), and was afterwards primarily used by the school of Scottish empiricist philosophers and mental scientists. The new concept of emotion was popularized above all by Thomas Brown's *Lectures on the Philosophy of the Human Mind* (1820), in which the term *emotion* was used to mean "all those feelings that were neither sensations nor intellectual states."¹² In contrast to earlier terms such as *affection* and *passion*, the concept of *emotion* did not carry specifically Christian associations and values. The concept of emotion was a *secular psychological category*, and we should therefore also regard these philosophers and scientists as part of the network.

Let us now take a closer look at the actor Garrick to see what was meant by the *natural expression* of an emotion. Garrick's acting debut in London took place prior to the intense preoccupation with the relationship between body and soul, and before the debates about the art of acting. In other words, Garrick's innovations in acting were not a direct response to these debates. As we have already seen with Diderot, Garrick and his art of acting rather formed a central element of the network.

Garrick debuted in the role of Richard III in Colley Cibber's 1700 version of Shakespeare's tragedy on 19 October 1741. His debut as an actor and Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature* (in which the term *emotion* was used for the first time) were exactly a year apart. At the beginning of the performance, Garrick's new way of acting astonished the audience. From the beginning of the performance, his acting put the audience in a state of wonder that quickly turned into rapture:

Mr. Garrick's easy and familiar, yet forcible style in speaking and acting, at first threw the critics into some hesitation concerning the novelty as well as propriety of his manner.

¹² Thomas Dixon. *From Passions to Emotions: The Creation of a Secular Psychological Category*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 23. See Thomas Brown. *Lectures on the Philosophy of the Human Mind*. Edinburgh: Tait, 1820.

They had long been accustomed to an elevation of the voice, with a sudden mechanical depression of its tones, calculated to excite admiration, and to entrap applause. To the just modulation of the words, and concurring expression of the features from the genuine workings of nature, they had been strangers, at least for some time. But after he had gone through a variety of scenes, in which he gave proof of consummate art, and perfect knowledge of character, their doubts were turned into surprise and amazement, from which they relieved themselves by loud and reiterated applause. [...] Mr. Garrick shone forth like a theatrical Newton; he threw new light on elocution and action.¹³

If the comparison to Newton seems far-fetched, a letter from the famous actor Charles Macklin to William Cooke supports this claim:

It was amazing how without any example, but on the contrary with great prejudice against him, he could throw such spirit and novelty into the part as to convince every impartial person on the very first impression that he was right. In short, Sir, he at once decided the public taste; and though the players formed a cabal against him, [...] it was a puff to thunder.¹⁴

Even Garrick's first appearances on stage were revolutionary, as the reference to Newton suggests. It is unclear, though, what exactly constituted this revolution. Expressions such as "the genuine workings of nature" or "perfect knowledge of character" were also used in the first half of the eighteenth century in order to legitimate rhetorical gestures. The concepts of nature and the natural changed substantially over the course of the eighteenth century. The above descriptions of Garrick do not give us a very clear sense of how his art differed so radically from his predecessors.

To determine what was so 'revolutionary' in Garrick's acting, we need a more precise description of what Garrick did in these scenes, such as Diderot's account of Garrick's improvised pantomimes. These descriptions are not often found in reviews, which generally focus on Garrick's rendition of the dramatic character and the impression he made on critics and other spectators. A somewhat more precise description of one of the mad scenes in *King Lear* can be found in a review by John Hill, the translator of Sainte-Albine's treatise, which he had published under his own name with the title *The Actor: A Treatise on the Art of Playing* (1750). Hill writes:

'Tis an odd Effect of a Laugh to produce Tears; but I believe there was hardly a dry Eye in the House on his executing that first absolute Act of Madness in the Character. While I admired the action, I was almost at a Loss to comprehend in what Manner it was per-

¹³ Thomas Davies. *Memoirs of the Life of David Garrick*. London: Self-published, 1780, vol. 1, pp. 40–44.

¹⁴ William Cooke. *Memoirs of Charles Macklin*. London: Asperne, 1804, p. 99.

formed: 'T was not anything like the Laugh of Mirth or Pleasantry, the Triumph of a happy Imagination; but seemed merely the Exertion of the Organs of the body, without any Connection with the Soul; an involuntary Emotion of the Muscles, while the Mind was fixed on something else. Upon the whole, other Lears I have seen, [...] Must pardon me, if I declare that the frantic Part of the character seems never to have been rightly understood till this gentleman studied it.¹⁵

Hill describes here how Garrick's laughter at the start of Lear's madness made a particularly strong impression on him as much as on the rest of the audience, rousing them to tears. Garrick's acting also shed a new light on madness for Hill. In other words, the acting taught Hill about the dramatic character. Garrick's acting does not present madness as a single affect that can always be expressed in the same way. Instead he shows a particular madness related to the character of the dramatic figure. The madness played here is not madness *per se*, but rather Lear's specific madness. What is remarkable in Hill's review is the use of the word *emotion*, which here is used in the sense of an uncontrollable muscle movement.

Of all the theater theorists, Lichtenberg emphasized most vehemently that actors must individualize the mental states they portray. During his stay in London in 1775, he saw Garrick in various roles. Lichtenberg's *Letters from England* offer the most precise portraits we have of Garrick's acting. In these letters, Lichtenberg extensively and in great detail describes Garrick's portrayals of Hamlet, Abel Drugger (from Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist*), and Sir John Brute (from Vanbrugh's *The Provoked Wife*). Lichtenberg describes in particular the scene in which the ghost of Hamlet's father appears to him for the first time:

Hamlet appears in a black dress, the only one in the whole court, alas! still worn for his poor father [...]. Horatio and Marcellus, in uniform are with him [...]; Hamlet has folded his arms under his cloak and pulled his hat down over his eyes; it is a cold night and just twelve o'clock; the theater is darkened, and [...] quiet [...]. Suddenly, as Hamlet moves toward the back of the stage slightly to the left and turns his back on the audience, Horatio starts, and saying: "Look, My Lord, it comes," points to the right, where the ghost has already appeared and stands motionless, before anyone is aware of him. At these words Garrick turns sharply and at the same moment staggers back two or three paces with his knees giving way under him; his hat falls to the ground and both his arms, especially the left, are stretched out nearly full length, with the hands as high as his head, the right arm more bent and the hand lower, the fingers apart; his mouth is open: thus he stands rooted to the spot, with legs apart, but no loss of dignity, supported by his friends, who are better acquainted with the apparition and fear lest he should collapse. His whole

¹⁵ John Hill. Quoted in Charles Harold Gray. *Theatrical Criticism in London to 1795*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1931, p. 113.

demeanor is so expressive of terror that it made my flesh creep even before he began to speak. The almost terror-struck silence of the audience, which preceded this appearance and filled one with a sense of insecurity, probably did much to enhance this effect. At last he speaks, not at the beginning, but at the end of a breath, with a trembling voice, "Angels and ministers of Grace defend us!" words, which supply anything this scene may lack and make it one of the greatest and most terrible, which will ever be played on any stage. The ghost beckons him, I wish you could see him, with eyes fixed on the ghost, though he is speaking to his companions, freeing himself from their restraining hands [...]. [...] [H]e stands with his sword on guard against the specter, saying: "Go on, I follow thee," and the ghost goes on off stage. Hamlet still remains motionless [...] and at length, when the spectator can no longer see the ghost, he begins slowly to follow him, now standing still and then going on, with sword still upon guard, eyes fixed on the ghost, hair disordered, and out of breath, until he too is lost to sight. [...] What an amazing triumph.¹⁶

The expression of terror in Lichtenberg's account goes into such detail about elements and phases that it extends far beyond the codified expression that Lang had provided. It also goes beyond the descriptions in physiological textbooks and observations of actors in later tracts, such as Johann Jakob Engel's 1785–1786 work on acting, *Ideen zu einer Mimik*.¹⁷ Lichtenberg describes the gestures, movements, and articulations that express terror itself. It also focuses on Hamlet's character traits – his particular sensibility as well as his social standing ("no loss of dignity") and his specific situation (still in mourning).

In Lichtenberg's description, Garrick's portrayal of Hamlet's reaction to the appearance of his father's ghost allows processes of the human *soul* to appear in ways that are not accounted for in either the physiology or the philosophy of the time. Hence, the art of acting opened up new dimensions of how to gain knowledge about people, their mental states, and their emotions. Garrick's art of acting was epoch-making from his very first appearances in 1741. Through Garrick, theater became a *psychological institution*, a laboratory for empirical psychology. It was able to function as such because by expressing very particu-

16 Georg Christoph Lichtenberg. *Lichtenberg's Visits to England, as Described in His Letters and Diaries*. Translated and edited by Margaret L. Mare and W. H. Quarrell. Oxford: Clarendon, 1938, pp. 9–11.

17 Engel's book was translated into English by Henry Siddons and appeared in 1815 titled *Practical Illustrations of Rhetorical Gesture and Action: Adapted To The English Drama; From A Work On The Subject by M. Engel, Member of The Royal Academy of Berlin; Embellished with sixty-nine Engravings, Expressive Of The Various Passions, And Representing The Modern Costume Of The London Theatres*. A second improved edition appeared in London in 1822, printed for Sherwood, Neely, and Jons, Paternoster Row. Remarkably, in this translation the gestures that accord to the physiological *law of analogy* are termed *rhetorical*, and the emotions that express them are termed *passions*.

lar emotions the art of acting not only aroused emotions in the spectators but at the same time broadened their knowledge of human beings and their psyche.

Garrick's early and remarkable achievement inspired other actors of his time, though without the same 'genius' and success. In his *Letters from England*, Lichtenberg expressly refers to the German actor Conrad Ekhof (1720–1778), who was not of the same caliber as Garrick but nevertheless by far surpassed some other celebrated London actors.

In fact, the first performance of Lessing's *Miß Sara Sampson*, which starred Ekhof as Mellefont, already deeply affected the spectators. In a letter to Johann Wilhelm Ludwig Gleim, Karl Wilhelm Ramler reports on the first performance of July 1755 in Frankfurt upon Oder: "Herr Lessing's tragedy was performed in Frankfurt, and the audience sat for three and a half hours, silent as statues, weeping."¹⁸ Keeping in mind that in the middle of the eighteenth century audiences in the German states were rather noisy, coming and going as they pleased, eating, drinking, and conversing as the action unfolded on the stage, this seems to be an extraordinary response, which was due not only to the tragedy but also to a new style of acting. Friedrich Nicolai saw a performance in Berlin in October the following year and gave a detailed account of it in a letter to Lessing:

Before I tell you about the performance in more detail, I must let you know that I was extremely affected; up to the beginning of the fifth act, I was often in tears, but by the end of the same act and throughout the whole scene with Sara, I was far too moved to be able to cry anymore. This has never happened to me at any other drama and confounds, to a certain extent, my own system, which generally resists being moved by tragedy. My feelings and my critical annotations on both your play and the actors were mixed in a wonderful confusion in my head.¹⁹

The emotions triggered in the spectators here and in other cases in the eighteenth century were still explained via the concept of contagion. As Johann Georg Sulzer writes about performances in his *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste* in 1792: "It is certain that under no circumstances are human beings capable of more lively impressions and feelings than at public performances.

18 Johann Wilhelm Ludwig Gleim. "To Karl Wilhelm Ramler." 25 July 1755. *Briefwechsel zwischen Gleim und Ramler: 1753–1759*, edited by Carl Schüddekopf. Tübingen: Bibliothek des literarischen Vereins in Stuttgart 1907, vol. 2, p. 206.

19 Friedrich Nicolai. "To Gotthold Ephraim Lessing." 3 Nov. 1756. G. E. Lessing. *Werke und Briefe*, edited by Wilfried Barner. Frankfurt: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1987, vol. 11.1, pp. 111–116; pp. 111 f.

[...] Nothing in this world is more contagious or effective than emotions perceived from a crowd of people all at once."²⁰

Usually, the network operated through an exchange of letters or through translations of essays and even whole books in which the 'members' of the network explained their view on acting. Detailed descriptions of acting and actors as in Lichtenberg's letters became increasingly common in German discussions of performances. Critics and theorists were no longer satisfied with individual descriptions, and compared how different actors performed the same roles and scenes. From these accounts we know, for example, that in Lear's mad scene Johann Franz Hieronymus Brockmann (1745–1812) climbed onto a tree stump as he proclaimed: "I will preach to thee: mark." In Friedrich Ludwig Schröder's (1744–1816) portrayal of Lear in the same scene, Lear attempted to climb the stump, but then collapsed. Contemporaries considered these variations *refinements*, because they revealed more about the 'truth' of Lear.

In his description of Schröder's portrayal of Hamlet, the critic of the *Litteratur- und Theaterzeitung* (1779) compared its details to Brockmann's portrayal of the same role in what became the first celebrated Hamlet on the German stage. He ended his report with a description of Act III, Scene 4 between Hamlet and his mother:

When speaking the words, "How is it with you, lady?" Schröder avoided a mistake that Brockmann made. The latter looked at his mother as he spoke. The former spoke to his mother, whom he held with a shaking hand, without shifting his gaze away from the ghost.²¹

These *refinements* were not seen as expressing psychological 'truths' simply because they coincided with scientific knowledge about physiology. Rather, the art of acting enabled new scientific knowledge on emotions. In the second half of the eighteenth century it provided contemporaries with insights into the emotional states of the human soul, previously hidden and as yet undiscovered by either physiology or philosophy.

In his abovementioned book on acting, the philosopher – and later director of the Royal Theater in Berlin – Engel went so far [fig. 1] as to systematize the state of the human soul by considering single emotions alone.

²⁰ Johann Georg Sulzer. *Allgemeine Theorie der schönen Künste*. 2nd exp. ed., Leipzig: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1794, vol. 4, pp. 254 f.

²¹ Quoted in Berthold Litzmann. *Friedrich Ludwig Schröder: Ein Beitrag zur deutschen Literatur- und Theatergeschichte*. Hamburg: Voss, 1890 and 1894. 2 vols.

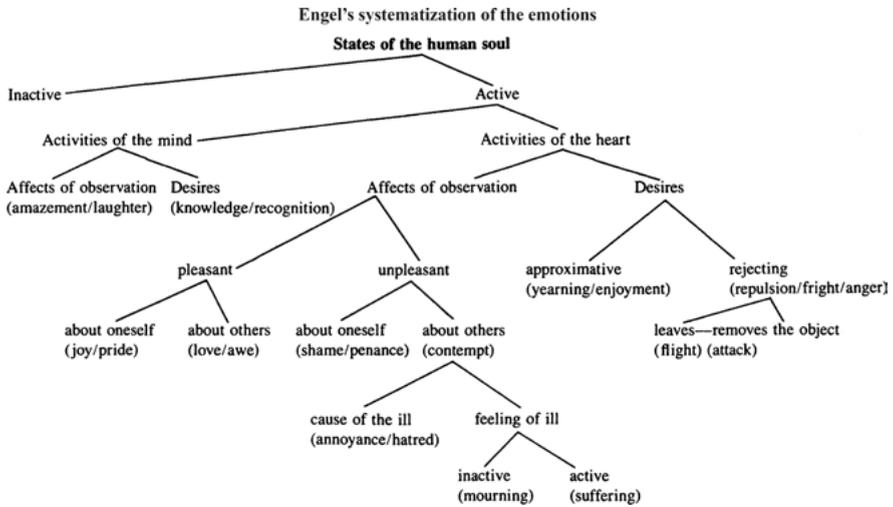


Fig. 1: My synopsis. See Erika Fischer-Lichte. *The Semiotics of Theater*. Translated by Jeremy Gaines and Doris L. Jones. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992, p. 164.

The classification claims to take into account all single emotions that are not the product of combinations. All those that are not listed must thus be considered to be blended – i.e., combinations. Engel provided a detailed description of each state contained in the classification, and via the *natural law of analogy* formulated a corresponding gestural sign best suited to provide the perfect expression of each state. For example, he described anger as “the desire to remove, to destroy an ill,” a desire which is “one with the desire to punish and take revenge.”²²

[A]ll Nature's energies stream outwards in order to transform the joy of what is Evil into Fear by the terrifying sight of it, into Pain by its destructive effect, and, by contrast, to turn our own bitter Annoyance into a pleasant feeling of our Strength, the Terror we instill in others [...].²³

He identified the corresponding physical expression that derived analogously from this state as follows:

Anger equips [...] all the external limbs with strength; pre-eminently arming those who are destined to destroy. If the external parts, overfilled with blood and juices, brim over and tremble, and the bloodshot, rolling eyes shoot glances like fiery daggers, then a certain indignation, a certain disquiet is also expressed by the hands and teeth: the former

²² Johann Jakob Engel. *Mimik*. 1804. Frankfurt: Athenäum, 1971, p. 285.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 236 f.

are clenched convulsively, the latter are bared and gnashed [...] all movements are jerky and of extreme violence; the gait is heavy, forced, shattering.²⁴

Each particular physical change was thus seen to have its cause in a certain emotion and, therefore, pointed back to that cause. Taken together, all these changes formed the gestural sign for anger, and so described the expression of the respective emotion perfectly. Whereas the corresponding modification generated by real anger collectively was to be understood as an indexical sign pointing to the underlying emotion, the gestures produced on stage according to Engel's rules constituted an imitation that perfected them. The result was a series of iconic signs, the suitable and perfect representation of the indexical signs of reality. They were neither a spontaneous expression of the emotion nor an arbitrary, conventional sign thereof, but, rather, adequate representations of the gestural sign observed in reality, a sign that had arisen as the spontaneous expression of the respective feeling.

'Mimic' knowledge and psychological knowledge here go hand in hand. In order to be able to constitute the 'correct' gestural signs, it is assumed that "the moral being is of just as much value to the observer as a polyp to Trembley or an aphid to Bonnet."²⁵ As this phrasing suggests, the development of this new kind of acting was regarded as a scientific undertaking, exploring hitherto unknown realms of the human soul.

At the beginning of the 1780s, Karl Philipp Moritz announced his plan to publish a *Journal for Empirical Psychology* dedicated to case studies, that is, to empirical material that could provide a basis for further research. The first part of the first volume appeared in 1783 and was titled *KNOW THYSELF, or Journal of Empirical Psychology, a reader for the learned and unlearned*.²⁶ Between 1783 and 1793, ten volumes were published that favored reports on certain mental states and 'sick' or deviant behavior. These reports were only possible through minute introspection, provoked and enhanced by the new art of acting. Knowledge of the human soul as promoted by the network of philosophers, actors, dramatists, and physiologists became one of the most important goals toward the end of the century. The art of acting and its theorization paved the way for the creation of a new academic discipline – empirical psychology – and played a significant role in establishing the concept of emotion as a secular one, indispensable for this new discipline.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 238.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 27.

²⁶ See Hans Förstl, and Beate Rattay-Förstl. "Karl Philipp Moritz and the *Journal of Empirical Psychology*: An introductory note and a series of psychiatric case reports." *History of Psychiatry*, vol. 3, 1992, pp. 95 ff.

In conclusion: Although the two networks discussed here both identified gestures deemed to be the most adequate representations of certain emotions while at the same time being able to arouse those feelings in the spectators, the ways they proceeded and the goals they strove to realize differed enormously. The Jesuit network exposed the spectators to rhetorical representations of the canonical affects in order to transform them into *virī percūsi*, whose strong ego would not only keep them in the Catholic faith and prepare them to suffer for it without surrendering to all possible kinds of temptations, but would also, if not primarily, make them act as ideal courtiers.

The eighteenth-century network developed 'natural' signs for the most diverse emotions by following the principle of analogy in order to trigger strong feelings in the spectators, who predominantly hailed from the educated middle class. This meant pursuing a twofold purpose. One goal was the perfection of the human being by turning him/her into an empathetic being. The other was possible only on the basis of scientific knowledge of the mental and psychic states of human beings. This new kind of 'natural' acting was not only rooted in scientific knowledge. This form of acting itself brought forth new knowledge. The exposure to this new kind of acting thus contributed to human perfection also insofar as it enabled a much deeper and better knowledge of oneself and the other. Moreover, it furthered the process of shaping a new cultural identity of the educated middle class.

In both cases, the networks in question attributed to theater, and particularly to acting, a key role in the realization of their overall goals, however different they and the means of achieving them may have been. Both addressed audiences in different European countries and, as the available sources and documents suggest, were quite successful over a prolonged period of time. Both speak to the efficacy of networks if they are clearly structured with regard to their goals and the means necessary to achieve the envisaged developments and changes.