THE LANGUAGE OF GESTURE IN ITALIAN DANCE

FROM COMMEDIA DELL'ARTE TO BLASIS

Giannandrea Poesio
Dottore in Lettere (University of Florence)

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of
the requirements of the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Dance Studies
University of Surrey

September 1993
This thesis investigates the origins and the evolution of theatre mime in Italy and its transformation into "ballet mime", a vocabulary of conventional gestures used in classical ballet. The research demonstrates that "ballet mime" originated from the drama tradition. Although dance historians have credited Carlo Blasis with the definitive codification of this language of gesture, Blasis' contribution to "ballet mime", it is argued, was minimal. In the first part, an historical account of the evolution of the language of gesture in Italy is given: mime is analysed in relation to the acting techniques of the Commedia dell'Arte, to the theories on "ballet d'action" formulated by Gasparo Angiolini, Viganò's "coreodramma" and Blasis' career as a dancer, teacher and choreographer. Part Two consists of an analysis of written sources dealing with the language of gesture which demonstrates the continuity of the mime tradition from the Commedia dell' Arte to Blasis. In parallel, Blasis' manuals are analysed. In Part Three, an investigation of the visual material on mime provides evidence to support the general argument. The final chapter assesses current theories and Blasis' posthumous reputation.
PART TWO

ANALYSIS OF THE WRITTEN MATERIAL ON GESTURE
(1625-1857)

Chapter 4 Towards a grammar of gesture

1.0 Introduction
2.0 Giovanni da Bonifacio: language of gesture from the everyday (1625)
3.0 The language of gesture on stage: Il Corago (1628)
4.0 Commedia dell'Arte and the language of gesture:
   Andrea Perrucci's Dell'Arte Rappresentativa (1699)
5.0 Luigi Riccoboni's Dell'Arte Rappresentativa (1728)
6.0 Vincenzo Requeno: the rediscovery of Chironomia (1797)
7.0 Gestures and acting: Antonio Morrocchesi's Lezioni di Declamazione (1832)
8.0 Conclusion

Chapter 5 Blasis the author: an analysis of his major publications

1.0 Introduction
2.0 Blasis' corpus: an overview
3.0 Blasis' dance-related works: a detailed analysis
   3.1 The Traité (1820)
   3.2 The Code of Terpsichore (1828)
   3.3 The Saggi e Prospetto (1841) and the Studi sulle Arti Imitatrici (1844)
   3.4 The Notes upon Dancing (1847)
   3.5 L'uomo fisico, intellettuale e morale (1857)
4.0 Conclusion

Chapter 6 Blasis and the art of mime

1.0 Introduction
2.0 Blasis as a mime dancer and teacher
3.0 Mime in Blasis' writings
   3.1 The Traité (1820)
   3.2 The Code of Terpsichore (1828)
   3.3 The Saggi e prospetto (1841)
   3.4 The Studi sulle Arti Imitatrici (1844)
   3.5 The Notes upon Dancing (1847)
   3.6 L'uomo (1857)
4.0 Conclusion
PART THREE

THE ILLUSTRATED GESTURE: ANALYSIS OF THE VISUAL MATERIAL ON MIME (1600-1857)

Chapter 7 A methodology for the analysis of the visual material in mime treatises and related sources

1.0 Introduction
2.0 Visual material on mime in books
3.0 Visual material on mime in related sources
4.0 Methods of analysis
5.0 Sources of the analysis
   5.1 The Fossard collection
   5.2 Jacob Engel's Lettere intorno alla mimica
   5.3 Morrocchesi's Lezioni di declamazione
   5.4 Blasis' illustrations
6.0 Conclusion

Chapter 8 The comparative analysis of the visual material on mime (1600-1857)

1.0 Introduction
2.0 Elements of comparative analysis: sets of gestures and their sub-categories
   2.1 Gesture from the everyday: characteristics context and analysis
   2.2 From dialect movements to "heroic" mime: the evolution of the language of gesture
3.0 Towards an illustrated codification:
   Jacob Engel and Antonio Morrocchesi
   5.1 Morrocchesi's codification: the narrative gesture
   5.2 Morrocchesi's codification: the expressive gesture
4.0 Visual codification in Blasis' works:
   problems of attribution
5.0 Blasis and the codification of the language of gesture:
   differences and similarities with Engel and Morrocchesi
6.0 Conclusion

Chapter 9 Blasis and the art of mime. The posthumous reputation

1.0 Introduction
2.0 Blasis' reputation in the nineteenth century, criticism and imitation
3.0 Blasis' s reputation and influence in the second half of the nineteenth century
4.0 Early twentieth-century writing on mime and Carlo Blasis: a controversial view
5.0 The making of a reputation: twentieth-century dance history and Blasis
6.0 Blasis and the codification of "ballet mime": a misinterpreted contribution
7.0 Conclusion
LIST OF TABLES

Diagram 1 An overview of Blasis' corpus: the key works. 141
Diagram 2 Blasis' Traité and its subsequent revisions. 143
Diagram 3 Ballets performed at la Scala when Blasis was "primo ballerino" 172
Diagram 4 A comparison between publications on mime in the first half of the nineteenth century 178
Diagram 5 Illustrated dance texts and non-illustrated writings on mime 205

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS (SEPARATE VOLUME)

Figure 1 313
Figure 2 314
Figure 3 315
Figure 4 316
Figure 5 317
Figure 6 318
Figure 7 319
Figure 8 320
Figure 9 321
Figure 10 322
Figure 11 323
Figure 12 324
Figure 13 325
Figure 14 326
Figure 15 327
Figure 16 328
Figure 17 329
Figure 18 330
Figure 19 331
Figure 20 332
Figure 21 333
Figure 22 334
Figure 23 335
Figure 24 336
Figure 25 337
Figure 26 338
Figure 27 339
Figure 28 340
Figure 29 341
Figure 30 342
Figure 31 343
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the valued information on Blasis' publications given by Maestro Giampiero Tintori, Director of the Biblioteca Teatrale della Scala in Milan.

The British Library, the Dance Collection of the New York Public Library, the Biblioteca Nazionale di Firenze and the Archivi della Danza di Torino have been invaluable sources for this study.

I am grateful to my father, for letting me use his library and his collection of rare books.

I would like to express my gratitude to my two tutors, Professor Janet Adshead-Lansdale, University of Surrey, and Professor Margaret M. McGowan, University of Sussex, who guided me through this research with their great expertise, supporting me with both scholarly and friendly advice.

A special thank goes to all my English friends, for their great help with the language.

Finally I would like to acknowledge one friend in particular, who does not want to be mentioned, for continuous encouragement, patience and coffee.

This thesis is dedicated to my parents.

vi
INTRODUCTION

In classical ballet, the narration of events and the description of feelings and emotions are conveyed through traditional mime signs. These movements, corresponding to nouns, pronouns, verbs or even entire sentences, form a specific language of gesture, the function of which is similar to that of subtitles in silent movies. Although examples of "ballet mime", as it is generally called, can be found in Russian, French and Danish ballets of the nineteenth century, this particular language of gesture originated and evolved in Italy, and its historical roots can be traced in the Commedia dell'Arte. The itinerant troupes of the Commedia and the many Italian dancers who toured extensively during both the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries made their language of gesture universally known. Drama and dance theorists from other European countries soon recognised the value of Italian mime and acknowledged its uniqueness in their works. In the nineteenth century, the Italian language of gesture became the standard mime vocabulary used in theatrical dancing across Europe. "Ballet mime" is regarded today as a lesser artistic subspecies, if not as an obsolete and disturbing accessory to ballet. These conventional movements, however, are historically important, for they stem from almost four centuries of theatre tradition.
Research on this particular form of mime has never been undertaken. Although "ballet mime" derived and evolved from drama, it has always been considered exclusively as an element of theatrical dancing. Dance historians agree in crediting both Jean-Georges Noverre and Gasparo Angiolini with the introduction of mime gestures into eighteenth-century ballet, in order to provide the danced action with a narrative framework and to enhance the dramatic content of the performance. In assessing Noverre's contribution to dance and that of Angiolini, dance scholars have frequently overlooked the fact that the rediscovery of mime in the eighteenth century was not a phenomenon exclusive to ballet, although they have occasionally acknowledged that the mime gestures of "ballet d'action" derived from Commedia dell'Arte.

The creation of a standard vocabulary of gesture in nineteenth-century ballet is another argument which has often been treated rather hurriedly. Dance historians have credited the French-Italian ballet-master and dance theorist Carlo Blasis with the definitive codification of "ballet mime". During the first half of the nineteenth century, Blasis wrote a considerable number of manuals and treatises on dance, in which the art of mime was discussed along with principles of ballet technique and ballet composition. Although these books are considered as works which played an important part in setting the
rules of classical ballet, a detailed study of Blasis' corpus has not been attempted before. As is demonstrated in this thesis the assumption that Blasis was the man responsible for the codification of conventional mime gestures, as well as ballet steps, derives mainly from a misinterpretation of Blasis' written works.

This thesis investigates the origins and the evolution of the language of gesture in Italian theatre, from Commedia dell'Arte to Carlo Blasis. In part, it aims to demonstrate that "ballet mime" was not invented specifically for theatrical dancing, but perpetuated an established tradition of "expressive" gesture used in drama. In addition, the research has as its purpose to assess the current theories about Blasis' codification of "ballet mime", demonstrating their inadequacy.

The thesis is divided into three parts. Although these sections are interdisciplinary and complementary to each other, the nature of the focus is different in each part and, therefore, different methodologies have been taken into account.

A historical account of the language of gesture in Italy, from Commedia dell'Arte to Blasis, introduces the discussion of the subject in the first part of the thesis. Mime is examined in relation to the acting techniques of the Commedia, to Angiolini's theories on "ballet d'action", to Viganò's "coreodramma", and to Blasis' career as a dancer, a choreographer and a
teacher. These elements, discussed in the first three chapters, correspond to four significant stages in the evolution of the language of gesture in Italy and provide the contextualisation for both analysis of the written sources and that of the visual material on mime which follow.

In the second part of the thesis, which consists of the analysis of the written sources on mime, Chapter 4 focuses on publications which played an important part within the creation of a "grammar of gesture". These publications, selected according to criteria explained in the text, are related mainly to drama. They are analysed individually, following a chronological order, from 1625 onwards, and attention is drawn to both the references to the language of gesture and the similarities between each work. Blasis' corpus is then discussed in Chapter 5, which examines in detail the major works directly related to dance, in order to introduce the analysis of his writing on mime, which forms the content of Chapter 6.

The third part of the thesis consists of the analysis of the visual material on mime and a concluding chapter. The methodology for the analysis is discussed and presented in Chapter 7. This is followed by the comparative analysis of the visual material in Chapter 8, where illustrations selected from different sources are analysed in order to demonstrate the evolution of the language of gesture in Italy.
Finally, Chapter 9 reflects on Blasis' posthumous reputation and on the making of his fame. An investigation of the theories formulated by several dance scholars, both about Blasis and his contribution to theatrical dancing and "ballet mime", demonstrates the limitations of interpretations of the man and of his work.

The quotations in foreign languages are translated in the Appendix. The translation of these passages is literal, although some alterations to the structure of the passages have been made for the clarity of the text. Each translation is followed by the bibliographical reference to the source from which the quotation has been taken.

The illustrations analysed in Chapter 8 are to be found in a separate volume. Each illustration is numbered and accompanied by the reference to the source. To respond to the requirements of the analysis of the visual material, some illustrations have undergone some editing, such as the enlargement of single sections.
PART ONE

AN HISTORICAL OUTLINE OF THE EVOLUTION OF THE LANGUAGE OF GESTURE IN ITALY
Chapter 1

From Commedia dell'Arte to the "ballet d'action":
the evolution of theatre gesture in Italy

1.0 Introduction
2.0 The importance of mime in the Commedia dell'Arte
3.0 The mimed "lazzi" and other expressive gestures
4.0 The rediscovery of mime and the birth of the
   "ballet d'action"
5.0 Gasparo Angiolini, the first Italian theorist of
   the "ballet d'action"
6.0 Theories on mime in Angiolini's written works
7.0 Conclusion
1.0 Introduction

Expressive gestures have been a recurring feature in the history of theatre since the origins of drama. These gestures lasted through the centuries either in the form of a complementary set of movements accompanying acting, or in the form of mimed actions on their own. Well-documented sources report how the use of gestures was an essential element in both Greek and Roman theatre. The latter included a form of performance entirely based on mime, called "pantomimus". Unfortunately, none of these ancient documents on mime gives a detailed account of the technique used by the "mimi", a problem which was particularly felt by eighteenth-century dance and theatre-theorists, who aimed at reconstructing that form of theatre.

At the end of the Roman Empire, with the advent of Christianity, theatre as a professional art declined and then disappeared, for moral and philosophical reasons. The "pantomimus", however, managed to survive through the Middle Ages to the Renaissance, concealed in the acts of peripatetic performers such as jugglers, funambulists and conjurers. These acts can be considered as the roots of the Commedia dell'Arte, an Italian theatre form which

---

1 Both ancient Greek and Latin literature number considerable examples of documents about theatre mime. Among these sources, particularly relevant to the analysis of the "pantomimus" are the works by Macrobius.
originated around 1550. The name Commedia dell'Arte suggests that Italian actors decided to create a guild on their own, following the example of other Italian guilds, the so-called "Arti", such as the "Arte della lana" or the "Arte del ferro". The purpose of these guilds was to safeguard and to strengthen the political rights of the artisans, gathered according to their qualifications; the "Arti" thus granted legal recognition to the artisans' activities. The fact that actors congregated in an "Arte", therefore, implied that, by the mid-sixteenth century, theatre had regained its professional status.

It is general knowledge that the importance of the Commedia lay mainly in the fact that it had a significant influence on the evolution of the performing arts. Many rules, principles and conventions stemming from the Commedia survived long after its decline, being assimilated into drama, opera and, as it will be demonstrated, into ballet. The rebirth of professional theatre brought forth a new literature which strived to record and to document the principles of stage practice, in order to provide theatre people with reference texts of their art; these manuals, in turn, prompted the writing of similar works dealing with both opera and theatrical dancing. Finally, the Commedia became the source of inspiration for the visual arts which have

²Literally "Art of wool-working" and "Art of the ironmongers".
provided us with considerable illustrated records, documenting the origins of many characteristic features of different and subsequent forms of theatre. Both literary and visual sources reveal that the Commedia was a unique and complex phenomenon within the history of performing arts.

2.0 The importance of mime in the Commedia dell'Arte

The Commedia dell'Arte is a topic which has been much studied and analysed, mainly in consequence of a revived academic interest in the subject at the beginning of this century. Yet, many aspects of the Commedia need further research. One of these aspects is the use of mime language, which played an essential role within the dramatic structure of the performances and, in several instances, supplied the theatrical action whenever the spoken language was inadequate. Although many scholars have acknowledged the importance of mime actions in the Commedia dell'Arte, none has undertaken a deeper analysis of the subject. Konstantin Miklacesfky, in his detailed analysis of the Commedia, refers to the use of mime movements in order to explain and to justify the use of masks:

l'art mimique des comédiens italiens ne se limitait pas aux seuls jeux de physionomie, mais il comportait toute une série de gestes et d'attitudes; et c'est pour cela que ces acteurs jouaient volontiers masqués.¹

¹Constant Mic(Konstantin Miklascefsky), La Commedia
Pierre Duchartre, on the other hand, does not take mime into account, despite a brief analysis of the "lazzi". And, as far as Allardyce Nicoll is concerned, he merely stresses that those who consider Commedia performances as pantomimes are in error. Mime as an integral part of improvised acting is also ignored by Italian scholars, such as the philosopher Benedetto Croce and Mario Apollonio.

There are two major sources of documentation on mime in the Commedia dell'Arte one of which is the visual material. Although the static nature of the pictures can render the meaning of a movement and its relation to the dramatic context obscure, the visual material still reveals how important gestures were within a performance, as there are no illustrations in which the language of gesture is absent. Even illustrations portraying a single figure, such as a "fixed type" of the Commedia or "maschera", include movements and positions derived from the characteristic gesticulation of each character. Those visual sources reveal that the movements performed by fixed types were generally taken from dialectal

---

Literally "mask".
repertoires of gesture from specific Italian regions,\(^8\) mainly because each "maschera" of the Commedia represented a different part of Italy and was thus characterised by different local habits. An example of these illustrations can be found in the Fossard collection, a section of which is devoted to the various "maschere" in their typical attitudes. The visual sources are the object of the analysis in Part Three of this thesis.

The second source of documentation concerning mime in the Commedia dell'Arte is the written material, either in the form of treatises on acting technique and stagecraft or in the form of the scenarios of the Commedia, the "canovacci",\(^9\) which provide us with a large number of verbal descriptions. The "canovacci" were not full scripts, but a set of guidelines, which included detailed instructions about mimed actions for the improvising actors. An analysis of the scenarios indicates that large sections of the performances relied on those mimed actions and that to be a good mime was one of the essential skills of the professional actor.

The "canovacci", however, are a problematic source of information, for the scripts which survived are assembled in collections such as Flaminio Scala's,\(^10\) and

---

\(^8\)Each Italian dialect is, in fact, characterised by a particular set of gesture, a "vernacular" of movements.

\(^9\)Literally "rags".

\(^10\)Flaminio Scala, Il teatro delle Favole Rappresentative, 1611, two volumes. Reprinted in Archivio del Teatro
have neither chronological order nor any time reference. It is not possible, therefore, to rely on that material in order to undertake a historical study of the evolution of mime actions within the so-called "comedy of skills". The directions to the actors, moreover, often referred to elements of stage practice which were not recorded and which, supposedly, the performers knew and passed onto each other orally. For these reasons the written works on acting technique appear to be more reliable sources to take into account. Unfortunately these publications belong to a later period of the Commedia, when some of the original features of the improvised performance had been replaced by established acting formulae. These treatises are analysed in Chapter 4 of the present work.

3.0 The mimed "lazzi" and other expressive gestures

What is generally indicated as "mime" in the context of the "comedy of skills" should be considered as part of a broader category, that of the "lazzi" or the comic actions usually performed with no words. The "lazzi", a word which finds a very limited translation in "jests", were the vital section of the Commedia itself as stressed by Robert Erenstein:

the lazzì were the cherries on the Commedia dell'Arte cake. They can be defined as the comic interruptions to the plot, they made no contribution to the progression of the action.

They retard the action rather than advance it. And yet these were often the funniest moments and the audience awaited them expectantly.\textsuperscript{11}

The etymology of the word "lazzo" is not certain. Some authors suggest that the word could be a dialectal corruption of the Italian "lacci" or "strings", also having the meaning of "traps", the prey of which was meant to be the audience.\textsuperscript{12} Other sources give a more plausible explanation.\textsuperscript{13} The word could be a verbal corruption of the Latin term "actio", which stands for "action", pronounced with the article "l'" before. This combination of an Italian article and a Latin word could have produced "lactio" or, if the Italian pronunciation is taken into account, "lazzio", a meaningless dialectal corruption from which "lazzo" could have derived. This explanation is significant especially when associated with mime language. The "actio" is the performing moment, where something is happening in terms of movement more than in terms of words or dialogue.

It would be a mistake, however, to consider these burlesque pleasantries only as the mimed parts of the play, for there were two different forms of "lazzi". One was based essentially on movements, involving also

\textsuperscript{12}Giovanni Quadrio, Della Storia e della Ragione di ogni Poesia, Bologna, no publisher, 1739, vol. III, p.224.
\textsuperscript{13}Benedetto Croce, Sul significato e il valore artistico della Commedia dell'Arte, Napoli, Atti della Reale Accademia di Napoli, 1929, p. 35.
acrobaric tricks or dance steps; the other involved the use of words, such as tongue-twisting tirades, ill-chosen metaphors, or the use of a few corrupt Latin quotations. The Italian scholar Anton Giulio Bragaglia suggests that the gestural "lazzi" were the first to be inserted within the scenarios in the early days of the Commedia, while the "spoken" ones belonged to a later, more cultured period. Although attractive, the theory is not supported by any documentation. It is impossible, therefore, to assert the priority of one form of "lazzi" over the other, although the first type could have had more ancient origins, being related to the acts of itinerant jesters and funambulists in the Middle Ages.

Some of the "lazzi" had a vulgar or coarse nature, perhaps to satisfy the taste of a very popular audience, while others were naive jokes typical of every buffoon. In both cases, the "lazzi" implied a mimed sequence. This is proved not only by the description of the jests listed in manuals of the time such as Andrea Perrucci's Dell'Arte Rappresentativa, but also by the guidelines included in almost every scenario. In Il cavadente, for instance, one of the most popular plays collected in the two volumes of Flaminio Scala's Il Teatro delle Favole

14 Anton Giulio Bragaglia, Evoluzione del mimo, Milano, Ceschina, 1930, p. 45.
Rappresentative, Pedrolino, one of the servants, is supposed to perform the "lazzo of the smell", which is repeated in turn by all the other characters to mock Pantalone. The scenario does not provide any further direction, but the lazzo can be recreated from a reading of the following scenes. In other scenarios of the same collection, it is possible to find some descriptions of the mimed actions within the script itself. In La pazzia di Isabella, the main character, that of Isabella, is supposed to accompany her "madness-monologue" with a mimed description of the various planets, each one comically portrayed in a different mood or attitude. This is an interesting case, for the lines of the monologue separate set of directions indicate, with great precision, the type of mimed actions intended to be performed along with the speech. In this instance, the mimed sequence was given to a "noble" character, such as the female Lover or the "Innamorata", an exception to the rule that the "lazzi" were exclusive to comic "maschere". Later on, when expressive theatre gestures became the patrimony of the "ballet d'action", mime passages were conceived mainly in relation to "noble" roles.

In Lo Schiavetto by Giovan Battista Andreini, the "servetta", ancestor of Columbine, is supposed, according

18 Giovan Battista Andreini, Lo Schiavetto, transcription
to the directions, to mime the action of shaving her face with lather and razor. This movement, still in use in some southern Italian regions, stood and stands in the vernacular for "being bored". This could support the theory that nearly all the gestures were taken directly from everyday life, a theory which had already been formulated in the first half of the nineteenth century by the Italian researcher Andrea De Jorio who produced also a rather fantastical theory, namely that the ancient art of mime had survived in the colourful gestural dialect of the Neapolitans.19

Mime sequences varied in length, to provide the other actors with a "breathing break". One of the most famous is still performed today by many comedians. This "lazzo" concerns Harlequin suffering from a haunting hunger, a constant characteristic of the "maschera". Desperate from not finding anything to satisfy his need for food, the witty servant makes several attempts to catch a fly. Once the insect is in his hands, Harlequin mimes the nibbling at it as if it were a delicacy.

Some of the mimed "lazzi" were complex, and differed from the mere repetition of dialactel movements and of gestures derived from everyday habits. An example can be found in the "madness" monologue of Isabella, mentioned

by the Department of Theatre History, Faculty of Humanities, University of Florence, 1983.

17
above. In this instance the actress was required to accompany each imitation with few dance steps, for in the monologue Isabella claims to have seen both musical instruments and planets dancing together the more fashionable dances of the time, such as the "Pavaniglia" and the "Canario". Similarly, in Andreini's Lo Schiavetto, the actor playing the role of Pedrolino, one of the many ancestors of today's Harlequin, is instructed to "mime" - although the Italian verb used is "fare" or "to make" - the "night". It is obvious that, not having any other indication in the text, there had to be a fixed and prescribed set of gestures which conveyed the idea of "night" in mime language. Unfortunately, there is no hint of what this set of gestures could be. What might be assumed as certain is that those movements were created for the purpose, and did not derive from any dialect or popular tradition.

One of the most complete sources concerning the "lazzi" is the list or "repertorio" of "azzioni ridicole" (ridiculous actions) in the second part of Perrucci's Dell'Arte Rappresentativa Premeditata e all'Improvviso.\(^{20}\) In the same paragraph, Perrucci summed up and analysed every ridiculous feat performed without words, from the simple ones, based on a single movement, to the more complex.

\(^{20}\)Delle azzioni ridicole, gesti travestimenti, scene di notte, e canzoni, Regola XII in Andrea Perrucci, op. cit. pp. 249-256.
Ridicolo sarà ne gesti di porsi il cappello, camminare, correre, affettar gravità, o velocità ne i passi... Ridicolo nelle dignità mal sostentate da un balordo, fingendo un Rè, un Principe, un Capitano, e che sò io. Ridicolo negli effetti, facendo un'azione vile in cambio d'una grave, come nel porsi sconciamente in trono, buttarsi a terra facendo la riverenza, e simili. Ridicolo in altre azioni come Margite che combatteva con l'ombra sua. I Psilli, che pugnavano contro i venti; e D.Quixote con li molini a vento. Ridicoli negli ornamenti, vestendosi uno Sciocco da Principe, o da Rè; scioccamente servendosi di calzoni per maniche, degli stivali per guanti, e di vesti non confacenti allo suo personaggio. Ridicolo negli Istrumenti, servendosi della Spada per Cavallo, del Cappello per ventaglio, e del fodero per Spada.  

Among the more complex "azzioni ridicole" Perrucci listed the "night scenes" in which, according to the author's opinion, the Neapolitans were better performers than the actors from Lombardy. 

It is possible that the actions of a "night scene" described here were the same used in the "lazzo of the night" mentioned above, as performed by Pedrolino in

---

Andreini's *Lo Schiavetto*, even though in the second instance the actor was not required to recreate a nocturnal setting but to convey, through mime movements, the idea of the night. Incidentally, the passage from Perrucci's book is relevant for it contains the only mention of the word "lazzi" within the whole treatise, whereas the term is used as a synonym of "comic art, wit of words and actions".

Another list of "lazzi" is in the manuscript kept in the Biblioteca Comunale Augusta in Perugia, entitled *Selva ovvero zibaldone di concetti comici raccolti dal P.D. Placido Adriani di Lucca.*\(^{23}\) The document is dated 1734, hence it was written and published at the time when the Commedia was declining. Nonetheless, the collection is a selection of forty-two different types of "lazzi", supposedly taken from the preexisting tradition. An analysis of the collection reveals that three of the forty-two jests are entirely based on mime and do not involve any other kind of action, such as dancing, singing, music or acting. These are: "lazzo del piangere e del ridere" ("lazzo of laughing and crying"), where the character or characters pretend to cry and they laugh instead, with the appropriate mime; "lazzo di buona guardia alla porta" ("lazzo of watching the door"), which

consisted in a mime sequence where the character performed all sorts of humorous movements to "watch" literally the door; "lazzo della scherma" ("the fencing lazzo"), where the characters performed a spoof duel, mocking the rules of fencing. All the remaining jests of the list, however, mainly based on spoken jokes, include a substantial amount of expressive gestures which accompany the lines.

The "lazzi" were not the only situation in which mimed movements took place. Meaningful and expressive gestures underlined the whole dramatic development of the play, and it often happened that a particular movement was part of the fixed characteristics of a "maschera". An example is given by the four "humours" of Harlequin as portrayed in four different engravings by Claude Gillot: "Harlequin sighing", "Harlequin weeping", "the gluttonous Harlequin" and "Harlequin curtsying". 24

The decadence of the Commedia dell'Arte and its transformation into a more refined form of theatre in the eighteenth century relegated the mimed "lazzi" to a lesser type of stagecraft. In some instances, following the practice of introducing the "maschere" into other forms of theatre art for the entertainment's sake, an attempt was made to insert the "lazzi" as well. Their vulgar and roughly comic nature, however, did not match the generally serious canons of drama, opera and ballet.

24 Reproduced in Pierre Duchartre, op.cit., p.34.
In 1773, the Italian ballet-master Gasparo Angiolini reported how theatrical dancing was badly affected by these jests.

A questa danza difficile ma insignificante s'accoppiavano tutte quelle cose barbare, indecenti, fuori affatto del naturale che prendevano il nome di danze da Pulcinella, da Giangurgolo, da Arlecchino, da Piero, da Dottore, da Pantalone, danze che disonoravano la scena per i lazzii, i gesti, i salti e le svincolature di quegli indecenti ballerini.

Despite Angiolini's bitter criticism, this passage points clearly to the fact that the "lazzi" had remained a feature of the performing arts long after the demise of the Commedia dell'Arte. The same was true in drama. Reformers of the Italian theatre, such as the dramatist Carlo Goldoni,\(^2\) could not avoid the presence of the "maschere" in their comedies, inheriting with them their mime traditions. In several instances, as in Goldoni's Arlecchino servitore di due padroni, the script is

\(^2\)Gasparo Angiolini, Lettere a Monsieur Noverre sopra i Balli Pantomimi, Milano, Bianchi, 1773, p.10.
\(^2\) Carlo Goldoni (Venice 1707-Paris 1793) reformed the Italian drama by creating "written plays" in juxtaposition to extemporary theatre. Moreover his plays mirrored the social reality of his time. The manifesto of the new theatre was the play Il teatro comico, written in 1750-51, the year in which Goldoni produced a set of sixteen new plays, known as the Sedici Commedie Nuove. Among Goldoni's most popular works are La Locandiera (1750), I rusteghi (1760), La trilogia della villeggiatura (1761), Le baruffe chiozzotte (1762). The play Arlecchino servitore di due padroni (Harlequin servant of two masters) was written in 1745, when Goldoni was still a lawyer.
provided with specific guidelines for the mime actions, in the fashion of the old scenarios.

4.0 The rediscovery of mime and the birth of the "ballet d'action"

The eighteenth-century "ballet d'action" represents the application of the rediscovered art of mime at its best. Yet it would be incorrect to consider ballet as the only form of theatre to be affected by the new theories on the importance of a gestural idiom. The "rediscovery" of mime, and the conviction that the use of expressive gestures could provide theatre arts with new life and new formulae, involved a long experimental process of which the creation of the "ballet d'action" was only one of the culminating points. The question of revitalising the art of theatre with mime had been raised long before the birth of pantomime ballet. Historians agree in dating the beginning of that process around the year 1673, when *De Poematum cantu et viribus Rhytmi* was published in Oxford by Isaac Vossius. Since then, many writers and theorists, more or less linked with theatre arts, devoted their studies to the analysis of different modes of expressing feelings and emotions, conceived either as an accessory to pre-existing languages, such as declamation, singing, acting or dancing, or as an independent art. The search for a means of expression other than words brought forth
new forms of theatre; among them particularly interesting were the "monodrama", a "hybrid consisting of music, declamation and pantomime which flourished from the 1770s to the end of the century", and the "ballet d'action". Both forms originated in France, and were the product of theories formulated in a well-cultured "milieu".

Monodrama as a form was created by Rousseau with his one-act play Pygmalion. The work was probably written in 1763 but was not produced until 1770 in Lyons....Rousseau wrote Pygmalion as a practical demonstration of his theories on recitative in French opera...For Rousseau [,] music was not an abstract form without expression. Since speech and music, as he says, cannot walk together [,] he has tried to make one follow the other; every "phrase parlé" [sic] is prepared for by a "phrase musicale" [sic]. When passion has reached such an intensity that the words no longer suffice, the declamation must be broken off and the violent emotion expressed pantomimically to the accompaniment of expressive music. Sound and gestures, Rousseau says, are man's original means of expression.27

The first example of "ballet d'action" is conventionally considered to be a performance of the third act of Corneille's tragedy Horace at a reception given by the Duchesse du Maine in 1714 at Sceaux, when the drama was interpreted without words by two dancers, to the accompaniment of instrumental music. Soon after this performance, the new theories spread throughout Europe, influencing the works of several ballet-masters, such as the Austrian Franz Anton Hilverding von Wewen

(1710-1768). Between 1742 and 1752, Franz Hilverding staged at the Court Theatre in Vienna several "pantomime" ballets, in which he attempted to coordinate the dramatic action by creating a balance between the dancing and the mimed passages. Hilverding can thus be considered the forerunner of that theatre form which only twenty years later found a more adequate expression in the works of Jean Georges Noverre and of Gasparo Angiolini.

It is interesting to note how, even though it had been formulated in France, the "ballet d'action" found a fertile ground in German countries between 1755 and 1765. Towns such as Stuttgart, where Noverre operated, and Vienna, where both Hilverding and Angiolini worked, witnessed the first successful experimentations of a new form of theatrical dancing. Although in these towns there was no tradition of theatrical dancing, it was there that a coterie of choreographers, poets, set-designers, musicians and Maecenas, contributed to the creation of pantomime ballet. Belonging to the group of Hilverding, Calzabigi, Servandoni, Noverre, Quaglio and Durazzo was also the composer Christoph Wilibald Gluck who, at the same time, contributed successfully to the renewal of opera.
5.0 Gasparo Angiolini, the first Italian theorist of the "ballet d'action"

The Italian contribution to the eighteenth-century "ballet d'action" is limited to Gasparo, or Gaspare, Angiolini, who formulated his theories and put them into practice outside his fatherland. The Florentine-born ballet master, whose real name was Angiolo Gasparini, has long been ignored by dance and ballet historians. Paul Magriel mentions only a few titles of his most relevant choreographies; 28 Serge Lifar describes Angiolini as "un autre viennois", 29 while for Sandt, he was "un italien francisé, familiarisé avec le génie chorégraphique français". 30 According to Michaut, 31 Angiolini was a pupil of Noverre. Finally, Derek Lynham does not attribute any importance to that man in his biography of Noverre. 32 With the exception of Jersild, 33 only in recent times have the man and his work been "rediscovered" and "reinstated" within the context where they belong. 34 Biographical

34 Among the recent works:
information about Angiolini is scarce. Born in 1731, he came from a family of theatre artists, and received his first dance training under the guidance of his father Francesco. Between 1748 and 1751 he danced in Venice and in Spoleto. Six years later he staged several ballets at the Teatro Regio in Turin, which were choreographed in the style of the fashionable "ballets-divertissements" of that century and, therefore, gave no hint that any new choreographic theory was to emerge. The new ideas began to develop after Angiolini left Italy, shortly before 1758. It was in Stuttgart that the Florentine dancer met Franz Hilverding and was inspired by him to create new theatrical dance forms. Before leaving Vienna to go to St. Petersburg, Hilverding recommended Angiolini as his successor in the post at the Court Theatre. The Viennese period (1758-1766) was an important one in the life of Angiolini. It was in that town that the ballet-master met and started a collaboration with Christoph Willibald Gluck, the outcome of which were the ballets Don Juan (1761), Semiramis (1765) and the dances for Orpheus (1762).

Following the example of Hilverding, Angiolini left Vienna and went to work in St. Petersburg, where, in affirming theatrical dancing as an art, he made a considerable contribution to the development of Russian

---

ballet. In St. Petersburg Angiolini choreographed, among many others, the ballet *Il mondo della Luna*, based on a work by Carlo Goldoni with music by Giovanni Paisiello. In 1786 the ballet-master went back to Italy, where he staged several ballets at La Scala in Milan and at the Teatro Regio in Turin. In Italy he also mingled with the supporters of a new political regime, sharing their ideas and eventually becoming a faithful follower of Napoleon. Political involvement caused his arrest in 1799, after the end of the Cisalpina Republic. He regained his freedom in 1801 and he died in Milan in 1803.

The lack of academic interest in Angiolini might be explained by the fact that, as a consequence of a confrontation with Jean Georges Noverre, the Florentine ballet-master remained for a long while overshadowed by the fame of the French theoretician and choreographer. The artistic "querelle" was that, on the one hand, Noverre claimed to be the innovator of ballet theories, while, on the other, Angiolini argued that the invention of the same theories and their translation into theatrical practice had to be ascribed to the Austrian ballet-master Franz Hilverding, to whom Angiolini referred as his teacher. A less cultured and less educated man than Noverre, the Florentine ballet-master never managed to gain the fame he probably expected through the publication of his *Lettere a Monsieur*
Noverre, in which he refuted point by point the more popular *Lettres sur la Danse* of his rival. This rivalry with Noverre overshadowed other and more important aspects of Angiolini's career, both as a theoretician and a ballet-master.

6.0 Theories on mime in Angiolini's written works

Gasparo Angiolini left a corpus of thirty nine publications, ballet librettos and theoretical works, but none of these can be of help in the study of the evolution of mime, as none of the works deals with the technical side of that art. Nonetheless, an analysis of Angiolini's theories is essential in order to understand subsequent formulations on the subject, in so far as those theories formed a landmark which was referred to by other Italian choreographers, theatre theoreticians, and pedagogues such as Viganò, Morrocchesi and Blasis.

Among the works illustrating the ballet-master's ideas and formulae for a new type of ballet is the *Dissertation sur Les Ballets Pantomimes des Anciens pour servir de programme au ballet pantomime tragique de Semiramis*, published in 1765.\(^{36}\) In this introduction to one of his most celebrated ballets, Angiolini expanded his conceptions on theatrical dancing, already expounded

in the "introduction" to his first pantomime ballet, Don Juan. These ideas concerned the possibilities offered by the translation into dance of ancient dramas, of which Semiramis is Angiolini's first example, for Don Juan belonged more to the genre of the Spanish "Comédie Héroïque". The transposition of an ancient drama into a choreographic work, meant for Angiolini to attempt a restoration of ancient pantomime. In order to revive that art Angiolini referred to the principles drawn from the works of the Greek philosopher and poet Lucian, of whom he wrote in the Dissertation "Lucien, que je respecte comme un grand maître et que je suis comme mon guide". According to these principles, a mime dancer was supposed to have the following prerequisites:

il faut que le Danseur pantomime connaisse la Poésie, la Géométrie, la Musique, la Philosophie, l'Histoire, et la Fable; qu'il sache exprimer les passions et les mouvements de l'âme qu'il emprunte de la Peinture et de la Sculpture les différentes postures et contenances... Ce Danseur doit savoir aussi particulièrement expliquer les conceptions de l'âme, et découvrir ses sentiments par les gestes et les mouvements du corps: enfin il doit avoir le secret de voir partout ce qui convient... et avec cela être subtil, inventif, judicieux, et avoir l'oreille très délicate."

Needless to say, the education that a dancer received in the eighteenth century was very far from Lucian's principles. The reason was that

37Gasparo Angiolini, op.cit., p.36.
la danse a dégénéré de nos jours au point de ne
la regarder depuis long-temps que comme l'art de
faire entrechats et des gambades, de sauter ou
courir en cadence, ou tout au plus de porter le
corps, ou de marcher avec grace, et sans perdre
l'équilibre, d'avoir les bras moëleux, et des
attitudes pittoresques et élégantes. Nos écoles
ne nous apprennent autre chose.\textsuperscript{38}

On the contrary, the model proposed was clearly
defined in the following passage.

La saltation des anciens n'étoit donc autre
chose que la Danse pantomime véritable, ou l'art
de mouvoir les piés, les bras, les corps en
cadence au son des instruments, et de rendre
intelligible aux Spectateurs ce qu'on veut
représenter, par des gestes, des signes, et des
expressions d'amour, de haîne, de fureur et de
désespoir.\textsuperscript{39}

To reconstruct the ancient art of pantomime,
however, was not an easy task. Angiolini was aware of the
scarce sources he could rely on, and tried to adapt
general theatre principles, derived mainly from Horace's
\textit{Ars Poetica}. One of these principles, derived in turn
from Aristotle, concerned the three unities of drama,
which Angiolini considered as fundamental to the new form
of theatrical dancing. Of course, as the ballet-master
explained in his dissertation, these unities had to be
"adapted" to suit the art of dancing. The adaptation, in
Angiolini's opinion, could be done in the following way.
As far as the unity of place was concerned, he thought it

\textsuperscript{38}Gasparo Angiolini, op.cit., p.36.
\textsuperscript{39}Gasparo Angiolini, op.cit., p.37.
was legitimate to use the entire space of either a royal palace or even a whole town; the unity of time for dramas prescribed the span of a whole day, but dramas were longer than ballets (they lasted up to three hours), while with the help of the words it was possible to render a long plot intelligible. Danced action had to be shorter because of the dancers' physical capacities. The number of roles had to be reduced too, as it was not easy to make clear who they represented, without the aid of the words. As for the unity of action, Pantomime itself made the action agile and fast, as an expressive gesture could sum up many words and concepts; according to Angiolini his *Semiramis* lasted only twenty minutes. Therefore the action and the subject had to be simple. In stressing this point of view Angiolini criticised the taste of the French operas of his time, the subjects of which were too complex and rich in parallel stories and in allegorical characters.

Dans cette danse il est question de remuer l'ame et non pas de plaire aux yeux. Si on n'y réussit pas, on manque son but; et quant'à moi, il me semble fondé de croire qu'il est impossible d'émoover les passions avec des êtres fantastiques personnifiés.⁴⁰

These principles were supposedly the fundamentals of Angiolini's art; they recur in another of his written works, the *Lettere di Gasparo Angiolini a Monsieur*

⁴⁰Gasparo Angiolini, op.cit., p.37.
Noverre sopra i balli pantomimi, published in 1773.\textsuperscript{41} According to the author, the simplicity of the action performed and the consequent clarity of the subject were the only ways to avoid the use of a written programme explaining the plot in advance, a device which Angiolini considered "humiliating for the art itself". The custom, and the solution, of turning to the programme in the case of a complex dramatic structure, had been previously suggested by Jean Georges Noverre in one of his Lettres, as an expedient not to impose any limitation onto the art of pantomime ballet.

The real essence of pantomime ballets, according to Angiolini, lay in the possibilities of the expressive means, and everything that was beyond its capability had not to be taken into consideration. The expressive means were, of course, movements depicting and portraying the contents of the action, namely either human feelings and passions, or objects and events both from fantasy and reality. These gestures formed a separate corpus from the range of dance movements as stated in the second letter.

\textsuperscript{41}Gasparo Angiolini, Lettere di Gaspare Angiolini a Monsieur Noverre sopra i Balli Pantomimi, Milano, Bianchi, 1773.
tale armonica semplicità, che nel fondo affaticano e vi disgustano, che giammai non sono stati adottati dall'arte, che l'ignoranza ha suggerito e che il cattivo gusto ha introdotto sulla scena. 42

Here two elements need to be analysed in detail. One is the fact that Angiolini established a clear differentiation between two types of dance, the "danza materiale", based only on technical feats stemming from an affirmed tradition, and the "danza parlante" or expressive dancing, synonymous with "pantomimo" or the art of mime. The distinction summarises the complex range of theories which had accompanied the evolution of the "ballet d'action". Angiolini was not the first man to formulate such a differentiation; it formed part of the pre-existing theories on the "ballet d'action" since it had come into being. Nonetheless, the Florentine ballet-master can be considered the first to have created a suitable classification, for the two adjectives, "materiale" and "parlante", 43 survived long after him and were used by many authors and theoreticians to define the two dance forms.

The second element which deserves particular attention is the fact that, according to Angiolini, expressive gestures could be either still or in motion. A

---

42 Gasparo Angiolini, op. cit., p. 83.
43 The adjective "materiale" means literally "material, here with the sense of "mechanical". The adjective "parlante", literally "talking", can be rendered with "expressive".
study of previous works on the same subject from the early seventeenth century onwards, reveals that this appears to be the first time that the double nature of the gestures is taken into account. Before Angiolini's Lettere, treatises on mime analysed and described expressive movements only according to their dynamic nature, whereas the stillness of a statuary pose was not contemplated. Angiolini's innovation consisted thus in considering motionless postures as part of the theatrical mime. The idea came obviously from the study of paintings and sculptures which, according to the principles expounded in the Dissertation, were supposed to be the primary source of inspiration both to a ballet-master and to a dance; at the same time the use of "still" poses on stage echoed the contemporary genre of "tableaux vivants", a fashionable form of entertainment.

The whole passage concerning the two genres of dancing and the two types of expressive gestures is particularly relevant as it is the only reference to the mechanisms of mime language in Angiolini's works. In line with contemporary treatises such as Vincenzo Requeno's Chironomia (1797) or Johann Jacob Engel's Ideen zur einer Mimik (1785), the Lettere of Gasparo Angiolini, as well as his other publications on the same subject, lacked technical description, being a theoretical and academic dissertation. The lack of technical references to the use
of mime is also one of the reasons why the present work deals with Angiolini separately from the rest of authors who studied and analysed the dynamic of mime movements before Blasis. The analysis of the works of these writers can be found in Chapter 4.

7.0 Conclusion

Two elements in Angiolini's criticism about the presence in ballet of elements stemming from the Commedia deserve to be analysed. One is the fact that the "maschere" appeared in contemporary ballets. According to Angiolini, the "maschere" performed characteristic dances corresponding to the attributes of each fixed type; one can suppose that the steps and the patterns of those dances did not belong to the tradition of the "danse d'école" imported from France, but were directly derived from the choreographic traditions of the Commedia which, in turn, resulted from folklore. The assertion is important, for it proves that the Commedia had a considerable influence on Italian ballet, although this is a fact which is generally not acknowledged by dance historians. In shifting from one form of theatre to another, the "maschere" retained their characteristics and, what is more important, some of their performing elements, such as the "lazzi" mentioned in Angiolini's criticism. This indicates that, before the advent of

"See page 22.
"ballet d'action", dance performances were structured in order to accommodate some components of the Commedia dell'Arte tradition, and that these elements must have been part of theatrical dancing for a long time, if one considers that Commedia declined in the first half of the eighteenth century and Angiolini's passage was written in 1773. Further research might prove that between the Commedia and the eighteenth-century ballet there is a tighter link than is usually thought.

The second interesting element in Angiolini's passage is the author's disapproval of the insertion of characters from the Commedia in the context of a ballet. The ballet-master's objection reflects and summarises the general opinion that theorists and supporters of "ballet d'action" had of the art of dancing, namely that dance, being a "noble" art stemming from antiquity, should not deal with elements of vulgar and coarse nature. None of the theorists who formulated and supported the rebirth of pantomime, however, had taken into account that in ancient Greece and, most of all, in ancient Rome, the genre of "pantomimus" was characterised by "plebeian" components, very similar to the "lazzi". The pantomime that eighteenth-century men longed to revive was a very much idealised example, far from its original model. The eighteenth-century theories on mime and their subsequent application to the performing arts, marked an important
stage in the evolution of the language of gesture. The inspiration drawn from art works such as sculptures or paintings, recommended in almost every treatise of that century, generated a new form of theatrical movement, which superseded the gestural idiom of the Commedia. Quick, direct mime became more hieratic; movements from everyday were turned into statuary poses. These new modes did not remain exclusive to the "ballet d'action", for they became the fundamentals of Viganò's art, at the beginning of the nineteenth century.
Chapter 2

The evolution of pantomime ballet in Italy:

Salvatore Viganò

1.0 Introduction

2.0 A brief historical account of the life and career of Salvatore Viganò

3.0 The source material on Viganò: a problem of documentation

4.0 An analysis of some characteristic elements of "coreodramma"

5.0 Conclusion
1.0 Introduction

An appreciation of Salvatore Viganò and of his contribution to Italian theatrical dancing in the early nineteenth century is essential to an understanding of the evolution of mime in Italian ballet. "Coreodramma", the choreographic genre formulated and created by Viganò, epitomised the pantomimic trends in theatrical dancing, reaching heights which concluded a process of development started more than sixty years before by both Gasparo Angiolini and Jean Georges Noverre. This new Italian dance form was structured on a well-balanced assimilation of mime into ballet and vice versa. Viganò rejected the principles of the "danse d'école" or pure dancing, also known as "dancing in the French style", and favoured a type of expressive, rhythmic movement which corresponded more directly to the psychological nuances of the plot. The response of pantomime gestures to the music, their integration within the danced action, the use of simultaneous choreographic images within the same scene to enhance the pathos of the performance, represented "the full and definitive realisation of the precepts of the ballet d'action".¹

Although it originated from theories which had previously been expounded, "coreodramma" constituted a

unique genre which, in dance history, cannot be placed alongside any other type of choreographic composition. This uniqueness derived from the combination of several factors. Viganò's artistic skills found a fertile field of application in the dance activities of La Scala, the most important theatre for Italian ballet and opera. The plots of some tragic "coreodrammas" were prompted by the enthusiastic rediscovery and the critical revaluation of Shakespeare's dramas, which took place in Italy at the beginning of the nineteenth century. In addition, the massive proportions of the productions reflected the fashionable "grandeur" which marked both the Napoleon era and the years immediately after the 1815 congress in Vienna.

Viganò, nephew of the composer Luigi Boccherini, was a well-cultured man who strove towards the realisation of a project in which the art of dancing, the art of music and the art of painting were all involved to the same degree. One century before the theatre reform brought about by Diaghilev and his collaborators, Viganò had reached the same conclusions, although on a different basis.

The word "choreographer", in its meaning of "creator of ballet steps", does not fully describe Viganò, as affirmed by the Italian dance historian Luigi Rossi.

Il genio di Viganò, ad un ripensamento storico visto nella prospettiva del cammino della danza
teatrale in oltre un secolo, risulta oggi principalemente quello di un coordinatore delle diverse dimensioni dello spettacolo. L'accezione di "compositore di ballo" con lui si dilata smisuratamente inglobando le funzioni di librettista, di autore della musica e di colui che, con terminologia odierna, definiremmo il regista. 2

The genre of "coreodramma" could not be reproduced by Viganò's successors, being the product of a single mind and being inseparable from the personality of its creator. After the death of the choreographer, in 1821, "coreodramma" rapidly declined and disappeared. During the following years, both Viganò's brother, Giulio, and the choreographer Pietro Hus attempted several times to keep the tradition alive by restaging some of the most significant works; these proved unsuccessful, lacking the personal inspiration of the author. 3 Yet "coreodramma" had lasted long enough to imprint on Italian ballet those characteristics which denoted, for more than one century, the genre known as "ballo grande". 4

---

2 Luigi Rossi, Il ballo alla Scala, Milano, Edizioni della Scala, 1972, p. 63.
3 Pietro Hus restaged the coreodramma Prometeo in 1844, with the dancer Efoisio Catte in the main role. See Pompeo Cambiaso, La Scala 1778-1906, Milano, Edizioni della Scala, 1906, 5th edition and Luigi Rossi, op. cit., p. 64.
4 Literally "great ballet", although there is a difference between "ballet" and "ballo". The term was coined in relation to the vast proportions of the works by Viganò. Some of the most exterior characteristics of "coreodramma", such as the extraordinary spectacular character of the works, characterised the Italian choreographic works throughout the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth century. "Ballo grande" is generally used to indicate the Italian choreographic genre, which found its peak in the trilogy of ballets by Achille Manzotti, Excelsior (1881), Amor (1886) and Sport, (1896).
Viganò's works changed the conception of theatre dancing. On the one hand, the large-scale productions required long periods of rehearsals, sometimes entire months, a prerequisite that in the past had never been imagined. On the other, the particular technique of rhythmic and expressive mime required dancers especially trained. Among them was Antonia, or Antonietta Pallerini, Viganò's "muse".

Although "coreodramma" is an isolated phenomenon within the history of Italian ballet, its influence was particularly relevant to the subsequent formulation of theories on dancing and, above all, on mime applied to theatrical dancing. Dance historians agree in affirming that this influence was particularly felt by Blasis, who had danced at La Scala theatre while Viganò was resident choreographer. In order to provide the background for assessing this theory, the present chapter explores from both a historical and an analytical perspective Salvatore Viganò and his works.

2.0 A brief historical account of the life and career of Salvatore Viganò

Salvatore Viganò, born on 25 March 1769 in Naples, arrived at La Scala Theatre in Milan at the height of his artistic maturity, when he had already gained an international reputation. Previously, he had worked in Spain, in Venice and in Vienna, where he had produced the
ballet The Creatures of Prometheus, premiered in 1801, in collaboration with Beethoven. Although this work had met with little success, it could be considered as the first example of Viganò's choreographic composition containing the germs of a new form of theatrical dancing. Once the work was performed at La Scala, restaged and revised, it marked the beginning of "era of coreodramma".\(^5\)

Between 1811 and 1812 Viganò staged five "balli grandi" which did not impress the audience of La Scala. These productions belonged to the pre-Milanese period, in which Viganò was still experimenting a new choreographic genre. The five "balli" reflected his experiences as a dancer, when he had worked with choreographers such as Jean Dauberval, whose La Fille Mal Gardée Viganò had danced in Venice; the five works staged at La Scala, therefore, reproduced choreographic and dramatic schemes which were too familiar to cause any particular reaction. The only composition which aroused some positive comments was Il Noce di Benevento, performed at La Scala Theatre on April, 1812. This "ballo", which many dance historians tend to consider as the first example of "Romantic" ballet, was based on a rather unusual and extravagant theme for the time, with witches' covens and apparitions of monsters and demons as recurring elements. The spectacular character of the performance and the deployment of a considerable number of dancers and extras

were later to characterise the whole of Viganò's production.

The first major work that Viganò "created" for La Scala was the totally revised version of The Creatures of Prometheus, this time entitled Prometheus, set to a new score, with music by various composers, including Mozart, Haydn and Viganò himself. The revised work was premiered on 22 May 1813. Compared to the Viennese production, the new Prometheus, differed in many aspects. The plot had been rewritten and expanded, and the action, which in the Viennese production was rather basic, in the Milanese version involved a larger number of characters, both mythological and allegorical, such as the Four Virtues and the Nine Muses. A large-scale use of theatrical machinery also provided continuous spectacular effects. The "coreodramma" ended with an "apotheosis", in which some scholars have seen a precedent for the canonic "apotheosis" of the "ballo grande" of the last two decades of the century. In a later run of performances of Prometheus, during the autumn season of the same year, Filippo Taglioni, father of the celebrated Romantic ballerina Marie, interpreted the role of Mars.

Between 1812 and 1813, Viganò created five new choreographies, Samandria liberata, Il nuovo Pigmalione, Gli Ussiti, Il Sindaco vigilante and Numa Pompilio, none

---

4See Luigi Rossi, Il ballo alla Scala, Milano, Edizioni della Scala, 1972, p.54.
of which, according to contemporary chronicles, was particularly successful. It was in 1817, that he created Mirra, derived from the tragedy by the Italian playwright Vittorio Alfieri. Mirra, premiered in June, was praised as a work of genius, as stated also by Stendhal, who, on 12 November 1816, wrote enthusiastic comments in his diary. In recording the success of the new work, Vigano's biographer Carlo Ritorni used the term "coreotragedia", thus implying a distinction from "coreodramma", which, supposedly, did not have a tragic connotation.

Mirra was followed by two other creations, Psammi, a "coreodramma" based on an Egyptian plot, and Dedalus, another successful work, which won critical acclaim. Among the three works composed by Vigano during the following year, 1818, two must be considered as the most significant products of the ballet-master's creativity. These are Otello, based on Shakespeare's tragedy, and La Vestale, derived from Spontini's contemporary opera. The third coreodramma, La spada di Kenneth, set in Scotland, was another precursor of the Romantic ballet, for it contained fantastic elements drawn from folklore and legends.

The inevitable comparison between the choreographic version of Otello and written drama did not preoccupy Vigano. The ballet-master set the entire plot of this "coreodramma" in Venice and managed to render the most

---

8Pompeo Cambiasi, op.cit. pp.565-566.
9Stendhal, Diari, Torino, Einaudi, 1977, p.89.
difficult moments of the story with great success. The dialogue between Jago and Othello, "received every night an enthusiastic outburst of applause".\textsuperscript{10} Similarly, La Vestale, was an adaptation of a well-known opera of the period, although, at the time the "coreodramma" was premiered, the opera had not yet been performed at La Scala, where it was staged only seven years later.

The year 1819 was marked by the realisation of Viganò's most ambitious and most succesful project, the "coreodramma" I Titani. The inspiration for the content was drawn from ancient mythology, elaborated for the occasion with more than poetic license, in order to suit the project; a mixture of pagan rites and biblical tales formed the plot. According to the libretto, the action begun with an Arcadian scene, portraying the "golden age" of man's history; such harmony was suddenly disturbed by the appearance of the Titans who, joined by the Cyclops, brought in "terror and despair" and gave the mortals three vases containing all the vices and the bad qualities characteristic of humans.\textsuperscript{11} As the world seemed to be in chaos and taken over by the Titans, Jupiter appeared from above and buried them under "falling mountains". I Titani represented the last acclaimed product of Viganò's choreographic genius. Between 1819 and 1821, the year of his death, he produced other

\textsuperscript{10}Anonymous reviewer, quoted in Luigi Rossi, op.cit. p.59.
"coreodrammas", but none achieved the success of Prometeo, Mirra, Otello, La Vestale and I Titani. Only Didone, performed posthumously on 22 September 1821, was received with respectful deference to the memory of the ballet-master.

3.0 The source material on Viganò: a problem of documentation

Although many books of ballet history include a chapter or a paragraph on Viganò and dance historians agree in considering his work as a milestone in the evolution of "classical" ballet, the number of more specific and well-researched sources concerning the great ballet master is limited to two. Neither can be considered satisfactory, since they are not primary sources. The first, entitled Commentarii della vita e delle opere coreodrammatiche di Salvatore Viganò e della coreografia e de' corepei scritti da Carlo Ritorni, reggiano is a collection of detailed records of Viganò's theatre works, written by Carlo Ritorni an admirer of the ballet-master. The publication is not a reliable source mainly because of the oversympathetic attitude of the author towards the creator of "coreodramma". In addition, as Carlo Ritorni did not have much competence in theatrical dancing, his records are limited to detailed

description of the plots, with no indication about the technical layout of the "coreodrammas".

The collected papers of a conference on Viganò held in 1984 at the Teatro Romolo Valli in the Italian town of Reggio Emilia, and published in that year under the title *Il sogno del coreodramma. Salvatore Viganò poeta muto* constitute the second, more recent source. These papers provide a rich contextualisation of the subject, analysing all the cultural and artistic aspects related to "coreodramma", considered within the musical theatre of its time. Unfortunately, as none of the lecturers was specifically involved with dance or ballet, the papers lack an analytical evaluation of this essential element. The research is also characterised by repeated references to Ritorni's book, since source material on Viganò is scarce. The collected papers on Viganò, nonetheless, provide an interesting contribution to the analysis of a long ignored topic of dance history.

Salvatore Viganò did not leave any written work concerning his ideas on the structure and the technique of "coreodramma". According to Vincenzo Buonsignori, towards the end of his life Viganò wanted to write a book on rhythmic mime, the one he had used in his works. Buonsignori reports that although the book was unfinished and unpublished, Viganò left a manuscript where some of his precepts were codified. Unfortunately Buonsignori is

---

the only source of information about the manuscript, for there is no evidence of its existence in the books and in the newspapers of the time, or in the Archives of the Museo Teatrale annexed to the theatre La Scala in Milan. In his study on dance activities at La Scala between 1778 and 1970, the Italian scholar Luigi Rossi reports that Viganò attempted the codification of his own system of dance notation. Rossi, however, does not support his assertion with any evidence, and it could be that he refers to Buonsignori's passage, misinterpreting it.

Other examples of source material on Viganò are scenarios and programmes of the various "coreodrammas"; the sketches for the settings by Alessandro Sanquirico, Viganò's favourite set-designer; and several literary descriptions of the "coreodrammas", including a critical commentary and a detailed description of some scenes in Stendhal's Journal d'Italie. None of these sources, however, provides additional information to Ritorni's book.

4.0 An analysis of some characteristic elements of the "coreodramma"

The lack of a treatise or a more detailed technical source on the "coreodramma" obliges the scholar to analyse Vigano's theatrical works through the records of

---

14Vincenzo Buonsignori, Precetti sull'arte mimica, Siena, Tipografia dell'Ancora, 1854, p.19.
15Luigi Rossi, op.cit. p.64.
Carlo Ritorni. Although the Commentarii are imbued with subjective and biased attitudes towards the subject, it is still possible to identify a few characteristic elements. For instance, a comparative reading of Carlo Ritorni's descriptions of Vigano's choreographies reveals some recurring aspects of the "coreodramma" which can be considered as the fundamentals of that form of dance theatre. The first element to draw the attention of the scholar is Viganò's rejection of a written "introduction" to his works. As the ballet-master affirmed,

More than forty years after the "querelle" between Angiolini and Noverre, Vigand solved the controversy about the use of a written programme to explain the mimed action. His solution consisted in choosing subjects and plots which, in his opinion, were complete and,

---

17The passage, by Salvatore Viganò, is one of the few examples of the ballet-master's writing. As such it is reported in Carlo Ritorni, op.cit., pp.198-199.
therefore, did not need any introduction. According to Viganò, every moment of the action ought to be performed on stage, in order to avoid complex references to facts and events which had happened somewhere else; even the relationships between the characters and their psychological nuances were clearly rendered by pantomime. The brief passage indicates that, in Viganò's opinion, everything could be expressed through gesture, in contrast with Angiolini's theories about the limitations of the language of gesture.

The second element of interest in Viganò's works is that the structure of the dramatic and danced action of major works, such as Mirra, Otello or La Vestale, was the same, representing a constant in his production; this structure accommodated several sections or variants, which could be added or removed with a great deal of interchangeability, without affecting the original formula. These sections, always identical, were:

4.1 "choral" scenes of both danced and mimed nature entrusted entirely to the "corps de ballet" in the first act.
4.2 mime acting interwoven with a small amount of dancing in the "French style" in the second act.
4.3 the so-called "tragic pantomime" in the form of a monologue, a dialogue or a finale to be
performed by the soloist with the "corps de ballet", in the third act.
4.4 mimed scenes alternately assigned to soloists and to "ensembles", in the last one or two acts.

The inclusion of choral scenes (4.1) reveals how, following a well-rooted tradition within the performing arts, Vigano aimed to surprise the audience at the beginning of his "coreodrammas". To entrust the first act to the "masse",\(^\text{18}\) deploying from the beginning the full company inclusive of the "corps de ballet" and extras, produced an effect of grandeur. An example can be found in the opening "tableau" of La Vestale.

Apparisce subitamente uno scenario di sorprendente vastità...Le gradinate e le loggie son piene dei Consoli, di senatori, di tutte le romane dignità, e popolo spettatore della lotta...spingonsi avanti gli aurighi, girando un certo numero di volte intorno al circo.\(^\text{19}\)

The presence of the full company on the stage also allowed the ballet-master to create choral dances, which were usually derived from folklore, as in the case of Otello where there was performed a "Furlana", a dance from the North-Eastern regions of Italy.

The combination of mime acting with dancing in the "French style" (4.2) is particularly interesting. The

\(^{18}\)Literally "masses".
\(^{19}\)Carlo Ritorni, op.cit. pp.199-200.
second act of Viganò's "coreodrammas" started and ended with a mimed scene. In between there was the "balladue alla francese" or "dance for two in the French style". This is the only exception to Viganò's continuity of style. The "balladue", ancestor of the "pas de deux", was the only moment of the "coreodrama" in which French "technical" or "mechanical" dancing took place. The reasons for such a discrepancy in the stylistic structure of "coreodrama" can be found in the taste of the public and in their need for "entertainment". The "balladue" was generally introduced by a contextual pretext such as the celebration of a victory or a banquet.

The last two elements of "coreodrama" listed above, (4.3 and 4.4) indicate one of the most characteristic aspects of the art of "coreodrama", that of the mimed action entrusted to principals and soloists. Viganò had traced a neat distinction between different genres of mimed action. One was "pictorial" mime or the one used to confer a sense of continuous and differentiated activity on the stage, particularly those performed by the "corps de ballet". The other was the so-called "tragic" pantomime, which had a less decorative function, being the means of expression of soloists and principals who conveyed their characters' feelings and emotions through it.

In the papers of the congress on Viganò, professor Fabrizio Frasnedi stresses the difficulty that a
contemporary scholar might come across in trying to understand the technical nature of the two forms of mime.\textsuperscript{20} He asserts, in fact, that the pantomime of the "corps de ballet", in the form of gestures rhythmically performed in accordance to the music and to the action of the soloists, survived as an art on its own in what is generally referred to as "comic" or "grotesque" mime.\textsuperscript{21} In contrast, the other range of gestures, the "tragic" mime, disappeared, being exclusive to Viganò's art. The assertion might be too hazardous, especially if the theories formulated by Angiolini and his contemporaries are taken into account.\textsuperscript{22} In Angiolini's works, as well as in those of Noverre, the dancers who were supposed to portray noble or "tragic" characters, as in the case of Semiramis, were advised to look upon masterworks of the visual arts, in order to find a source of inspiration for their gestures. Examples of these "statuary" poses and "hieratic" movements can be found in many visual sources of the period, as in Engel's Ideen zur einer Mimik. One might suppose that Vigand followed the rules stemming from the teaching of the "ballet d'action" with which he had been trained; "tragic" mime, therefore, was not something he had created for the "coreodramma", and,

\textsuperscript{20}Fabrizio Frasnedi, 'Il genio pantomimo' in Ezio Raimondi, op.cit., pp.241-325.
\textsuperscript{21}An example of this type of mime is that of Marcel Marceau.
\textsuperscript{22}See Chapter 1, pp.23-35.
although it gradually disappeared during the nineteenth century, it is still well documented.

Professor Frasnedi's assertion on the survival of the mime of the "corps de ballet" in that defined today as "comic" or "grotesque" is not entirely satisfactory.\textsuperscript{23} The mime Viganò used for the "corps de ballet" had to be clear and intelligible, derived from common habits and from gestural tradition. This type of gesture stemmed supposedly either from folklore and dialect culture on the one hand, or from the language of gesture belonging to the Commedia dell'Arte on the other. In both cases, it survived as an integral part of the nineteenth-century ballet tradition, distinct from the so-called "comic" or "grotesque" mime.

An interesting element which seems to have been quite frequently overlooked in dance history manuals and even in the papers of the 1984 congress, concerns the mime monologues and duets referred to above (4.3). Since the reform of ballet started in the eighteenth century, one of the major concerns of dance theorists and ballet masters was to find appropriate and intelligible ways of rendering abstract concepts through mime. In order to circumvent the difficulty of such representation, different factions of reformers proposed different solutions. Some of these theorists suggested simply to avoid the choice of an argument or of a plot which might

create confusion in the audience. As mentioned above, Gasparo Angiolini shared this opinion in stressing the simplicity of the narrative action as an essential element of his choreographic compositions. In contrast, Noverre proposed the introduction of written programmes explaining the content of the mimed action. In both cases, the limits of sign languages were acknowledged. Authors dealing with the mime matter, but not involved with ballet, suggested the use of "compound" movements which could express several meanings. This device, however, did not provide a suitable solution to the problem. In various treatises, as in those by Blasis, one can find a discussion of this argument. Ideas and concepts related to the past or the future, or to something which happened off-stage and therefore had to be reported, always created problems for the authors dealing with mime.

For these reasons, Carlo Ritorni's frequent mention of entire monologues or dialogues performed only through the language of gesture cannot be ignored. Unfortunately the description of these events is limited to the narration of the content, avoiding the depiction of the means used. Nonetheless, it is worth quoting the Commentarii.

Siamo nell'interno del tempio di Vesta. Tocca appunto la guardia del periglioso fuoco ad Emilia. Il soliloquio della quale, intelligibile nel suo muto linguaggio come la favella, sarebbe
in poesia un classico squarcio se lo si fosse potuto conservar con caratteri, o se l'avesse voltato in tragici versi il grande che dipinse Oresti atterrito all'aspetto dell'ombra di Agamennone...Ma come raffigurare alla mente del Lettore l'azione della Pallerini, che corrispondeva all'invenzioni e all'istruzioni del maestro con quelle sue forme e sembianze cotanto atte ad esprimere un tragico terrore in immagine tutta greco e romana! E' dessa appoggiata all'altare in mesto concentramento; riscuotesi e sollecita la fiamma. Se ne scosta poi alcun poco, e ripensando al suo stato, ascolta l'interna passione nascente. Prima colla ragione vuol sedarne gli impulsi, poi col dovere e la religione, ricordando a sè il proprio carattere; finalmente per mezzo più efficace ricorre alla Dea, e la supplica sgombrarle dal seno il malnato affetto: muovasi a pietà della sua ancella, che vestita di que' sacri veli vuol essere dedicata al servizio di lei, non men colla persona che col cuore. Nel discender di nuovo dai gradini dell'ara ov'ha orato, arrestasi ad un pensier che le raffigura le immagini dell'amante; la vede cogli occhi della fantasia; pur vuol discacciarla, ma le care sembianze ancor le sono presenti; dall'altra parte voce celeste, quasi baleno sul capo, par che le rischiari la vista sui doveri suoi; volge lo sguardo a' suolo, e prega tuttavia. 24

The passage reveals how the range of feelings and emotions which had to be conveyed by the principal dancer in a Viganò's work went far beyond the basic vocabulary of gestures codified up to that time. 25 It is possible that Viganò managed to extend the vocabulary of theatre gesture, by adding expressive movements which were subsequently lost. It is also possible that the personal skills of the interpreter, in this case Antonia Pallerini, played a decisive part in conveying the scene.

24Carlo Ritorni, op.cit., p. 204-206.
25For an account and an analysis of the mime technique prior to Viganò, see Chapter 4.
Another striking element resulting from Ritorni's account is that, with the exception of a few common actions, the whole scene is based on a display of the psychological reactions of the character. The ballet-master and the interpreter had supposedly created specific movements to depict each nuance of passion or emotion and, what is more important, had managed to render those movements intelligible to the audience. La Vestale was in fact one of the greatest successes of Viganò at La Scala, a factor which proves that the public did not find any difficulty in understanding and penetrating the content of the dramatic action.

The description suggests that the scene from La Vestale involved a type of movement which could be described as "hieratic" as well as "statuary" poses, in accordance with that "tragic" form of mime mentioned above. This reflected the principles derived from the previous century, when artistic canons were moulded on the examples of both ancient Greek and Rome. It seems, therefore, that Viganò did not belong to the Romantic movement, although neither did he share the ideas of the supporters of the Italian "Classicismo" either. From this perspective, both the inventor of "coreodramma" and his creations constitute an interesting case. Viganò and his work belong to a moment of cultural and artistic transition when the various arts were slowly shifting from the "Classicismo" canons towards the Romantic modes.
"Coreodramma" should therefore be considered as a Pre-Romantic form of theatrical dancing. Yet, the term "Pre-Romantic", in dance history, refers to the epoch of the "ballet d'action", in which "coreodramma" is arguably included. Although both forms focused on mime, there was a neat difference between "coreodramma" and "ballet d'action". Unlike the creators and the supporters of the "ballet d'action" Viganò did not want to pursue the dream of a restored art of pantomime, in the fashion of ancient Greek theatre. His "coreodrammas" were meant to be a new form of theatre, independent of historical models. The purpose of "coreodramma", according to its creator, was mainly to confer a valid artistic meaning on danced performance, differently from the modes of the "French dancing". In Viganò's opinion, as revealed also by the example of the "silent" monologue, there were no limits to the expression of concepts through gestures. In this, he differed greatly from Angiolini.

"Coreodramma" inaugurated a new style, soon to be defined by its contemporaries as "dancing in the Italian style" or rhythmical miming, in contrast with the "French dancing", or technical dancing, which Viganò maintained only for entertainment's sake. To preserve pure dancing created some discrepancies as well as a remarkable discontinuity of style as indicated above (4.2). The inventor of the "coreodramma", however, had to make some

---

concessions to the taste of the audiences, for French or "mechanical" dancing was very much in favour, and eventually it regained its absolute primacy once Vigano's season was over. The supremacy of mimed action over "mechanical" dancing reversed the canons of theatrical dancing as a form of performing art. Acclaimed and praised by some of his most cultured contemporaries, such as Gioacchino Rossini or Stendhal, Vigano also received a considerable amount of criticism. The traditionalists of the time accused him of creating only "pantomimes" and regarded him as responsible for the estrangement of "French" dancers from La Scala. Vigano never answered these accusations. His supporters, on the contrary, replied that

Vigano's defence, written in colloquial style which was characteristic of the journalistic writing of the period, focuses on an important element. There is a clear distinction between pantomime as conceived by Vigano and

---

27 See Carlo Ritorni, op. cit., p.XI.
28 Angelo Petracchi, Analisi del ballo di Vigano intitolato Mirra, Milano, Bettoni, 1818, unnumbered pages, quoted in Luigi Rossi, op. cit., p.64.
French pantomime. The latter is said to be "walked" and not "danced". This differentiation is essential in order to understand the Italian mime in ballet. As discussed in the previous chapter, French mime, after the performance at the reception of the Duchesse Du Maine, evolved towards different forms of theatre, such as the "monodrama" which represented a distinct genre from "ballet d'action". Soon the art of mime acquired its character as an independent form of theatre, which did not need a particular context, such as opera or ballet, to have its own "raison d'être". From the first decade of the nineteenth century, "pantomime" constituted one of the most fashionable forms of entertainment in France, an example of which may be found in the film Les enfants du paradis. Mime acting in Italy, on the contrary, never became an independent form of theatre, and remained linked to other forms of performing art, such as opera, ballet and drama.

In order to suit different contexts, mime actions had to follow the well-defined rules of the various artistic genres. Theorists such as Vincenzo Requeno distinguished in their works the different types of mime which related to each form of theatre. For these reasons, mime in Italy was conceived only in relation either to the word or to the music. In the latter case, expressive

---

29See Chapter 1, p. 24.
gestures were adjusted to musical measures in order not to create any discrepancy with the rest of the action, either sung and danced. Considered from this perspective, Italian mime was "danced", to use the words of Viganò's supporters, for it followed notes and phrases of the music in the same way as the ballet steps, in contrast with the "walked" and independent French mime. It is interesting that, in 1830, Carlo Blasis criticised French mime for not being suitable to ballet:

In Italy people are naturally inclined to Pantomimes, and the mimes already make use of gestures of convention. In France, some length of time, and a course of deep study, would be required to attain the same degree of perfection. The French Pantomimes have adopted only a small number of gestures, of which the greater part is destitute of correct expression. 31

The criticism, which might have been prompted by the short experience Blasis had as a dancer in Viganò's "coreodrammas", is interesting if the dance training Blasis had received is taken into consideration. As discussed in the next chapter, Blasis became a dancer under the guidance of several French teachers, representatives of that style which Viganò did not favour and was always billed as a "French dancer" himself. In addition, even the few mime roles that Blasis danced before going to Italy were based on the mime principles

stemming from the French tradition. Although he never shared Viganò's opinion on rhythmic mime and on its supremacy on technical dancing, it is possible that, by the time he was writing the *Code of Terpsichore*, Blasis had become aware of a new dimension in the use of expressive gesture in the Italian style.

5.0 Conclusion

Sono soprattutto Vigand e Blasis, tra il 1813 e il 1830, i maestri che alla pantomima conferiscono la più alta dignità artistica. L'uno, attraverso il coreodramma, cioè il perfetto equilibrio tra movimento ed espressione, giunge ad attuare la cosiddetta "pantomima danzata". L'altro, [Blasis] attraverso l'esperienza viganoviana e, soprattutto un saggio e ispiratissimo magistero. 32

This assertion reflects the attitude that several dance historians have towards Viganò. The Neapolitan ballet-master is usually regarded as the person who conferred a particular high standard and cultural status on the art of mime in Italian ballet. Although this argument is not disputed, it is the formulation of the thesis which appears to be misleading. Viganò did not create or "invent" a form of theatrical mime, and more particularly, he did not create a vocabulary based on conventional gesture similar to the one still currently used within the nineteenth-century ballets. Although the

only sources providing evidence are Ritorni's chronicles, such as that of *La Vestale*, it can be seen that Viganò's mime was not based on a fixed vocabulary of signs. In this respect it differed from French mime which, apart from being "walked", was, already at the beginning of the nineteenth century, very stylised.

The few contemporary critical sources which exist stress the fact that Viganò supported the use of a "natural" mime language, which could not have fixed schemes, rules or principles. In order to be "natural" the movements derived from the interpretation of the dancers. This is demonstrated by Ritorni's records and by the fact that Viganò had to train his dancers especially.

In affirming that Viganò "conferred on pantomime the highest degree of dignity", Gino Tani and other historians who share the same opinion, seem to imply that, through "coreodramma", the art of mime in ballet received its definitive regulation which, in fact, was reached much later.

Tani's assertion, moreover, draws attention to another point: that is, placing Blasis alongside Viganò, as if the two ballet-masters could represent two complementary sections in the same chapter of dance history. Curiously this seems to be a general problem, for there are other scholars who tend to link the two names. As is demonstrated in Chapter 3 of this thesis, there are several differences between the two men. The
factor which confused dance historians is that they both contributed to the reassessment of mime gesture within theatrical dancing. The only link between Viganò and Blasis arises from Blasis' career as a dancer at La Scala while the former was the resident choreographer. The experience of Viganò's art must have had some effect on Blasis' theories; particularly in relation to natural and expressive gestures. It should be remembered that, in his treatises, Blasis never mentioned or referred to Viganò. This is an important point, which indicates that between the two ballet-masters there might have been substantial differences of opinion about the use and the types of mime. This seems not to be considered by Tani, who affirms ambiguously that it was through "the experience with Viganò", combined with "his inspired teaching", that Blasis conferred dignity on pantomime. Both Chapter 3 and Chapter 6 of this thesis will demonstrate the flaws of this statement.
Chapter 3

Carlo Blasis: the man, the dancer, the choreographer and the teacher.

1.0 Introduction
2.0 An analysis of the source material on Blasis
3.0 Blasis the man
4.0 Blasis the dancer
5.0 Elements of Blasis' choreography: the manuscript of Faust
6.0 Blasis the choreographer: an evaluation
7.0 Blasis the teacher
8.0 Conclusion
1.0 **Introduction**

Despite the copious primary source material on Blasis, such as the corpus of his publications and other items related to his career in dance, the work of this prominent ballet-master has never been extensively analysed. The reasons for this lie both in the scarcity of biographical sources and in the fact that research material is problematic to deal with. Few documents provide accurate information, while some of the more reliable sources present problems of classification, chronology and contextualisation.

The historic events that took place during Blasis' early years, namely from his birth to his appointment as Director of the Dance Academy in Milan in 1837, generated a series of abrupt changes in the man's career that cannot be accurately retraced and documented. The turbulent political situation in Naples after the French Revolution and during the early years of the Napoleonic era forced the Blasis family to move from Naples to Marseilles, where the young Carlo received his artistic education. Unfortunately, in the chaotic atmosphere that accompanied first the transformation of the Neapolitan kingdom into a republic and then the repression of the new state by the forces of the "ancien régime", documents concerning the Blasis family disappeared. Similarly, the first years of Carlo Blasis in Marseilles are not
documented and the only sources of information are some biographical notes which, as discussed below, cannot be considered reliable. Blasis' career both as a dancer and a choreographer also represents a problematic field of research, for the only existing documents are playbills and ballet-programmes scattered in the countries where he toured and worked. To retrace the stages of Blasis' activity in the theatre and to integrate this material with more detailed documentation would provide a new area for research.

Yet, the existing source material allows an analysis of some significant aspects of Blasis' life and career. This chapter examines these aspects, in order to provide further contextualisation to the arguments discussed in both the Second and the Third part of this thesis. At the same time, the biographical account of Blasis puts into relief the man's relation with the art of mime, thus concluding the historical outline of the evolution of "ballet mime" in Italy.

2.0 An analysis of the source material on Blasis

A comprehensive collection of sources directly related to Carlo Blasis does not exist. The Dance Collection of the New York Public Library (NYPL) holds only fourteen programmes, either for ballets in which Blasis appeared as one of the dancers, both as a member of the "corps de ballet" and as principal dancer, or his
choreographic compositions.¹ These items were formerly part of the collection assembled by Cia Fornaroli, a Milanese ballerina from La Scala who married Toscanini's son Walter and moved to New York; they document only twelve appearances of Blasis in Italy and two in Portugal, not illustrating the rest of his activity abroad. Even the source material kept in the museum of the theatre La Scala in Milan does not provide scholars with a complete set of references; the only significant item of the Milanese collection is the manuscript of the choreographic composition Faust, analysed below.

One of the items housed in the NYPL Dance Collection is a biography of the French-Italian ballet master, written in 1871, seven years before his death. This small book, Cenni biografici di Carlo de Blasis was published in a limited and numbered edition to celebrate Blasis' seventy-sixth birthday, on November 4.² In the preface, the publisher informs readers that the content of the publication was extracted from a biographical dictionary, Libro d'oro dei nostri tempi o biografie d'illustri contemporanei, which described the lives and the works of some of the most illustrious Italian men, chosen among lawyers, philosophers, historians, politicians, writers,

¹These are: Gli amori di Adone e Venere, Milano, Teatro alla Canobbiana(1835); Cagliostro, Venice, La Fenice Theatre(1852); Hermosa, Venice, La Fenice Theatre, (1852); Le galanterie parigine, Firenze, La Pergola Theatre(1853); A Diabrinha, Lisbon, S. Carlos Theatre (1857); Fiorina, Lisbon, S.Carlos Theatre(1858).
²Giovanni Berri, Cenni biografici di Carlo de Blasis, Milano, Gernia, 1871.
scientists, poets, artists, professionals, industrialists, etc." of the nineteenth century. A first reading of the Cenni biografici di Carlo Blasis reveals how the author Giovanni Berri, introduced by the publisher's preface as "professor of humanities", had rearranged pre-existing material in a better prose, contributing only one original chapter at the end of the book, describing the ballet-master in his retirement. The pre-existing biographical information which Berri had referred to was extracted mainly from two previous sources: an anonymous summary of Blasis' choreographic and written works, published in 1854 and including extracts and numerous citations from reviews of unquoted newspapers which discussed the life and career of the artist; and the third section of the Notes upon Dancing, published in England in 1847, which deals with the history of the Blasis family. Both the biographical information in Il Genio e le Passioni and that in Notes upon Dancing have many affinities in the way the content is structured and in the style of the prose. It is possible that the anonymous biographical sketch and the third

3 Anon., Libro d'oro dei nostri tempi o biografie d'illustri contemporanei, Milano, Gernia, 1870, frontispiece.
4 See Giovanni Berri, op.cit., pp. 34-46.
5 Anon., Il Genio e le Passioni. Delle composizioni coreografiche e delle opere letterarie di Carlo Blasis. Coll'aggiunta delle testimonianze di vari scrittori e di una sua dissertazione inedita sovra le passioni e il genio, Milano, Presso i Fratelli Centenari, 1854.
section of the English book were written by Carlo Blasis himself or under his direction. This hypothesis is suggested by several factors.

2.1 The biographical accounts on the Blasis family, in Notes upon Dancing (1847), Il Genio e le Passioni (1854), and in Raccolta di varj articoli letterarj (1858) are identical. 7

2.2 The biographical accounts mentioned above are all anonymous, despite the fact that other biographical articles published in Blasis' books are generally credited to both writers and journalists of the nineteenth century. 8

2.3 The prose used in these biographical sketches is similar to that used by Blasis in his treatises.

2.4 An essay signed by Blasis and probably written around 1847, containing a passage which recurs identically in each of the biographical accounts mentioned above.

7 Compare Carlo Blasis, Notes upon Dancing, pp. 84-141, Anon., Il Genio e le Passioni, unnumbered pages and Anon., Raccolta di varj articoli letterarj scelti fra accreditati giornali italiani e stranieri ed opinioni di distinti scrittori che illustrarono l'opera di Carlo Blasis, Milano, Oliva, 1858, pp. 32-47.

The essay was a tribute to the memory of Blasis' father Francesco. It is included in a collection of articles on the Blasis family, which is neither Il Genio e le Passioni nor the Raccolta di varj articoli letterari and which is bound together with a copy of Notes upon Dancing in the music and dance collection of the Biblioteca Nazionale in Florence. The passage mentioned above reads as follow.

Forzato dal vortice della rivoluzione che allora infuriava egli [Francesco Blasis] fu obbligato a partire per la Francia. Quivi, fermatosi a Marsiglia, egli fu chiamato semplicemente Blasis, da che il "De" potevva offendere certe orecchie.

In the third section of Notes upon Dancing the same passage is translated in English

Being forced within the vortex of the revolution that then raged, overwhelming or disturbing both men and things, he was obliged to depart to France, and, having settled in Marseilles, he was thenceforward called simply Blasis, the "De" having been found to give offence to certain ears.  

Another interesting element which may support the theory expounded above, is the tendency to overrate the achievements of the Blasis family in all the biographical accounts. An ostentatious link with an aristocratic family of ancient Rome or even with Roman emperors is stressed several times in the text, hence the particle

⁹Carlo Blasis, op. cit., p.87.
"de" before the surname which in Italy denotes an aristocratic family name and which occurs also in the passage analysed. Finally, the art of Francesco Blasis, Carlo's father, a modest composer who left a limited corpus of works, is often compared to that of a Mozart or any other musical genius.

The tendency to overrate and overstate characterises also the later work by Berri. A comparison of his book to both publications shows how the author adopted and, in some occasions, faithfully reproduced parts of the previous writings without taking into consideration any other source of information, such as the biography of Blasis published in 1825 in Venice, as part of the Annals of the Teatro La Fenice, where the artist then danced. Another characteristic of the Cenni biografici di Carlo de Blasis is that throughout the whole book no date is mentioned or referred to. This feature, however, does not apply only to Berri's work but reflects a general problem concerning Blasis' biographical material. The chronology of events included in Il Genio e le Passioni is, in fact, approximate, and summarises under a few chronological headings several events in the life of the ballet-master. In the third section of Notes Upon Dancing there are no date references other than those related to the publication of Blasis' books.

10Francesco Locatelli, 'Carlo Blasis' in Almanacco del Teatro La Fenice, Venezia, La Fenice, 1825, unnumbered pages.
The copy of Berri's book kept in the NYPL Dance Collection presents an interesting difference. Along the margins of each page someone has written dates corresponding to the events reported in the text. The handwriting is the same as that of the inscription on the frontispiece, which states that the book is "rarissimo", or very rare. It is possible, therefore, that the handwriting is that of Walter Toscanini, Cia Fornaroli's husband and Arturo's son, to whom a letter is also addressed, enclosed with the book. This letter, unsigned and incomplete, dated 27 February 1950, communicates the dates of Blasis' birth and death as registered in the Communal Archives of Milan. According to that source, Blasis was born in Naples on 4 November 1795. The reliability of the Milanese archives is only superficial, however, for it must be remembered that in many instances during the nineteenth century data were transmitted to the archives by the person concerned, and were seldom verified, especially if the related documents had disappeared before the unification of the Italian kingdom (1861) for reasons of a political and social kind. The biographical notes about the dancer Carlo Blasis in the Annals of the Venetian theatre La Fenice, report 1794 as the year of Blasis' birth; in the third section of Notes upon dancing that date is postponed to the year 1803.\(^{11}\)

This information is the less convincing, being in a book

\(^{11}\)Carlo Blasis, op.cit., p.87.
written by Blasis himself, who had much interest in changing the date to appear as an exceptionally talented artist who started his career at a very young age.

The hand-written notes along the margins of Berri's book also provide the scholar with some references other than dates: the author shows a remarkable knowledge of the historical sources on Blasis, for in several instances he adds some comments and some personal footnotes, stating in which book, archive or collection source material confirming Berri's writing can be found.

3.0 Blasis the man

Despite what the embellishments in the biographical sources might suggest, Carlo Blasis was neither a common personality nor a mean dancer. Evidence of this is his name reported in ballet programmes of important European theatres of that time, and his documented collaboration with some of the celebrated ballet-masters of the period. His family provided him with an extensive artistic education - demonstrating the wealthy means of his parents - which allowed him to maintain a variety of interests for the whole of his life. It would not be correct, however, to think that his was a special case, for whenever a family could afford it, this was the usual procedure for the education of a young artist; Salvatore Viganò, nephew of Boccherini, had had a similar
preparation, in the same way as many actors and singers of the time.

The cultural background concurrent with Blasis' early life reflected the ideas of the eighteenth century and, more particularly, the principles of the Italian "Classicismo", an artistic current which had derived from the Italian "Illuminismo", the equivalent of the Enlightenment. The fundamentals of the "Classicismo" movement were the continuous quest for a perfect and ideal beauty in every form of art on the one hand, and the denial of human feelings and emotions as artistic subject matter, on the other. The supporters of the "Classicismo" thereby rejected the presence of human passions within works of art; hence the subsequent criticism from the Romantics who saw the "Classicismo" as cold and non-expressive. The biographical material reveals that one of Carlo Blasis' teachers was the sculptor Antonio Canova,\textsuperscript{12} whose works, in the fashion of single sculptures or statuary groups reproducing models from ancient Greece, are considered both the manifesto and the epitome of Italian "Classicismo".

Even the ballet-masters who taught the young Blasis based their teaching on similar principles, for they instructed him in the study of "French dancing" or the "danse d'école", based on pure technique and on the geometrical harmony of lines, that same type of dancing

\textsuperscript{12}Carlo Blasis, \textit{Notes upon Dancing}, London, Delaporte, 1847, p.89.
Angiolini had billed as "mechanical". Blasis' biography in *Notes upon Dancing* reports that among these teachers were Pierre Gardel of the Paris Opera and the celebrated ballet-master Jean Dauberval, one of the last exponents of "ballet d'action". According to the text, Dauberval "presided over the Dancing School of Bordeaux" at the time the Blasis family settled in that town. This is not confirmed in Berri's biography, which reports only that Blasis appeared at the Grand Théâtre in Bordeaux. The collaboration with Dauberval is particularly relevant in reassessing the dates of Blasis' life. The French choreographer died in 1806, hence Blasis could not have been born in 1803, as reported in *Notes Upon Dancing*; consequently, 1815 could have not been the year the Blasis family settled in Bordeaux, as suggested by one of the hand-written notes in Berri's book, unless Carlo Blasis never studied with Dauberval. According to the list of roles in *Il Genio e le Passioni*, however, Blasis danced in many works by Dauberval, *La Fille Mal Gardée* (1792) among them. In this ballet he portrayed more than once the character of Colin or Colas and he also restaged the work several times in his life with particular success. It would be improbable, therefore, that Blasis did not have any direct contact with Dauberval, and it is

---

13 Carlo Blasis, op.cit., p.90.
14 Giovanni Berri, op.cit., p.8.
15 Anon., op.cit., unnumbered pages.
16 In Anon., op.cit., unnumbered pages, it is reported that he restaged the ballet at La Fenice Theatre in Venice.
likely that this was possibly the way through which Blasis became acquainted with "expressive" dancing, based on mime.

Blasis' "Classicismo" education was the main reason for his interest in enlarging his cultural horizons, as the variety of interests was one of the prerequisites of the "Classicismo" man. It was this education that made Blasis what today would be called a "Renaissance man". The proof of this universal talent is the number of written works dealing with different subjects, ranging from music to art history and from anatomy to philosophy, as well as his writings on dance.\footnote{See Chapter 5 for a listing of his written works.}

 Despite living in the Romantic era, Blasis preferred to maintain the old principles of his education, rather than to adopt the new ideas. He had a profound faith in the "classical" precepts of ballet technique. For Blasis, both the geometry of the lines and the harmony of well-executed movements transcended the aesthetics of the period. Blasis' classroom teachings remained essentially "classical", though, paradoxically, it was upon this "classical" technique that dancers such as Sofia Fuoco, Carlotta Grisi and Fanny Cerrito - all pupils of Blasis - created the newer style of "Romantic" dancing.

Another proof of Blasis' attachment to the Italian "Classicismo" comes from the subject matter he usually considered for his choreographies. With the exception of
A Diabrinha (1857), Ileria (1854) and Fiorina (1858), billed as either "ballo romantico" or "ballo fantastico", thus near to the Romantic formulae, all the remaining titles listed either in Il Genio e le Passioni, or in Notes upon Dancing, reveal their adhesion to the canons of the "Classicismo".

4.0 Blasis the dancer

Although the scarcity of sources does not allow an extensive analysis of Carlo Blasis' dancing career, it is still possible to reconstruct an approximate account of Blasis' appearances on stage, quoting and comparing information from different sources. Both Berri and the author of the biographical account published in the Almanacco del Teatro La Fenice agree in reporting that Blasis made his debut at the opera house in Marseilles, on 6 February 1809, as an "enfant prodige". The success he received convinced his father to present the child in other French theatres, among which the Bordeaux Opera. According to Tani, around 1815 the young dancer arrived in Paris to study with the celebrated Gardel at the Académie Royale de Musique, where he made his Parisian debut with great success. Blasis remained at the Paris

19Carlo Blasis, op.cit., p.105.
20Giovanni Berri, op.cit., p.4 and Francesco Locatelli, op.cit., unnumbered page.
Opéra for three years, appearing together with well-known dancers of the period, such as Bigottini, Gosselin, Legros, Albert and Coulon. Discussing Blasis' activity at the Paris Opera, Tani refers to an extract from a French newspaper and affirms that

i suoi successi furono tanto più gloriosi in quanto egli era il più giovane dei suoi compagni; ma i doni di natura, le lezioni dei grandi maestri, l'indefeso lavoro, i continui studi su tutto ciò che si riferisce alle arti del ballo e della pantomima, gli facevano acquistare i mezzi per riuscire nei vari generi della danza e una facilità d'esecuzione straordinaria. 22

Because of a disagreement with the organisation of the Parisian theatre, Blasis left France to go to perform in Italy. After having appeared in Venice, Rome, Florence, and Turin, he was engaged at La Scala Theatre in Milan where he danced from 1818 to 1820 and then from 1822 to 1823. From 1824 to 1826 Blasis danced at the Regio Theatre in Turin and in 1826 he was invited for the first time to dance in London, where he appeared at the King's Theatre, at the Drury Lane and at the Covent Garden. In 1827 he and his wife, Annunciata Ramaccini, danced at the S. Carlo Theatre in Naples, where he injured his left foot. Despite the injury, the following year he was first in London and then in Paris. The foot, however, did not recover and after a brief tour in Venice, Naples, Modena and Genoa, Blasis was forced to give up his

dancing career. According to Francesco Locatelli, this happened in 1831.\textsuperscript{23}

While the biographical account in the third section of \textit{Notes upon Dancing} reports a listing of the most important roles Blasis danced, in Berri's book there is no mention of the characters Blasis portrayed on the stage. In \textit{Il Genio e le Passioni} the roles are listed in the same way as in \textit{Notes upon Dancing}, and this similarity is another element supporting the hypothesis that in both cases the author of the text was Blasis himself. Unfortunately there are no press-related sources that give an account of Blasis' dancing. The list of roles is, however, a telling document, for the variety of characters portrayed on stage gives a clear idea of the versatility of the artist.

His repertoire included classical parts such as Téléméaque in the ballet with the same title, Mars in \textit{Les Filets de Vulcain}, the title role in \textit{Le Jugement de Pâris}, Zéphyre in \textit{Psyché}, and Mercure in \textit{Jeux d'Eglé} on the one hand; comic roles such as Colin in \textit{La Fille Mal Gardée}, the Officier in Pierre Gardel's \textit{La Dansomanie}, Lubin in the comic ballet \textit{Annette et Lubin}, and Figaro in his own choreographic version of \textit{Le Mariage de Figaro} on the other. As reported in \textit{Notes upon Dancing} in a footnote:

\textsuperscript{23}Francesco Locatelli, op.cit., unnumbered page.
the biographical information down to this point is extracted from various periodicals published at Bordeaux: particularly from the *Mémorial Bordeleis*[sic], and the *Indicateur*.24

Both these publications have disappeared and, therefore, the dates on which young Blasis danced these roles cannot be determined. The footnote indicates also that Blasis danced these roles when in Bordeaux. What his repertoire was in other European theatres is not documented. A significant feature of the list is that some of the parts involved a certain amount of mime action, especially within a comic ballet such as *La Fille Mal Gardée* (1792) and Gardel's *La Dansomanie* (1800). In the same footnote of *Notes upon Dancing* is written:

> it may be here observed that young Blasis, upon reflecting what important assistance Pantomimic gesture derives from a knowledge of theatrical declamation, studied that art, taking for his models Talma, Lafont, Joanny and Martelly. He recited, in a small amateur theatre, the *Oedipe* of Voltaire, and Oreste in the tragedy of *Iphigénie*, by Guimonde de la Touche.

This is the only mention of Blasis studying mime, in order to apply that learning to the art of dance. That he had to refer to the models of celebrated actors of the time suggests that mime dancing was not considered and practised as an independent form of art and needed to be extrapolated from a different context. Blasis as a mime dancer, however, is a topic which needs a particular

24*Carlo Blasis, Notes upon Dancing*, London, Delaporte, 1847, p.91.
analysis. For this reason, Blasis as a mime dancer is discussed and analysed in chapter Six of this thesis, which is entirely devoted to the Blasis and the art of mime.

5.0 Elements of Blasis' choreography: the manuscript of Faust

The two lists of ballets created by Blasis are among the few sources documenting his activity as a choreographer. Unfortunately, neither listing provides a classification by genre nor a description of the ballets, which are classified under various headings written in a peculiar English: "Epic or Heroic", "General Historic", "Mythologic", "Anacreontic", "Greco" and "Roman-Historic", "Mixed-Historic", "Oratorial or Biblical", "Oriental", "Poetic", "Mixed Character", and "Semi-Serious". The element that immediately draws attention is that the multiple interests of Carlo Blasis are clearly reflected in the various genres of his ballets. His love for opera and for drama, for instance, inspired the creation of an "azione danzata" or danced action - as the term ballet was not frequently used in Italy at that time - entitled Count Almaviva(1825). This work, belonging to the "semi-serious" category derived obviously from both the Beaumarchais trilogy on Figaro and either Paisiello's or

Rossini's *Barbiere di Siviglia*. Ballet-librettos and programmes related to the choreographies mentioned above are scarce, usually being housed in some private collection. However, even these items do not illustrate the way Blasis created and structured his compositions, containing only a synopsis of the plot.

One of the most significant documents concerning the choreographic activity of Carlo Blasis is a manuscript kept in the archives of the museum of the theatre La Scala in Milan. The work is a complete scenario for a ballet, the subject of which derived from Goethe's *Faust*. The manuscript is dated 1835, a proof of how Blasis was well attuned to the cultural events of his time, as Goethe's book had been published in two parts, one in 1808 and the other in 1832. The ballet, entitled *Mefistofele ossia il Genio del Male* ("Mephistopheles or the Evil Genius") was never performed in Italy as it provoked doubts among the impresarios who did not know of Goethe or of this literary work. Added to which the ballet was conceived in a way which contrasted with the ballet and theatre canons of the time: it did not take into account the compulsory "numbers" for the soloists; it needed complex and expensive settings and was, according to the intentions of the author reported in his preface,²⁶ a "symbolic and philosophical" work of theatre

- a very suspect feature, especially during the politically turbulent days of Italian Risorgimento.

The project had been originally handed in to the impresario of the theatre La Scala, the Duke Visconti, in 1835. Thirteen years later, while the ballet *Mefistofele* by Jules Perrot was performed at the same theatre, Blasis gave the manuscript to a friend, the lawyer Curti. In publishing a few excerpts of the manuscript in the newspaper *La Fama*, Curti asserted that the idea of Blasis could have been more successful than Perrot's creation.27 After that date (1848) the papers disappeared to return to La Scala only in 1956, as a present from the French actress Vera Körene.

The document consists of eighteen papers written in a very crabbed hand by Blasis describing the action; eighteen papers in another handwriting, supposedly that of Blasis' father; and thirty nine papers of different sizes concerning sketches for costumes, settings, machinery and, what is more important, some elementary attempts at notating the choreography of the principal scenes also drawn by Blasis. The manuscript is bound in brown cardboard on which is engraved in gold "Faust di C. Blasis", while the first page written by Blasis bears a different title: "Mefistofele ossia il Genio del Male/ Ballo Poetico Filosofico/ in nove

---

Quadri, di Carlo Blasis/ Origine, Argomento e Allegoria del soggetto".\textsuperscript{28}

Although the title appears to be in Italian, the text of the manuscript is in French, with the exception of some notes along the margins of the sketches. The description of the plot is in the same prose as that of the various manuals and treatises. The treatment of the subject reproduces only part of the story conceived by Goethe. Divided into eight acts, the ballet focuses mainly on the episode of Margarethe and that of Faust's journey to different parts of the world including the underworld. It is surprising that in the fourth section of his \underline{Code of Terpsichore}, published seven years before the manuscript was handed in to the impresarios, Blasis declared that a ballet composer should never take a literary work such as Goethe's \textit{Faust} as the inspiration for a ballet; according to the author, the "Romantic" elements of the story were not suitable to a ballet scenario.\textsuperscript{29} In approaching \textit{Faust}, however, Blasis did not consider the Romantic side of Goethe's poem. On the contrary he approached the project of the ballet from a "Classicismo" point of view, as he explains in the first page of the manuscript

\textsuperscript{28}Literally "Mephistopheles or the Evil Genius/Philosophical and poetical ballet/ in nine Parts, by Carlo Blasis/Origins, Content and Allegory of the subject".

\textsuperscript{29}Carlo Blasis, \underline{The Code of Terpsichore}, London, Bulcock, 1828, p.165.
Oltre a ciò essa offre incomparabilmente ogni genere di illusione teatrale.\textsuperscript{30}

The sentence reveals that one of the most appealing factors of the project was that theatrical magic or "illusion comique". In choosing Goethe's story the young and ambitious choreographer had considered the chance it provided of impressing audiences with theatrical effects and a large deployment of dancers. In translating the poem into danced action Blasis aimed also to portray on stage the two main genres of theatre, "genre sentimental" and "genre admiratif" which, in his opinion, were both encompassed by Goethe's work; the reference to the two genres would have also presented him to the audience of La Scala as a cultured man. Blasis believed that mythological dramas and medieval tales, to which the public of that time was getting more and more accustomed, could represent the right device for showing the "illusion comique" at its highest level. Yet, to refer to medieval tales, a characteristic factor of the Romantic movement, did not necessarily mean, in Blasis' opinion, to create a "Romantic" ballet in the style of La Sylphide which, in the meanwhile, had been premiered both in Milan in 1827, with choreography by Louis Henry, and in Paris in 1832, with choreography by Filippo Taglioni. If considered from this perspective, the apparent contradiction between the passage from The Code of Terpsichore, considering Goethe's work as an unsuitable

\textsuperscript{30}Carlo Blasis, Faust, manuscript, 1835, p.1.
source of inspiration for a ballet, and the written plan for *Faust* does not hold.

It is difficult to express an opinion on Blasis' project. The manuscript reveals that the choreographer wrote a work in the choral genre, indicating also how much Viganó's canons had influenced Blasis' way of composing a ballet. An example is the scene of the witches' Sabbath which, as recorded in one of the drawings notating the choreography, is rendered in a spectacular manner similar to that of the same scene in Viganó's only "fantastic" work, *Il noce di Benevento*, as described by Carlo Ritorni. The sketch illustrates a large deployment of masses, a characteristic element of "coreodramma", moving on different levels of the sets showing a narrow valley between high mountains. A set of directions related to that scene is written on a little sheet which does not belong to the main corpus of the manuscript. It reports that for the witches' scene several exotic animals were also needed, camels among them. Other scenes were entrusted to the "corps de ballet", such as the "Dance of the shades", and the whole work involved a continuous use of mechanical

---

31Music by J. Süßmeyer. Premiered in Vienna in 1802, and then restaged at La Scala theatre, Milan, 1817.  
33Carlo Blasis, op.cit., plate no.18.  
34Carlo Blasis, op.cit., plate no.8.
effects to ensure a succession of quick and surprising changes.

6.0 Blasis the choreographer: an evaluation

Blasis had had several opportunities for studying and absorbing the elements characteristic of Italian theatrical dancing. In 1818 he had made his debut at La Scala in Milan, dancing in Viganò's "coreodramma" Dedalo.\(^{35}\) The engagement with the Milanese theatre lasted till 1823. During this period Blasis appeared as principal dancer in many ballets choreographed both by Viganò and by other celebrated choreographers of the time, such as Gaetano Gioja, Giuseppe Bocci, Jean-Pierre Aumer and Giovanni Galzerani. With the exception of Viganò, all the other choreographers were representatives of a particular kind of theatrical dancing, from which developed the genre of "ballo grande" with which is generally identified Italian theatrical dancing of the nineteenth century. It is interesting to note that after Viganò's death in 1821, Italian ballet moved towards new styles and new formulae partly because of Blasis' influence, although not through his experiments as a choreographer. With the appointment of Blasis as Director of the Milanese Dance Academy in 1838, pure dancing, previously rejected by Viganò, returned to fashion. In Italy, the Milanese Dance Academy provided the standard

reference for technique, style and taste in ballet. Hence, the choreographers of Blasis’ period at La Scala (1837-1850) had to face the problem of an artistic compromise between classical "French" dancing and traditional rhythmic "Italian" mime action. The result established the definitive structure of the Italian "ballo grande": a vast, spectacular production, generally in four, five or even six acts, in which the action was mainly mimed, interspersed with incidental dances. The difference from the contemporary French Romantic ballets, where the mime action and the dancing were integrated in a different proportion, is evident.

It would be a mistake, however, to consider Blasis as a forerunner of the "ballo grande". The canons and the basic structure of that genre of theatrical dancing came into being immediately after Viganò’s death, resulting from the attempts at perpetuating the "coreodramma" tradition. Blasis worked on Faust between 1825 and 1830, as has been suggested by the research of Giampiero Tintori.36 In those years the works of Gioja, Aumer and Galzerani, generally considered as the "creators" of the "ballo grande" had already superseded Viganò’s ballets in the memory of the audiences.37

Despite producing an extensive number of ballets, Carlo Blasis never gained fame as a choreographer in

36Giampiero Tintori, op.cit.
Italy. His choreographic debut took place in 1819 at La Scala, when he was still a young member of the "corps de ballet". The title of the ballet was *Il Finto Feudatario* based on a score by Blasis' father, Francesco. The bad reception of his first work, certainly due to lack of experience, influenced the rest of Blasis' choreographic career at La Scala. During the thirteen years Blasis directed and taught at the Dance Academy attached to La Scala he composed, for his pupils, three hundred works, mainly interpolations to operas or to ballets by other choreographers.38 None of these, however, was seen to make a decisive contribution, for they are not even mentioned in the detailed chronicles of the theatre39. These works can be classified in three categories: the "ballabile", a balletic term which means a dance for the "corps de ballet"; the "divertissements" to be inserted in operas - whereas ballet in operas represented a lesser genre of choreography; and little duets and solos to be integrated within the context of someone else's choreography. An example of Blasis' "ballabile" is described in *Notes upon Dancing*.

Upon the occasion of the coronation of the emperor of Austria in 1838 as king of Italy, Blasis, being commanded to prepare a grand theatrical spectacle at La Scala, composed aresco, Il Genio e le Passioni. Delle composizioni coreografiche e delle opere letterarie di Carlo de Blasis, Milano, Presso i Fratelli Centenari, 1854, p.22.
"ballabile", representing the Lombard and the Venetian people, who had arrived in Milan to witness the rejoicings. This grand movement was executed by one hundred and thirty-two dancers, male and female; and perhaps never did any composition of the kind display more pomp and variety; two-thirds of the whole company consisted of pupils from the Academy.⁴⁰

Outside La Scala things were not different. Although Blasis was a prolific choreographer his name is not included in any of the lists of celebrated ballet-composers published in books that, at the turn of the century, summed up nineteenth-century dance activity in Italy.⁴¹ At the Argentina theatre in Rome, in 1854, Blasis' ballet Ileria was performed for less than two weeks, against the four weeks of performance of the more popular Violetta by Antonio Cortesi, despite the "fantastic" and spectacular subject of the former and the dancing in it of the acclaimed Giovanni Lepri, one of Blasis' best pupils, and teacher of Enrico Cecchetti.⁴²

Foreign audiences might have been more indulgent with Blasis the choreographer, as proved by the amount of ballets he staged in various European countries.⁴³ According to Giovanni Berri, Blasis was invited to Moscow

⁴³ See Gastone Vuillier, La Danza, Milano, Tipografia del Corriere della Sera, 1899, pp.338-362.
⁴⁴ The information is given in a letter from Giovanni Lepri to the impresario Giovanni Lanari, dated January, 14, 1854, Florence, private collection.
⁴⁵ Anon., Il Genio e le Passioni. Delle composizioni coreografiche e delle opere letterarie di Carlo de Blasis, Milano, Presso i Fratelli Centenari, 1854, p.17.
where he managed to stage his Faust in 1858. The NYPL Dance Collection houses a programme, dated 1856, for the ballet Faust, as performed in Warsaw. It could be that Berri confused the Moscow engagement with the previous Polish one, as both had followed an invitation from the Tsar Alexander II. The programme reports that the ballet was billed as "Romantic", and was divided in five acts and nine scenes. What was originally supposed to be a "philosophical" work, therefore, had been turned into a Romantic ballet and the reasons for this change remain unknown. It is possible that Blasis had adapted his work to match the popular taste of the time to which he had become accustomed while directing the Milanese Academy and teaching some of the most celebrated "Romantic" ballerinas.

An interesting feature of the Polish programme is that among the composers who provided the music for the ballet is Francesco Antonio de Blasis, Carlo's father. The eighteen sheets contained in the manuscript of Faust, and written by Francesco Blasis, are an opera libretto entitled Marguerite/ Episode de Faust/ Opera/ En trois actes/ Musique de F.A.de Blasis/ Membre du Conservatoire de Naples et de plusieurs Academies litteraires et artistiques d'Italie, de France et d'Angleterre. These

44G.Berri, Cenni biografici di Carlo de Blasis, Milano, Gernia, 1871, p.17. The date is handwritten.
46Carlo Blasis, Faust, Milano, manuscript, 1835, pp.20-38.
papers suggest that Francesco de Blasis had composed, or attempted to, an opera entitled Faust, hence the title on the folder of Blasis' Mefistofele. Giampiero Tintori, Director of the museum of La Scala, mentions that in 1856, the same year that the ballet Faust was premiered in Warsaw, Francesco de Blasis' opera was also performed in that town. Tintori does not give any evidence to prove this assertion, and it is probable that he considered the ballet programme as an opera one. It is possible, however, that in order to pay a tribute to his father, dead five years before, Carlo Blasis had asked three ballet composers whose names appear in the programme, Luigi Casamorata, Francesco Bajetti and Giovanni Viviani, to restore his father's work.

7.0 Blasis the teacher

The lack of source material has led dance historians to concentrate on one aspect of Blasis' career, namely his activity as teacher. Blasis' written works dealing with the rules and the principles of the dance practice, constitute, in fact, reliable sources of documentation alongside the recollections and the recorded tokens of esteem of Blasis' contemporaries. Yet, dance historians seem not to be able to distinguish between Blasis' activity as a pedagogue and that of Blasis as a dance theorist. Although Blasis' written works deal with the

"Giampiero Tintori, op.cit., p.5."
principles he taught and put into practice through his teaching, they do not provide any evidence of the practical teaching itself. In writing the *Traité* or the *Code of Terpsichore*,\(^4\) Blasis did not intend to pass on to posterity a method of teaching with a practical dimension; although his treatises deal with technical elements of the dance practice, they remain theoretical works, with only a general didactic purpose. Those manuals provide only a partial documentation of Blasis' activity as a teacher, namely the general rules of his art. In order to find more evidence on the topic, therefore, one must take into account other factors of evidence.

Blasis maintained the post of teacher and Director of the Imperial Dance Academy attached to La Scala theatre in Milan from 1838 to 1851. This fact is, in itself, a proof of his celebrated teaching qualities. Founded in 1813, the Imperial Dance Academy was the second dance school at professional level in Italy, the first being the school attached to the S.Carlo theatre in Naples, opened in 1812. Prior to Blasis' arrival the teaching staff, including the "refining" teacher and the Director, were changed every five years. Once Blasis and his wife, Annunziata Ramaccini, took over, the rule, by general request, was discarded. The motivation provided,

according to the chronicles of La Scala collected by the Italian scholar Luigi Rossi, was that Blasis' teaching was "insuperable". Further evidence of Blasis' teaching qualities can be found in the list of famous dancers of the nineteenth century who moved to Milan in order to attend Blasis' classes during the thirteen years at La Scala

Fanny Cerrito, Carlotta Grisi, Sofia Fuoco, Lucile Grahn, Augusta Maywood, Claudina Cucchi, Amalia Ferraris, Amina Boschetti, Carolina Rosati, Ippolito Montplaisir, Giovanni Lepri, Pasquale Borri.\(^4\)

One of those, Claudina Cucchi, Giuseppe Verdi's favourite ballerina, wrote in her memoirs

La scuola dei Blasis era tutta di grazia, di brio, e cercava l'effetto della danza nella vaghezza delle movenze. Blasis era un uomo molto colto, letterato egergio ed aveva anche scritto e pubblicato molto intorno all'arte della danza, che conosceva in tutti i più mirabili dettagli, nelle più delicate sfumature, rendendola arte intellettuale e non solo arte ginnastica...

Monsieur Blasis esigeva che le sue allieve si sitruissero, leggessero molto, nei limiti del massimo possibile della coltura e della gentilezza più squisita. Non si accontentava che facessero le "piroettes"[sic] e li "entrechats", ma voleva che ad ogni movimento fosse data quell'impronta caratteristica di grazia e leggiadria, a formare la quale è pur necessario il concorso di una seria educazione dell'animo e dell'intelletto.\(^5\)

\(^4\)Luigi Rossi, op.cit., p.76.
\(^5\)Claudina Cucchi, Vent'anni di palcoscenico, Roma, Voghera, 1904, pp.5-6.
The ballerina's recollections indicate that in his practical teaching Blasis followed the rule expounded in his treatises, namely that a dancer could achieve the best of his art through culture and not through mere technique - a rule which reflected Blasis' "Classicismo" education.

A feature of Blasis' teaching which dance historians have often overlooked is that, as mentioned above, the ballet-master did not create a specific "method". As Fernau Hall affirmed

[Blasis] developed a new Italian school out of the existing French school: Blasis' own original contribution was a wonderful purity of line and a harmonious balance between the angles of the limbs.  

The ballet-master based his teaching on passing on the rules and the principles he had received from teachers such as Jean Dauberval and Pierre Gardel; Blasis added only a personal revision to some elements, but he never created his own system. Another element which is not usually taken into account, is the fact that at the Imperial Academy of Dance Blasis was the "refining" teacher. In the Italian ballet tradition, the "refining" teacher was, and still is, the person in charge of the professional classes; in other words the "refining" teacher did not deal with those exercises meant to

---

develop the artists' technique but taught how to confer artistic qualities on the dance technique, as also stated by Claudina Cucchi in the passage above. It could be affirmed that, although Blasis did not create a method, he certainly created a "style" of dancing, which marked Italian ballet of the first half of the nineteenth century.

8.0 Conclusion

This chapter is not a complete biographical and analytical study of Blasis. It provides a frame of reference within which research on the evolution of Italian ballet mime can be conducted. As mentioned in the first paragraph, extensive research on Blasis is needed because, despite the controversy that surrounds his role as a dancer, a choreographer and even as a teacher, the man is one of the most prominent and interesting figures in the history of dance. It is only through a detailed study of Blasis and of his work that his contribution to nineteenth-century dance can be appreciated, in contrast to the much idealised image presented by many dance historians. As indicated in this chapter such research will not be easy, because of scarce primary source material. In addition, references in dance history works are inadequate, both in terms of accuracy and because dance historians tend to consider isolated aspects of Blasis' career.
The brief analysis of Blasis presented in this chapter brings into relief the debt of the ballet-master for his reputation to his own written works. It is in these sources, in fact, that one can find references to his activities, both as dancer and choreographer. No source, apart from Berri's controversial biography, gives evidence of his successes, and failures; the only exception being the few chronicles and personal recollections discussing his teaching career. An analysis of Blasis' corpus,\(^{52}\) reveals how Blasis was the main source for his own biographical accounts, such as that included in Notes upon Dancing, and, therefore, the main source for his posthumous reputation. As many of Blasis' written works deal with principles and rules of theatrical dancing, the man attained great fame as theorist and pedagogue. One might suppose that in drawing particular attention to these two acclaimed aspects of his life, Blasis wanted to obliterate the memory of less successful aspects.

The analysis of some significant aspects of Blasis' life and career reveals that the ballet-master was not involved with the art of mime as much as his predecessor, Salvatore Viganò. The only attempt that Blasis made at creating a ballet in the style of "coreodramma" was the unsuccessful Faust. Although in the manuscript there are no indications about the use of mime, one can suppose

\(^{52}\)See Chapter 5.
that, in the intention of the author, the narrative side of the action would have relied on the language of gesture. After the project failed, Blasis concentrated mainly on choreographing works in which the mime element was totally absent, such as the "pas" and the "ballabile" mentioned above. Some scenarios of Blasis' full-length ballets, however, suggest the presence of mime elements within the danced action. In the first act of *Le galanterie parigine*, for instance, there is a love "dialogue" between the two main characters, Jolicoeur and Argentina, followed by a comic "mime scene".53

The historical account of the origins and the evolution of the language of gesture in Italy from Commedia dell'Arte to Blasis, demonstrates that theatre mime was originally conceived for drama and that it evolved mainly within this context. Only in the second half of the eighteenth century did dance theorists such as Jean Georges Noverre and Gasparo Angiolini refer to that particular form of mime in order to enhance the dramatic and narrative side of theatrical dancing. They did not invent, therefore, another language of gesture for the "ballet d'action", but adopted formulae which existed already. Similarly, Blasis too referred in his written works to principles which did not belong to theatrical dancing. In order to provide more evidence for this assertion, Part Two of this thesis is a detailed

analysis of the major written works on mime in Italy, from Commedia dell'Arte to Blasis.
PART TWO

ANALYSIS OF THE WRITTEN MATERIAL ON GESTURE

(1625–1857)
Chapter 4

Towards a grammar of gesture

1.0 Introduction

2.0 Giovanni da Bonifacio: language of gesture from the everyday (1625)

3.0 The language of gesture on stage:
   *Il Corago* (1628)

4.0 Commedia dell'Arte and the language of gesture:
   Andrea Perrucci's *Dell'Arte Rappresentativa* (1699)

5.0 Luigi Riccoboni's *Dell'Arte Rappresentativa* (1728)

6.0 Vincenzo Requeno: the rediscovery of
   *Chironomia* (1797)

7.0 Gestures and acting: Antonio Morrocchesi's *Lezioni di Declamazione* (1832)

8.0 Conclusion
1.0 Introduction

Research on the codification of the language of gesture in Italy prior to the nineteenth century can be problematic if a term "a quo" is not clearly defined. Treatises on mime and pantomime have been written since ancient times, and the subject never ceased to appeal to theorists and writers throughout the ages. In the previous section, however, it has been demonstrated how significant events of theatre history took place in Italy at the end of Renaissance period; these radical changes marked the beginning of a new era for the performing arts. The Commedia dell'Arte might be thus considered as a satisfactory term "a quo" for this research.

Because of the rebirth of theatre as a professional art, the structure and the content of books dealing with theatre arts were subjected to substantial modifications resulting in innovations in the aims and the focus of the written works. Literary and academic dissertations were replaced with treatises concentrating more on practical aspects of stage-craft, such as the various performing techniques. Mime, being a vital part of acting, was included in the new range of studies. Between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries several attempts were made to give the language of gesture a definitive "grammar" and, by the end of eighteenth century, the
literature on "silent language" relating either to drama or to dance was abundant. It is within this tradition that Blasis' works must be placed and analysed.

The study of gesture, of its meaning and of its use, however, was not exclusive to theatre studies, for it aroused some interest also in the area of social studies. Many authors analysed the language of gesture from different standpoints and their publications had a considerable influence on the writing of subsequent theatre treatises. These non-theatrical dissertations provide a context to the analysis of both the evolution and the codification of theatre gesture in Italy. Works such as L'arte dei cenni,¹ and La mimica degli antichi investigata nel gestire napoletano,² have therefore been included in the analysis, although they do not belong to the history of Italian theatre mime.

One of the major and recurring problems encountered by the scholar concerns the use of an appropriate terminology. Several expressions used in this research are directly derived from a well-affirmed academic tradition. A few terms, nonetheless, need to be explained and clarified in relation to their specific context. This is the case with "codification", a word which has already occurred several times. In the history of theatre arts

¹Giovanni da Bonifacio, L'arte dei cenni, Vicenza, no publisher, 1625.
and in that of theatrical dancing above all, there are two forms of gesture's "codification": written words and illustrations. In this part of the research only the literary descriptions are taken into account, for the illustrations are discussed in Part Three of this thesis.

The problem about written codification consists mainly in the limitation imposed by its relying only on words. Similarly to ballet-steps, evocative, imitative or expressive mime needs a particular explanation which involves not just the description of the movement in its final appearance, but also the more complex process required to achieve that final pose. A description based on words alone or on illustrations alone is often not complete or detailed and it may be inconclusive. The various authors considered in this chapter, from Bonifacio (1625) to Morrocchesi (1832), were aware of such difficulties and constantly tried to circumvent the problem. This may explain why most of the treatises were written in a discursive way, including a great deal of historical, literary and theoretical argumentation. This approach, which seems to be the recurring solution each one of those authors adopted, was continued by Blasis, as demonstrated in Chapter 5.
2.0 Giovanni da Bonifacio: language of gesture from the everyday (1625)

Although references to the language of gesture and its meaning can be found in various dancing treatises of both early and late Renaissance, the first work entirely devoted to the subject is dated 1625. The author, Giovanni da Bonifacio, was a jurist from the northern Italian town of Vicenza who, like many other cultured men of his time, had a wide range of interests. Among them, the use and the signification of arm and hand movements particularly drew his attention. As Bonifacio was a member of one of the Academies of Arts and Sciences, which in the seventeenth century could be found in all parts of Italy, he considered the subject of his interest suitable for a dissertation, which was published under the title *L'arte dei cenni*.

A pedantic introduction in the form of a dedication to colleagues of the Accademia Filarmonica in Vicenza precedes the two-part study; the first part deals with a syntactical description of each gesture, while the second explains how those movements can be applied to the liberal arts. The dissertation begins with five chapters which give a general description of the subject. In these five chapters the author states the importance of the silent idiom, its dignity as an ancient art, and explains the meaning of words such as "cennno, atto, gesto,
sembiante e modo", which in Italian language are five different nuances for the word "gesture". Each one of the remaining thirty-five chapters of the first part is related to a part of the human body, from forehead to feet, so that each movement is classified and analysed according to the physical part involved. The chapters are subdivided under heads concerning various movements or "cenni". It is interesting to note that simple physical gestures, such as the nodding of the head, are classified as gestures alongside several metaphorical expressions, as in the case of "avere la nebbia intorno al capo" - to have fog around the head - which in colloquial language stood, at that time, for being confused. In his repertory of headings Giovanni da Bonifacio included also motionless parts of the human body such as the beard, considered as the centre element of an expressive movement, as in the case of "to sleek one's beard", a "cenno" which, according to the author, is performed by the hands but focuses on the beard. The description of the dynamic structure and of the meaning of each gesture is always accompanied by literary quotations ranging from ancient authors to contemporary poets, philosophers and artists. Such a display of knowledge is not just a recurring feature of academic writing of the period, but served a specific purpose. Literary quotations on the subject served several functions: to validate the
importance of the argument; to demonstrate that the language of gesture was not a lesser form of art or a secondary subject of research; and to ratify the scholarly value of the work. At the same time the use of quotations enhanced the prose of the dissertation and, in several instances, provided the writer with a useful device to avoid the descriptive problems mentioned above.

The second section of L'Arte dei cenni, in ten chapters, extends to the application of each gesture and its significance within the liberal arts. Although dance is not considered among the liberal arts, in the eighth chapter, which explores the relationship between gestures and music, there is a short paragraph investigating the importance of gestures in either theatrical or 'social dancing. The same paragraph contains a brief historical account of ancient pantomimes, as practised in Greek and Roman theatre, and a reference to the "Chironomia", defined as a "sort of dance with hands gestures, very similar to those ones in Phyrric dance". The short paragraph in the eighth chapter of L'Arte dei cenni is the only reference in the work to theatre gesture.

Although L'Arte dei cenni was not a manual dealing with the practice and the technique of theatre arts, the description of each gesture is accurate and fully detailed. Giovanni da Bonifacio's analysis of the various movements included, in fact, an attempt to describe the
dynamic process of each gesture. This particular approach to the subject of the dissertation did not aim to teach how to perform the movements discussed: the description of the dynamic of the movements was meant to have "scientific" value, investigating and analysing the movement, and its significance, in full detail. The non-instructional purposes of the book are evident from a first reading; the treatment of the subject is purely analytical, following the example of fashionable academic dissertations of the time.

3.0 The language of gesture on stage: Il Corago (1628)

The publication of treatises and technical dissertations on acting accompanied the rebirth of professional theatre from the first half of the sixteenth century. None of these publications, however, dealt with theatre gesture. The first one to do so, is a manuscript discovered in 1983, Il Corago o vero alcune osservazioni per metter bene in scena le composizioni drammatiche," written between 1628 and 1637. The text, which is anonymous, focuses on the work of a specific person in charge of staging dramatic performances, the "corago" or chorus master, ancestor of the contemporary director. A comparative study of the titles of theatrical works mentioned in the text has helped Paolo Fabbri and Angelo

---

3Paolo Fabbri, Angelo Pompilio, (editors), Il Corago, Università di Bologna, Dipartimento di Musica e Spettacolo, Firenze, Olschki, 1983.
Pompilio, the two scholars who found the manuscript, to fix the dates between which it was written. They also suggested that the writing of *Il Corago* should be credited to several authors, Francesco Rinuccini among them.

The dissertation deals with a set of technical instructions for staging dramas, operas and also dance performances. The aim of the text is to provide the director with a wide range of elements which, combined together should have responded to the different needs of the performances, thus guaranteeing a perfect outcome. The text, articulated in twenty-three chapters in the form of "advertisements" follows the various stages in the construction of a theatrical event.

In Chapter Six three different genres of acting are classified. Along with acting with words and acting with music, is acting with gestures, which is described by the authors as the most ancient genre, known as "pantomimo". Chapter Sixteen, then, is devoted to the art of using gestures while acting. After some general precepts, the text becomes more technical and the principal gestures required on stage are accurately described. This description, together with the directions enclosed, deserves to be analysed.

Devono i gesti essere accompagnati alle parole, cioè se uno parla con un altro in scena non deve gestire verso la parte dove colui non fusse nè
meno con la mano che fusse pura da quella parte, 
ciò se quello con cui parla fusse da man dritta 
non deve gestire con la sinistra con la quale si 
deve sempre sfuggire il gestire poichè fa brutta 
vista vedere uno gestire con la mancina. non di 
meno sarà tal volta permesso quando si avesse la 
mano destra impedita da qualche cagione come da 
zagaglia, quando si rappresentasse ninfa o 
pastore, se bene in tal caso molto meglio 
sarebbe mutarla nella mano sinistra per avere 
libera la destra da gestire. Quando si 
rappresenta un re o un generale non sarà 
sconvengere che l'uno o l'altro e con lo 
scettro e col baston gestissi, poi che meglio 
apparirà agli occhi degli spettatori e sarà più 
maestevole che se tenessero lo scettro e il 
bastone con la mano sinistra. Può venire caso 
tal ora che devino ricevere lettere o fare altra 
azione, nel qual caso non disdirà la ricevino 
con la sinistra.'

The passage contains three fundamentals of the 
language of gesture for the stage: each sentence must be 
accompanied by gestures; the gestures must be "tuned" to 
the action; the choice of the gestures must follow the 
principles of what one could consider the "aesthetics" of 
mime language. In providing an example for the last rule, 
the authors of Il Corago recommend never to use the left 
hand and to avoid gestural actions generally involving 
the left part of the body. By traditional belief the 
"left" was considered to be the side of the devil, hence 
the implication of the adjective "sinister" derived from 
the Italian "sinistra". For this reason, the authors of 
the treatises accepted only a few exceptions to the rule, 
as in the case of shepherds, nymphs and kings whose right

'Paolo Fabbri, Angelo Pompilio, op.cit., p.94
The chapter continues with a more technical analysis of gesture.

Perchè sono differenti gli affetti che si dimostrano con le parole, tali ancora devono essere i gesti con i quali s'accompagnano. L'atto del pregare accompagnerà bene il gesto che sia fatto con ambe le mani, le quali da principio un poco mosse in dentro con le braccia non affatto distese venghino con soavità allargate in fuora, nè disd tal ora nell'istesso tempo inchinare da una banda un poco la fronte. L'atto di orare o di pregare un nume o una deità, come accade nei sacrificii, verrà esser fatto con maggiore sommissione e riverenza: perciò converserà alle volte curvare il petto e gestire con una mano o con due accostandole a quello, come anco di porsi a ginocchioni, che sempre sarà meglio fatto con un solo ginocchio che con due avvertendo sempre di mettere in terra quello che sarà dalla banda degli spettatori per avere occasione di tenergli più che sia possibile volto sempre la faccia. Ne l'atto de l'ira il gesto verrà essere fiero e concitato, movendo la mano con più o manco furia secondo le parol, e questo stesso gesto verrà essere fatto per lo più con muovera la mano verso la persona e scaglierla poi con impeto in fuora alla cadenza dei periodi: inoltre verranno fatti meglio con una mano che con due insieme. Li atti di dolore verranno essere accompagnati con gesto fatto ora con due ora con una mano, e pare che proprio sia il gesto di alzare la mano e lasciarla quasi con la parola abbandonata, non disdicendo anco alle volte il lasciarla da quella mano che casca leggeremente percuotere, ma nel sollevarla in su va fatto molto adagio e con grande accortezza(...)Nelli atti di disperazione il gesto che l'accompagna verrà essere regolatamente sregolato, cioè spesso variato ora stringendosi le mani insieme accostandole al petto poi distendendole a basso, talora scagliandole in fuora quando minacciando quando accostandole al volto per asciugare il pianto, e simili altri detti di sopra.  

5Paolo Fabbri, Angelo Pompilio, op.cit., pp.94-95
Although the description does not cover the wider range of movements which formed the gestural repertoire of actors of the time, the guidelines provided in the passage concerning basic actions, emotions and feelings, such as rage, grief and despair, are a remarkable example of written codification. Each gesture is examined by taking several elements into consideration: the basic dynamic of arm and hand movements; their relation to the rest of the body; the directions that the body must follow according to the given movements; the correct use of both scenic space and stage directions for each gesture.

An interesting feature of the gestures described in the passage is that, despite their theatrical adaptation, they were clearly derived from everyday movements. To cover the face with both hands is the most elementary movement still in use to signify "tears", just as a threatening raised fist is still commonly associated with the idea of "anger". Even some of the body movements complementary to those particular gestures reveal their reference to common habits, as the action of kneeling, related to the gesture for "praying". Such a reference to everyday movements guaranteed the immediate understanding of the language of gesture by the audiences adding, at the same time, a touch of reality to the dramatic action. This is the reason why treatises such as Il Corago
instructed the actors to use "simple" and intelligible gestures rather than more artificial and metaphorical movements.

Mime actions, however, could not just rely on a limited range of movements for the sake of clarity. Aware of the problem, the authors of *Il Corago* included a few instructions dealing with more complex gestures, the purpose of which was to enhance visually the narration of events.

Perché la narrativa comprende molte e diverse azioni, così anco molti e diversi dovranno essere i gesti con la quale s'accompagnano. Accade tal ora di raccontare un duello o una battaglia, nel che si dovrà avvertire ora con tutte e due le mani, ora con una mano fare il gesto, ora con l'altra scompagnatamente, nel qual caso sarà necessario solamente il gestire con la mancina. Tal volta accaderà narrare la morte di qualche eroe et il modo, nel qual caso sarà necessario rappresentare i gesti di colui del quale narra la morte. Un'altra volta bisognerà raccontare qualche caso di allegrezza che doverà accompagnare con gesto allegro che farà con tenere le braccia un poco inarcate e dal mezzo dove l'andrà suavemente accostando, slargarle in fuora con mediocre prestezza rivolgendo talora gli occhi verso il cielo et intorno intorno per significare la sua allegrezza, pregando in un certo modo col movimento della fronte invitare tutte le cose seco a gioire. 6

The reference in the passage to more complex movements, or "compound" gestures, is significant for this is the first time these gestures are considered in an Italian acting treatise. Particular evidence is given

6Paolo Fabbri, Angelo Pompilio, op.cit., p.95
for the specific nature of these gestures by discussing them in a different section of the text, separately from the part dealing with elementary movements. Over the centuries, "compound" gestures became one of the most discussed subjects on which focused the attention of several authors, Gasparo Angiolini among them. Between the seventeenth and the nineteenth centuries the classification and the codification of these movements, their use on stage and their dynamics posed some of the more problematic questions on theatrical mime, dividing the various authors into opposite factions and diverging schools of thought. Interestingly, the authors of Il Corago considered these movements as acceptable elements of the acting technique; only a century later, Gasparo Angiolini expressed his opposition to any use of these gestures which, in his opinion, corrupted the simplicity required for mimed actions and hindered the flow of the dramatic action.

4.0 Commedia dell'Arte and the language of gesture:

Andrea Perrucci's Dell'Arte Rappresentativa (1699)

Within the history of the codification of the language of gesture in Italy, the next text concerned with an analysis of theatrical movement is Andrea Perrucci's Dell'Arte Rappresentativa Premeditata e all'Improvviso, written and published in Naples in 1699.
As the title implies, the book deals with the techniques of both "erudite" theatre, referred to as "arte rappresentativa premeditata", and of Commedia dell'Arte, or "all'improvviso". Andrea Perrucci was a well known author of scenarios for the Commedia from Southern Italy, and as a playwright he had also to stage his own works as well as those of other authors. When this activity drew to a close, he was prompted to record his cumulative theatrical experiences, which resulted in the publishing of *L'Arte Rappresentativa*.

The treatise is twice as large as *Il Corago*, but the basic structure follows that of the previous work, although there is no evidence that Perrucci knew it. Instead of the division into chapters, the content of *Dell'Arte Rappresentativa* is organised according to "regole" or rules. Particularly interesting is Rule XI, entitled "Del Gestire conveniente al Rappresentante" ("On the appropriate set of gestures for the Performer"). The discussion of theatrical gestures which an actor was supposed to know, is preceded by an historical introduction enriched with many quotations mainly derived from works by Greek and Latin poets and philosophers. This follows the fashion already displayed in Da Bonifacio's *L'Arte dei cenni*.

After having compared contemporary actors to ancient "histriones" and having established a correlation between the art of the orator and that of the actor, Perrucci starts his study of the appropriate theatrical movements. The analysis follows the scheme introduced by Da Bonifacio, namely to consider different sets of movements in relation to each different part of the body. In this way, the movements are described one by one starting with those involving the head, among which are the various styles of placing and handling a hat, and ending with those related to the feet. In contrast to L'Arte dei cenni, "metaphorical" gestures are not included, although there are categories here which had not been contemplated before. Many aspects of the rules contained in section XI resemble those already explored in Il Corago. For instance one finds the recommendation of using the right hand instead of the left; a principle here extended to the whole body, which is supposed to start a movement from the left in order to end on the right - a rule which does not seem to consider any action performed with the left side to the audience.

Particularly interesting are the precepts concerning the "positions" the actor has to take and to maintain on stage, which are related to the head, the neck, the breast and the waist. Instead of being dictated by aesthetic reasons, these positions are recommended as
they provide the performer with a natural placement of his body, so that he can attain a wide range of skills while acting with more freedom and apparent ease.

Stia la cervice retta, nè il collo si distenda, perché viene la voce a minuirsi... Il petto stia anche ritto, e non incurvato, se non quando rappresentasse un vecchio, a cui è necessario il piegarsi per dimostrare l'età cadente... La Vita si porti dritta, e con gravità modesta, che non vi sia iattanza. ⁸

An important passage is at the end of the "regola". It consists of the description of "fixed" gestures corresponding to "fixed" theatrical types. Although there is no direct reference to the characters of the Commedia, with the exception of the Captains, the repertoire of gestures is obviously derived from the tradition of that particular form of theatre. According to the author:

Sicche devono essere i gesti nè Sovrani gravi, nelle Donne modesti, nè Vecchi temperati, nè Giovani graziosi, e vaghi, nelle Serve licenziosi, ma regolati, ne i Servi, e astuti vivaci, negli sciocchi inconsiderati; ne i Capitan Bravi stirati, ma anche con termine; nelle Furie violenti, ma stiracchiati; nelle parti dè Santi, o persone Pie, divoti, umili, e costumati; e benchè certa Regola non possi dare a' Ridicoli, se gli ripete che non siano indecenti, lascivi e irriverenti. ⁹

In the chapter, however, there is neither mention of "compound" gestures nor any reference to the movements

⁸Andrea Perrucci, op.cit., p. 124.
⁹Andrea Perrucci, op.cit., p. 126.
which illustrate facts or events not taking place on stage. This omission is hardly surprising, if it is considered that Perrucci was a playwright and a producer, but not a performer; he lacked, therefore, the necessary acting experience to be fully aware of the problem. Less than thirty years after the publication of Perrucci's Dell'Arte Rappresentativa, an acclaimed actor was to fill that gap.

5.0 Luigi Riccoboni's Dell'Arte Rappresentativa (1728)

One of the most celebrated actors and company directors of the late years of Commedia dell'Arte was Luigi Riccoboni, who portrayed on stage the fixed character of the Lover Lelio, and who was assigned the task of forming a new troupe of Italian actors in Paris after the death of Louis XIV. In 1728 the Italian actor, described by Commedia dell'Arte historians as a man of great culture, wrote and published in London a poem in hendecasyllabic verses, divided into six chapters dealing with some basic rules of both stagecraft and acting. The title, Dell'Arte Rappresentativa, is the same as that of Andrea Perrucci's treatise. Unlike Perrucci's book, in which the content is divided according to the differentiation between written or erudite theatre and

---

11Luigi Riccoboni, Dell'Arte Rappresentativa, Capitoli Sei, Parigi, no publisher, 1728.
extemporary acting, Riccoboni's poem took into consideration only one genre of dramatic art, namely that of "commedia all'improvviso". Although the six chapters of the poem are interspersed with several references to the language of gesture and its appropriate use, it is the fourth chapter which deals more specifically with the repertoire of movements an actor should master. Although the use of verses often renders the sense of the text unclear, the concepts are very similar to those expounded in Il Corago and in Perrucci's Dell'Arte Rappresentativa. Riccoboni describes some "characteristic" movements of both simple and "compound" nature, such as those for mercy, prayer and horror and then advises the actor how to interweave gesture and acting.

In addition to the analysis of the language of gesture, Riccoboni emphasises the importance of facial mime, a feature which had not been considered in the previous treatises. In the author's opinion, facial mime is more important than any other form of expressive gesticulation; to substantiate his assertion, Riccoboni refers to a dramatic performance, where the actress is supposed to show the turmoil of her soul passing through several unhappy situations. Instead of an overuse of arm and hand movement, the author recommends the showing of a gradual alteration of the features to convey the emotional response of the character to the events.
Detailed instructions and examples are then given for practising facial mime, such as the use of a mirror in front of which the actor must rehearse the gamut of human feelings.

In contrast to Il Corago and to Perrucci's book, both following the "scientific" analysis of the movement formulated by Giovanni da Bonifacio, Riccoboni's poem does not provide any technical description of the gestures and of their dynamics. In the author's opinion, expressive gesture was only an accessory to acting, accompanying movements being a form of "coloratura" of monologues, "tirades", dialogues and group scenes. A detailed description of the dynamic of each movement is not, therefore, taken into consideration as a relevant topic for the dissertation. Riccoboni stated that there cannot be a non-spoken action on stage, and declared himself against that genre of performance the Latins called "pantomimus". This assertion is interesting, if it is considered that at the same time in France the revival of ancient mime shows constituted one of the most fashionable cultural trends, which eventually led to the formulation of the "ballet d'action". Although Riccoboni was not an illiterate, he did not belong to the intellectual "milieu" where the theories concerning "ballet d'action" were originally enunciated. One must also take into account that Riccoboni operated during the
last years of Commedia dell'Arte, when this theatre genre underwent significant changes. During the first decades of the eighteenth century, the Commedia had become a refined and fashionable form of entertainment sought after by aristocratic and cultured audiences, in contrast to the original "popular" characterisation of the earlier performances of the "commedia all'improvviso". Dell'Arte companies of acknowledged value did not perform on built-for-the-occasion stages any longer and instead, as in the case of Riccoboni's troupe, were given town theatres. Improvised acting had been superseded by written plays, often derived from literary, even erudite sources. Riccoboni's rejection of "non-spoken" acting, which characterised the early, pioneering days of the Commedia, must be considered within this context, from which essential elements, such as the "lazzi", were gradually removed.

6.0 Vincenzo Requeno: the rediscovery of Chironomia (1797)

Although the book Scoperta della Chironomia o L'Arte di gestire con le mani, is not a treatise on mime, its publication played a significant part within the history of the evolution of theatre gesture. Theorists such as Andrea de Jorio and Carlo Blasis referred several times

in their works to the art of Chironomia, crediting the author of the book, the Spanish abbot Vincenzo Requeno, with a great contribution to the research on the ancient art of mime. The abbot claimed in his work that he had rediscovered the rules and the principles of a lost idiom based on hands' gestures, the "chironomia". The etymology of the term derived from ancient Greek, literally meaning "rhythmical use of the hands". Requeno maintained that, in ancient times, chironomia had two different functions: one for the orators in the forum and the other for mime actors on stage. The former aimed at teaching orators to calculate mathematical equations in public; the latter served to train theatre artists in using specific gestures required for the performances.

According to Requeno, the existence of a sign language which conveyed both numbers and letters in ancient civilisations was proved by a text written by the Venerable Bede. The title of this work was De Computo vel Loquela Digitorum and the first printed copy of it, dated 1525, was obviously posthumous. Requeno credited the Venerable Bede with a definitive codification of the hands' sign language. In order to give evidence of his affirmation, the abbot referred to a plate inserted at the end of the De Computo vel Loquela Digitorum. This plate showed a diagram concerning the correspondances between the letters of the Greek alphabet, twenty-seven
Requeno saw in this diagram a key to understand the language of gesture used by Greek and Latin performers in pantomimes. What he did not acknowledge was that the Venerable Bede had explicitly stated that the "Loquela Digitorum" was intended only as a useful and amusing exercise for the mind. The Italian scholar Giovanni Ricci who has recently analysed and edited Requeno's book, has brought into relief that in Bede's work there is no mention of using sign language as a theatre device. One must also consider that at the time the Venerable Bede was writing, the art of pantomime had long disappeared. In addition to which, the system proposed by Bede is an alpha-numeric one, which does not have anything in common with the imitative gestures used by ancient mimes, which were not based on a literal translation of letters into signs.

Despite the flaws of its historical argumentation, Requeno's book can be seen as an important stage in creating a grammar of gesture. The significance of the book resides mainly in the fact that in "rediscovering"
chironomia, the abbot aimed at reviving the ancient art of pantomime, as clearly stated in the seventh chapter of his book. In proposing new theatrical formulae, however, Requeno did not consider the "ballet d'action" as the most natural field of application for his theories. Indeed, it is interesting that the author of Chironomia did not take into consideration the ideas previously enunciated by Angiolini and Noverre. The "pantomimes" which Requeno wanted to revive resembled fashionable amateur "intermezzi" of the time and had nothing in common with ballet performances. The reasons for this particular attitude derive from the coinciding of several factors. It must be remembered that at the time, with the exception of Milan and Venice, the art of "ballet d'action" was not well established in Italy. This was mainly due to the fragmented political and cultural geography of the country during the late eighteenth century. Both large towns such as Rome, under the Pope's conservative regime, and smaller centres such as Parma and Mantua, where Requeno lived in different periods of his life, maintained old theatrical traditions. These were characterised either by a constant fear of the new, often regarded as synonymous with "revolutionary", or by a lethargic attitude towards novelties, depending on the geographical distance from international towns where changes in fashion and art were more rapidly imported and

\[13\] Vincenzo Requeno, op. cit., pp. 87-90.
adopted. In any event, Requeno's theories could not have incorporated those of Noverre or Angiolini, for in the opinion of the abbot, a perfect pantomime had to focus on the chironomia alone, with no concession to other types of movement such as dance.

The book is divided in two sections. The first part is entitled "Dell'arte di gestire con le mani per computare" ("About the art of gesticulating with the hands, in order to calculate"). Despite this title, the first part is an historical account of the origins of chironomia and of its use in ancient civilisations. The only exceptions are the two last chapters of the first section, chapter six and seven, which deal respectively with signs for the left hand to convey the numbers from one to nine together with the tens up to ninety, and the gestures for the right hand signifying the hundreds and the thousands. The second part, entitled "Dell'arte del gestire con le mani necessaria per il risorgimento dell'antica pantomima" ("About the art of gesticulating with the hands in order to revive the ancient pantomime") follows the historical argumentation introduced in the first part. Quotations and literary examples provide the pattern for the discussion of the importance of the lost art. The two final chapters, seven and eight, discuss the reasons for supporting the introduction of chironomia in contemporary pantomimes. More in particular, in chapter
seven the abbot draws the attention of the reader to the lack of perfection with which contemporary pantomime shows were staged. Finally, three plates reproducing the twenty-seven gestures codified by the Venerable Bede provide visual reference to the content of chapters five and six in the first part.

Requено's theories had a notable influence on Carlo Blasis. It is difficult to state when he encountered the abbot's work for the first time. Certainly, this did not happen during his training in France, as there is no mention of chironomia in the first two works dealing with different aspects of theatrical dancing, the 1820 Traité and the 1828 Code of Terpsichore. The first reference to the art of chironomia is made in the summary of the Saggi e Prospetto del trattato generale di pantomima naturale e di pantomima teatrale, dated 1841. Despite the reference, the text of the Saggi e Prospetto does not deal with the topic. Chironomia is eventually discussed in the 1857 L'uomo fisico, intellettuale e morale, where this art is included in a diagram and in a paragraph illustrating the arts as products of the human genius.

12Carlo Blasis, Saggi e Prospetto del trattato generale di Pantomima Naturale e di Pantomima Teatrale, Milano, Guglielmini e Radaelli, 1841.
13Carlo Blasis, L'uomo fisico, intellettuale e morale, Milano, Guglielmini, 1857.
7.0 Gestures and acting: Antonio Morrocchesi's *Lezioni di Declamazione* (1832)

Antonio Morrocchesi is one of the most significant figures in the history of Italian theatre. Tuscan actor, playwright and pedagogue, he lived between 1768 and 1838. In 1791 he made his professional debut as an actor in Florence, after having studied humanities at a Florentine college run by priests. His cultural and artistic growth was therefore imbued with ideas relating to the Italian "Classicismo". The main characteristic of this artistic movement was to adopt the forms of idealised Greek and Roman antiquity and to use them to inform the content of various arts. The outcome was often a hybrid, where new ideas were expressed through a stylised and conventional set of expressive means.

An example can be found in Vittorio Alfieri's tragedies. Alfieri's political belief in one unified Italian nation played a decisive role in the formulation of the theories of "Risorgimento", a political movement which characterised Italian history during the Romantic period (1820-1861). Although Alfieri's ideas can be considered as Romantic, they were still expressed in a "Classicismo" form, namely through metaphors echoing the models of classical dramas. In order to contextualise and to understand Antonio Morrocchesi, the fact that he was an acclaimed interpreter of Alfieri's plays must be taken
into account; also relevant is that he became a model for the next generation of actors who, despite living and operating in the Romantic period, remained professionally attached to the classically inspired teachings of the Tuscan pedagogue. Theatre historians agree in considering Morrocchesi's treatise, the Lezioni di declamazione, as his most valuable contribution to the Italian theatre.

The book, in which he summarised his experiences as both an actor and a teacher, marked a very important step in the evolution of the codification of theatre movement. Six of the fifteen "Lessons" of the manual are devoted to the study of movements, gestures and still poses which were to be included in the actor's repertoire. These "Lessons" are as follows: the Ninth on "Anima e Sentimento"("Soul and Feelings"); the tenth on "Fisionomia"("Physiognomy"); the Eleventh on the "Scena Muta"("Silent Scene"); the twelfth on "Gesti"("Gestures"); the Thirteenth on "Compostezza e passo"("Posture and Walking on Stage"); and the Fifteenth on "Modo di venire, di stare, e di partire dalla scena" ("How to enter, to stay and to leave the stage").

As the headings indicate, the Lessons deal with a virtually complete range of physical activities. Some of them echo the sections devoted to analogous topics in Il Corago (1628) and in Perrucci's Dell'Arte Rappresentativa

17Antonio Morrocchesi, Lezioni di declamazione, Firenze, All'insegna di Dante, 1832.
Like the authors of these works Morrocchesi analysed and explored theatrical situations which could occur during different types of performances. In contrast to them, however, Morrocchesi in his treatise discussed each topic separately from the others and in greater detail, as revealed by the content of the Lessons mentioned above; the Lessons were also interdisciplinary, a feature which had never occurred before.

Another new and significant feature of Morrocchesi's manual were forty plates illustrating the use of theatre gestures to accompany specific lines of dramatic texts. The last twenty plates, for example, depict an entire monologue derived from Alfieri's Oreste. The forty plates established thus a set of codified movements to which many Italian performers referred, dancers among them. Although there are no obvious proofs of Morrocchesi's influence on Blasis, the latter must have been aware of the teachings of the Tuscan pedagogue. The Blasis family spent a long time in Florence and Virginia Blasis, Carlo's sister, was a renowned singer and actress who might have received some of Morrocchesi's precepts. A comparison between the plates of Morrocchesi's Lezioni di Declamazione and the illustrations of the five plates in Blasis' L'uomo fisico, intellettuale e morale (1857) does provide evidence of a possible link between the two artists, as will be argued below.
8.0 Conclusion

This analysis of the Italian literature on movement before Blasis focuses on selected works which represent significant stages in the written codification of theatre gesture in Italy. The sources analysed have been selected according to several factors: the particular nature and structure of the works, which provided the model for other minor written sources of similar content; their significance and their contribution within both theatre literature and gesture literature in Italy; and their strategic chronological position within the history of codified movement, corresponding to artistic, social and cultural changes.

There are texts which have not been included or discussed. A common denominator of these texts is that, as explained above, they reproduced formulae already expounded in one of the major works analysed in this chapter. In 1771, for example, a Trattato completo, formale e materiale del teatro was published in Rome. Its author, Francesco Milizia, followed the structure of Il Corago, examining all the various genres of performance, from tragedy to ballet, and dividing the treatise into "rules" concerning the different aspects and requirements of the dramatic art. The only new feature in Milizia's treatise is a set of six plates

18Francesco Milizia, Trattato completo, formale e materiale del teatro, Roma, Pasquali, 1794.
illustrating the architectural changes that theatre buildings underwent through history. It is interesting that Milizia followed the example of *Il Corago* and not that of either Perrucci or Riccoboni, both chronologically nearer to him. His work does not deal with the Commedia dell'Arte and focuses only on tragedies, erudite plays, operas and ballets. Although dance performances are taken into account, there is no mention of gesture or stage movements, and the only reference to the art of pantomime is a literary one, made by the author to assert the importance that kind of performance had in ancient civilisations.

Like Milizia, the Italian actor, playwright and pedagogue Angelo Canova, wrote in 1829 his *Lettere sopra l'arte d'Imitazione* (Letters on the Art of Imitation), which were published only ten years later.¹⁹ Canova's *Lettere* followed the structure of both *Il Corago* and Milizia's work, which had received a second edition in 1794. The book is mainly a literary dissertation on acting, dedicated to the actress and "primadonna" Anna Pelandi Fiorilli. The only reference to the importance of expressive movements can be found in the Fifth and in the Sixth Letter, dealing respectively with facial mime and with body mime. Both letters, however, are purely discursive and there is no attempt to establish any rule.

¹⁹Angelo Canova, *Lettere sopra l'arte d'imitazione*, Torino, Mussano, 1839.
The literary content of Canova's Lettere echoed and resembled that of a previous work, Jacob Engel's Ideen zur einer Mimik (1785), translated into Italian by Giovanni Rasori in 1820 with the title Lettere intorno alla Mimica. The book was neither a theatre treatise nor a manual, but more a philosophical dissertation about the art of mime and the importance of the language of gesture both on stage and in everyday life. Engel's work, generally regarded as a milestone in mime literature, does not belong to the Italian mime literature and therefore it has not been analysed in this chapter. The Italian translation, however, provided an important example within the codification of mime gestures in the early part of the nineteenth century, particularly because of the plates providing visual examples. For this reason, the Italian edition of Engel's book is discussed in the Third Part of this work, dealing with the analysis of the visual material.

In 1832 the Neapolitan scholar Andrea de Jorio wrote and published La mimica degli antichi investigata nel gestire napoletano (The ancient art of mime rediscovered in Neapolitan vernacular gestures). In his introduction, the author stated that the work did not deal with theatre

20 Johan Jacob Engel, Giovanni Rasori, (translator), Lettere intorno alla mimica, Milano, Batelli e Fanfani, 1820.
mime but that its aim was an investigation of folklore customs and their links with the classical art of mime. To substantiate his assertion, De Jorio analysed more than one hundred gestures locally determined. The book contains twenty-one plates, sixteen of which illustrate gestures occurring in daily situations, two reproduce figures from Greek vases in order to support the argument of the book, and three show in detail the positions of fingers, hands and head in each gestural sign. Within research on the evolution and on the codification of the language of gesture, De Jorio's book is important mainly because of its illustrations, which are analysed in Part Three of this thesis.

The analysis of the written sources dealing with a "grammar of gesture" reveals that during two hundred and fifty years of theatre history, some of the basic principles related to the art of mime did not change and were passed on from generation to generation. This fact is particularly significant if one considers the social, artistic, cultural and aesthetic changes which took place within that period on the one hand, and the geographical differences which characterised Italy at the time on the other. The similarities between a manual published in the Southern regions and a treatise written in Northern Italy, or between a text published in the second half of the seventeenth century and one written and printed at
the beginning of the nineteenth century indicate that for
more than two centuries Italian theatre traditions
referred to the same canons; at the same time the
similarities prove that those canons had been originally
established by Commedia dell'Arte. In both chronological
and geographical terms, the influence of Commedia on both
Italian and European performing arts has often been
overlooked, and historically misinterpreted. The formulae
of the Commedia became an integral part not just of the
drama tradition, but also of opera and, to an extent, of
ballet. It is not surprising that ballet-masters of early
nineteenth century turned to that affirmed tradition to
provide their art with new rules and new elements, the
language of gesture among them.

In Blasis' written works there are no direct
references to the works discussed in this chapter, with
the sole exception of that mention of "chironomia"
reported above. Yet, an analysis of Blasis' books dealing
with gesture reveals that the ballet-master knew some of
the treatises considered here. This analysis constitutes
the argument of both Chapter 5 and Chapter 6, where the
former aims at contextualising the subject discussed in
the latter.
Chapter 5

Blasis the author: an analysis of his major publications

1.0 Introduction

2.0 Blasis' corpus: an overview

3.0 Blasis' dance-related works: a detailed analysis

3.1 The Traité (1820)

3.2 The Code of Terpsichore (1828)

3.3 The Saggi e Prospetto (1841) and the Studi sulle Arti Imitatrici (1844)

3.4 The Notes upon Dancing (1847)

3.5 L'uomo fisico, intellettuale e morale (1857)

4.0 Conclusion
1.0 Introduction

The multifaceted artistic education Carlo Blasis had received in his early years in France is documented by the abundance of publications he left to posterity; books, ballet-scenarios, articles and manuscripts explore a wide range of cultural and artistic subjects. A study of the corpus has never been undertaken and previous studies of Blasis' written material concern only a selection of the works dealing with dance. Yet an analysis of the writings can present problems, for there are fifty books, excluding translations in different languages, eighty ballet librettos, and nearly one hundred short articles. The quantity of the sources is, however, only an apparent problem, for a brief scanning of the same sources reveals that an attribute of Blasis' writing seems to have been the continuous reassertion of ideas and principles previously expounded until he found a satisfactory formula in terms of content and of exposition. Blasis reworked the same argument several times and presented it in different forms. The articles published in Italian, French and English newspapers are,

for example, translated excerpts from some of the books Blasis had previously written. An investigation of Blasis' written works requires that the basic sources, from which derived the other writings, are traced; these basic sources consist of a restricted number of titles.

2.0 Blasis' corpus: an overview.

The relationships between texts written by Blasis might be illustrated in diagrammatic form. Diagram 1 classifies, under different heads, the main key works selected from the entire corpus. The categories have been given traditional names so to provide a quick reference to the content of the books, while the columns have been structured from left to right according to the hierarchy of Blasis' interests. Thus, as dance represented the main activity to which Blasis devoted his life, it occupies the first column. Music is the second subject of interest, and Visual Arts the third, although the only selected title is halfway between an art study and a biographical dissertation. A fourth column includes those studies that cannot be easily classified; the term "anthropological studies" has been chosen, in the meaning that this definition has in Italy.² Finally, a column has

² In Italian Universities Anthropological studies are not strictly related to the study of the human being, but include also a study of human behaviour and its annexes - such as art and traditions - called Social and Cultural Anthropology. This discipline came into being during the first half of the nineteenth century, and soon became a fashionable subject for treatises and essays. Both
been added to accommodate the only book dealing with drama, in the form of a biography.

Diagram 1 An overview of Blasis' corpus: the key works

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DANCE</th>
<th>MUSIC</th>
<th>ARTS</th>
<th>ESSAYS</th>
<th>THEATRE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traité de la danse (1820)</td>
<td>Della musica</td>
<td>Terpsichore sur le Chant (1828)</td>
<td>Biografia di Garrick (1841)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Code of Terpsichore (1828)</td>
<td>Observation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes upon Dancing (1847)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Studi sulle Arti Imitatrici (1844)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>L'Uomo fisico, intellettuale e morale (1857)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Leonardo da Vinci (1872)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The diagram throws into relief the central works in Blasis's corpus. These works are also writings which prove to be "original" in the sense that, in each instance, this was the first time that Blasis dealt with their subject. Each book represented a new exploration; yet it might be objected that, from that point of view, the Code of Terpsichore (1828) includes the previous Blasis' Studi sulle Arti Imitatrici (1844) and L'Uomo fisico, intellettuale e morale (1857) can be considered as his contribution to the subject.
Traité (1820), while the Notes upon Dancing (1847) contain, in their turn, a section of the Code. Although there is some substance in this argument, both works also deal with topics not exploited before, and for this reason the Code and the Notes deserve to be included in the conspectus.

A feature of Blasis' writings, particularly evident in the dance-related works, was that the French-Italian pedagogue seemed to be constantly searching for a more satisfactory exposition of his theories; this is revealed by the multiple revisions of some of the works listed in diagram 1 which, although they did not modify the basic structure and the original content of the "key-works", conferred new perspectives and new orientations on the discussion and the treatment of the topics. An example can be found in Blasis' updating of his dance manual, originally published as the 1820 Traité élémentaire, théorique et pratique de l'art de la danse, as revealed by diagram 2.

---

4Carlo Blasis, Notes upon Dancing, London, Delaporte, 1847.
5Carlo Blasis, Traité élémentaire, théorique et pratique de l'art de la danse, Milan, Chez Beati et Tenenti, 1820.
A reading of the works listed in diagram 2 demonstrates that each treatise consisted of a revised edition of the previous text, from the original *Traité*. In the case of the 1828 *Code of Terpsichore*, the revision consisted in adding new topics to the 1820 manual. The first French edition of the *Code*, included a few scores for ballroom dancing which were not included in the English edition. Finally, the 1866 revision of the *Nouveau manuel complet de la danse*, included a new section on social dancing.

Another feature of Blasis' corpus is that many works are interdisciplinary. For example, the *Studi sulle Arti*
Imitatrici can be related either to the 1828 Code as far as the practice of pantomime is concerned, or to the subsequent L'uomo, for its discussion of the "artistic genius" and of "Ideal Beauty". Similarly, in L'uomo references can be found to both David Garrick and Leonardo, with whom Blasis dealt also in two biographical studies, respectively published in 1840 and in 1872. It is interesting to note that, although he was dealing with similar subjects, Blasis treated the recurring topics in different ways, according to the different context in which they were discussed. The theories on mime expounded in Studi sulle Arti Imitatrici were not a repetition of what he had written in the pantomime section of the previous Code; and the references to Garrick and Leonardo in L'uomo did not reproduce the content of the two biographies. Each work, moreover, presented different views on the same subjects, often complementary to each other.

3.0 Blasis' dance-related works: a detailed analysis.

In order to understand the interconnections between Blasis written works, it is necessary to consider each work separately and in detail. Because of the particular purpose of this research, only the dance-related and the

---

6Carlo Blasis, Studi sulle Arti Imitatrici, Milano, Chiusi, 1844.
7Carlo Blasis, L'uomo fisico, intellettuale e morale, Milano, Guglielmini, 1857.
mime-related sources have been taken into account, for it is in these sources that one can find information on the language of gesture.

3.1 The Traité (1820)

The 1820 Traité élémentaire, théorique et pratique de l'art de la danse,⁸ is Blasis' first attempt to codify the principles of theatrical dancing and it is his first work as an author. Dance scholars generally consider the Traité as a milestone in the evolution of recording ballet technique, regarding previous works of similar nature as theoretical accounts of the subject rather than technical and didactic accounts. Carlo Blasis was well aware of this fact, lamenting in his introduction the lack of a practical writing on dance. He also affirmed that books such as Jean George Noverre's Lettres sur la Danse,⁹ published in 1760, were of no use to professional dancers, teachers and students, revealing his opinion of the eighteenth-century ballet-master.

The treatise is divided into nine chapters. The first and the last are in the form of general instructions, dealing respectively with the prerequisites needed to be a dancer and with the proto-type of the ballet master. Of the remaining chapters, the second, the third and the fourth focus on a specific part of the body.

⁸Carlo Blasis, op.cit.
such as legs, physique and arms; in their turn, the fifth, the sixth and the seventh chapters concern the study and the description of fundamentals of the technique of theatrical dancing such as the "attitude", the "arabesque" and "pirouettes". These three chapters are particularly relevant to the history of the evolution of ballet technique, for they fixed the principles which, still today, rule this dance language. It is in the section devoted to the study of the "attitude" that, in order to provide the reader with a clear explanation of the particular movement, Blasis refers to the sculpture of Mercury by Jean Boulogne, establishing the correct form of the position.

La position, que les danseurs appellent particulièrement l'attitude, est la plus belle de celles qui existent dans la danse, et la plus difficile dans son exécution; elle est, à mon avis, une espèce d'imitation de celle que l'on admire dans le célèbre Mercure de J. Bologne.

The eighth chapter concerns Blasis' classification of the three types of dancer, namely the "serious" or "noble", the "demi-caractère" and the "comic"; each type is described and analysed in terms of physical shape and characterisation of the roles. This classification corresponds to the three main genres of ballet performed

10 Jean Bologne or Boulogue, 1524-1608. French sculptor, who settled and worked in Italy where he took the name of Gian Bologna. His well-known bronze statue of Mercury is kept in the Bargello Museum of Florence.
11 Carlo Blasis, op. cit., p. 67.
in Italian theatres at the time. "Noble" roles were those portraying heroes, kings or gods in the still fashionable mythological ballets; the "demi-caractère" were the roles connected to "comic" ballets or ballets with a bucolic setting, such as Dauberval's La Fille Mal Gardée; the "comic", also called "grotesque", roles appeared mainly in mythological compositions, to portray non-heroic characters such as satyrs.

The treatise is completed with an appendix discussing in detail other elements of dance technique. These include the five basic positions of the feet, the "battements", the "rond de jambe" and their derivations. The content of the appendix is clearly differentiated from that of the previous chapters. Blasis traces a neat distinction between the "attitudes", the "pirouettes", the "arabesques" and the elements discussed in the appendix, which he calls "éléments pratiques". This definition might suggest that, in the author's opinion, the former had a more "artistic" nature in contrast with the "technical" character of the latter, being derived from visual arts sources as in the case of Jean Bologne's Mercury. Fourteen plates collected at the end of the treatise provide visual references to the content of the entire manual.

The 1820 Traité contains two features of particular interest which recurred several times in subsequent
works. One is represented by the two "stick-drawings" inserted in a footnote to the introduction.\textsuperscript{12} This graphic device, the invention of which is claimed by the author, is meant to provide dance students with a subsidiary expedient in studying the correctness of body lines. The same text and drawings reappeared as an integral part of the 1828 \textit{Code of Terpsichore} and then in 1857 \textit{L'uomo fisico, intellettuale e morale}, where there are three pages of "stick-drawings" depicting some of the body attitudes corresponding to different moods and emotions.\textsuperscript{13} The second feature of the \textit{Traité} to recur in subsequent works, is the reference to visual arts and the parallel between these and the art of dancing. In the 1844 \textit{Studi sulle Arti Imitatrici}, Blasis developed this parallel to its full extent. The relation between dance or mime and the visual arts finds its "raison d' être" in "Classicismo" ideas, which had influenced Blasis' artistic growth. As mentioned above, ballet-masters and theorists such as Noverre or Angiolini, had often stressed the importance of deriving good models and examples for dancing from observing, studying and imitating fine arts. It was thus natural that Blasis included the same type of advice in his manual, for he

\textsuperscript{12} Carlo Blasis, op.cit., p.16.  
himself had been trained to use the same forms of reference.

3.2 The Code of Terpsichore (1828)

Compared to the Traité the subsequent Code of Terpsichore,\(^{14}\) enjoyed an increased popularity in Europe as shown by contemporary articles and reviews. First published in London in 1828, it was translated into French in 1830 and published in the collection of the Encyclopédie Roret, under the title Manual Complet de la danse, comprenant la théorie, la pratique et l'histoire de cet art depuis les temps les plus reculés jusqu'à nos jours,\(^{15}\) a title which echoes in part that of the 1820 Traité. Both the English and French edition and the publishing in the Roret collection contributed to the great popularity the Code achieved, for the Roret manuals were fashionable publications intended to provide the middle classes with general information on several subjects.

Subsequent editions of the Encyclopédie Roret appeared in 1866 and in 1884. In both instances the original structure of the book had been modified by removing the historical part altogether with the chapter on Pantomime, and by adding a practical description of

\(^{14}\)Carlo Blasis, op.cit.
\(^{15}\)Carlo Blasis, Manuel complet de la danse, Paris, Librairie Encyclopédique de Roret, 1830.
contemporary social dances by a Mr Lemaitre. This addition did not occur in the English reprint by Stewart D. Headlam, of 1888, entitled *The Theory of Theatrical Dancing* with a chapter on Pantomime. Edited from Carlo Blasis' *Code of Terpsichore*, with original plates, where only some of the most pedantic literary passages had been edited out.

In writing the *Code of Terpsichore*, Blasis aimed at dealing with every aspect of theatrical dancing, both from the historical and the practical standpoint. The book, therefore, differed notably from the previous *Traité* which was incorporated into the text. The *Code* is divided into six parts, preceded by a dedication and a Preface, and followed by a Conclusion. Each part deals with a different aspect of dancing, including the social.

Part the First, "Rise and Progress of Dancing", reproduces the "Avant-Propos" of the *Traité*; the entire section, discussing the history of dance from antiquity, is here re-edited and enlarged with the footnotes of the previous publication. The historical account is followed by a description of eleven different types of national dances, such as the "Cachucha" and the "Fandango". Part the Second, "Theory of Theatrical Dancing" reproduces the first eight chapters of the *Traité*, with the addition of a revised ninth chapter on the ballet-master in which

---

some precepts on the art of choreographing are also elaborated. Finally, the "Appendix" of the 1820 Traité, reproduced altogether with the original fourteen plates, concludes the second part of the Code.

Part the Third is new, entitled "On Pantomime, and the studies necessary for a pantomimic performer". It focuses on the importance of mime action within a ballet, providing the reader with general rules concerning theatre gesture. This part is divided in two sections: one deals with the history and the study of mime; the other is a brief historical account which discusses the origins of the Commedia dell'Arte fixed characters, or "maschere", and their dialectal expressive gesticulation.

Part the Fourth, which constitutes the largest section of the work, is devoted to the "Composition of Ballets". Divided into twenty-four chapters, it analyses all the different notions and elements necessary for composing a ballet, such as the "Plot", the "Dramatic Action and Passion" and the "Decoration". In this section the influence of the "Classicismo" education Blasis had received in the early years of his life is particularly evident. In discussing the composition of a ballet, Blasis refers to the formulae of classical theatre and, more particularly, to Aristotle's "unities", considered as fundamental and essential elements. In addition, in the chapter discussing the "Plot" the author provides
several examples of possible scenarios, all stemming from the classical tradition, and condemns, at the same time, those stories containing "Romantic" elements, such as Goethe's *Faust*, for being not suitable sources of inspiration. In the following Part of the *Code*, entitled "Programmes, containing examples of every species of ballets", the author substantiated his theories about the choice of ballet plots with a long list of suitable dramatic suggestions for ballets, he had already adapted into scenarios. Each one of these plots corresponds to a different genre of theatrical dancing, ranging from the "dramatic" and the "anacreontic" to the "comic" or the "demi-caractère", which represented the fashionable forms of Italian theatrical dancing of the period. Among the various scenarios for potential ballets one can find both a "Romantic" and a "Fairy" ballet. Blasis' definitions are however misleading. The former, although it deals with a complex love story, does not contain any conventional "Romantic" element. The latter, despite the troubadour setting and the theme of a mortal loving a nymph, resembles more one of the mythological plots canonic of the eighteenth-century choreographies than one of the "supernatural" stories of the Romantic ballet.

---

17 See also Chapter 3 of the present work.
Part the Sixth of the Code is entitled "Private Dancing", and deals with social dances. After a general introduction, and the explanations of rules, steps, figures and of what must be intended for "quadrilles", the author describes eight different "figures" of the quadrille. Another section concentrates on the "waltz", and a third analyses a "New set of quadrilles". This is the part of the book which was subjected to the more drastic changes in subsequent editions and translations, especially because of the changing trends in social dancing. This part is also very important as it introduces two new aspects of Blasis' artistic activity, that of "inventor" of new ballroom dances and that of the ballroom dancing teacher. Although this phenomenon still needs more research, it was fashionable in the nineteenth century to ask celebrated ballet-masters to devote part of their artistic creativity to social dancing.

The book ends with a few pages of "Conclusion" which reassert the parallel between Dancing and the Fine Arts, in a more complete development than in the Traité, a set of scores for the social dances and a set of plates showing the ballet steps and positions altogether with some choreographic suggestions for groupings.
3.3. The Saggi e Prospetto (1841) and the Studi sulle Arti Imitatrici (1844).

One of the rarest items of the Blasis' corpus is a book published in a limited edition in 1841, entitled Saggi e Prospetto del trattato di Pantomima Naturale e di Pantomima Teatrale.\textsuperscript{20} As indicated in the title, where the Italian word "Prospetto" stands for "Project", this work was meant to be an introduction to a subsequent book, the "Trattato generale" ("General treatise"), dealing entirely with mime, of both "natural" and "theatrical" genre. The Saggi e Prospetto is divided in two sections. The first is a detailed summary of the topics to be discussed in the Trattato; the second is a set of "saggi" or essays dealing with the ImitatiYe Arts. Although the Trattato was never written, the section containing the essays was re-edited a few years later under the title Studi sulle Arti Imitatrici.\textsuperscript{21} This book is in the form of a fashionable "pamphlet" of the time, and collects the essays of the 1841 publication together with some other writings Blasis had published in several Italian newspapers between 1835 and 1844. The title of the book is not original, for Jean George Noverre had published his Lettres sur les Arts Imitateurs in 1807,\textsuperscript{22} in France.

\textsuperscript{20}Carlo Blasis, Milano, Guglielmini e Redaelli, 1841.
\textsuperscript{21}Carlo Blasis, Studi sulle Arti Imitatrici, Milano, Chusi, 1844.
\textsuperscript{22}Jean Georges Noverre, Lettres sur les Arts Imitateurs en Général et sur la Danse en Particulier, Paris et La Haye, no publisher, 1807.
a fact which Blasis may have known. Interestingly, the two works dealt with approximately the same topics.

The Studi sulle Arti Imitatrici was the third book which Blasis had written in Italian, the first being a dissertation on dramatic music,\textsuperscript{23} and the second being the Saggi e Prospetto mentioned above. The first section of the Studi is the "Analogia",\textsuperscript{24} in which the inter-art analogies are discussed in general terms. In the "Analogia", Blasis establishes a hierarchy of the arts of imitation, where the highest rank is given equally to music, dance and mime. According to the author, these three arts are "more imitative" than the others, namely poetry and painting, as they are confined to the limitations of words and of flat and still images. The same argument applies to sculpture which, despite being superior to painting and poetry by virtue of reproducing the forms in their three-dimensional character, cannot render the imitated object in its living qualities.

This introduction is followed by five chapters, in the form of "saggi", each one dealing with a different aspect of the subject. In the first essay, "Del Mimo e dell'azione pantomima", the art of mime is discussed from a literary perspective, although the author stresses the importance of this art within contemporary ballet. The

\textsuperscript{23}Carlo Blasis, Della musica drammatica italiana in Francia e della musica francese dal secolo XVII sino al principio del secolo XIX, Milano, Guglielmini, 1841.

\textsuperscript{24}Literally "analogy".
second essay concerns Blasis' opinion about the "Bello Ideale" or "Ideal Beauty", the canons of which correspond to the aesthetic standards of the late eighteenth-century visual arts, namely a classical purity of exterior forms. The theme of "Ideal Beauty" occurs several times in subsequent writing, and in particular in articles that Blasis published all over Europe in the following years. The concept of "Ideal Beauty", in Blasis' opinion, is meant to provide a constant example for dancers, mimes, actors and singers. In order to give a clear description of his standard "Ideal Beauty", Blasis refers to a sample of masterworks mainly derived from examples of Greek, Roman and Italian Renaissance visual arts. By this means, Blasis defines an "Ideal Beauty" which incorporates physiognomy, stature, character, expression, behaviour and the body as a whole. Although there is no evidence to prove it, one can establish a parallel between Blasis' description of the "noble" dancer in both the Traité and the Code, and his notion of "Ideal Beauty". The second essay introduces another aspect of Blasis' personality, namely his philosophical attitude towards art in general. It is in this essay that the ballet-master reveals his conception of dance as part of a humanistic constellation comprising all other arts.

The third and fourth essays are mainly literary and historical accounts of Greek poetry and mythology. In the
second part of the fourth essay, however, the myth of the Three Graces is used to introduce the author's concept of "grace" in theatre arts and his advice to performers on how to be "graceful" on stage. Despite being overwhelmed by literary quotations, the passage is one of the few examples of technical advice given in the book. More technical references can be found in the final essay, the fifth, which focuses on the concept of the "Ideal Beauty" applied to "physical" theatre arts, such as dance or mime.

3.4 The Notes upon Dancing (1847)

Notes upon Dancing is the second major work by Blasis to be published in London. In 1847 Blasis was working at the Italian Opera, Covent Garden, where he had been appointed ballet-master, while he still maintained his post as Director at the Imperial Academy of Dancing in Milan. The popularity that Blasis had acquired first as principal dancer at the King's Theatre, at the time of the Code of Terpsichore, and his subsequent fame as the ballet-master who had taught many of the great dancers of the Romantic period, were a sufficient justification for the appearance of a book which summarised his artistic principles, his knowledge and his biography. The book is divided into three different parts, introduced by an

"advertisement", written by the editor and translator, Richard Barton, the same person who translated the Code.

The first section is a reissuing of Part the First in the Code of Terpsichore, revised and enlarged. The original division into two sections is maintained, although the sections are united under the same heading "Rise, progress, decline & revival of Dancing. Works on Dancing. Celebrated dancers. Description of ancient and modern dances". The new elements in the first section consist of a list of famous dancers from the past, plus an annotated list of important works of literature on dancing. This new material includes also a study of eight national dances not discussed in the Code.

The second part of the book is an account of the Milanese Imperial Academy of Dancing, based on articles previously published on the subject, particularly in the Milanese newspapers Il Figaro and La Gazzetta. The account consists of a brief history of the Academy and of a description of its situation, its structure and its teaching methods under Blasis directorship, including a list of pupils, in which one can find the names of Carlotta Grisi, Carolina Rosati, Giovanni Lepri. The description of the classes demonstrates that Blasis' theories had been successfully turned into practice. The account of the "Grande Leçon", taught by Blasis himself,

\(^{26}\)As reported in Carlo Blasis, op.cit., pp. 86-87.
indicates that the principles enunciated in both the Traité and in the Code, were carefully respected in the daily routine.

According to a footnote,\(^{27}\) also some information included in the third part of the book derives from a collection of articles anonymously edited and summarised. This part is divided in four sections, corresponding to biographical sketches of four members of the Blasis family: Carlo, Francesco (Carlo's father), Virginia (Carlo's sister) and Annunziata Ramaccini Blasis (Carlo's wife). These biographical accounts and the description of the Milanese Academy suggest that Blasis did not write the last two parts of the book, for which Richard Barton should be credited. According to the frontispiece, the "Notes upon Dancing" by Blasis constituted only the first section of the book, to be followed by a

history of the Imperial and Royal Academy of Dancing at Milan, to which are added Biographical Notices of the Blasis Family, interspersed with various passages on Theatrical Art, edited and translated by Richard Barton.\(^{28}\)

Although the passage sounds ambiguous, one can suppose that it indicates that Blasis was not responsible for two thirds of the book. An accurate reading of both sections, however, reveals many details in the prose and in the exposition of the topic that leave little

\(^{27}\)Carlo Blasis, op.cit., p.91.

\(^{28}\)Carlo Blasis, op.cit., frontispiece.
doubt about the real author. The fact that Blasis apparently wrote his own biography and many other flattering articles, is an argument which has been already discussed. It is possible that he was also responsible for both the accounts on the Milanese Academy and on his family.

3.5 L'uomo fisico, intellettuale e morale (1857)

L'uomo fisico, intellettuale e morale is not a dance treatise; indeed, dance as a subject, has a very small place in it. The work could be classified as a vast, comprehensive, dissertation belonging to that branch of anthropological studies which deals with men's habits and social behaviour, yet the work is even more extensive. Starting from an anatomical study of the human being, the "uomo fisico", the author aims at reaching what Luigi Rossi has rightly defined as a "vast synthesis of the humanistic principles with ethical implications".

The book has two parts. The first deals with an analysis of the human being from three different perspectives which, as indicated in the title of the work, are the physical, the intellectual and the ethical aspects of man. The three views are placed one after the other according to a hierarchical scheme of importance.

29See Chapter 3, pp.69-75.  
30Carlo Blasis, L'uomo fisico, intellettuale e morale, Milano, Guglielmini, 1857.  
where the physical side of the man is the lowest and the moral is the highest.

Forty chapters constitute the first section of the work; in this part the author reviews every single characteristic of the human being, from elementary actions, such as walking, eating or speaking, to the inner aspects of the self, including faith and love. The analysis of these characteristics is carried forward through an expanded number of quotations and references. Such a display of encyclopedic knowledge provided Blasis with the device to avoid the question of a deeper discussion of the subject. Although Blasis appears to be very confident with regard to physical aspects of the matter in hand, he reveals some weaknesses in treating the intellectual and the moral side of man. The two sections which deal with these two latter aspects, in fact, are interspersed with many literary and artistic quotations which enhance a superficial discussion of the argument. In contrast, the first section, concerning the "uomo fisico" is less pedantic and reflects the author's theories based on his practical knowledge of dance. This approach is particularly evident in the Appendix to the first part and in the description of the plates which follow the Appendix. Blasis had devised a graphic system in order to "illustrate" different types of characters, such as the "humorous", the "heavy", the "weak", and the
"brave". The system consisted in assigning to each type of character a set of geometrical figures, such as direct lines, triangles, squares and circles. A rigid, "angular" character would have thus been represented by a set of triangles and straight lines, while a morbid personality was portrayed by circular lines or semi-circles. Blasis referred to this graphic device mainly to describe some of the elementary physical actions as performed by various characters; one plate illustrates the various ways of walking according to different moods and characters.\(^{32}\) Other plates, at the end of the first part, include a study of the directions of the eyes, corresponding to different emotions, two pages of "stick-drawings" showing a set of codified body postures related to inner feelings, and a study of the body's centre of gravity in some expressive position.

The second part of L'uomo concerns the study of human "genius" as applied to every kind of human activity: war, agriculture, religion, and arts, including dance and pantomime. Every type of human "genius" is discussed with a wealth of literary quotations, in separate chapters. This part differs from all the rest of Blasis' writing, for it is the only section of the entire corpus which does not involve an artistic subject. The various arts became illustrative; they are secondary,

\(^{32}\)Carlo Blasis, op.cit., p.209.
merely used by the author as examples to support his humanistic theories.

4.0 Conclusion

The analysis of Blasis' works on dance and on the performing arts in general highlights some factors which deserve to be discussed in detail. Blasis was not the first dance theorist to publish the codified rules of his art, as many dance historians have superficially claimed. Technical books and treatises on dance steps existed from the Renaissance onwards, and some of the basic rules, such as those concerning the five positions, had been codified long before Blasis. There is no doubt, though, that by writing the Traité, the ballet-master summarised and popularised the fundamentals of ballet technique, creating an authoritative source for nineteenth-century dancers, teachers and theorists.

The importance of the Traité lies mainly in the scientific approach to the subject. Unlike other books by Blasis, the 1820 manual does not consist of a pedantic or literary dissertation on the subject, but focuses on an analytical description of the movements. Yet, despite his urge to revise his writing, Blasis never updated the technical principles originally expounded in the Traité. Both in the Code and in its subsequent editions, the technical section remained the same as that published in
1820. It seems that Blasis concentrated on re-editing the literary aspect of his works, regardless the fact that in more than forty years, from 1820 to 1866, ballet technique had evolved, mainly because of the introduction of pointe shoes, an element which is never referred to in Blasis' manuals. It is true that dancing "en pointe" did not involve radical changes in classical ballet technique, and that the basic components of that vocabulary remained the same as those popularised by the Traité; yet the French-Italian pedagogue might have been expected to take those changes into account.

Literary quotations are a recurring element in Blasis' writing. They find their "raison d'être" in Blasis' education, imbued with "Classicismo" ideas. Such a display of culture, however, answered also a specific purpose. By overwhelming the text with quotations and pedantic references, Blasis managed to avoid the account of his personal experiences. In none of Blasis' works concerning the performing arts can one find a mention of his own artistic career; this is particularly evident in the section of the 1828 Code, where the author discusses the art of choreographing ballets. Blasis' unsuccessful activity as a choreographer has already been discussed above. Aware of his limitations, Blasis might have willingly omitted any reference to that part of his life.

33The date of the second edition of the Nouveau manuel complet de danse.
34See Chapter 3, pp.90-94.
What remains unsolved, however, is why he never mentioned his activity as a dancer. An analysis of his dancing career,\textsuperscript{35} demonstrates that despite dancing in many celebrated theatres, he never achieved the fame of some of his contemporaries. Added to which, the only "praise" of his dancing is in his own publications and, therefore, cannot be considered as a reliable source of information. The scientific exposition of dance rules in the \textit{Traité} might fulfill the same task as the literary quotations; the straightforward, analytical account did not allow any digression on personal experiences which, in contrast, could have provided useful examples for dance students.

The analytical overview of Blasis' major written works indicates that some of these publications contain references to the language of gesture, although they focus on dance technique. These references to mime are discussed in detail in Chapter 6, which investigates Blasis' contribution to the written codification of theatre gesture.

\textsuperscript{35}See Chapter 3, pp.80-83.
Chapter 6

Blasis and the art of mime

1.0 Introduction

2.0 Blasis as a mime dancer and teacher

3.0 Mime in Blasis' writings

   3.1 The *Traité* (1820)
   3.2 The *Code of Terpsichore* (1828)
   3.3 The *Saggi e Prospetto* (1841)
   3.4 The *Studi sulle Arti Imitatrici* (1844)
   3.5 The *Notes upon Dancing* (1847)
   3.6 *L'uomo* (1857)

4.0 Conclusion
1.0 Introduction

Although in the Traité Carlo Blasis had classified three types of dancer, the "noble", the "demi caractère" and the "comic", his distinction remained purely academic and never became an integral part of the Italian theatre tradition. Throughout the nineteenth century dancers who performed in Italy were divided into two categories only: the "ballerini di rango francese", literally "dancers of French rank", and the "ballerini di rango italiano", or "dancers of Italian rank". The former were performers who, regardless of their nationality, perpetuated the tradition of the French school of dancing, which focused on technical skills and feats. The "dancers of Italian rank", on the contrary, were those who specialised in the art of mime, the Italian origins of which, from the Commedia onwards, were officially recognised worldwide. Both categories had been recognised and identified long before the publication of the Traité. The distinction between the two genres, which was used only in relation to principal dancers, did not imply any hierarchical priority of the French dancers on the Italian ones or vice versa. Evidence of this artistic parity can be found in the listings of the performers and of their artistic status within the company reported in almost every programme or ballet libretto of the time. According to
these sources, in a standard Italian ballet company the number of "dancers of French rank" always corresponded to the number of Italian dancers, although, in some works of the second half of the nineteenth-century, the latter slightly outnumbered their counterparts. The distinction, which emphasises the important role that mime played within nineteenth-century Italian ballet, lasted for many decades, for in some programmes of La Scala theatre of the early twentieth century the differentiation is still maintained.

The origins of the differentiation between the two genres can be traced to the end of Viganò's choreographic supremacy at La Scala theatre in Milan. Immediately after the death of the inventor of "coreodramma" his followers were not able to perpetuate his teachings or to reproduce his formulae. Consequently, more space was eventually given to the imported genre of the "ballo alla francese" or French ballet, which focused more on the display of dance technique than on narrative and rhythmic mime. Soon this new imported genre acquired large popularity and became very fashionable. French ballet, however, did not supplant the "ballo pantomimo", which never went out of favour. The two genres were thus interwoven, and from this the unique form of nineteenth-century theatrical dancing known as the Italian "ballo" was generated. In consequence, dancers had to be qualified accordingly, a
feature which is exclusive to Italian dance training of the last century.

2.0 Blasis as a mime dancer and teacher

Biographical sources such as the collected reviews in the Raccolta di varj articoli letterarj scelti fra accreditati giornali italiani e stranieri ed opinioni di distinti scrittori che illustrarono l'opera di Carlo Blasis, artista eed autore di varj scritti sulle arti belle, la letteratura e sopra il teatro,¹ and the pamphlet Il Genio e le Passioni. Delle composizioni coreografiche e delle opere letterarie di Carlo Blasis,² agree in reporting that Blasis was a versatile performer able to play different roles. This is documented by the long list of characters he portrayed on stage during his dancing career, a list which, as mentioned above, appears in the second section of the Notes upon Dancing.³ Among the roles that Blasis danced before joining the ballet company at La Scala theatre, were "serious" roles, those he later classified as "noble", as well as comic ones. Interestingly, the list includes characters such as Colin in Dauberval's La Fille Mal Gardée (1789) and Celicourt in Gardel's La dansomanie (1800). Although these roles are not "comic", they are not "noble" either, and tend to

¹Anonymous, Milano, Guglielmini, 1858.
²Anonymous, Milano, Guglielmini, 1854.
be roles "de caractère", focusing more on mime acting than on technical dancing. The two biographical works and the list of characters portrayed on stage, however, are the only sources giving evidence of Blasis' artistic versatility, an attribute which is not acknowledged in any other document, such as Blasis' biography by Giovanni Berri. 

As mentioned above, the classification of the two types of dancers was established immediately after Viganò, although examples of a similar terminology had been in use since the beginning of the second decade of the nineteenth century. It is not surprising, then, that in the documents recording dance activities at La Scala theatre in Milan, there is no indication which of the two categories Blasis belonged. The source material concerning the first three years Blasis spent as a member of La Scala ballet company, characterised by Viganò's artistic hegemony, reports only that the dancer belonged to the ranks of "primo ballerino" or principal dancer.

This is particularly interesting, for the name of Blasis is recorded, under the same category, along with that of Antonia Pallerini, Viganò's muse, a celebrated mime dancer. It might be that, in those days, an artist engaged as "primo ballerino" was supposed to perform

---

4See Giovanni Berri, Cenni biografici di Carlo de Blasis, Milano, Gernia, 1871.
also a mime, especially in the "coreodrammas", where "French dancing" was totally missing. It is also possible, though, that the title "primo ballerino" instead of the more appropriate "primo mimo", derived from the terminology of the contract with which the theatre had secured the dancer for several seasons.

Diagram 3 illustrates the genres of ballets given during the first engagement of Blasis at La Scala, which lasted less than three years, and which ended shortly before Viganò's death. The diagram lists the titles of ballets performed within the three seasons, Carnival and Lent, Spring, and Fall, in which the Italian theatrical year was divided throughout the nineteenth century. The ballets have been classified in three genres, Viganò's "coreodramma", the "serious", which includes the ballets with either mythological or historical characterization, and the "comic", comprising the ballets which have a humorous plot or were derived from a comedy. Each title is listed together with the name of its choreographer when this was not Viganò.
Diagram 3 Ballets performed at La Scala Theatre when Blasis was "primo ballerino" during Viganò's period

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Coreodramma</th>
<th>Serious</th>
<th>Comic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1818</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Carnival and Lent</td>
<td>Dedalo</td>
<td>La vera felicità</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Season</td>
<td></td>
<td>(Bertini)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>La scuola del</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>villaggio</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Otello</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spring Season</td>
<td>La spada di</td>
<td>Il paggio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Kenneth</td>
<td>(Bertini)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Otello</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>La vestale</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fall Season</td>
<td>Pirro ed Ermlone</td>
<td>La villeggiatura</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Fabris)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Il conte di Essex</td>
<td>L'ingegno supera</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Liechtental)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1819</td>
<td>Coreodramma</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Carnival and Lent</td>
<td>Achar Gran Mogol</td>
<td>La Cenerentola</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Season</td>
<td></td>
<td>(Bertini)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Saffo (Gioja)</td>
<td>Capriccio e buon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>cuore (Gioja)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spring Season</td>
<td>Bianca</td>
<td>Il finto feudatario</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Blasis)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>La Vestale</td>
<td>Amore e dovere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Galzerani)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fall Season</td>
<td>La Vestale</td>
<td>La spada di legno</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Galzerani)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Elisabetta</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Galzerani)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I Titani</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Il calzolaio di</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mompelliari</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1820</td>
<td>Coreodramma</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Carnival and Lent</td>
<td>Cimene</td>
<td>La campanella</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Season</td>
<td></td>
<td>d'argento</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>L'idolo birmano</td>
<td>(Bertini)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Bertini)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I Titani</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Alessandro</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

172
According to the programmes of ballet held in the Dance Collection of the New York Public Library, Blasis danced only in one "coreodramma", La Vestale, during the Spring Season of 1818. The name of the great pedagogue is listed in the programme as a member of the "corps de ballet". All the other programmes reporting the name of Blasis, either as a soloist or as a principal dancer, are related to either "serious" or "comic" ballets, of which "French dancing" was one of the main components. In contrast, dance historians such as Fernau Hall and Gino Tani report that Blasis was often billed as "ballerino di rango francese", although they do not document their assertions.

The fact that Blasis could perform different types of danced roles is possibly explained by the broad-based education he had received in France during his early years. During that period, he had worked with many teachers and ballet masters who had taken part in the renewal of theatrical dancing brought about the "ballet d'action". Unfortunately, the biographical sources do not indicate who had been responsible for introducing Blasis to the rules of the art of mime. The only mention of Carlo Blasis's interest in mime in this period is a footnote in Notes Upon Dancing.

It may be observed that young Blasis, upon reflecting what important assistance Pantomime gesture derives from a knowledge of theatrical declamation, studied that art, taking for his models Talma, Lafont, Joanny and Martelly. He recited in a small amateur theatre, the Oedipe of Voltaire, and Oreste in the tragedy of Iphigénie, by Guimond de la Touche. From this essay he was found he might have become a first-rate tragedian.8

Mime experiences as expressed within his dancing career were not reflected in Blasis' subsequent activity as a teacher. At the Milanese Dance Academy he never dealt with mime classes, which were taught by his wife, Annunziata Ramaccini, whose name recurs in the list of mime artists engaged at La Scala theatre, during the same years as her husband. Mime classes had been regularly held since 1813, the year of the foundation of the school, and when in 1837 Carlo Blasis was appointed Director of the Academy his wife Annunziata took charge of the "finishing" class of mime. Giuseppe Bocci, a celebrated mime dancer of the "coreodramma" period, taught mime at more elementary levels. It is in the second section of Notes upon Dancing there is an account of the organization of the school

Signora Blasis presides over the department of Pantomime, in which it is her business to give the finishing lessons; and accordingly, in her presence soliloquies, dialogues, scenes and complete acts, consisting of dancing and pantomime, are executed. By this means the

8Carlo Blasis, op.cit., p.91.

174
pupils are properly and completely initiated into the most difficult parts of the pantomimic art.9

This is the only reference to the practical teaching of mime under Blasis, which provides a interesting clue in understanding also the written works dealing with the subject.

3.0 Mime in Blasis' writings

Although the art of mime constituted one of the components of theatrical dancing at the time of Blasis, and had been integral part of his activity as a dancer, the written works, with only one exception, contain little reference to that art. This is an interesting aspect of the Blasis' corpus, for it denotes the particular attitude the ballet-master had towards the subject. In his preface to the Traité, Blasis complained about the lack of a similar work in previous dance literature. He claimed that his new book was the first of its kind as authors such as Noverre had not felt the need of codifying the technical principles of their art. As discussed in the previous chapter, Blasis' assertion reflected his biased interpretation of Noverre's work. The literature dealing with the language of gesture and its technique did not have the same problem. Before Blasis decided to devote a specific work to the art of

9C.Blasis, op.cit., p.61.
mime, the Saggi e Prospetto del trattato generale di pantomima naturale e di pantomima teatrale,\textsuperscript{10} publications dealing with the same subject had not been uncommon.\textsuperscript{11}

It is possible that in his early years the author of The Code of Terpsichore had been aware of Jean Georges Noverre's Lettres sur les arts imitateurs, published in France in 1803, which discussed the language of gesture and its importance more in detail than the previous and more widely known Lettres sur la danse. In addition to which, a translation of Johann Jacob Engel Ideen zur einer Mimik, appeared in Milan in 1820, the same year in which the Traité was published; Engel's book was translated by Giovanni Rasori and published under the title Lettere intorno alla mimica. The two volumes, which also included a reprint of Riccoboni's Dell'Arte rappresentativa, were enriched with illustrations depicting all the gestures referred to in the text. Although this publication does not belong to the list of Italian written works on mime, being a translation of a German work of the previous century, the Lettere intorno alla mimica cannot be overlooked for it became a popular reference text on the subject immediately after its translation and publication in Italy. In several

\textsuperscript{10}C.Blasis, Saggi e Prospetto del trattato generale di pantomima naturale e di pantomima teatrale fondato sui principi della fisica e della geometria e dedotto dagli elementi del disegno e del bello ideale, Milano, Guglielmini e Redaelli, 1841
\textsuperscript{11}See Chapter 4.
instances authors dealing with the language of gesture referred to the Rasori translation as a invaluable work.\textsuperscript{12}

The fifty-eight letters examined and discussed a wide range of gestures, providing a contextualisation of each movement through references to both performing arts and social habits; in some instances, the discussion included a brief description of the movement's dynamic. An interesting feature of the work is a detailed study of the interdependence between physical movements and psychological reactions. Although writers such as Andrea Perrucci (1699) and Luigi Riccoboni (1728) had already taken into account the relation between gestures and human feelings, Engel's approach to the topic appears to be more "scientific". While both Perrucci and Riccoboni considered the argument only in relation to the performing act, Engel's dissertation included a detailed study of human behaviour not related to any artistic context. The same approach provided the backbone of the analysis of gestures in the chapter on human passions of Blasis' \textit{L'uomo fisico, intellettuale e morale}. It is possible that Blasis, aware of the existence of Engel's work, decided not to undertake any further study on theatrical mime in his early manuals and essays, for it was not until 1841 that he wrote and published the \textit{Saggi e Prospetto}.

\textsuperscript{12}An example can be found in Vincenzo Buonsignori, \textit{Precetti sull'arte mimica}, Siena, Tipografia dell'Ancora, 1854, p.10.
Diagram 4 introduces a more detailed analysis of the references to mime in selected works of Blasis' corpus. The diagram shows a chronological comparison between nineteenth-century publications concerning mime and Blasis' works dealing with the same subject.

### Diagram 4: A comparison between publications on mime in the first half of the nineteenth century

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Works by other authors</th>
<th>Blasis' works</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1803</td>
<td>Jean Georges Noverre</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Lettres sur les arts</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Imitateurs</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1820</td>
<td>Jacob Engel, transl. by Rasori</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Lettere intorno alla mimica</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1828</td>
<td>Antonio Morrocchesi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Lezioni di declamazione</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Andrea de Jorio</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>La mimica degli antichi investigata nel gestire napoletano</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1841</td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Saggi e Prospetto del trattato di pantomima naturale e di pantomima teatrale</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1844</td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Studi sulle Arti Imitatrici</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1857</td>
<td></td>
<td><em>L'uomo fisico, intellettuale e morale</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.1. The Traité (1820)

The particular nature of the Traité, focusing on the principles and on the technique of theatrical dancing does not give much space to the discussion of mime. This is demonstrated by the absence of a chapter or even a paragraph on the subject in the whole work. There are, however, some brief references to the art of Mime and Pantomime, interspersed in the Avant-Propos as well as in the first chapter. These are mainly literary quotations following the style which characterises the subsequent works by Blasis.

The reading of these passages and the analysis of the way they are inserted in the text reveal the author's attitude towards mime. In giving preeminence to the discussion of dance technique Blasis seems to consider mime as a different art form, independent and detached from the art of dancing. This position, which is never clearly defined by the author, appears to be in open contrast to the theories formulated by the supporters of "ballet d'action", for whom expressive gesture were an integral part of the choreographic art. Statements such as:

Ce serait une chose plaisante que celle de voir un mime représentant l'un des plus illustres personnages de l'antiquité, avec les manières naïves et badines qui caractérisent l'habitant des campagnes. Le danseur et le mime doivent consulter leur physique et leurs habitudes corporelles pour se couvrir du costume des
or, further on

La pantomime exprime beaucoup sans doute, mais sans l'accent et le sentiment des sons mélodieux de la musique, elle ne peut nous toucher, et nous émouvoir entièrement.¹³

could lead to the conclusion that Blasis considered the art of mime as different from the art of dancing, and in a position of inferiority. Such a conclusion would, however, be erroneous, for the passages are conceived so as to stress the importance of pure dancing, in a characteristic "Italian" way of expounding theories which is based on creating contrasts in order to put the main topic into relief. The different attitude towards mime in the subsequent and more complete work, The Code of Terpsichore provides evidence of that.

3.2 The Code of Terpsichore (1828)

From the list of contents it is clear that, unlike the Traité, Pantomime is widely considered in the Code of Terpsichore, being extensively discussed in the Third Part. The discussion takes the form of an historical dissertation enriched by several theoretical precepts, of both a general and technical nature. It is in this

¹³ Carlo Blasis, Traité élémentaire, théorique et pratique de l'art de la danse, Milan, Chez Joseph Beati et Tenenti, 1820, pp.31-35.

180
section that Blasis expounded, for the first time, his classification of three types of mime gestures: the "natural", derived from everyday habits and common human behaviour; the "artificial", stemming from examples of the visual arts; and the "conventional", derived from the theatre practice of dumb signs, which, according to the author, had its roots in far-off times. The latter are of vital importance in order to "cast a light on some obscure parts of Pantomime performance" and, as they "bear some kind of analogy to the things they represent", they are thus "sufficiently intelligible" to the spectator.¹⁴

The nature of "artificial" gestures remains obscure as, according to Blasis, they find their roots in various manifestations of Art, meaning mainly the visual arts, exactly in the same way as the so-called "conventional" gestures. Thus Blasis does not mark a clear boundary between the first and the second type. The only element of differentiation given to the reader is the description of "artificial" gestures as those which: "serve to represent objects, as a warrior, a child, a temple, a ship, arms, robes etc." On the other hand, "conventional" gestures are those conveying "things that we cannot perfectly understand but with the assistance of our imagination". As an example for this category Blasis

refers to "a festival, a wedding, a coronation, the imitation of a father, a husband, a son, the indication of power, slavery, revolt etc."\textsuperscript{15}

Then, further on, "artificial" actions are suddenly termed "symbolic" and are put together in the same category with "conventional" movements, so that any previous distinction disappears. The "symbolic" gestures are those "employed to signify every thing that cannot be exactly imitated or counterfeited by means of simply natural gestures alone".\textsuperscript{16} In the following paragraph, however, both kinds of gestures, the artificial and the conventional, are paired together again under the term "artificial" in order to create a new differentiation with a third type of gesture, the "natural". These movements, too, present a problem of identification. The fact that Blasis defines them as "innate" does not help the reader's understanding, as such gestures can vary from race to race. Aware of the problem, but without giving a precise statement about it, the author discusses the differences between Italian and French mime. For Blasis, the former express themselves easily through gestures, and expressive gesticulation is an essential and integral part of Italian speech. French mime, on the contrary, presents difficulties and Blasis complains about the bad usage of Pantomime in French ballets. Such

\textsuperscript{15}Carlo Blasis, op.cit., pp.114-116.
\textsuperscript{16}Carlo Blasis, op.cit., p.118.
a general lack of clarity is a surprising feature in Blasis' writing. An explanation could derive from the fact that these ideas were not created by the ballet master, but constituted a set of theories already exploited by other authors, reworked, though not well assimilated.

In the first volume of the Lettere intorno alla mimica, and more precisely in Letter IX, Engel classified three types of gestures relating to the art of mime. In the Italian translation, these three types were called "d'intenzione", "d'imitazione", and "involontarii". In contrast to Blasis, Engel, and Rasori on his behalf, gave a clear and detailed explanation of each type.

Alcuni li dico d'essere d'intenzione: ei sono azioni esterne volontarie, la cui mercè appaiono chiari i movimenti dell'anima...Ne sono esempi l'inchinarci verso l'oggetto che amiamo...Alcuni atti li dico di imitazione in quanto che imitano non già l'oggetto che aggiiasi nel pensiero, ma sì lo stato e gli effetti da quello prodotti.E ci ha parimente altri atteggiamenti i quali son fenomeni involontarii, effetti assolutamente fisici degl'interni moti dell'anima.

It is possible that Blasis, in his classification of gestures referred to the content of Engel's ninth letter, trying to pass for his own the theories of the German theorist. To believe Blasis guilty of plagiarism,

---

17Literally "intentional", "imitative" and "spontaneous"
18Johann Jacob Engel, Giovanni Rasori, (translator), Lettere intorno alla mimica, versione dal tedesco di G.Rasori, Milano, Batelli e Fanfani, 1820, pp. 89-90.
however, would be a mistake. The intentional, imitative and spontaneous gestures are not exactly the same as the artificial, conventional and natural ones. According to Engel, each type of gesture was directly derived, for different reasons, from the motions of the soul; whereas for Blasis only the natural gestures were linked to human feelings and emotions, the conventional and artificial ones having a less emotional nature. Despite the difference, however, the similarity of the classification cannot be overlooked.

The dissertation on pantomime in *The Code of Terpsichore* reissues and develops the ideas briefly exploited in the *Traité*. The text seems to confirm that Pantomime and Dancing were two different forms of art, and that they needed the expertise of a skilful ballet-master, in order to be interwoven in the same performing context. Four passages support this point of view.

In France there are dancers capable of performing Pantomime perfectly; and if they do not introduce more of it into their parts, the cause of it should be attributed to the composers who neglect too much this department, or who have not sufficient talent to put Pantomime upon an equality with dancing.

Pantomime, like dancing, has its different kinds [sic]. Gesture, look, carriage, in short all the physical expressions are not exactly the same in every person.
The first study of the pantomimic actor ought to be dancing; to acquire which, he must devote a few years of steady application, that he may know it well, and be thus enabled to profit by its advantages.

Our ballets [the Italian ones] have the advantage of being performed by a greater number of persons. Each mime or dancer takes the part which best suits his peculiar figure and talent. It is the duty of the Ballet-Master to look into these particulars and judiciously to distribute and appropriate the parts. 19

It is interesting to note how, having established the difference between a dancer and a mime, referring to the latter as "mime actor", Blasis did not consider that particular kind of versatile artist who, like himself, was able to be both a mime and a dancer. In the section on Pantomime, and in other chapters of The Code dealing with the same subject, this double artistry is never contemplated, with the exception of one passage.

In France, the parts and lines of actors have been divided and sub-divided in the minute manner, that all may be in a sort of exact accordance. The following is a classification of some of the principal parts: Jeunes premières; jeunes premières ingénuités [sic]; amoureux; amoureux marqués [sic]; grandes coquettes; petits maîtres; marquis; premiers rôles; pères nobles; mères nobles; rôles à manteau; duegnes (Spanish personage); financiers; soubrettes; valets... This example deserves to be followed in every branch of theatrical art. But it frequently happens that, through motives of interest or ambition, an actor is induced to aim at acquiring a talent as universal as possible. This is well enough, if he finds himself really endowed with the required qualifications. Indeed I would then advise him to imitate every thing, 19

19 Carlo Blasis, op. cit., pp. 120, 121, 122, 123, 124.
to render himself a perfect master of mimicry in every kind.\textsuperscript{20}

Yet this passage is ambiguous for it refers to artists dealing with different forms of the same art, namely the equivalents of the "noble", "character" and "grotesque" dancing, but it does not discuss the instance of a single artist being able to deal with different arts at the same time. The classification of the various types of dramatic art is, in the opinion of the author, one of the many examples applicable to all theatre arts. Consequently a good artist is the one who is able to extend himself across the wide range of chances provided by his own art; still it is not clear whether Blasis is saying that only the mime can move between one style and another, whether the dancer can, or, indeed, whether either can make the two art forms compatible within the context of a single performance or even on different occasions. The issue, however, does not involve the compatibility between Dance and Pantomime. The link between the two arts is music which, in the opinion of the author, is an essential element in the compatibility of Pantomime within a ballet. In discussing the matter Blasis, who had received a good musical training, affirms that Pantomime, like dancing, should be "regulated according to music", in order to follow "the rhythm of the tunes". The interdependence between music and

\textsuperscript{20}C. Blasis, op. cit., p. 125
Pantomime, however, should not be forced in order to achieve the task. The ballet-master should be able to regulate the perfect balance between the two arts in order to "manage that each sentiment expressed may be responsive to the measure".\textsuperscript{21}

The Third Part of the \textit{Code} ends with a brief account on the characters of Commedia dell'Arte;\textsuperscript{22} it does not provide the reader with any extra information, and no technical observations are made; Blasis relies exclusively on an historical account together with a detailed description of each "maschera". The Third Part, therefore, does not include any technical advice to the performer, as had been the case in other sections devoted to dance technique. The only suggestions of a technical nature concern the "inspiration" for both a ballet-master and a mime actor. Anticipating the content of the \textit{Studi sulle Arti Imitatrici}, Blasis asserted the importance of studying human nature, the human mind and human genius, in order to be able to convey emotions and feelings in the most realistic way.

3.3. The \textit{Saggi e Prospetto}(1841)

The only work by Blasis dealing exclusively with the art of mime is the 1841 \textit{Saggi e Prospetto del trattato di

\textsuperscript{21}Carlo Blasis, op.cit., p.127.
\textsuperscript{22}'On the origins of those masked Characters who perform in Italian Comedies' in Carlo Blasis, op.cit., pp.129-132.
pantomima naturale e di pantomima teatrale. The publication was intended as an introduction to another work, the treatise or "trattato" of pantomime mentioned in the title, which was never written. According to the introduction and to the summary of the Saggi e Prospetto, the "trattato" aimed at covering every aspect of mime, providing the reader with a considerable amount of illustrated examples, as briefly reported also in the frontispiece of the book.

Con un metodo di insegnamento preciso e sicuro e con l'aiuto d'un sistema figurativo si descrivono analiticamente i caratteri, le passioni, le sensazioni, le idee, le impressioni. 23

A sample of the system of illustrated examples, to which the passage refers, is an illustration facing the frontispiece and depicting several characters expressing their moods through corresponding physical attitudes. The Introduction to the work and the five-page summary of the "trattato" were the only sections not to be reproduced in the subsequent Studi sulle Arti Imitatrici, in which, on the contrary, one can find the five essays or "saggi" originally paired with the "prospetto". If the lack of information on mime which characterises the Studi is considered, then the introduction and the summary of the

23Carlo Blasis, Saggi e Prospetto del trattato di pantomima naturale e di pantomima teatrale, Milano, Guglielmini e Redaelli, 1841, frontispiece.
Saggi e Prospetto become the only sources documenting Blasis approach to mime and the only sources revealing the structure and the content of the mime treatise Blasis had in mind. The Introduction is anonymous, but a comparison with the prose of other works by Blasis suggests that he wrote that as well. The two types of mime discussed in the treatise are immediately introduced and defined: "pantomima naturale" or "natural pantomime" deals with all the gestures derived from the everyday and from innate habits of the human being; once these gestures became an integral part of an art form, and are consequently subjected to the rules of that art, they form the "pantomima teatrale" or "theatre pantomime". This distinction is clearer than the classification of the three types of mime gesture expounded in the Code of Terpsichore, and suggests that Blasis pondered on the argument. Having defined the two types of "pantomime", the author of the introduction discusses the reasons which prompted the idea of writing a treatise on mime. Other works on the same subject are then taken into account, Engel's book among them, and the writer asserts that, as none of these publications provides enough information of both technical and theoretical kind on the

The Italian term "pantomima" and its English equivalent "pantomime", were used by Blasis as synonyms of "mimo" and "mime". This terminology has been respected in this thesis, although in contemporary language, there is a difference in both languages between "pantomime" and "mime".

189
art of mime, Blasis decided to fill the gap and to write a treatise which aims to be complete.

The summary of the treatise demonstrates Blasis' intention. The "trattato" was going to be in seventeen parts, each one dealing with different topics, which were: "natural pantomime", "the face", "the centre of gravity", "feelings and passions", "age", "character", "theatre pantomime", "natural and conventional gestures", "imitating arts", "subjects to imitate", "different genres of pantomime", "music", "costumes", "chironomia", "choreography and mime", "a dictionary of ballet and mime terms" and "the maschere of the Commedia". A brief analysis of the headings, of the sub-headings and of the content of each part, reveals that some topics had been discussed in previous works. For example, the theory of "the centre of gravity", to be discussed in the Third Part of the "trattato", had been formulated in the Code;\(^\text{25}\) both the Fifteenth Part, dealing with the art of choreography, and the Seventeenth, on the "maschere", echoed the two similar sections in the Code, respectively entitled "The composition of Ballets";\(^\text{26}\) and "On the origins of those Masked Characters who perform in Italian Comedies".\(^\text{27}\)

\(^{26}\) In Carlo Blasis, op.cit., pp.139-141.
\(^{27}\) In Carlo Blasis, op.cit., pp.129-132.
It is interesting to note that the summary of the "trattato" also included topics which were going to be included in subsequent works. The Second Part, on the "face" and the eyes, the Third Part on the "centre of gravity", the Fourth Part, on "feelings and passions", the Fifth Part, on "age" and the Sixth Part, on "character", were all discussed, under identical or similar headings in L'uomo fisico, intellettuale e morale.28

3.4. The Studi sulle Arti Imitatrici (1844)

Although there are references to mime throughout the book, and an entire essay is devoted to the subject, namely the first of the Studi, the art of pantomime is always considered either from an historical or an academic point of view, without any technical instruction as in the Code of Terpsichore. In addition to which, many considerations expounded in the Studi are borrowed from the Third Part, of the Code, including the relationship between mime and music discussed above; nothing new is added.

Some of the precepts already expounded in the third section of the Code are reissued and developed in the first essay of the Studi. Discussing the art of the "mime

actor" and his physical prerequisites, Blasis affirms that

La fisionomia del mimo dev'essere loquacemente espressiva, e visibilmente aver dee marcati tutti i tratti che la compongono. Che i muscoli pronunziati del suo volto siano suscettibili di mobilità; che bene abbia aperto l'occhio e in un vivace lo sguardo. Anco la statura deve essere normale onde si adatti alle svariate parti che a lui vengono affidate; le forme del suo corpo siano nobili e proporzionate, i suoi movimenti e le sue pose facili, i suoi gesti naturali e spontanei.

Further on in the first essay, the advice for studying human nature, already formulated in the Code, is repeated. This time, however, the recommendation is particularly interesting

Il primo studio al quale si porrà mente l'attore mimico dev'esser quello dell'uomo fisico, ma far lo deve nel tempo stesso che ei studia l'uomo morale. 29

The mention of man as both a "physical" and "moral" subject of study for the mime actor introduces the classification of the three main aspects of the human being, namely the "physical", the "moral" and the "intellectual", which constituted the argument of the subsequent work, L'uomo fisico, intellettuale e morale, published in 1857.

The rest of the essay includes a few practical suggestions to the performer, in which are echoed some of the rules expounded in both *Il Corago* and Perrucci's *Dell'Arte rappresentativa*.

Il mimo, l'attore, deve sapere ben presentarsi in iscena incedere con passo fermo ma naturale, atteggiarsi con precisione e sicurezza, e indicare con tutta la persona ch'egli è padrone di se stesso, e quindi dello sviluppo di tutti i suoi mezzi, bandire da' suoi movimenti l'esagerato, il contorto, e con eguale accorgimento tanto il manierato che il lezioso, quanto il concitato che il severo; astenersi dal soverchio calpestar l'impalcato, a meno ch'ei non finga passioni eminentemente violenti, come sarebbero la collera, la disperazione, il delirio e la rabbia... Conviene che ei ponga i suoi gesti in relazione con la capacità del teatro: negeletta questa necessaria proporzione ei correrebbe il rischio di comparire esagerato in un locale circoscritto; freddo, insignificante, inintelligibile in un altro più vasto.30

### 3.5. Notes upon Dancing (1847)

One of the only two references to Pantomime in *Notes Upon Dancing* can be found in the "advertisement" at the beginning of the book. Here the translator discusses briefly what is a ballet, and identifies the object of this art as being "the Beautiful in motion, supported by expressive and well adapted music". Barton then continues:

30Carlo Blasis, op.cit., p.23. Compare this passage with the ones quoted from *Il Corago*, in Chapter 4, pp.111-114, and from Andrea Perrucci's *Dell'Arte Rappresentativa*, in the same chapter, pp.117-120.
This may be effected in two ways, by two classes of movements; the one is quick, vehement and joyous, and is no[ne] other than Dancing - but the other class of motions is a far different thing; it is no less than a mute expression of feelings, passions, ideas, intentions, or any other sensation belonging to a reasonable being - this is properly termed Pantomime, and must also be sustained by music."

The utility of mime passages in a ballet is then stressed by the translator, who acknowledges Blasis as the author of a system, probably the one sketched in the Saggi e Prospetto, through which mime actors could not fail in performance. The other reference to mime art can be found in Part Two, being the account of the classes held at the Imperial Academy of Dance in Milan, mentioned above.

3.6 L'uomo (1857)

Although L'uomo fisico, intellettuale e morale was not intended to be a treatise, some topics discussed in the first of the two sections of the book belonged originally to the framework of the "trattato" on natural and theatre mime. One might suppose that Blasis, having prepared the discussion of those topics for a work which was never completed, used the existing material for his last publication. This is particularly evident in a

31Carlo Blasis, Notes upon Dancing, London, Delaporte, 1847, p.I.
32Carlo Blasis, L'uomo fisico intellettuale e morale, Milano, Guglielmini, 1857.
33See Paragraph 3.3, p.187.
section of the book placed between the First and the Second part of the work, and not relating to the content of either. This section includes several illustrations, among which are five plates explained to the reader through accompanying notes. Each plate represents movements and static poses of the body according to different human reactions, feelings and emotions. The first plate also shows every possible direction of the eyes according to the feeling expressed. The drawings are all by Blasis and bear resemblance to some of the forty illustrations in Morrocchesi's *Lezioni di declamazione*.

Preceding the five plates and their explanatory notes are more illustrations, which show a system of graphic notation based on geometry, that Blasis created in order to describe how the character and the personality of a person corresponded to her or his way of walking; a theory which echoed those subsequently enunciated by the Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso, who affirmed that determined physiognomies corresponded to both criminal attitudes and feelings. Following the notation of the various ways of walking, one finds the seventeen "stick-drawings" showing some movements and attitudes of the body corresponding to psychological reactions. These are an extended version of the first two examples of

---

34 Antonio Morrocchesi, *Lezioni di declamazione*, Firenze, All'insegna di Dante, 1832.
"stick-drawing", which were inserted in a footnote to the "Avant-Propos" in the 1820 Traité. An interesting feature of these illustrations, including the five plates, is that, although they are not supported by any dance context given the anthropological nature of the work, each figure includes the drawing of the direction line of the barycentre, or centre of gravity, conventionally referred to in ballet technique.

More evidence of the fact that the central section of L'uomo was derived from the unfinished treatise on mime, is given by one plate, which sketches some physical expression of different feelings; this plate is exactly the same facing the frontispiece of the 1841 Saggi e Prospetto. One might suppose, therefore, that all the other plates forming this "independent" section of the book, constitute part of that illustrated system of analysis mentioned in the frontispiece of the 1841 text.

4.0 Conclusion

The analysis of references to the art of mime in Blasis' written works demonstrates that the ballet-master never attempted a written codification of the mime practice applied to theatrical dancing. Although the art of mime constitutes a recurring topic in Blasis' corpus, the subject is treated from a literary and theoretical perspective. In addition, Blasis never formulated his own
theories on the topic: in discussing mime and its application to the performing arts, he referred to existing notions, derived from previous dissertations on both drama and dance.

The only exception could have been the unfinished treatise summarised in the Saggi e Prospetto. An accurate reading of the summary, however, reveals that the even the "trattato" would have relied more on a theoretical discussion of the subject than on a practical and technical set of rules. This impression is supported by those sections of the "trattato" which, with the same headings and the same tables of contents, were eventually published in L'uomo fisico, intellettuale e morale. The chapter on human emotions or "Passioni" which, as discussed above, corresponds to the Fourth Part of the unfinished "trattato generale di pantomima naturale e di pantomima teatrale", is a long, pedantic discussion of various psychological reactions commonly experienced by human beings; there is no description of the physical responses to those "Passioni". Similarly the section on "age", the Fifth Part of the "trattato" which corresponds to the twenty-third chapter of L'uomo, is nothing else but a long dissertation on the various "ages" of man, with no explanation of how these "ages" can be identified from a physical point of view.
The section of *L'uomo* placed in between the first and the second part of the book is the only source providing evidence of a system of codification of movement, gesture and positions of the body. The codification, however, is achieved mainly through the illustrations, with a few lines of explanatory text. The written explanation of the text does not establish any rule and summarises the analysis of gesture written by Engel in *Ideen zur einer Mimik*.

To state that Carlo Blasis was not responsible for a written codification of mime, does not diminish the importance of the French-Italian ballet-master. As demonstrated in this part of the thesis, in discussing the use of mime in ballet, Blasis referred to theories which had been formulated mainly in relation to drama and not to dance, as in the case of Engel's *Ideen zur einer Mimik*. Although he had been trained under the guidance of some of the most important exponents of the "ballet d'action", it was also his acting experience which made Blasis aware of the importance of expressive gesture, as affirmed above. This element should not be overlooked, as it is through Blasis' genius that principles created for a specific performing context, were shifted and eventually adapted to become an integral part of the dance language, even though the process of adaptation cannot be credited to him. The analysis of the
illustrations, in Part Three of this thesis will provide more evidence of this fact and, at the same time, will explore Blasis' attempts to codify mime movement through visual examples.
PART THREE

THE ILLUSTRATED GESTURE: ANALYSIS OF THE VISUAL MATERIAL
ON MIME (1600-1857)
Chapter 7

A methodology for the analysis of the visual material in mime treatises and related sources

1.0 Introduction

2.0 Visual material on mime in books

3.0 Visual material on mime in related sources

4.0 Methods of analysis

5.0 Sources of the analysis

5.1 The Fossard collection

5.2 Jacob Engel's *Lettere intorno alla mimica*

5.3 Morrocchesi's *Lezioni di declamazione*

5.4 Blasis' illustrations

6.0 Conclusion
1.0 Introduction

The present chapter focuses on the study of the illustrated sources, establishing and proposing, where necessary, a set of methodologies for the comparative analysis of the various mime movements portrayed in the texts and in other related sources. The purpose of this analysis is to retrace the main stages in the development of the codification of mime gestures based on visual examples, in order to provide a complementary study to that concerning the codification of mime in written works.

In Part Two of this thesis, the analysis of the written works dealing with mime, revealed that some publications included a visual exemplification of the content, in the form of plates. In Chapter 5 it was also demonstrated that Blasis adopted the same device for four of his publications, namely the Traité (1820), the Code of Terpsichore (1828), the Saggi e Prospetto (1841) and L'uomo (1857).

The visual material on mime is more abundant than the written sources, since the iconography of gesture embraces more than the limited number of illustrations to be found in books; it includes drawings, engravings, paintings and etchings not related to a literary context, which form a range of "alternative" sources. These
figures, independent of text, can be found as part of a specific corpus, such as the Fossard or the Callot collections, or they can be isolated examples of visual material. For the purposes of the comparative analysis, the distinction between the two types of sources does not pose a problem; the items of the Fossard collection were, originally, individual pictures, assembled by Monsieur Fossard who followed neither a chronological order nor a thematic arrangement. In the analysis, therefore, both types of sources are paired, and then compared to the illustrations related to written sources, in order to identify similarities or differences.

In several instances, the comparative study of the illustrations shows that some gestures became part of a well-established performing tradition and were perpetuated within different forms of theatre arts for more than two centuries, with little or no changes. At the same time, the analysis reveals that there are movements illustrated which did not survive through the centuries or which survived but underwent significant changes. The difficulty of formulating a methodology of

---

1 The Recueil Fossard was a collection of sixteenth century engravings, compiled by Fossard for Louis XIV and then discovered in the early twentieth century by Agne Beijer. See Agne Beijer, Pierre Duchartre, Le Recueil Fossard, Paris, Librairie Théâtrale, 1981. The Callot collection is named after the author of the engravings, which are assembled under the title I balli di Sfessania, although they have never been published as a whole.
analysis, which is appropriate to all the sources, derives mainly from these discrepancies.

2.0 Visual material on mime in books

The device of providing visual examples of movement, so that the text of a manual or of a treatise could be more comprehensible, was not a feature exclusive to books dealing with the language of gesture. Yet, theorists and pedagogues writing on the various forms of mime, such as the social and the theatrical, adopted this device comparatively late, in the second half of eighteenth century, when illustrations exemplifying various forms of motion had long been used in other contexts. Well-known examples can be found in anatomical or pictorial studies from the early Renaissance onwards, and, what is more interesting for the purpose of this research, in texts dealing with dance and ballet. The function of these illustrations was, of course, to provide the reader with a means of explanation complementary to the printed words. The purpose could be attained in two different ways, corresponding to two different forms of illustrated examples: either a figure portraying the whole body while executing the movement and keeping a particular posture, or a set of stylised signs summarising the dance movements, namely a system of movement notation.

In diagram 5 illustrated dance manuals or treatises
are compared to non-illustrated written works on mime gestures, starting from the second half of the sixteenth century which is the point at which this research begun.

Diagram 5 Illustrated dance texts and non illustrated works on mime

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>ILLUSTRATED WORKS ON DANCE</th>
<th>NON ILLUSTRATED WORKS ON MIME</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1581</td>
<td>Fabritio Caroso, Il Ballarino</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1589</td>
<td>Thoinot Arbeau, Orchesographie</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1600</td>
<td>Fabritio Caroso, Nobiltà di Dame</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1604</td>
<td>Cesare Negri, Nuove inventioni di balli</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1625</td>
<td>Giovanni da Bonifacio, L'arte dei cenni</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1699</td>
<td>Andrea Perrucci, Dell'arte rappresentativa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1700</td>
<td>Pat-Auge Feuillet, Choreographie</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1716</td>
<td>Gregorio Lambranzi, Neue und Curieuse Teatralscne Tantz-schul</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1717</td>
<td>John Weaver, The Loves of Mars and Venus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1725</td>
<td>Pierre Rameau, Le Maître à Danser</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1728</td>
<td>Luigi Riccoboni, Dell'Arte Rappresentativa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1760</td>
<td>Jean Georges Noverre, Lettres sur la Danse</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1779</td>
<td>Gennaro Magri, Trattato Teoretico -Pratico</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The diagram reveals that by the time Bonifacio's L'arte dei cenni was published, the art of completing
dance manuals with explanatory illustrations, either in the form of full figures or in that of conventional signs of notation, was a well established one. Although Arbeau's *Orchésographie*, is generally considered the first publication to use illustrations as a means of explanation, the diagram includes an earlier text by Fabritio Caroso. This is, in fact, adorned with plates, which illustrate various poses of the dancers discussed in the text. The inclusion of Feuillet's *Chorégraphie*, deserves particular attention, as the book expounds a method of notating only dance steps, without considering the upper part of the body. The signs invented by Feuillet, nonetheless, constitute a precise form of illustrating movement, which can also be seen as a further development of a previous, rudimentary, form of notation which used complete images of body postures.

It is difficult to explain the difference between illustrated publications and non-illustrated ones, revealed by the diagram. A clue, however, can be found in comparing Caroso's *Nobiltà di dame* (1600) to Bonifacio's *L'arte dei cenni* (1625). In the former, one finds

---

3Thoinot Arbeau, *Orchésographie*, Langres, no publisher, 1588.
6See Ann Hutchinsons Guest, *Choreo-graphics, a comparison of dance notation systems from the fifteenth century to the present*, Gordon and Breach, New York, 1989.
constant reference to the "mathematical" nature of dance sequences and dance steps, a concept which implies ideas of perfection of execution together with strict correspondance to the music, and a purity derived from geometrical forms or patterns. An example of this approach to the subject can be found in the geometrical illustration of the pattern in the "contrappasso", which had to be executed, as Caroso said, with "matematica perfezione", or mathematical perfection. As mentioned above, visual examples in dance manuals were prompted by the need to make clear the difficult composition of the dances' structure explained in the text. Figures, better than words, gave an immediate understanding of the geometry of the movement itself. The idea of such a "scientific" method of describing dance, reflected cultural attitudes and rules of the period which established a strict correlation within the liberal arts, and in particular between mathematics and dancing. In contrast, Giovanni da Bonifacio, in the introduction to his L'arte dei cenni and in the second part of the dissertation, drew the attention of the reader to the difficulty of containing gestures within scientific laws because, in his opinion, gestures were motions of the body derived from natural and instinctive impulses. Bonifacio asserted, therefore, that gestures had a special nature, from which the dance movements differed
greatly. It is possible that, aware of this limiting characteristic, theorists and writers after Bonifacio and up to Johann Jacob Engel, were reluctant to freeze gesture in an illustration. Yet, even if this hypothesis is accepted, the question why this attitude towards illustrations suddenly changed in the second half of the eighteenth century remains unsolved.

Dance illustrations and images of mime in books have always been different, especially with respect to the purpose of the illustration itself. The former focused on a clear visual explanation of a specific moment within the dynamic of the whole dance movement. The language of dancing, and particularly of the dance technique developed between the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, commonly labelled as "classical", was essentially based on the interactive relationship between static elements such as different poses or "positions", forming the basic vocabulary of ballet, and a related, ruled set of movements, corresponding to the syntax of classical dance language. The particular nature of the basic elements in dance allowed, and still allows, the dance motion to be divided into several static sections, and consequently analysed according to the anatomical and geometrical nature proper to each dance step or movement, i.e. a transference of weight from one foot to another, a
change of position, a leap in the air and the landing from a jumped step.

The study of mime gesture, on the contrary, never developed a similar system of vocabulary and syntax. As discussed in Part Two of this thesis, the majority of theorists and writers dealing with this topic stressed only the importance of the final outcome, and did not acknowledge the dynamic process of a movement. There is, to be sure, an attempt in Blasis to show various elements in the dynamic pattern of the movements, such as the directions of the body. In order to depict these elements, Blasis introduced in each illustration a dotted line, corresponding either to the dynamic of the movements, from left to right, from above downwards and vice versa, or to the changes in the placement of the body weight. But these visual instructions, similar to those in studies on perspective for painters, do not make up for the lack of a broader analytical explanation of the entire dynamic process of gesture.

An analysis of the works including visual examples of the movements discussed, reveals an interesting common denominator. These authors, rather paradoxically, ended by creating a vocabulary of "conventional" signs, while stating and assuming that, although gesture had to be controlled and mastered, it could not be expressed

according to fixed rules, since this would have spoiled its natural expressivity. The contradiction can be explained if one considers that all those writers, with the sole exception of De Jorio, whose treatise dealt more with the folklore aspect of gestures, shared the same theories of theatrical "naturalism", intended as a reflection of reality, filtered by the artist's eye and then rendered by codified forms of different languages. This notion, still used today in relation to both mime and ballet vocabulary,\(^8\) harmonised with the formal "Classicismo" theories which affected, although in different ways, the artistic and cultural trends of the period between Requeno and Blasis, namely between 1797 and 1857. As discussed in Parts One and Two, according to those theories, different models stemming from the visual arts, such as statues from antiquity, were considered as "realistic" reproductions of nature. This is also the reason why the illustrations in mime books bear an abiding resemblance to the conventional attitudes of the statues of that period. Finally, the reference to statuary poses can explain the lack of dynamic instructions in both texts and figures, as the main purpose was to instruct the actor or the dancer to reproduce the pose, not to explain the process to achieve it.

\(^8\)See Anya Peterson Royce, Movement and meaning - creativity and interpretation in ballet and mime, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1984, pp.3-24.
The analysis of the differences between dance illustrations and those related to mime in books, puts into relief another element which deserves to be considered: the placement of the illustrations within the text. In dance manuals, illustrations have generally an immediate relation to the written content. In Arbeau's *Orchésographie*, for example, they are inserted between paragraphs, so that the reader can compare the visual examples to the verbal descriptions; in Gregorio Lambranzi's manual of 1716, on the other hand, the text is inserted within the frame of the illustration itself, while in Feuillet, there is a perfect balance between text and the signs of dance notation. Each one of these examples shows how much attention was paid to provide visual exemplifications, and to establish a form of codification of the dance vocabulary. The absence of an equal treatment of the illustrations portraying mime gestures emphasises the little consideration that writers on mime gave to visual examples. Among these authors, Jacob Engel, in his book *Lettere intorno alla mimica*, groups the plates at random, although giving precise references in the text to the plate to which the verbal

9Thoinot Arbeau, op.cit.
11Raoul-Auger Feuillet, op.cit.
12Johann Jacob Engel, Giovanni Rasori, (translator), Milano, Batelli e Fanfani, 1820.

211
descriptions correspond, a feature which was maintained in subsequent reprints and translations. Other writers placed the whole set of figures at the end of the book, in the form of an appendix or as an auxiliary tool; illustrations placed in this way can be found in the texts by Requeno, De Jorio and Morrocchesi. The latter presents an interesting case, for in his Lezioni di declamazione, the chapter on theatrical gestures is completely detached from the set of images, with four other chapters in between; in addition, in the chapter on gesture there is no reference to any of the forty plates collected at the end of the book. An exception to this system of grouping the illustrations at the end of the dissertation, can be found in Blasis' L'uomo fisico, intellettuale e morale: the twelve stick drawings, the plate dealing with the eyes' directions and the two plates which illustrate the movements of the upper part of the body expressing different feelings, are strategically placed near the text discussing those topics, in order to provide an immediate understanding of the written part.

3.0 Visual material on mime in related sources

Although the source material on the Commedia dell'Arte is abundant, it is difficult to interpret and, therefore, represents a challenge to historians and
scholars. Fortunately, a large amount of documentation related to the Commedia is in the form of illustrated records, providing a good field of study for the evolution of expressive gestures used on the stage. These images, mainly engravings or etchings, are often assembled in a collection, but they can also be found separately. Etchings and engravings are not, however, the only illustrated items available for analysis.

Another type of source material includes paintings and drawings of a different nature, which took theatrical subjects as their inspiration. This second type of what could be called "free-floating" sources, namely those independent of text, is represented by a restricted number of items, which requires a careful study, as its importance can easily be overestimated. The problem with paintings or drawings derives mainly from the fact that neither were intended to be a record of a theatre event, but on the contrary, they were meant to have only a "decorative" purpose. This "raison d'etre" is often forgotten, as it is difficult to say whether the movements of the subject portrayed - actor, singer or dancer - are meant to be expressive or merely "nice" poses suitably fitting the painting itself. The context in which the subject is portrayed can sometimes provide a clue, but not always.
An example can be found in The Pre-Romantic Ballet, where is reproduced a painting by Louis Carrogis (1717-1806) showing a "pas de deux pantomime" from Sylvie, as performed by Jean Dauberval and Marie Allard. The position of the arms of both interpreters could be derived from the vocabulary of mime gestures, but could also be an arbitrary invention of the painter, designed in order to have a pose dramatically appropriate for his subject. The painter might also have chosen two authentic conventional poses from two different performing contexts, and then placed them in a frame of his own creation.

There is enough evidence, thus, of how sources unrelated to a specific context are suggestive but unreliable. An identical problem exists in relation to all those images which cannot be related to a specific context explaining their meaning. Several items in the two collections mentioned above can be misleading, in the absence of supporting elements. For all these reasons, to work on the sources independent of text involves an accurate analysis of the illustrations, by cross-referencing them with more substantial forms of documentation. These can be written references, the supporting evidence of context, such as a precise moment of the ballet or the play within which gestures can

achieve a clear motivation and meaning, or roles whose characterization depends on specific gestures.

In the Fossard collection, for instance, it is possible to find a whole sequence of engravings depicting different characters of the Commedia dell'Arte performing various jests or "lazzi". Each one of the characters, like today's comics, has a brief set of printed lines placed at the foot of the illustration. Those lines are a good device to indicate whether the gestures portrayed belong to theatrical mime language or not. Similarly, in the case of the *Sylvie* painting mentioned above, the fact that the painter, Louis Carrogis was well-known for the faithfulness of his records, supports the fact that the gestures of Dauberval and Allard are really derived from the contemporary vocabulary of theatre mime and belong together to that specific moment portrayed.

The value of the sources unrelated to a specific context derives mainly from the fact that these illustrations fill the historical gap shown by diagram 5. In particular, the content of both Callot's *Balli di Sfessania* and of the Fossard collection covers a large span of time, from the mid-sixteenth through the whole seventeenth century, a period in which, as demonstrated by the diagram, written works on mime did not use illustrative exemplifications.
4.0 Methods of analysis

As the abundance of illustrated source material might be rather problematic to deal with, it is necessary to find a proper methodology in order to provide the comparative analysis of mime gestures within a solid framework. A common approach to this study consists in collecting all the material and placing it in chronological order. This chronological-comprehensive display is necessary not only to trace and to follow the evolution of one or more conventional gestures, but it also guarantees a complete coverage of the sources. It is through this device that many documents are seen to be superfluous for the purpose of this research and can be discarded. On the other hand, the removal of apparent useless material has to be undertaken with care, for many illustrations which seem not to have any counterpart within the context studied can still be useful as "negative" proofs, or proofs of non-evidence. Yet, to set all the illustrations one after the other, according to dates, is inadequate for the purposes of the analysis. A different method of beginning the study could be the retrospective view of the changes in gestures through the ages.
The retrospective method starts from a set of images, selected by the scholar, in this case those included in Blasis' works, and then moves backwards, trying to retrace the historical passages within the evolution of gestures, and, where possible, to reconstruct the history of each single movement together with its origins. As this method deals with a restricted number of research elements, it can certainly not be regarded as a complete account, since the danger is to omit relevant sources of contextualisation which might not be strictly related to the illustrations analysed. The lack of immediate relationship between images does not in fact represent a good reason for the discarding of figures portraying gesture which are similar but not exactly the same. The study of images of mime movements involves the study of the entire range of nuances for each single gesture, and even if these "variations on a main theme" differ seriously from the original in terms of posture or motion, they represent a contribution to the analysis, which cannot be overlooked.

In so far as both the chronological and the retrospective approaches are not satisfactory on their own, a combination of the two will provide a good basic framework for the analysis. The retrospective method focuses on selected elements immediately identified, while the chronological device helps to avoid incorrect
choices of further selection, providing the research with a necessary richness of material. The two methods mentioned above, however, represent only two basic layers in the structure of the work, for a comparative analysis based only on these two layers will be inconclusive. In analysing the evolution of theatre gesture other elements must be taken into account, which are: the relation of gesture to the different performing contexts, such as Commedia dell'Arte, the "Classicismo" drama, the "ballet d'action" or the nineteenth-century ballet; the study of artistic and social changes that might have affected the evolution of the language of gesture; the time and space parameters, namely the interaction between gesture and the "tempi" of the different performing arts and their interdependence with the performing space; the relation of gesture to different characters; the sources from which the language of gestures was derived, such as common habits or artistic models. As shown in Chapter Eight, the study of these elements forms the content of the analysis, and complements the chronological and retrospective research.

5.0 Sources of the analysis

In order to compare the illustrations and to retrace the different stages of the evolution of theatre gesture, taking into account the elements mentioned above, the
analysis follows the chrono-historical order which characterises the first five chapters of this thesis. As for the analysis of the written material, the analysis of the visual material moves from the Commedia dell'Arte forwards through time, taking into account a selection of sources. The choice of these sources follows the same criteria adopted for the analysis of the written works, taking into account the particular nature of the sources and their strategic chronological position within the history of the illustrated gesture.

5.1 The Fossard collection

The Fossard collection includes engravings illustrating moments and characters from the Commedia dell'Arte performances, derived from both the sixteenth and the seventeenth century. This collection was discovered by Agne Beijer in the early twentieth century as it had been kept in the uncatalogued reserves of the Museum of Stockholm. The importance of the Fossard collection derives mainly from the fact that, as written in the dedication of Monsieur Fossard to King Louis XIV, the engravings come from different periods, such as the reigns of Henry IV, Louis XIII and Louis XIV. If one accepts the generally held theory that Commedia dell'Arte came into being in the mid sixteenth-century, then the Fossard collection gains in value since it offers a
summary of mime gestures from the beginnings of the Commedia.

There are mainly three different types of illustrations:

5.1.1 the full-page engraving, depicting a precise moment of the performance, with the characters engaged in various actions, explained by written lines within the frame of the engraving itself.

5.1.2 isolated portraits of single characters, sometimes grouped all together in the same engraving, but without any connection.

5.1.3 a vignette illustrating a few "lazzi" or jests, as performed by the "zanni" or buffoons.

This latter type does not concern the comparative analysis of mime gestures; as demonstrated, the mimed "lazzi" remained an exclusive feature of the Commedia, with the sole exception of Italian ballet in the early eighteenth century, and did not become part of the language of gesture. The second type, on the other hand, can be quite a useful source, especially when captions, even in the form of a sonnet is connected to the single image. Gestures which belong to the vernacular gesticulation of each character can be identified by the
written lines; and in the case of no written captions, the fixed qualities of each "maschera" can help in recognising the meaning of a gesture, such as that for "hiding" which characterises recurrently the fearful Capitan Spavento or those for "richness", "possession" and "tight-fistedness" of the wealthy Pantaloon. Still, the monographic quality of the illustrations can often be an obstacle in the identification of less familiar poses, which can be identified only if put in relation to a specific moment in the performance. This second type is certainly the most difficult to deal with, as the illustration can be very misleading and very tempting at the same time. The first type is, of course, the easiest to handle, as it is possible to avoid any misinterpretation because of the written lines describing the action portrayed in detail.

The Fossard collection is not the only set of pictorial sources to be found on the Commedia dell'Arte. There are other collections, such as the Callot one, of the Balli di Sfessania, illustrating mainly some danced jests of the zannis, and Gillot's collection, which includes other illustrations of the "maschere" and of their actions on stage. What has been said for the Fossard collection applies to these other two, as well as to all those iconographical sources on the Commedia, existing on their own.
5.2 Jacob Engel's Lettere intorno alla mimica

The 1785 publication of Engel's book, Ideen zur einer Mimik, gave to the illustrated codification of mime gesture its most complete expression for that time. The illustrations portray sixty-nine gestures described in the two volumes. Although not all the movements and poses illustrated are related to the language of theatre gesture, as the work is a dissertation on mime and not a theatre treatise, the content of many figures reflects and refers to images derived from contemporary drama and dance, and from previous treatises on gestures. While the text itself is very similar to other books, such as those by Bonifacio or Noverre, it is through the illustrations that the work acquires value for comparative analysis. The vignettes show anonymous characters, both men and women, dressed in the civilian way of the time, frozen in different attitudes. Only in the instance where the plates refer to examples derived from the performing arts, do the characters portrayed appear dressed in tunics in the Greek style. This feature, which reflects the influence of the eighteenth-century revival of ancient drama, is the same adopted almost fifty years later by Antonio Morrocchesi in his Lezioni di declamazione.

Subsequent translations of Engel's work into French (1788), and into Italian (1820) which is the one referred to in this thesis, did not bring substantial changes to
the illustrations, which were more or less faithfully reproduced from the originals. The Italian edition, however, is the only one to reproduce the plates from the original edition. In contrast, the English version (1822) is characterized by significant alterations in the poses illustrated, despite the fact that the written description, although translated, remains that of the original.

5.3 Morrocchesi's Lezioni di declamazione

The plates in Antonio Morrocchesi's Lezioni di Declamazione (1832) demonstrate that in the first half of the nineteenth century the language of theatre gesture had been provided with a complete vocabulary of expressive signs. Although to codify a considerable amount of expressive gestures was not the intention of the author, throughout the nineteenth century the illustrated examples at the end of the treatise were regarded as models to reproduce faithfully.

As mentioned above, the set of forty illustrations which forms the last section of the book, shows clearly a great range of expressive movements intended to accompany and to underline the actors' speech. A feature which is particularly interesting and relevant to the comparative analysis, is the visual exemplification of the movements which accompany an entire monologue; the monologue is

---

\textsuperscript{14}See Chapter 4, pp.129-130.
divided into short sections corresponding to different plates and each section of the narrative action is represented by a specific gesture. It is interesting to note how the characters wear theatrical costumes which reproduce Renaissance fashion for the women and the Roman tunic or armour for the men, another proof that the "Classicismo" influence was still very strong in Italy.

As it is observed in the comparative analysis, the illustrations from Morrocchesi's *Lezioni* bear an evident similarity to those of Engel's *Ideen*. This is not mere coincidence, and it shows how in Europe, between the last decades of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth, theatre theoreticians and pedagogues were well aware of the necessity of codifying the rules of their art. These rules, moreover, had an international standard, as they appear to be the same despite being conceived in different geographical locations.

5.4 Blasis' illustrations

Although Carlo Blasis adopted the device of providing illustrated examples of the written text from his first treatise on dancing,\(^{15}\) he referred to that same device for illustrating mime only in his last work, *L'uomo fisico, intellettuale e morale*. It has been demonstrated, though, that the set of illustrations and

\(^{15}\) Carlo Blasis, *Traité élémentaire, théorique et pratique de l'art de la danse*, Milan, Chez Beati et Tenenti, 1820, see Chapter 5, p.145.
related text were originally intended for a previous work, the "trattato" on natural and theatre pantomime, the summary of which had been published in the 1841 Saggi e Prospetto del trattato generale di pantomima naturale e di pantomima teatrale. The illustrations included in this section of L'uomo are of two types: "stick-drawings" and full figures. The former stress the importance of eye-direction according to the body posture in various attitudes; the latter deal with a complete description of the expressive motion of the body.

In the context of an analysis of mime gesture and of its history, both the stick-drawings and the plates in L'uomo are particularly significant. These illustrations summarise theories and principles on mime of the first half of the nineteenth century. At the same time, they are the last visual reference to mime movement, as for the rest of the century, in spite of many imitations of Blasis' dancing treatises, no theorist or pedagogue devoted a work or part of a work to the analysis of theatre mime, with the sole exception of Serafino Torelli. Finally, although these illustrations depict only a restricted number of poses, they prove that ballet mime inherited conventional signs from other theatre forms, thus supporting the theory that mime in ballet was not an original feature of that art.

16Chapter 6, p.187.
17See Chapter 9, pp.269-272.
6.0 Conclusion

The comparative analysis which follows must be considered only as a complementary device to support the theories expounded in this thesis. A study of the evolution of mime in Italy through the illustrated material would need research of its own.

Although the analysis has been carefully structured in order to take into account all the elements discussed in this chapter, it still presents some technical flaws. These arise mainly from the fact that the structure of the analysis had to be created for the purpose and does not follow a pre-existing, well-established method, for there were no available appropriate models of analysis.

In retracing the evolution of theatre mime in three centuries of Italian theatre history, the comparative analysis aims to give evidence of the continuity of a tradition which, in the form of conventional ballet signs, is still alive. At the same time, another purpose of the analysis is to stress the link between drama and ballet, demonstrated by the similarity of illustrations related to these arts.
Chapter 8

The comparative analysis of the visual material on mime (1600-1857)

1.0 Introduction

2.0 Elements of comparative analysis: sets of gestures and their sub-categories
   2.1 Gesture from the everyday: characteristics context and analysis
   2.2 From dialect movements to "heroic" mime: the evolution of the language of gesture

3.0 Towards an illustrated codification:
   Jacob Engel and Antonio Morrocchesi
   3.1 Morrocchesi's codification: the narrative gesture
   3.2 Morrocchesi's codification: the expressive gesture

4.0 Visual codification in Blasis' works: problems of attribution

5.0 Blasis and the codification of the language of gesture: differences and similarities with Engel and Morrocchesi

6.0 Conclusion
1.0 Introduction

The methodology for the analysis of the visual material, elaborated in the previous chapter, divides the illustrations into categories corresponding to different sets of sources. Each category includes elements which are not homogeneous. An etching belonging to a treatise on mime gestures has a different quality and different purposes from a painting which uses a theatrical subject merely as a source of inspiration. It could be objected that the terms of comparison are not exactly the same, and therefore the comparative analysis of the visual material is questionable. Yet, the focus of the analysis is not on the illustrative means used for gestures, but on the gestures themselves, so that the different methods of illustration do not affect the results of the study, even though they have to be taken into account.

The argument could be that a drawing or engraving, included in a treatise or in a manual, has greater validity, since it was originally conceived as a visual example, and as such is, presumably, as accurate and detailed as the artist could make it. In contrast, an illustration that does not relate to any text and which depicts a character of the Commedia dell' Arte, or a moment in the performance, has not the same instructional value. This second type of image might need special
consideration, the purpose of which consists in attributing a possible and satisfactory meaning to the gestures portrayed.

The analysis is based on considering one or more of the following elements. Firstly, the dramatic situation, if that is what is depicted, must be taken into account; it is often possible to deduce the meaning of a gesture by referring to its visual contextualisation. Secondly, the characteristics of the "maschere", if known, might provide further clues. Thirdly, if there are no other indications, a study of the characters' expression in the illustration might suggest a possible explanation of the movement portrayed.

In many instances the visual examples concerning either the Commedia or the pantomime ballets depict moments of the theatrical action, even though filtered through the painter's imagination. The majority of these scenes, particularly in the case of the Commedia, are easily understandable, even if they stand on their own, detached from a wider explanatory context. In some instances, information comes from the captions placed either at the top or at the bottom of the illustrations, in which are reported the lines spoken by the characters or there is a brief description of their actions. The nature and the meaning of the illustrated gesture can be deduced from this relationship of image and text. Figure 229
from the Fossard collection, is an example. The scene represents Pantalone who, cursing his short sight, tries to recognise Zany Cornetto who, in turn, hides his face pretending to be a soldier - as stated by the captions under each character. The gesture of Pantalone, with the left arm half-raised and the left hand adjusting the spectacles, is a movement related in several Italian gestural dialects to the action of seeing and of getting a clearer view. Zany Cornetto's position, wrapped in his cloak, with his left arm on the right shoulder to hold the garment, is another characteristic gesture, often recurring in the illustrations of the Commedia, which conveys the idea of hiding. This pose has an equivalent in Engel's book, with exactly the same meaning, as shown in figure 2; in this instance the idea of hiding is indicated by the inward movement of the left arm, with the left hand resting on the right shoulder. Finally, an identical gesture is performed by Capitan Coccodrillo in figure 3, from the Fossard collection. According to the captions at the bottom of the plate, Coccodrillo spies Harlequin who, disguised as a nobleman, performs one of those "ridiculous actions" - that of a servant acting as a nobleman - listed by Andrea Perrucci in the paragraph about the "lazzi" in Dell'Arte Rappresentativa. Another

item from the Fossard collection depicts Captain Coccodrillo assuming the same position within a different context, as in figure 4. The illustration portrays the Captain, in this instance Isabella's lover, following Pantalone "incognito" who rides his servant, pretending he is a donkey.

Other illustrations are not accompanied by any written description. It is still possible, nonetheless to derive the meaning of the movements by referring either to a "canovaccio" or to an acting treatise. Throughout the many years of the Commedia, the actions, and mainly the comic ones, tended to be repeated and to be passed on from type to type without great changes. Figure 5, for instance, despite the absence of guidelines, can be easily related to the "lazzo of the smell", as performed by Pedrolino in Il Cavadente. The central figure is Pantalone, as shown by both his garments and his beard, covering his mouth in a gesture of shame, while on his right a servant whispers to him the reasons for the behaviour of the other servant on the left, who covers his nose. In these three instances the gestures are all derived from a national vocabulary of movement still in use in many Italian regions.

Chapter 1, p.18.

The illustrations of isolated characters, out of a theatrical situation, are more problematic. In a few cases the scholar can rely on the captions that sometimes accompany these figures. When the captions are missing, both the second and the third element of the evaluative analysis come into play, even if the conclusion might remain open to discussion. The second element of evaluation is the knowledge of the characteristics of each "maschera", and of its variations. The fixed types of the Commedia dell'Arte embodied stylized human qualities. Pantalone, and all his derivations such as the "old father" and the "Magnifico", remained for more than two centuries the Venetian old gentleman, notorious for his tight-fistedness and for his ridiculous sexual urges. Harlequin, also known as either Pedrolino or Truffaldino, represented the servant both witty and lazy at the same time, while the Lovers - known either as Isabella and Orazio or Rosaura and Lindoro - maintained through the years their continuous struggle with the labours of love.

As such, these recurring characteristics, stated and confirmed by various written sources such as the treatises by Riccoboni or by Perrucci, are useful for the scholar, for they provide an important element of identification for the gestures. Broad, elegant gestures, for instance, characterised "noble" roles such as those of the "Innamorati" or Lovers, corresponding to the
"rank" of the "maschere". The gestures of the "Zanni" or "servants", were supposedly more vulgar and coarse and more directly taken from the various dialects than those of a "Dottore", a pedantic saviour, or than those of a rich old gentleman such as Pantalone, representative of a well-mannered bourgeoisie. Finally, it is possible that the Captain's mimed actions were generally based on movements related to fighting, fencing, shooting and duelling, as suggested by his boisterous tirades.

There is a neat distinction between figure 6 and figure 7. The former depicts Isabella, one of the two Lovers, who, according to the captions, is rejecting a sexual proposal from Pantalone. The movement which stands for "rejection" belongs to a documented set of movements of negation. This gesture can be compared with similar ones belonging to a later period, as demonstrated in figure 8, from Engel's manual, and in figure 9, from Morrocchesi's acting treatise. Both authors classified that movement as belonging to the gestural repertoire of tragic heroines.¹

The illustration in figure 7, which has no captions but the name of the "maschera", portrays Francisquina, a female servant, known as the "soubrette". Her gesture, of a questioning nature, denotes her status, for the bent

¹Johann Jacob Engel, Giovanni Rasori, (translator), Lettere intorno alla mimica, Milano, Batelli e Fanfani, 1820, p. 167; Antonio Morrocchesi, Lezioni di Declamazione, Firenze, All'insegna di Dante, 1832, p.246.
arm with the hand resting slightly forward on the hip has always been, and still is, related to the manners of peasants. The other arm too, extended in the questioning position, shows a movement that belongs to a specific dialect of gestural actions, namely the "Neapolitan", as revealed in fig. 10, from the analysis of the Neapolitan gestural dialect by Andrea De Jorio.\footnote{Andrea de Jorio, La mimica degli antichi investigata nel gestire napoletano, Napoli, Del Forno, 1832. Facsimile of the first edition, Bologna, Forni, 1979, plate 8.} The movement represents the act of asking a question, as suggested also by the comparison with similar poses recurring in other illustrations.

2.0 Elements of the comparative analysis: sets of gestures and their sub-categories

In approaching the comparative study of the visual material, the first stage is to identify a set of gestures and then to retrace the evolution of each one, analysing the various stages of the development through the sequence of illustrations. This is a tempting procedure, though not a satisfactory one, as the number of illustrations is rather considerable, hence the impossibility of tracing every movement. In order to avoid the problem, the scholar can attempt a classification of the various gestures, thus creating some sub-categories.
After having assembled the research material, a survey reveals that gestures can be grouped together according firstly to the characteristics of the movement, and secondly to their meaning. Authors such as Engel and Blasis had come to a similar conclusion and had tried to classify different movements, creating a distinction between those which were "natural" and those which were "artificial". Without referring to either Engel's or Blasis' classification, both having methodological flaws, the scholar will immediately identify two categories of gestures. These are firstly those movements which represent common actions from everyday life - such as eating, sleeping, listening, drinking, working - and, secondly those gestures conveying more subtle and complex meanings, usually associated with the "inner" activities of the human being, such as feelings and emotions of fear, happiness and hope.

Once this preliminary distinction has been made, several sub-categories can be identified and created, according to the characteristics of each gesture. For example, a sub-category of movements according to their "mode", either negative or affirmative; a sub-category of movements dealing with similar psychological reactions such as fear and horror; and a sub-category of different gestures conveying nuances of the same meaning. Obviously, the formulation of sub-categories does not
imply that each set of gestures is independent from the others. Many of these sub-categories present an intricate pattern of cross-references. This is particularly evident as far as the second type of gesture is concerned, that associated with inner activities. The first type of gesture, moreover, that concerning "exterior" or physical activities, may have a connection with those of the second type, for many of the everyday actions involve an inner reaction. However, in the majority of cases, gestures depicting natural actions can be analysed separately, for there are few cross-references between them.

2.1 Gesture from the everyday: characteristics, context and analysis

From a historical point of view, the illustrations of movements associated with everyday activities, i.e. eating, drinking, sleeping, present a common denominator. Once the material has been assembled and briefly scanned, it is evident that only early visual documents, such as those related to the Commedia dell'Arte, take those gestures into consideration. Frequent examples are the images of "Zanni" or "servants", whose hunger constituted one of the main characteristics of the fixed types; Gillot, in portraying the four humours of Harlequin, included the type's gluttony (fig.11). Similarly, the
miming of other physical activities, even of a coarser nature, is a recurring element in the visual documents of the Commedia. Gestures were always very explicit, and the movements were neither complex nor over-refined; nor were the compound gestures of the "ballet d'action" present, for the meaning had to be immediately comprehensible in order to fit in with the spirit of improvised acting. It must be understood that the subjects of the scenarios had to be simple, and that the various plots were composed following an almost identical structure, where the only variants were given by the modes of interweaving the scenes. The mime gestures, therefore, recurred almost identically from one performance to another, and from one fixed type to another.

Many of the theatre gestures depicting common habits derived from the dialects of signs which still characterise several Italian regions. An example is the act of eating. The movement performed by Gillot's Harlequin (fig. 11), discussed above, with the right hand reaching the mouth and the medium finger joining the thumb as in picking up a delicacy, is similar to the one illustrated in both Engel's and De Jorio's books. In the former, however, the plate (fig. 12), is used by the author to describe an inappropriate interpretation of a female dancer who wanted to convey the metaphor of the "earth gulping Rome". In analysing the mistaken rendering

5Jacob Engel, op. cit., vol. II, p.32.
of the metaphor Engel discusses the Italian origins of the movement. In the illustration from De Jorio's treatise (fig.13), the gesture is depicted not within a theatrical but in its most common context: in Naples "maccheroni" are eaten using that particular position of the hand. The author explains that this movement requires high skills to be performed properly, as it is aimed to direct the long string of pasta directly into the stomach, through the mouth.\(^6\) The comparison of both Gillot's and Engel's engravings to the illustration in De Jorio's book confirms how many movements of the Commedia were of a dialect nature.

Engel's book is an exception to the statement that gestures related to common actions were portrayed only in the early visual works. Although Engel's treatise is a dissertation on the appropriate use of gestures on stage, it includes an analysis of non-theatrical movements as well. Consequently, there are several poses from everyday movement which are analysed to support the theory that the study of human behaviour can help a performer in conferring better quality on his art. Some of these poses resemble the illustrated documents of the Commedia. The Zanni's greeting gesture in figure 14 is identical to that in figure 15 from Engel's book. In both instances the joyful nature of this greeting is revealed by the outwards movement, with arms fully stretched in front of

\(^6\)Andrea de Jorio, op.cit, p.348.
the character. Figure 16 shows two other gestures from Engel's book, which do not belong to theatrical tradition but derive from an Italian dialect form. The upper illustration depicts a warning against someone; the same gesture is analysed in De Jorio's treatise, as shown in figure 17. The lower illustration in figure 16, is a movement indicating disdain or scorn, also described by De Jorio as a typical feature of the Neapolitan dialect (fig.18). Figure 19 portrays a theatrical movement that the German author derives from a performance of Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. The circular position of the arms is used by the actor to describe Falstaff's large stomach. This gesture, generally indicating corpulence, appears in some sources of the Commedia as being related to the character of the Dottore whose characteristic pose is to hold his stomach.

2.2 From dialect movements to "heroic" mime: the evolution of the language of gesture

Dialect movements, however, constitute a limited field of research within the analysis of the evolution of theatre mime. In Chapter 1 it has been demonstrated how the creators of the "ballet d'action", inspired by the communicative language of movement within the Commedia, formulated specific theories on the subject. Differently from the rules expounded in *Il Corago* and in Perrucci's
Dell'Arte Rappresentativa, the theorists of the ballet d'action did not identify a set of movements which were appropriate or inappropriate from a theatrical point of view; they did not establish rules of gestural behaviour on stage; they did not create a repertoire of conventional movements as that described by Perrucci. For the theorists of the "ballet d'action", mime was inspired from imitating art works. The models were sculptures, paintings, often from antiquity providing the examples for expressing feelings and emotions. To the conventional movements with a set dynamic such as those described in seventeenth-century manuals, Hilverding, Angiolini and Noverre juxtaposed a range of "expressive" movements that were left to the "bravura" and most of all to the cultural background of either the ballet-master or the interpreter. The content of the performance was different. The slapstick jokes of the Commedia were replaced with dramatic subjects, where basic physical and common actions were not taken into account. Gestures thus became grand and heroic in ballet as well as in drama and in opera, acquiring expanded form in the larger space available. Many of the Commedia movements were in fact minute, often based on a complex and flowery use of the hands - an example being the "salute" of Harlequin, with one arm half raised and a quick semicircular turn of the

7Paolo Fabbri, Angelo Pompilio, (editors), Il Corago, Firenze, Olschki, 1983; Andrea Perrucci, op.cit.
hand - or a very restrained use of the arms, with the exception of specific "large" gestures related to characters such as the bragging Captain. The late eighteenth-century "heroic" mime, on the contrary, involved a broader sphere of action in terms of movements' dimension, for the statuary poses implied the use of the entire body. The nature of the movements performed was also dictated by time parameters. The quick "tempi" of the Commedia generated a fast gestuality that suited and matched the "lazzi"; conversely, the "hieratic" and cadenced acting in verses of the late eighteenth century required a slower kind of motion. Finally it should be noted that, within the Commedia, the vocabulary of gestures stood as a language on its own, as mime acting was one of the main idioms of extemporary theatre. Within the performing arts of the late eighteenth century, mime acting became an accessory, for gestures had to follow and to underline the words of a drama, to enhance the content of an aria, to embellish a sequence of steps. This factor, in harmony with the artistic taste of the period, produced a formal exteriorisation of movement, despite the campaigns of Angiolini and Noverre that a mime had to be "naturally expressive". The imitation of visual art works inevitably meant a reproduction of empty forms, which were to be transformed eventually into the ballet conventions of the
second half of the nineteenth century, and still practised today. A comparison between figure 20 and figure 21 provides an example. In figure 20 Pantalone, on the right, is threatening death to the two servants who have not done their job properly. The two Zanni beg for mercy. Their movements are rather balletic, nonetheless the arms are not fully outstretched and the whole movement, in both cases, does not involve much use of space. Figure 21, from Engel's book shows two moments of an actress interpreting the role of Alceste. In the upper illustration she is supposed to express fear of a ghost she has evoked; in the lower illustration she surrenders to the ghost. Gestures here are "hieratic" and "heroic" and broader in style than those in figure 20. It is important to note that while the central Zanni in figure 20 clearly expresses fear for Pantalone's threats, the upper illustration in figure 21 could have a range of different meanings, from "rejection" to "farewell". This statuary pose, as a matter of fact, shows a very stylised and conventional representation of "fear".

3.0 Towards the illustrated codification: Jacob Engel and Antonio Morrocchisi

In the introduction to his Italian translation of Jacob Engel's book, Giovanni Rasori stressed that the book was the first "scientific" treatise on theatre
gestures and that the author's intentions were to provide the performer with rules, precepts and examples for his art. It has been demonstrated that Engel's was not the first technical treatise on gestures; however, the book contains sixty illustrations of different poses that can be considered as a source of technical reference. The illustrations were based on real models, studied by the author, provided by performers of his time. In the explanation of each plate, Engel discussed in a literary way the appropriate and the inappropriate movements to perform for the sake of clarity within a performance. If considered from this point of view, the translation of the German book can be regarded as the first attempt towards a manual of theatrical poses published in Italy, a "scientific" text as in the words of Rasori. The Italian edition of Engel's work was well-received and soon became a well-known text, for it is referred to in many publications of the nineteenth century as a significant work which influenced subsequent publications on the same topic.

Twelve years after the publication of Engel's Italian translation, Antonio Morrocchesi's Lezioni di declamazione was published in Florence. The book was a

---

8Johann Jacob Engel, Giovanni Rasori, op.cit., pp.iv-v.
9See Vincenzo Buonsignori, Precetti sull'arte mimica, Siena, Tipografia dell'Ancora, 1854, p. IX.
Serafino Torelli, Trattato di arte scenica, Milano, manuscript, 1895 (?), p.I.
10Antonio Morrocchesi, op.cit.
collection of the author's teachings; hence, different from Engel's writing, it was meant to be a technical manual aiming at inexperienced actors. In the last section of the *Lezioni di declamazione* there are forty-one plates portraying poses related to particular situations and, what is more important, to specific lines of the drama. The plates are not related to an explanatory text; each illustration, however, has a caption at the bottom that is extrapolated from either a play or a tragedy, to put the pose into context.

It should be understood that neither Engel's treatise, nor Morrochesi's book were designed to fix a set of theatrical gestures. Both authors, and Engel in particular, stressed that the poses illustrated were to be taken as suggestions and that they should not limit the natural response of the actor to the text. It is not possible, though, to state how much the purpose of the illustrations was understood and taken into consideration by contemporary performers.

An interesting factor is that despite the fact that a few years elapsed between the first publication of Engel's *Ideen zur einer Mimik* (1785) and Morrochesi's treatise (1832), the illustrations in each work bear a considerable resemblance. In both instances the plates are not structured according to a particular order, showing different movements at random, although
Morrocchesi grouped a set of eighteen illustrations to highlight some gestural changes within a monologue, assigning a movement to each word or brief sentence.\footnote{Antonio Morrocchesi, \textit{op.cit}, from plate 20 to plate 38.}

3.1 Morrocchesi's codification: the narrative gesture

Morrocchesi's plates are, therefore, an interesting source of analysis, for they represent a significant stage in the creation of a vocabulary of mime. The gestures portrayed can be regarded as a summary of the different types of gestures analysed from Giovanni Da Bonifacio (1625) onwards. It is possible to divide the content of the eighteen plates into:

- 3.1.1 movements conveying the idea of events and actions which are not performed on stage at that particular moment;
- 3.1.2 movements which either convey or emphasize the expression of feelings, emotions and moods.

The first category includes those movements that were long discussed by theorists such as Angiolini and Noverre, who were both concerned about finding an adequate device to "narrate" the various events of the plot. Although Morrocchesi's dissertation does not concern ballet, the function of these "descriptive" or "narrative" movements is very similar to that expounded by the theorists of the "ballet d'action". In both
instances the "narrative" gestures were used to describe events and actions that do not take place in front of the public.

Figure 22 shows the movement corresponding to the action of "running". This gestural action, structured on a sweeping semi-circular motion of the arms from left to right towards the floor, is linked to the idea of someone or something moving towards the direction indicated. In this particular instance the movement illustrated describes the action of some horses running away, as also indicated by the line at the bottom of the page. This movement is still used within the vocabulary of conventional ballet gestures where it stands for "going". Figure 23 shows the opposite action. Here the actor describes the coming back of the horses, repeating a similar movement from right to left. This gesture too is still part of the vocabulary of ballet mime, where it stands for "coming".

In both cases the line of the body follows the movement. In the first example, the gesture is performed outwards, the arms being stretched towards an imaginary destination; hence the body leans forward and the weight is transferred to the supporting leg in front. In the other illustration the weight of the body is placed on

---


246
the back leg, so that the movement appears to be backwards and to have an "inwards" nature. The movement starts from a stretched position of the arms pointing away from the body and then, with a semi-circular motion from right to left, reaches a final posture in which arms and hands are both pointing downwards.

The illustration in figure 24 is another example of "narrative" gesture. The actor is here supposed to render the image of a hero dying of a violent death, as described in his narration of the events. The dynamic of the movement depicts the falling backwards of the "hero" with the arms in a raised "protective" position, as to avoid the mortal strike causing his death. The Italian word related to this movement, as in the caption at the bottom of the page, is "riverso", a word that does not have a precise equivalent in English, and which conveys the idea of falling backwards as in consequence of being struck either by a weapon or by sorrow. Also the following plate (fig. 25), has a descriptive nature, for the hands pointing downwards, according to the narration of the facts, indicate where lies the body of the stricken hero.

The analysis of the four plates reveals how the common denominator of Morrocchesi's "narrative" gestures is that the events narrated in the monologue do not find a direct translation into the accompanying movements.
Instead of a set of gestural signs corresponding to verbs, words or sentences - as in the case of some gestures from the Commedia or from the "ballet mime" of the late nineteenth century - Morrocchesi's plates refer to movements of a less specific nature, such as those illustrated in the four plates mentioned above. Pointing to the different directions does not, in fact, give a complete description of the event, but just sketches it. This device circumvented the problem of finding signs that communicate ideas not easily expressible by gestural means, a problem which had been long discussed by other theorists prior to Morrocchesi. The gesture describing the horses running could be related to any action involving movement towards a destination; the gesture does not specifically refer either to horses or to the action of running. Similarly the movement indicating the lying corpse does not describe the corpse itself, and the one conveying the idea of being struck consists only of a backwards movement. If considered from this perspective Morrocchesi's plates confirm the intention of the author of not wanting to fix a set of conventional theatre poses, each having a determined meaning.
3.2 Morrocchesi's codification: the expressive gesture

Although Morrocchesi's plates can be classified as in section 3.1 of this chapter, the classification is, as generally all classifications are, just a conventional device to provide the comparative analysis of visual material with a basic structure. Not all the gestures illustrated by the forty plates of Morrocchesi's book fall exactly into one of the two categories of gestures formulated above. Among the thirty-six illustrations related to gestures expressing feelings and emotions there are, in fact, some that present problems of identification. An example is in figure 26. Here the actress is portrayed in the act of trying to run away from someone, named Carlo in the caption, who is supposedly approaching. The movement illustrated is just one of the various ways to express "fear", and more in particular fear of someone; the position of the arms describes the desire of going hurriedly away from the present place. The movement can be related to the one in fig. 22, conveying the idea of "running", as the action of "running away" is strictly linked to "fear", to which it represents a natural physical reaction. In classifying the gesture illustrated, then, the difficulty is to decide if it is the "motion" factor, indicating the action of running away, which must be considered or if it is the feeling expressed by the whole movement.
Similarly, figure 27 shows a well-known movement of theatre mime, often used in silent movies too, which stands for "horror". In order to express her feelings the actress covers her eyes with the left hand while the right arm is extended backwards as to reject the object of the unpleasant sight. The rejecting motion indicates the existence of someone or something, hence it could easily be classified among the "narrative" gestures instead among the "expressive". An identical problem concerns figure 28, related to a scene of madness. As in figure 27, the left hand is raised to reject the sight of something terrible, while the right hand points to the imaginary object. The gesture here is more "narrative" than the previous one, for the actress is miming something which is either already happened somewhere else or might happen just in her mind. The gesture, however, is not intended to "narrate" a particular event, but to show the troubled mind-state of the character. Interestingly, the hand covering the eyes seems to be the common denominator of all the gestures related to the idea of "fear", as demonstrated by both figure 29 and figure 30, which are variations on the same theme.

The gesture standing for mercy in figure 31 is based on an "invoking" movement of the arms towards the sky. According to the caption, the actress is asking God to be merciful; the arms half-raised and half-stretched suggest
and somehow "describe" the presence of the recipient of her prayer. The same position of the arms recurs in figure 32, where the actor, kneeling, is begging to be forgiven. In this particular instance it is possible that the person he is invoking might be next to him, although not being portrayed for iconographical reasons.

Not all the "expressive" gestures have such a problematic nature. The movement conveying "vengeance" in figure 33, still part of the vocabulary of classic ballet mime, is based on the arm held horizontal at shoulder level with the forearm vertical and the first finger pointed. The gesture thus does not refer to any object or event and conveying its meaning by just being a "threatening" movement. It is difficult to retrace the reason why the idea of vengeance has been associated with the pointed first finger. A possible explanation is that the finger points to the sky as a reminder of divine justice. But it could also be that the finger points towards the character's forehead as to indicate that he or she will never forget, and forgive, what has been done. In many Italian dialects of gesture, in fact, the verb "to remember" is usually mimed with a similar movement. Another straightforward gesture is that in figure 34. The movement implies a question being asked. The position of the right arm is the same of that of the left arm in figure 8, from Commedia Dell'Arte source
material. This demonstrates the continuity of some movements within the theatre tradition, for a similar gesture is illustrated in Engel's book with the same meaning (fig. 35). Another movement which cannot be erroneously classified is that in figure 36. In this instance the caption at the bottom of the page does not give a specific meaning for the gesture, being just an exclamation of surprise caused by the sudden sight of an unusual flash of light. Considering the position and the expression on the character's face, the gesture illustrated seems to convey the idea of "surprise". The flash of light referred to in the caption could be of supernatural provenance, hence the rather ecstatic reaction of the character, expressed not only by his face but also by the movement itself. The semi-lowered arms both shifting towards the left of the plate, recall the movement in figure 23 implying the action of moving to somewhere. In figure 36, however, the slightly bent wrists indicate that the movement has been arrested because of some unexpected event, as both the left foot, not firmly placed on the floor, and the head turned up to the left suggest. The same position is analysed and illustrated in Blasis' *L'uomo fisico, intellettuale e morale*, where it is listed as "contemplation".  

4.0 Visual codification in Blasis' works: problems of attribution

The analysis of Blasis' written works in the second part of this thesis has demonstrated how the French-Italian pedagogue was well aware of the importance of visual aids in technical manuals. Both his most important works on ballet technique, the 1820 Traité and the 1828 Code of Terpsichore, include detailed plates explaining dance steps and some elementary rules of choreography. Blasis drew those illustrations himself, wishing to show his talent as a painter and to be sure that the visual examples responded exactly to the text. It would have been obvious then to use the same device also to support his theories on mime formulated in the 1828 Code and for the two books dealing with the art of mime, the 1841 Saggi e Prospetto and the 1844 Studi sulle Arti Imitatrici which was a revised edition of the former. Neither book, however, has any visual example, with the exception of the title-page in Saggi e Prospetto, which as argued above, is to be found in the subsequent work L'uomo, complete with explanations. The lack of illustrations in the Code and in the two books on

14Carlo Blasis, Traité élémentaire, théorique et pratique de l'art de la danse, Milano, Beati et Tenenti, 1820.
15Carlo Blasis, Saggi e Prospetto del trattato generale di pantomima naturale e di pantomima teatrale, Milano, Guglielmini e Redaelli, 1841.
Carlo Blasis, Studi sulle Arti Imitatrici, Milano, Chiusi, 1844.
pantomime is puzzling. While the absence of illustrated examples can be explained in the instance of both the Saggi, intended as an introduction to the unpublished treatise on mime, and of the Studi, which was a literary dissertation, it is not justified in relation to the Code, which aimed to be a practical manual. None of the sixteen plates providing visual examples of the topics discussed in the treatise relates to mime, although this subject is given an entire section of the work, inclusive of some technical advice.

The only work, therefore, in which visual sources related to the art of mime can be found is L'uomo. As argued above, the five plates, all designed by the author, and the three pages of "stick drawings" showing a selection of positions corresponding to human feelings and emotions, might have derived from the unpublished treatise on mime. Yet, the idea that these illustrations are the only surviving example of Blasis' codification of theatre gesture is an argument open to discussion. Blasis conceived L'uomo not as practical hand-book but as a scientific work on the human being and his behaviour. If considered from this perspective, the illustrations have therefore no relation to the theatre arts and serve the purpose of being scientific examples. It is obvious, nonetheless, that in analysing human feelings and emotions and the way they are expressed in body language,
Blasis could not help referring to his knowledge as a theatre man and to his previous studies on mime. The fact that he reproduced the plate facing the frontispiece of the *Saggi*, might support the hypothesis that he adapted to the purpose a set of illustrations which had been conceived for another context, namely a theoretical and practical book on mime. In addition, the similarity of some illustrations in *L'uomo* to those in the works by either Engel or Morrocchesi, gives more evidence to support that same theory. This is why that set of images can be included in the context of the comparative analysis.

5.0 Blasis and the codification of the language of gesture: differences and similarities with Engel and Morrocchesi

The five plates contained in *L'uomo* can be regarded as a summary of the codified language of gesture up to that moment. The illustrations differ from those of both Engel and Morrocchesi in that they do not focus on a small number of gestures, as in some cases from Engel's book,16 but they group several visual examples according to a specific theme given to the plate. Another difference from Engel's and Morrocchesi's treatises is that Blasis adds in several instances some dotted lines, to explain which direction the body, the head or the eyes

16See figure 16 and figure 21.
are following in each example. This device, which conveys the sense of movement against the stillness of fixed positions, reveals the influence of the dance training and also the dance-teacher's tendency to give great importance to the direction of the movement itself. From this point of view Blasis' illustrations appear to be less static than those of Engel and Morrocchesi; moreover the dotted lines provide the scholar with a safe device for the analysis of the movement, for they indicate the right directions of the body's lines. A third element of difference from both Engel and Morrocchesi consists in Blasis' use of the seventeen "stick drawings" to illustrate the lines to be followed by the body in expressing emotions and moods. The fact that these "match-men" were firstly introduced by Blasis in a footnote of the Traité as a device to help dance student confirms the link between the content of L'uomo and the practice of theatrical dancing.

Apart from the "stick drawings" (fig.37) the other illustrations show little pictures of moving bodies. Plate III (fig.38), is particularly interesting: the way the characters are portrayed, complete with their costumes, resembles the iconography used by both Engel and Morrocchesi. This plate is also the least "balletic" one, for the others tend to focus more on body movement than on "expression", as revealed by a comparison between
figure 38 and figure 39, which is a sample of the standards used in the remaining plates. According to the related text, the nude bodies used in figure 39, corresponding to Plate IV, illustrate the theory of the gravity centre and have nothing to do with the study of human emotions.

A new feature in Blasis' book is the analysis of the head and eyes directions. Plate II (fig.40), and the related text, provide the reader with a study of the connection between inner actions and outer expressions. In exploring the directions of the eyes and, consequently, of the head, Blasis gave a new contribution to the codification of expressive movement, for he set precise rules. He identified five standard positions of the head, each one allowing from a minimum of six to a maximum of nine movements of the eyes, corresponding to a wide range of human emotions. Hence, to look up towards the sky could be the sign for "admiration, ecstasy, hope, enthusiasm", while to look sideways might express "mistrust, precaution".\(^{17}\)

**6.0 Conclusion**

The analysis of the visual material reveals that the illustrated codification of the language of gesture in Italy is a phenomenon characteristic of the first three

\(^{17}\)Carlo Blasis, op.cit., the plates and their explanations are between page 216 and page 219.
decades of the nineteenth century. It also reveals that the illustrated codification of gesture, with the exception of De Jorio's example, was primarily related to drama, and not to dance. The two main sources of documentation are, in fact, Giovanni Rasori's translation of Jacob Engel's book and Antonio Morrocchesi's *Lezioni di declamazione* which dealt with gesture as a complement to acting, with the exception of a few references to dance in Engel's book. The movements illustrated in these sources summarised more than two centuries of theatre gesture, as demonstrated by the chronological comparison between early and late sources.

The only sources related to theatrical dancing are, therefore, the seventeen "stick-drawings" and the five plates in Blasis' *L'uomo*, although they appear in a non-dance book. The restricted amount of Blasis' illustrated examples, does not provide enough evidence to state that the French-Italian pedagogue attempted a codification of the language of gesture applied to ballet. In addition, Blasis' illustrations do not present any particular element of identification, in order to be classified as codified mime gestures for ballet. Their similarity to the plates in the books by both Engel and Morrocchesi, confirms that Blasis did not create anything new, but referred to pre-existing models, which he adjusted to his purposes by adding marginal features such
as the line depicting the placement of the gravity centre or that illustrating the direction of the movement. The similarity between Blasis' illustrations and those in the works by Engel and Morrocchesi, reveals also that the language of gesture derived from many years of theatre tradition, could be easily adapted to any form of performing art.

It is difficult to establish when Blasis understood this flexibility of the language of gesture and when he decided to transfer into the dance language principles which had been created mainly for drama. It could be that he realised this possibility while having his brief experience as an actor. Or it could be that he read Morrocchesi's manual while staying in Florence, where Morrocchesi taught and where Blasis' sister, Virginia, spent a great part of her successful career as both a singer and an actress. Finally, it could be that someone else was responsible for the adjustment of theatre mime, and that Blasis merely followed the example. The lack of sources concerning mime gesture for dance, such as the unfinished treatise by Viganò mentioned by Buonsignori, leaves the argument open to speculation.
Chapter 9
Blasis and the art of mime. The posthumous reputation

1.0 Introduction
2.0 Blasis' reputation in the nineteenth century, criticism and imitation
3.0 Blasis' reputation and influence in the second half of the nineteenth century
4.0 Early twentieth-century writing on mime and Carlo Blasis: a controversial view
5.0 The making of a reputation: twentieth-century dance history and Blasis
6.0 Blasis and the codification of "ballet mime": a misinterpreted contribution
7.0 Conclusion
1.0 Introduction

The analysis of the written material in the second part of this thesis demonstrates that Carlo Blasis cannot be considered as either the "inventor" or the "codifier" of a set of theatre gestures conveying different meanings; in writing on mime, Blasis referred to well-affirmed principles and rules stemming from two centuries of theatre tradition. The analysis of the visual material in the third part of this thesis provides more evidence of this point. Blasis did not create a system of illustrated codification of mime gestures applied to ballet, but reproduced in his plates some of the figures which had appeared in previous manuals by other authors.

At the end of the second part, it is argued that, although he was not responsible for any form of codification, Blasis should be credited for having adapted rules which were not originally formulated for dance. This assertion, however, needs to be clarified, for Blasis was neither the first nor the only person who accomplished the adjustment of mime rules to dance vocabulary. A comparison between the passages from acting manuals, such as Il Corago or Perrucci's Dell' Arte Rappresentativa,¹ and those derived from Angiolini's

¹Paolo Fabbri, Angelo Pompilio, (editors), Il Corago, Firenze, Olschki, 1983; Andrea Perrucci, Dell'Arte Rappresentativa Premeditata e all'Improvviso, Napoli,
works, reveals similarities in both the content of the dissertations and in the way the subject is treated. These similarities indicate that the adaptation of drama formulae to theatrical dancing had already taken place in the eighteenth century. Similarly, a study of the illustrated sources reveals that some movements related to drama had been transferred to dance long before Blasis. Examples can be found in Engel's book\textsuperscript{2} where the gestures illustrated are related to both forms of performing arts, with no distinction made between them.

The conclusions drawn at the end of the analysis of both the written material and the visual sources on mime, suggest an image of Blasis which does not coincide with that to be found in most works of dance history. Instead of being seen as the balle\textsuperscript{r}-master who, through an extensive activity as a writer, summarised and popularised principles on mime previously expounded, Blasis is still considered by many dance historians as the man who invented those principles and gave them a definitive codification. Such a posthumous reputation was built through the years by an interpretation of the man and of his works which, as demonstrated in this chapter, was erroneous and biased. In order to achieve this task,


\textsuperscript{2}Jacob Engel, Giovanni Rasori, (translator), \textit{Lettere intorno alla mimica}, Milano, Batelli e Fanfani, 1820.
a chronological analysis of Blasis' reputation is required.

2.0 Blasis' reputation in the nineteenth century, criticism and imitation.

In 1854, three years before the publication of L'uomo fisico, intellettuale e morale, and thirteen years after that of the Saggi e Prospetto del trattato generale di pantomima naturale e di pantomima teatrale, Vincenzo Buonsignori, a cultured patrician from Siena, wrote and published a little book, entitled Precetti sull'arte mimica applicabili alla coreografia e alla drammatica. The purpose of the pamphlet was clearly defined by the author in the introduction, where he explained that his work was not a treatise on mime technique, but a brief academic dissertation on the same subject. According to Buonsignori, the Precetti aimed to investigate the history of mime and to illustrate its essential elements together with their application to the performing arts, particularly drama and dance. The book, divided in four parts, or "Lessons", is a summary of pre-formulated theories on mime from the early eighteenth century.

3Carlo Blasis, L'uomo fisico, intellettuale e morale, Milano, Guglielmini, 1857.
4Carlo Blasis, Saggi e Prospetto del trattato generale di pantomima naturale e di pantomima teatrale, Milano, Guglielmini e Redaelli, 1841.
5Vincenzo Buonsignori, Precetti sull'arte mimica, Siena, Tipografia dell'Ancora, 1854.
onwards which, in many instances, the author claims as his own.

It is in the second "Lesson" that Buonsignori traces the history of the art of mime in Italy and mentions the names of theorists and writers who dealt with the subject, such as those of Luigi Riccoboni, Gasparo Angiolini and Giovanni Rasori, the latter in his capacity of translator of Engel's book. To these three authors Buonsignori ascribes the process of codification of mime language in Italy, a process which, in his opinion, culminated with Viganò, for it was with "coreodramma" that the art of pantomime in Italy regained, although for a short season, the importance it had had within ancient civilisations. Further on, in the Fourth Lesson, the death of Viganò is considered as the end of the "golden age" of mime art applied to ballet:

La comparsa di questo genio fosse nell'arte come l'apparizione nel cielo di una meteora luminosa che non lascia dietro di se traccia del di lei passaggio, ma solo la memoria di una luce sfolgorante, e così dopo di lui l'arte ricadde nella sua primitiva condizione, e sarebbe stata fortuna se vi si fosse mantenuta a quel grado, da cui invece col tempo andò vieppiù decadendo.6

The passage reveals Buonsignori's opinion about the state of mime in Italian ballet at that time. Blasis and his contribution to the popularisation of mime-related principles are not taken into account. In the second

6Vincenzo Buonsignori, op.cit., p.32
Lesson, moreover, the list of written works dealing with expressive gesture includes only those by Riccoboni, Angiolini, Rasori and the unfinished manual of mime technique by Viganò, discussed in the first part of this thesis. Buonsignori's book, therefore, stands as the only known Italian written source of the mid-nineteenth century in which there is no mention of Blasis, a fact which might suggest Buonsignori's critical attitude towards the celebrated ballet-master.

The passage cited above is one of the many examples of complaint about the situation of theatre mime at that time which recur within the text. In the Fourth Lesson, Buonsignori expresses his disagreement with the contemporary style of theatrical dancing. The reader is not told whether Buonsignori is referring to a specific form of theatrical dancing, or is considering the whole of Italian ballet around 1850. It could be that the object of his disapproval was the "imported" Romantic ballet in the French style, very fashionable in Italy by that time. But it could also be that the author's complaint concerned the Italian "ballo" which, by 1854, had been considerably influenced by Blasis' teaching. To ignore Blasis, by avoiding any acknowledgement of his work seems to be Buonsignori's means of criticism.

A more detailed analysis of the Precetti, however, reveals that in reproducing and in rewriting the most
important theories on mime expounded and published hitherto, Buonsignori included those of Blasis as well. Among the passages derived from unquoted previous sources one finds sections from *Il Corago*, Perrucci's *Dell'Arte Rappresentativa*, Engel's *Lettere intorno alla mimica* and Blasis' *Studi sulle Arti Imitatrici*. This latter is particularly interesting, for it places Buonsignori in contradiction with himself, if the author's indirect criticism to Blasis is considered. In describing the basic rules and the essential principles a mime actor should know and master on stage, the author of the *Precetti* quotes a complete section from the first essay of Blasis' *Studi sulle arti imitatrici*, without attributing any credit.

La prima qualità che deve studiare e possedere l'attore è quella di sapersi ben presentare in scena, sapersi atteggiare con precisione e sicurezza, in modo da far conoscere ch'egli è padrone di se stesso; deve bandire da tutti i suoi movimenti l'esagerato, il manierato e il lezioso, deve astenersi dal soverchio di calpestare il palco, a meno ch'egli non finga passioni eminentemente violente, come sarebbero la collera, la disperazione, il delirio; deve guardarsi bene dal passare dal faceto allo scurrile [...] deve saper misurare la proporzione, perchè correrebbe il rischio di comparire esagerato in un locale ristretto; freddo, insignificante, inintelligibile in un altro più vasto. Egli deve saper imitare il Pittore che prima calcola l'ampiezza della tela sulla quale deve esporre le figure necessarie al suo soggetto: non esiste arte là dove mancano proporzioni ed armonia.7

7Vincenzo Buonsignori, op.cit., pp.1-3.
In the first essay of the *Studi sulle Arti Imitatrici* Blasis wrote

Il mimo, l'attore, deve sapere bene presentarsi in scena, incedere con passo fermo ma naturale, atteggiarsi con precisione e sicurezza, e indicare con tutta la persona ch'egli è padrone di se stesso e quindi con lo sviluppo di tutti i suoi mezzi, bandire dai suoi movimenti l'esagerato, il contorto, e con eguale accorgimento tanto il manierato che il lezioso, quanto il concitato e il severo; astenersi dal soverchio calpestar l'impalcato, a meno ch'ei non finga passioni eminentemente violenti [sic], come sarebbero la collera, la disperazione, il delirio e la rabbia [...] che egli sia all'uopo faceto ma non scurrile, allegro ma non triviale. Conviene che ponga i suoi gesti in relazione con la capacità del teatro: negletta questa necessaria proporzione, ei correrebbe il rischio di comparire esagerato in un locale circoscritto; insignificante, inintelligibile, freddo in un altro più vasto. Imiterà egli dunque il pittore che calcola prima l'ampiezza della tela sulla quale esporre ei deve le figure richieste dal suo soggetto. Arte non avvi senza proporzione e armonia.

With the exception of a few terms, the difference between the two texts depends mainly on the changes which occurred to the Italian language during the nineteenth century, the two passages reveal substantial similarity. Although plagiarism comes immediately to mind, it must be remembered that those principles had been expounded several times before the publishing of both Blasis' *Studi* and Buonsignori's *Precetti*. In addition, in many instances the same theories were written using almost the

---

*Carlo Blasis, Studi sulle Arti Imitatrici, Milano, Chiusi, 1844, pp.23-24.*
same words. In the fifteenth chapter of the *Lezioni di declamazione*, which deals with appropriate manners for performance on stage, Antonio Morrocchesi prescribes that "l'attore deve astenersi dal calpestare troppo la scena" [the actor should not stamp too much on the stage] which is a slightly varied form of both Blasis' "astenersi dal soverchio calpestar l'impalcato" and Buonsignori's "deve astenersi dal soverchio di calpestare il palco".

The quotation from Blasis' *Studi sulle Arti Imitatrici* is not the only example of Buonsignori's contradictory attitude towards Blasis. The Second Lesson in Buonsignori's book deals with the distinction between the "natural" gesture derived from the everyday and the "conventional" derived from other sources, such as the visual arts. The terminology used for such distinction is the same as that in the Third Part of Blasis' *Code of Terpsichore*, which, presumably, Buonsignori knew from the Italian edition published in 1845. In addition, the list of objects and concepts which can be conveyed by "conventional" gesture is exactly the same in both works. Blasis, in turn, had derived the terminology of the classification from Engel's *Lettere intorno alla mimica*, as discussed in Part Two of this thesis.

---

11 Johann Jacob Engel, op.cit.
The Precetti, therefore, stands as an unique example within nineteenth-century Italian literature on mime, mainly because of the ambiguous position of its author. If, on the one hand, Buonsignori's criticism of the state of mime in ballet is the only instance of detraction from Blasis' merits which survived from the nineteenth century, the quotations from Blasis' corpus, on the other, imply respect, if not admiration, for the ballet-master.

3.0 Blasis' reputation and influence in the second half of the nineteenth century

As demonstrated, Blasis' contemporary reputation derived mainly from his corpus of written works. Apart from a few translations of foreign manuals, particularly that of E.A. Théléeur,12 throughout the nineteenth century Blasis' books dominated Italian literature on dance and mime. This fact is interesting if one considers that, in contrast to what had happened in France and in England, where Blasis' works were reprinted until 1886,13 in Italy his books and especially his technical manuals, such as the 1820 Traité and its 1830 Italian translation,14 were never reprinted after their first publication.

13See Chapter 5.
14Carlo Blasis, Trattato elementare, teorico-pratico dell'arte del ballo, Forli, Bordanini, 1830.
Another interesting element is that in 1851 Blasis left the post of teacher and director of the dance academy in Milan, which was offered to Augusto Huss who was succeeded by Giovanni Casati in 1868. Both Huss and Casati were "representatives of the French school"; their teaching, therefore, focused on the achievement of technical, rather acrobatic skills, in contrast to the elegant poses and the purity of lines proposed by Blasis. From these new teaching methods evolved the "Italian school" of dancing, so much admired and sought after world-wide in the second half of last century. Yet, neither Huss nor Casati overshadowed Blasis' fame, as demonstrated in an article of 1886, where he is acknowledged as the "father of Italian ballet and mime" and the one "whose writing gave a definitive systemisation to the vocabulary of those two arts".

An example of Blasis' influence in the second half of the nineteenth century, can be found in a manuscript by Serafino Torelli, teacher of Acting and Dramatic Movement at the Music Conservatoire of Milan. The document, kept in archives of the La Scala Museum in Milan, has no date; the Italian actor, historian and playwright Sergio Tofano, suggested in an article that Torelli's manuscript was written in 1895, but did not

15Luigi Rossi, Il ballo alla Scala, Milano, Edizioni della Scala, 1972, p.76.
16Ugo Pesci (editor), "Amor" in L'Illustrazione Italiana, year XIV, 21 february 1886, n.8, p.156.
provide any evidence to support his assertion. The names of a number of Italian actors mentioned in the text, however, confirm that the document was written in the last decade of the nineteenth century.

The manuscript is in four chapters, enriched with ink illustrations. In a brief introduction the author explains the importance of expressive gesture in acting, and acknowledges Engel's significant contribution to the study of the subject. From the second chapter onwards the dissertation is entirely devoted to the analysis of different gestures related to specific actions, emotions and feelings. The argument is organised in a scientific order, and every gesture is classified according to its nature, its structure and its purpose.

According to Torelli, there are four principal forms of gesture: the "affirmative", the "negative", the "indicative" and the "calling". The last two are described respectively as the one which "points" to something and the one which "draws attention" to something. Each gesture is then considered in its simple and complex form, the latter being when the movement is related to another or it forms part of a set of gestures conveying only one meaning. The analysis of the four principal gestures is followed by the analysis of "signs", as differentiated from "gestures". Torelli

defines as "signs" all those movements of the body prompted by different psychological reactions. The "signs", similarly, are considered in both their simple and complex forms; the "symptomatic signs" are simple, for they depict immediately quick changes in mood, while "double" signs are complex or more elaborate for they express the gradual shifting from one emotion to another, or a combination of feelings, such as "fear and sorrow". Finally Torelli takes into consideration what he refers to as "pose esprimenti" or "expressive poses". These are those unmoving, static attitudes of the body, the statuary poses of eighteenth-century drama and ballet, through which the actor manages to convey a wide range of feelings and emotions.

It is in the listing of these poses that evidence of Blasis' influence on Torelli can be found. The twenty poses illustrated and analysed in the manuscript correspond, in fact, to those illustrated and analysed by Blasis in the central section of 1857 L'uomo. More particularly, some of the poses discussed by Torelli bear a significant similarity to those illustrated by Blasis with the device of the "stick-drawings". In this respect, the poses standing for "marvel", "admiration" and "amazement" are identical. Of the remaining seventeen poses, ninety per cent have exact equivalents in the five plates illustrating L'uomo. In addition, the sequence of
the poses, from admiration to horror, reproduces, with a few additions, the same sequence of emotions illustrated in Plate III of Blasis' *L'uomo*.

Unfortunately there is no documentation to support the theory of a possible link between Torelli and Blasis. It is true that Torelli refers, in his introduction, to Engel's book, which depicted many of the poses mentioned above and which provided the inspiration for subsequent treatises; it is also true that, being an acting teacher, Torelli must have known Morrocchesi's manual with its forty plates illustrating similar attitudes. Still, neither Engel nor Morrocchesi had classified and analysed the poses in the way Blasis had done, following a specific sequence of emotions; and it is this form of analysis and classification that Torelli adopted in his manuscript. Finally, it should not be overlooked that both Blasis and Torelli operated in Milan and, although in different times, both worked within the musical world, for one was a ballet-master and the other worked at the Conservatoire of Music which, presumably, had many links with La Scala theatre.

4.0 Early twentieth-century writing on mime and Blasis: a controversial view

Torelli's manuscript can be considered as the last example of Blasis' influence on writing about mime. The
early twentieth century, in fact, did not present any work related to the great ballet-master. This is interesting, especially if two factors are taken into consideration. One is the popularity that mime in ballet acquired around the end of the nineteenth century because of the input of the Italian dancers who had joined foreign companies and theatres. Dancers such as Virginia Zucchi, Pierina Legnani and, most of all, Enrico Cecchetti, made a significant contribution to the popularisation of the so-called "balletic mime" all over Europe.

The second factor, which is a direct consequence of the first, is that the fashion for mime dancers and for mime dancing, induced authors and journalists to write and to publish on the subject. The interest for mime dancers did not cease with the advent of Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, but received new impetus from the art and the teaching of Italian dancer, Enrico Cecchetti. In 1914, the dance historian Mark Edward Perugini published in the English magazine Dancing Times a series of articles discussing the language of gesture as part of the ballet tradition. Although these publications are very detailed and historically accurate, there is only one reference to Blasis, in the form of a short paragraph at the end of the first article, where is reported Blasis' definition of the word "pantomime", extracted
from the *Code of Terpsichore*. The remaining essays do not consider the French-Italian ballet-master and his theories. The same attitude towards Blasis can be found in a later book by Irene Mawer, Perugini's wife.\(^\text{18}\) The book is an account of the various forms of expressing ideas and telling stories through the language of gesture. It also includes an historical account of that art and a section on mime in ballet. But in none of these parts is there a mention of Blasis, despite the fact that there are several references to Italian mime dancers and teachers.

Four years later Gertrude Pickersgill published another book on mime, focusing on the technical side of that art and of its various forms.\(^\text{19}\) The tenth chapter of this publication deals with the study of "conventional" mime gestures as used in ballet; although the subject is discussed from the historical point of view, with a detailed account of the development of those gestures from the Commedia dell'Arte onwards, there is no mention of Blasis. This attitude has influenced other later English technical works on the subject, such as a manual by Joan Lawson, which ignores Blasis and his contribution.\(^\text{20}\)


5.0 The making of a reputation: twentieth-century dance history and Blasis

Within dance history, Carlo Blasis has always been regarded as one of those prominent pedagogues and theorists who made a significant contribution to the development of ballet technique. This reputation derives mainly from the fact that Carlo Blasis, in the same way as Thoinot Arbeau and Pierre Rameau had in the previous centuries, wrote and published his dance principles, thus passing his doctrines on to posterity. Dance historians, such as the Frenchman André Levinson, described Carlo Blasis as the man "who codified the new laws of dance", referring to the recording of dance movement the ballet-master had undertaken during his life. A few years later, the English dance historian Cyril W. Beaumont, in one of his publications, referred to Blasis as the "first pedagogue of ballet"; this view of Blasis is shared among other contemporary scholars. According to Lincoln Kirstein, Blasis' "method is still the backbone of the purest traditions of the danse d'école"; Walter Sorell affirms that Blasis' "two

treatises [the Traité and the Code] set down the guidelines for many decades of ballet training"; 24 finally, Gino Tani affirms that

Con lui la incomparabile opera didattica italiana - iniziata dal sommo Domenichino sul principio del Rinascimento - giunge al culmine per tutta l'arte occidentale. 25

It is evident that dance scholars consider Blasis unique because of his corpus of written works which, in their opinion, seems to represent an exception to the usual activities of both a dancer and a ballet master of the nineteenth century. The fact that Blasis was an exceptionally "erudite" artist had been already stressed by his contemporaries, as revealed by Regli's statement:

Se la coreografia e la danza avessero una pubblica cattedra, Carlo Blasis sarebbe il solo che potrebbe occuparla. 26

A similar assertion can be found in the passage from Claudina Cucchi's memoirs, cited above

Mr. Blasis era un uomo molto colto, letterato egregio ed aveva anche scritto e pubblicato molto intorno all'arte della danza. 27

---

27Claudina Cucchi, Vent'anni di palcoscenico, Roma, Voghera, 1904, p.6.
And in a brief history of Italian ballet, written by a well-known journalist and published in the first decade of the twentieth century, one finds that

Il Blasis è riguardato a ragione come il caposcuola, poiché allargò infatti i confini dell'arte della danza, le diede lustro e decoro massimo e le affidò uno scopo. Egli fu il vero fondatore della grande scuola italiana. I suoi balli infiniti appartengono a tutti i generi[...] Scrittore erudito, elegante, lasciò libri preziosi.²⁸

It is important to note that, in the last two passages, it is the fact that Blasis wrote and published several books which validates his importance and his fame. In neither instance, however, is there mention either of the content of books or of their effective contribution to the codification of dance and mime rules. It seems solely due to the fact that Blasis wrote several books that he became famous, and this is used as evidence of his unique contribution.

The principles contained in Blasis' manuals are the basis of ballet technique, as it is known and practised today, and this is another factor which has been particularly influential in the creation of Blasis' posthumous image. Although this is not the right context to undertake a discussion on Blasis' contribution to ballet technique, it would be worthwhile remembering

that, within the nineteenth century, Blasis was not the only one who codified ballet principles and wrote dance manuals, although he was the first of that century, as has been acknowledged by Marian Hannah Winter. Those ballet principles, however, stemmed from a pre-existing tradition of theatrical dancing, in the same way as the mime precepts were derived from previous works.

6.0 Blasis and the codification of "ballet mime": a misinterpreted contribution

Blasis' reputation as the "codifier" does not relate to the ballet technique only, but also concerns mime in ballet. In his book about the history of mime, the Italian art critic Anton Giulio Bragaglia reported that both the codification of dance steps and the codification of mime gestures in ballet had to be ascribed to Blasis. At the centre of his discussion Bragaglia characterises Blasis, quoting Levinson, in the following way

Carlo Blasis, il grande coreografo, come dice il Levinson, "il legislatore", concepiva la pantomima non come ballo ma come linguaggio per "rendere visibili le occulte esagitazioni dell'animo".

The passage is followed by two pages giving a brief account of Blasis' life, after which the author

draws specific attention to the link between Blasis and pantomime by affirming that

Ma in questo principio del secolo decimonono, mentre Carlo Blasis fissava le definitive regole della pantomima risorta, monumento di legislazione coreica, Salvatore Viganò trionfava su tutti i coreografi quale genio compositore.\textsuperscript{30}

The short paragraph is particularly interesting, for the author acknowledges Blasis as the man who fixed the definitive rules of the "resurrected" art of pantomime. This explicit assertion has influenced more or less directly subsequent research on the subject. A recent example can be found in Gino Tani's history of dance:

Ma sono soprattutto Viganò e Blasis, tra il 1813 e il 1830, i maestri che alla pantomima conferiscono la più alta dignità artistica. [Blasis] attraverso l'esperienza viganoviana e, soprattutto, un saggio e ispiratissimo magistero, compie la sistemazione teorica e pratica di tutta la materia, dandole una tecnica e un'estetica la cui armonia trionfa per tutto il secolo e dovunque con le grandi virtuose della scuola scaligera.\textsuperscript{31}

A shortened version of this passage had been previously published in 1950 in the Enciclopedia dello Spettacolo, under the entry "Mime".\textsuperscript{32} In both instances Tani's bibliographical references include Bragaglia's

\textsuperscript{30}Anton Giulio Bragaglia, Evoluzione del mimo, Milano, Ceschina, 1930, pp.160-162.
\textsuperscript{31}Gino Tani, op.cit., vol.III, p. 1397.
book, a fact which can explain the similarities between the two authors' assertions. Among other dance historians, Marian Hannah Winter credited Blasis with a decisive role in the codification of pantomime. In describing the drawings of L'uomo fisico, intellettuale e morale, she wrote:

Carlo Blasis had given much thought to pantomime training during his years as choreographer and teacher. Toward the end of his life he produced what he considered his masterwork: L'uomo fisico, intellettuale e morale. The drawings were all his own invention. The title page showed the stresses and strains of various positions. And the lines to be followed by the body in expressing emotions were depicted in little "stick drawings". 33

As the work by Bragaglia appears among the source material used by Marian Hannah Winter, it may well be that such a statement as "Carlo Blasis had given much thought to pantomime training during his years as choreographer and teacher", derives directly from the assertion of the Italian writer. Although Walter Sorell does not refer to the Bragaglia's book in the bibliography of his contextualised analysis of dance history, his statement reflects the same historical attitude towards the subject.

Blasis introduced the code for what become the pantomimic gestures that were to him "the very


281
soul and support of ballet". This highly stylised [sic] expression is classical rather than Romantic, since it limits any freedom of expression, the unrestrained dynamic will, so characteristic of the Romantics in all the disciplines. 34

This assertion echoes the characterisation proposed by Levinson and mentioned above; in fact, Levinson's work appears in the bibliography at the end of the Sorell's book.

The position of the American dance historian and critic Lincoln Kirstein is slightly different. In one of his manuals, Kirstein discusses the importance of a written work such as the Code of Terpsichore and sums up the content of the Third Part in the following way:

The Third Section of his study [Blasis' Code of Terpsichore] is devoted to pantomime, "the very soul and support of a ballet". His [Blasis] analysis of gesture and movement is extremely acute, and in spite of the researches of Charles Darwin and later scientific observers can be still read for interest and use. He [Blasis] divides gestures into the "natural" and the "artificial", discusses the necessity of artificial conventionalization or stylization [sic] enabling them [the gestures] to carry across the footlights. He also observes the contributions of the Commedia dell'Arte and the inherent Latin gift for mimicry. He understands that pantomime, like dance itself, has a grammar, a vocabulary, and idiom, possessed of a superior logic, in no way accidental, which must be mastered by any serious dancer. 35

34 Walter Sorell, op.cit., p.236.  
The ideas expounded here seem to accord with the views of both Levinson and Bragaglia, although neither of the two authors is listed in the bibliography. Even without any direct statement, Kirstein confers great importance to the Third Part of the Code, almost as if it was a unique example of its kind. In addition, in the chapter from which the passage is taken, Kirstein couples the character of Blasis with that of Viganò, establishing a link between the two, based on the relation that both had with theatre mime. This link has been considered by many other dance historians, as some of the passages cited above have brought into relief. The fact that, although on a different basis and at different degrees, both Viganò and Blasis dealt with mime is enough, in the opinion of dance historians, to couple them and to establish a connection between the two. Indeed, the work of the two men, and their conception of pantomime art applied to theatrical dancing present significant differences which had also been highlighted by Blasis' contemporaries, such as Vincenzo Buonsignori. It is interesting to note that in a later book, Kirstein devoted an entire chapter to the history of mime applied to ballet without taking into account Blasis and his works.
7.0 Conclusion

The examples given here are a selection of twentieth-century opinions about Blasis and about mime in ballet. The various authors seem to imply that the set of conventional gestures, generally described as "ballet mime" and still performed today in the ballets from the nineteenth century, was codified by Blasis. This assumption is generally derived from a misinterpretation of the sources. In the passage cited above, Gino Tani, for example, refers in brackets, to the Saggi e Prospetto del trattato di pantomima teatrale e di pantomima naturale as written evidence of Blasis' codification. It is clear that Tani never read this rare book and speculated upon its content, being misled by the title, in which there is a reference to a "treatise on pantomime". The same misinterpretation of the Saggi e Prospetto had occurred, long before Tani, in Bragaglia's history of mime, where the book was mentioned to provide evidence of Blasis' written codification of the language of gesture. It is possible, therefore, that other authors have been similarly misled by the title of the Saggi e Prospetto and have considered that source as the supporting element of their theories.

In addition, scholars seem to ignore the fact that both the mime used by Viganò and that discussed by Blasis

in his works were far from being based on a conventional vocabulary of gestures. The language of gesture that both the inventor of "coreodramma" and the author of the Code referred to in their works was a "natural" form of mime, derived from the study of nature and from the analysis of the "Ideal Beauty" as illustrated by the visual arts.

This thesis demonstrates that, although several attempts at recording a vocabulary of theatre gestures were made in Italy between 1625 and 1857, none of these provided a definitive codification. The analysis of the visual material in Part Three of the thesis reveals that some of the gestures recurred within different forms of theatre at different times, for the historical reasons explained in Part One. These recurring gestures, however, were neither subjected to a rigid set of rules, as is the case of "ballet mime", nor became conventional or traditional despite the fact that they did recur. The analysis of the written material in Part Two of the thesis, demonstrates that, although the authors aimed to create a "grammar of gesture", they did not impose any constraint on the free interpretation of the performers, who could have used the written principles as mere guidelines. This artistic "freedom" also characterised the "ballet d'action" and, later, the "coreodramma". Although some ballet-masters and choreographers had to provide their dancers with a particular training, as in
the case of Viganò, they never referred to a fixed set of conventional gestures. Written sources such as Jacob Engel's *Ideen zur einer Mimik*, analysed and suggested various ways of expressing different concepts through movement, without establishing definitive formulae for the language of gesture. Similarly, in Ritorni's *Commentarii* there is no mention of Vigano teaching a specific mime vocabulary. Blasis himself, in the *Code*, in the *Studi* and in *L'uomo*, did not fix any mime signs, but insisted on an "inspired" mime interpretation of the performer, derived from the model provided either by nature or by the visual arts.

In contrast with the prevailing twentieth-century theories on Blasis, it can be affirmed that his contribution to the codification of "ballet mime" was minimal. His achievement lay in passing on pre-existing formulae and principles, without any personal addition or revision of the matter, as demonstrated in both Part Two and Part Three of this thesis. It is clear that, although he was interested in the art of mime, he did not attempt to make a system of the language of gesture, as he had done with the vocabulary of dance. Even a work such as the *Saggi e Prospetto*, which misled dance historians in formulating the current theories, was intended merely as a theoretical dissertation on the subject, as revealed by the subsequent *Studi sulle Arti Imitatrici*, in which
survived part of the Saggi. It is possible that conventional gestures, known today as "formal gestures for ballet", originated in a later period, when the principles summarised and popularised by Blasis had not only been forgotten but had also been superseded by different forms of dance technique. Further research, is therefore needed to support this assertion and to identify the "codifiers", if not the "inventors", of that theatre language.


APPENDIX

TRANSLATIONS OF THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE PASSAGES
Chapter 1

Page 10

The mime art of the Italian actors was not limited to facial mime, but it included a wide range of gestures and movements; this is the reason why those actors played willingly with masks.


Page 19

[The actor] will be ridiculous in placing the hat on his head, in the action of walking, of running, or in the action of conferring [excessive] slowness or speed to his steps; [the actor] will be ridiculous in performing a simpleton trying to act as a nobleman, pretending to be a King, a Prince or a Captain [...]; [the actor] will be ridiculous in the effects of his behaviour, as he will perform a vile action instead of a proper one, such as to sit indecently on a throne or to tumble while curtsying. [The actor] will be ridiculous in performing other actions, such as Margite who engaged a duel with his own shadow. Or the Psilli who fought the wind, or Don Quixote who fought the wind-mills. [The actors] will be ridiculous in their garments, as a simpleton will dress up as king or a prince; or he will use boots as gloves, trousers as sleeves and other garments which are not suitable to the character. [The actor] will be ridiculous in using tools, such as riding a sword as if it were a horse, using the hat as a fan or the sheath as if it were the sword.


Page 19

In those scenes where the actors pretend it is night, the Neapolitans are better performers than the people from Lombardy and from other
nations, and they are similarly gifted in the use of tongue-twisters. Foreign people, in fact, refer to the "lazzi" as Neapolitan lazzi (as "Lazzi" mean the comic art made of witty words and actions). In the night scene we see that [the Neapolitans] go around groping their way, bumping into each other and twisting their faces, climbing staircases and performing other silent acts that could not be more ridiculous.


Page 22

To this difficult but meaningless type of dance were coupled all those barbarian things, indecent, not belonging to nature, which were called dances of Pulcinella, of Giangurgolo, of Harlequin, of Piero, of Dottore, of Pantalone, dances which dishonoured the stage with the use of "lazzi", and with their gestures, their jumps and their twisted poses, as performed by those indecent dancers.


Page 30

It is necessary for the pantomime dancer to have knowledge of Poetry, Geometry, Music, Philosophy, History and... He must know how to express passions and the impulses of the soul [and he must know] how to derive from Painting and Sculpture the different positions... That dancer must also be able to convey the emotions of the soul and to express his feelings through the movements of his body; finally he must know the secret of finding his inspiration everywhere, and [by the knowledge of that secret] he [must] be creative, wise and endowed with a delicate ear.

Today dance has degenerated to the point of being merely the art of doing entrechats and "gambades", of jumping and running with the music or, at the most, of keeping a nice posture of the body, of marching with grace, and without loosing the balance, of having morbid arms, and of performing elegant and picturesque "attitudes". Our schools do not teach anything else.


The ancient art of "saltatio" was nothing else but real pantomime dance, or the art of moving the feet, the arms, the body with the music of the instruments, and of making the spectators understand what had to be conveyed, by using gestures, signs, and expressions of love, hate, rage and despair.


The purpose of that type of dance [the pantomime ballet] is to reward the soul and not just to please the eyes. If we do not succeed we do not accomplish the task; and, in my opinion, it seems right to believe that it is impossible to move one's emotions by [referring to] the impersonations of fantastic beings.

From those movements which, altogether, form the "materiale" [technical] dance, we move on to those positions which are more difficult [to perform], due to their exquisiteness and to the amount of thinking that they require, [positions] which are usually gathered under the general term of "pantomimo". These [positions],
whenever they are still or in motion, they are always lifelike, always expressive and always derived from the beautiful nature. All the remaining ones are movements which do not share this harmonic simplicity, [movements] which bore and annoy [the audience], [movements] which never originated in Art, which were inspired by ignorance and which were introduced on the stage by bad taste.

Gasparo Angiolini, Lettere di Gaspare Angiolini a Monsieur Noverre sopra i Balli Pantomimi, Milano, Bianchi, 1773, p.83.

Chapter 2

Page 41

If considered from an historical perspective, which takes into account one century of evolution of theatrical dancing, Viganò's genius is mainly revealed by his being a co-ordinator of diverse elements of the performance. In the case of Viganò, the term "ballet composer" acquires a broader dimension to the extent of including the activities of music composer, libretto writer and of director - to use a modern word.

Luigi Rossi, Il ballo alla Scala, Milano, Edizioni della Scala, 1972, p.63.

Page 51

I believe it is necessary to warn the admirers of my works that, given the difficulty of explaining by gestures (things related to) past and present, I always try to structure my own works in order that the spectator does not need any knowledge of the past or of the future facts to understand the content of the picture that I draw. It is therefore useless to have an introduction to my works, such as this one [La Vestale]. As the plot gradually develops on the stage, and as the human relationships, and the inherent feelings are all clearly conveyed, everyone can see and understand everything,
without studying or referring to programmes or written explanations.


Page 53

At first a vast setting is revealed... The stairs and the galleries (of the arena) are crowded with Consuls, Senators, all the Roman aristocracy and the people watching the fight... the charioteers come forward, turning several times around the circus.

Carlo Ritorni, Commentarii della vita e delle opere coreodrammatiche di Salvatore Viganò, Milano, Guglielmini e Redaelli, 1838, pp.199-200

Page 57

The set represents the interior of the temple of Vesta. Emilia is in charge of guarding the "dangerous" fire. If her silent monologue, as intelligible as a spoken one, could have been translated into written lyrics, it would have represented a wonderful example of poetry; or it could have been translated into tragic verses by the same [playwright] who described Oreste scared in front of the ghost of Agamemnon [meaning Vittorio Alfieri, author of the tragedy Oreste]. How is it possible to give a detailed account of the action performed by [Antonia] Pallerini, who, thanks to her perfect "Greco-Roman" features so suitable in conveying tragic terror, responded with all her skills to the directions and instructions of the "maestro". She is the one leaning towards the altar in a sad mood. She moves away a little and then, pondering on her destiny, she lets out all her feelings. First she tries to calm down the burning passion with the power of her mind, then she appeals to her duty and to her religion, trying to remind herself of her status. Finally, she asks the goddess, considering that her help is the only solution. She prays to the goddess and asks to be freed from such passion; [she begs the goddess] to be merciful with the priestess who is so devout, both in soul and body. While she descends the steps which lead to

293
the altar where she has been praying, she stops, thinking of her lover and visualising him; she sees him in her fantasies, and she wants to send that thought away; but the image of the beloved is there, as in front of her; on the other hand, a celestial voice, similar to lightning striking her head, seems to redeem her; she looks at the floor and starts praying again.


Page 61

Those asserting that in his [Viganò's] ballets there is no dance are liars. And he [Viganò as his defence] mentions the "furlana" in Otello, the Egyptian "ballabile" in Psammi, the Sicilian dance in Bianca, the ritual dance of the vestals in the first act of that "ballo" [La Vestale], and in I Titani almost the whole of the first act. He [Viganò] says that in all his "balli" there is dancing from the beginning to the end, as his [Viganò's] is a danced pantomime, and not a "walked" one in the French style.

Angelo Petracchi, Analisi del ballo di Viganò intitolato Mirra, Milano, Bettoni, 1818, unnumbered pages, quoted in Luigi Rossi, Il ballo alla Scala, Milano, Edizioni della Scala, 1972, p.64.

Page 64

Viganò and Blasis, between 1813 and 1830, conferred the highest degree of artistic dignity on pantomime: the former through "coreodramma", or the art of balance between movement and expression, created the so called "danced pantomime"; the latter, through his own experience as a dancer under Viganò's guidance and, above all, through his inspired teaching.

Chapter 3

Page 81

His [Blasis] glorious triumphs on stage were due to his young age, his being the youngest dancer; the natural talent, the teachings of great pedagogues, the infatigable practising, the constant research on everything was related to dance and mime, made him attain the success in various forms of dance and conferred on him an extraordinary technical ability.


Page 88

Apart from everything else, [the choice of this subject] allows the staging of every sort of theatre magic.

Carlo Blasis, Faust, manuscript, 1835, p. 1.

Page 97

Blasis' teaching was based on grace, vivacity, and the beauty of movement; Blasis was a cultured man, a celebrated intellectual, who wrote and published many works on dance, of which he knew the details and the nuances, in order to render this art an "art" and not just a display of gymnastic... Monsieur Blasis wanted his pupil to have the highest degree of culture they could attain and to read as much as possible. he was not satisfied by the mere execution of "pirouettes" and "entrechats"; he wanted [his pupils] to confer on movement grace and elegance, which can result only by a refined training of the soul and of the mind.

Claudina Cucchi, Vent'anni di palcoscenico, Roma, Voghera, 1904, pp. 5-6.
Gestures must accompany the words, which means that if someone is talking to someone else, the former should not speak towards the side where none is, and he should not even use the hand of that side of the body; so that in the instance of someone talking to someone standing at his right, the left hand should not be used, also because it would be better not to act with that hand, as it is an ugly view to see someone acting with the left hand. [To perform with the left hand], however, should be allowed in a few instances, especially when the other hand is engaged in some action or if it is holding something; an example are the [roles of the] shepherds or [the roles of the] nymphs who carry a shepherd walking stick. In this particular case it would be better to hold the stick with the other hand, in order to let the right one free to move. If [the actor is] portraying a king or a general, it is not wrong to gesticulate with either the sceptre or the wand [held in the right hand], for it is better to do like this than to hold the sceptre or the wand with the left hand. It can happen, however, that the action prescribes to them [the actor portraying either a king or a general] to receive a letter or to perform some other action [with the left hand]; in this instance it would not be considered wrong to receive the letter in the left hand.

Paolo Fabbri, Angelo Pompilio, (editors), Il Corago, o vero alcune osservazioni per metter bene in scena le composizioni drammatiche, Firenze, Olschki, 1983, p. 93.

As words convey different feelings, gestures which accompany those words must have a similar function. The [spoken] action of praying would [result] better if accompanied by the gesture of praying with both hands, which should move a little inwards at the beginning, with the arms not fully extended which must open outwards with suavity, while it would be not wrong to incline the forehead a little to the side. The [spoken] action of imploring or praying a god or a deity,
as before a sacrifice, must be performed in a
humble and reverential manner: sometimes by
curving the torso while gesticulating with one
hand or with both, placing them [the hands] near
the breast, and by kneeling, a gesture which
should performed using only one knee instead
than two, having care to avoid the use of the
knee which is on the side of the audience, in
order to keep the face towards the public. The
action of anger involves gestures which are
fierce and excited, performed by moving the
hand with more or less anger, according to the
words; this gesture will be generally performed
by moving the hand against the person [one] is
talking to and then throwing that same hand
outwards, with strength, in tune with the
cadence of the sentences; this gesture,
moreover, will be better performed with one hand
than with two. The actions of sorrow must be
accompanied by a gesture performed either with
two or with one hand, and it seems that [ a
suitable movement is ..] to raise the hand and
then to drop it down according to the words; it
is also right to hit gently that hand with the
other hand, performing the action of raising the
hand slowly and with care. The actions of
despair need the accompanying gesture to be
irregular, although performed with regularity,
which means that the gesture must be often
varied, by twisting the hands, by bringing them
near to the breast and then by moving them away
downwards, or by throwing the hands outwards as
in threatening someone, or by covering the face
with the hands as to dry the tears or other
similar gestures.

Paolo Fabbri, Angelo Pompilio, (editors), Il Corago, o
vero alcune osservazioni per metter bene in scena le
composizioni drammatiche, Firenze, Olschki, 1983,
pp.94-95

Page 116

As the narration of events includes many
actions, the gestures which accompany that
narration must be equally many. It happens,
sometimes, to describe a duel or a battle, an
action which must be accompanied by both hands,
either together or alternatively, or with just
one, in which case it will be appropriate to act
with the left hand. It happens, sometime, to
describe the death of an hero; in this instance
it will be necessary to imitate the final movements of the dead. In another instance one might be asked to convey some happy event, which he should perform by using some happy gesture, namely holding the arms slightly bent and rounded at the height of the breast and then, with a smooth and rapid action, to open both arms outwards while looking around and at the sky and moving the forehead as in inviting everyone and everything to partake in the joyful moment.

Paolo Fabbri, Angelo Pompilio (editors), Il Corago, o vero alcune osservazioni per metter bene in scena le composizioni drammatiche, Firenze, Olschki, 1983, p.95.

Page 120

The neck must stay erect, and it must not be stretched, for the stretching might affect and diminish the voice... The torso must also be erect, and never bent forwards, unless one is conveying the idea of being old, that implies to bend the torso as a sign of age... The waist must be held upright, but with poise and humility, and not as a sign of arrogance.

Page 120

Gestures for Kings must be solemn, for Women must be humble, for the Old they must be calm, for the Young must be graceful and quick, for the [female] Servants must be licentious, although with moderation, for the [male] Servants they must be witty and vivacious, for the Stupid they must make no sense; for the Captains they must be broad, although only to a certain extent; for the roles representing Saints or pious people they must be controlled, humble and represent devotion; and although there is no rule for the Ridiculous, their gesture should not be too licentious, indecent and coarse.


298
Chapter 5

Page 146

The position which dancers specifically refer to as attitude is the loveliest and most difficult of execution in dancing. In my opinion it is an adaptation of the much admired pose of the celebrated Mercury by Jean Boulogne.


Chapter 6

Pages 179-180

One of the most illustrious characters of antiquity represented as behaving like a jocular country bumpkin would indeed be a ridiculous sight and the dancer or the mime should examine his own physical qualifications before undertaking a part...

Undoubtedly, the pantomime expresses much, but without the tone and feeling of melodious sound it could not move us so deeply.


Page 183

Some [gestures] are called "intentional"; they are those spontaneous actions of the body which reveal the emotions of the soul as, for example to bow to the object of our love. Other gestures are called "imitative" for they imitate both a concept and the effects it provokes... Finally, there are those gestures which are called "unintentional", which derives from physical reactions to the internal motion of the soul.

[including] a precise teaching method based on an illustrated system of exemplification which analyses characters, emotions, feelings, ideas, impressions.


Page 192

The physiognomy of a mime must be expressive by itself and must have marked feature. The muscles of the face must always move; the eyes must always be open and vivacious. The height of the body must be normal, for the mime must interpret different roles; he must be well-proportioned, his movements must not be forced, his gestures must look natural and spontaneous...

The first object of study for a mime actor is man in his physical dimension, but the "moral" side of man must be studied at the same time.

Carlo Blasis, *Studi sulle Arti Imitatrici*, Milano, Chiusi, 1844, pp.19-20

Page 193

For the translation of this passage see the translation of the passage on page 266, Chapter 9, page 301.

**Chapter 9**

Page 264

The appearance of such a genius was for art what the appearance of a shining meteor is in the sky, [a meteor] which does not leave any trace of its passing by but the memory of a blazing light; in the same way, after him [meaning after Vigano's death] the art [meaning the art of dance] went back to its original condition; it would have been wonderful if it [the art] could
have been kept up to that degree; instead it gradually lowered its standards.

Vincenzo Buonsignori, *Precetti sull'arte mimica*, Siena, Tipografia dell'Ancona, 1854, p.32.

Page 266

The first quality an actor must master, is that of knowing how to make a fine appearance on stage, how to be properly mannered, with precision and self confidence, in order to show that he is perfectly mastering his art; any excess must be banned from his movement, as well as everything which is too mannered and affected; [the actor] must not stamp on the stage, unless he is showing extremely violent passions, such as rage, despair or delirium; [the actor] must not become vulgar when he is supposed to be comic [...] He also needs to have a good sense of proportion, in order not to exaggerate his actions within a small space or to be cold, inexpressive and unintelligible within a more vast theatre. He [the actor] must imitate the Painter who, as a first rule, calculates the dimensions of the canvas where he is going to lay his images; there is no art where there is no sense of proportion and harmony.


Page 267

[The content of this passage is exactly the same as that of the one above, with just few different words conveying the same meaning]


Page 277

It is thanks to him [Blasis] that the unrivalled Italian school [of ballet] - originated by the great Domenichino at the beginning of the Renaissance period - reaches the highest level within the Western world of art.

301
If choreography and dance were academic subjects, Carlo Blasis would be the first university professor to teach them.

Mr. Blasis was a very erudite man, an illustrious man of letters who had written and published many books on dance.

Blasis is considered as the first [pedagogue] who conferred dignity and importance on dance and who gave a purpose to dancing. He was the actual founder of the Italian school. His many ballets belong to all genres. He was an erudite writer who left us many precious books.

Carlo Blasis, the great choreographer, the one who, according to Levinson, codified the new laws of ballet, conceived pantomime not as part of theatrical dancing, but as an idiom, the purpose of which was to "make evident the hidden passions of the soul".

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, while Carlo Blasis established the definitive rules of the resurrected art of pantomime, [thus providing a ] glorious example of codification of the choreographic art, Salvatore Viganò was,
among the other choreographers, a triumphant genius.


Page 280

Through the works of masters such as Viganò and Blasis, between 1813 and 1830, pantomime reaches its highest degree of artistic dignity. [Blasis], through his experience with Viganò and, most of all, through his inspired teachings, arrived at the theoretical and practical definition of this art [pantomime], bestowing upon it technique and aesthetics whose harmony triumphed throughout the century, thanks to the great virtuoso dancers from the La Scala school.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Illustrations


Manuscripts

Andreini, Giovan Battista, Lo Schiavetto, transcription by the Department of Theatre History, Faculty of Humanities, University of Florence, 1983.

Blasis, Carlo, Faust-Mefistofele ossia il genio del male, Milano, 1835, Biblioteca teatrale della Scala, CR.Q.692

Lepri, Giovanni, Letter to the impresario Giovanni Lanari, 14 January 1854, Firenze, private collection.

Torelli, Serafino, Trattato di arte scenica, Milano, 1895(?), Biblioteca Teatrale della Scala, CR.Q. 122.

Libretti and ballet scenarios

Blasis, Carlo, Il finto feudatario, Milano, Pirola, 1819.

Amori di Adone e Venere, Milano, Pirola, 1835.

Hermosa, Venezia, Rizzi, 1852.

Cagliostro, Venezia, Rizzi, 1852.

Le galanterie parigine, Firenze, Galletti, 1853.

Ileria, Roma, Menicanti, 1854.

Faust, Warszawa, J.Unger, 1859.

A Diabrinha, Lisbon, Sanches, 1857.

Fiorina, Lisbon, Sanches, 1858.

Viganò, Salvatore, La Vestale, Milano, Pirola, 1818.

304
Treatises on mime, dance and drama (1581-1888)

Arbeau, Thoinot, Orchesographie, Langres, no publisher, 1588.

Blasis, Carlo, Traité élémentaire, théorique et pratique de l'art de la danse, Milan, Chez Beati et Tenenti, 1820.


Trattato elementare, teorico-pratico sull'arte del ballo contenente li sviluppi e dimostrazioni dé principi generali e particolari che devono guidare il ballerino. Tradotto dal francese dal primo ballerino e compositore di balli Pietro Campilli, Forli, Bordanini, 1830.


Manual complet de la danse, comprenant la théorie, la pratique et l'histoire de cet art depuis les temps les plus reculés jusqu'à nos jours, Paris, Librairie Encyclopédique de Roret, 1830.

The art of Dancing: comprising its theory and practice and a history of its rise and progress, from the earliest times: intended as well for the instruction of amateurs as the use of professional persons, London, Bull, 1831.

Saggi e Prospetto del trattato generale di pantomima naturale e di pantomima teatrale fondato sui principi della fisica e della geometria e dedotto dagli elementi del disegno e del bello ideale, Milano, Guglielmini e Redaelli, 1841.

Studi sulle Arti Imitatrici, Milano, Chiusi, 1844.

Notes upon Dancing, London, Delaporte, 1847.
L'uomo fisico, intellettuale e morale, Milano, Guglielmini. 1857.

Nouveau manuel complet de la danse, ou, Traité théorique et pratique de cet art depuis les tems les plus reculés jusqu'à nos jours, par Blasis. Nouvelle édition, entièrement refondue d'après la traduction de P. Vergnaud, revue par Gardel et augmentée des danses de société par M. Lemaitre, Paris, Librairie Encyclopédistique de Roret, 1866.

Nouveau manuel complet de la danse, ou, Traité théorique et pratique de cet art depuis les tems les plus reculés jusqu'à nos jours, par Blasis. Nouvelle édition, entièrement refondue et augmentée des danses de société par M. Lemaitre, Paris, Librairie Encyclopédistique de Roret, 1884.


Buonsignori, Vincenzo, Precetti sull'arte mimica, Siena, Tipografia dell'Ancona, 1854.

Canova, Angelo, Lettere sopra l'arte d'imitazione, Torino, Mussano, 1839.

Caroso, Fabritio, Il Ballarino, Venice, Ziletti, 1581.

Da Bonifacio, Giovanni, L'arte dei cenni, Vicenza, no publisher, 1628.


Engel, Johann Jacob, Rasori, Giovanni, (translator), Lettere intorno alla mimica, versione dal tedesco di Giovanni Rasori, Milano, Presso Batelli e Fanfani, 1820, two vols.

Fabbri, Paolo, Pompilio, Angelo, (editors), Il Corago o vero alcune osservazioni per metter bene in scena le composizioni drammatiche, Università di Bologna, Dipartimento di
Musica e Spettacolo, Firenze, Olschki, 1983.

Feuillet, R. - Auger, Choregraphie ou l'art de decrire la danse, Paris, published by the author, 1700.


Milizia, Francesco, Trattato completo, formale e materiale di teatro, Roma, Pasquali, 1794.

Morrocchesi, Antonio, Lezioni di declamazione, Firenze, All'insegna di Dante, 1832.


Riccoboni, Luigi, Dell'Arte Rappresentativa, Capitoli sei, Parigi, no publisher, 1728.


References

Angiolini, Gasparo, Dissertation sur les Ballets pantomimes des Anciens, pour servir de

Lettere di Gaspare Angiolini a Monsieur Noverre sopra i balli pantomimi, Milano, Bianchi, 1773.

Anon., Il Genio e le Passioni. Delle composizioni coreografiche e delle opere letterarie di Carlo Blasis. Coll'aggiunta delle testimonianze di vari scrittori e di una sua dissertazione inedita sovra le passioni e il genio, Milano, Presso i Fratelli Centenari, 1854.

Anon., Raccolta di Varj articoli letterarj scelti fra accreditati giornali italiani e stranieri ed opinioni di distinti scrittorj che illustrarono l'opera di Carlo Blasis, Milano, Oliva, 1858.

Anon., Libro d'oro dei nostri tempi o biografie d'illustri contemporanei, Milano, Gernia, 1870.

Apollonio, Mario, Storia della Commedia dell'Arte, Milano, Edizioni Augustea, 1930.


Blasis, Carlo, Observation sur le chant, Paris, no publisher, 1828.

Della musica drammatica italiana in Francia e della musica francese dal secolo XVII sino al principio del secolo XX, Milano, Guglielmini, 1841.

Biografia di Garrick, Milano, Guglielmini, 1841.

Biografia di Virginia Blasis e onori poetici, Milano, no publisher, 1853.


Berri, Giovanni, Cenni biografici di Carlo de Blasis, Milano, Gernia, 1871.


Cucchi, Claudina, *Vent'anni di palcoscenico*, Roma, Voghera, 1904.


Locatelli, Francesco, *'Carlo Blasis', Almanacco del teatro La Fenice*, Venezia, La Fenice, 1825.


Pesci, Ugo, *'Amor', L'Illustrazione Italiana*, Milano, 21 February 1886, anno XIV, n.8.


Quadrio, Giovanni, Della storia e della Ragione di ogni Poesia, Bologna, no publisher, 1739, three vols.


Tofano, Sergio, 'Della declamazione', Comoedia, Roma, 1950, anno XXII.


Vuillier, Gastone, La Danza-con un capitolo aggiunto sulla coreografia italiana, Milano, Tipografia del Corriere della Sera, 1899.

Wiel, Taddeo, I Teatri musicali veneziani del '700, Venezia, Archivio Veneto, 1891.