



52. Costume design for *Ballet du Grand Bal de la douairiere de Billebahaut* (The Grand Ball of the Dowager Billebahaut), attributed to Daniel Rabel, 1626



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54. School of Fontainebleau, *Allegorie mythologique* (The Mythical Allegory), ca. 1580

Our attention is chiefly drawn to the grotesque masks, through which the stage is populated with a great many colorful, often fantastical figures. The designer's inventiveness made the world of the burlesque ballets oneiric. The bonds of logic were loosened, a space of freedom was opened for gestures that would not have been permitted in other contexts. A tacit mood of the erotic hovered over the whole. The eroticism and opulence of the *ballets burlesques*, their affirmation of the corporeal, was rooted in the Epicurean tradition, present in France since the rule of Francis I. *Les Fées* and *Grand Ballet* may have derived from the spirit of the early Renaissance masquerades, but also from the impish mood of some canvases of the Fontainebleau school (Ill. 54) and Rabelais' writing. Yet there was also something more in these ballets – a kind

of celebration of the fecundity of nature characteristic of the first half of the seventeenth century. Something of the joy, vitality, and fecundity of Rubens (Ills. 55, 56), who painted an allegorical cycle for Marie de' Medici in the Luxembourg Palace in 1621–1625. Something of the physical tension, the tangible erotic energy so visible in the early sculptures of Bernini (Ill. 57). All of this is seen in a funhouse mirror, however, filtered through the grotesque, to build a sense of ambivalence, deregulation, openness, dissonance. It is in this context that we must read the eroticism of the *ballets burlesques*, including the frequent use of cross-dressing. Men had previously dressed as women in court ballets, but in the 1620s this motif was rampant. Franko sees this as an effort to elude imposed identities.

The *ballets burlesques* mocked the customs and pretensions of the day.⁴⁸⁹ Franko believes that the *ballets burlesques* can be seen in terms of resistance to the prevailing symbols. He sees them as a space of transgression where rigid principle of decorum in the geometrical ballet was broken. In the *libretti* of this period, we often encounter erotic subtexts and androgynous characters. At the same time, the creators and performers of the *ballets burlesques* were not averse to the grotesque repudiated in the dance treatises of the sixteenth century. The nobility who appeared in the spectacles often and enthusiastically played peasants.⁴⁹⁰ This in no way demonstrated their plebeian sympathies. It was a way of appreciating qualities that competed with the aggression, bluntness, and staticity of the prevailing culture of power – on the one hand, delicacy, softness, and emotion,⁴⁹¹ and on the other, everything that was spontaneous and earthy. This critique of decorum required a heavy dose of self-reflection, and thus introduced an opportunity to gain distance from the prevailing symbolic order.

In the burlesque ballets there was far more room for openness to interpretation and compositional innovation than in the spectacles of the Henri III period. The ballet artists of the early seventeenth century became fully conscious of the reigning conventions and began to play with them, which meant that the conventions were not absolute. As such, satirical ballets could be acknowledged as a tool for critiquing the geometrical, totally subordinate canonical dance, as well as the social relations it expressed. The nobility wanted to show that they could decide who they were for themselves. In the *ballets burlesques*, as we have said, the point was to make a unique composition, expressing the autonomy of the dancing body. “By conspicuously showing himself [on the ballet stage], a royal subject symbolically represented himself as a force of political resistance toward the established

⁴⁸⁹ Susan Au, *Ballet & Modern Dance*, London 1988, p. 16.

⁴⁹⁰ Franko, *Dance as Text...*, pp. 95–99.

⁴⁹¹ Franko (ibid., p. 76) stresses that love is the key value in *ballets burlesques*. This lets us see them as one of the instigators of the culture of love (*amour*), which began to triumph over the culture of glory (*gloire*) in the second half of the century in France. We will deal with this more extensively in Chapter 5.



55. Peter Paul Rubens, *La Ronde paysanne* (Rural Dance), ca. 1633–1637



56. Peter Paul Rubens, *La Kermesse ou Noce de village* (The Village Fête), 1635–1638



57. Giovanni Lorenzo Bernini, *Apollo and Dafne*, marble sculpture, 1622–1625

order. As a result of the growing social constraints he felt imposed on him, flagrant self-display was a noble's search for prestige, and even his very survival, via metaphor within a theatrical arena.⁴⁹² This was why identities were destabilized, affinities were dabbled with, and decency was the subject of experiment. This explains the emphasis on improvisation, in place of narrative coherence or geometrical shapes. The basic value was an individual, original stage presence and not subordination to an imposed form of choreography. This resistance in the symbolic space involved an autotelic game with one's image, stressing the individual style, the design of one's own body that contained a subversive suggestion – the performative nature of identity, even when it came to the monarch and the state. This is why it had to be suppressed.

⁴⁹² Carol Lee, *Ballet in Western Culture: A History of its origin and evolution*, London–New York 2002, p. 46.

Richelieu – Ballet and Propaganda

Ballets burlesques were a form of resistance against the hegemonic ambitions of the royal power, though with the onset of social transformation, this resistance was sentenced to failure. The liberty of the 1620s turned out to be a swan song before an epoch of total subordination. This constructing of the political space was begun on a mass scale by Cardinal Richelieu, when he became Louis' main advisor. His idea was simple – the maximum centralization of power. This meant all political opposition had to be suppressed. Thus the military offensive against the Huguenots ended in success, with the seizure of their main fortress, La Rochelle, and the signing of the treaty in Alais, upholding religious freedom, but eliminating all the political privileges Henri IV had awarded the Protestants. Yet it did not end there, for Richelieu knew that the royal monopoly was also a threat to the Catholic nobility, and thus, that faith was not the only factor in suppressing the opposition. This is why, in 1626, Richelieu liquidated the office of the Constable of France, the most powerful man in the nation after the king; an office that, in the recent past, had been held by such influential figures as Anne de Montmorency and the Duke de Luynes. This is why he ordered the demolition of the fortresses the nobility regularly used in revolts against the Crown.

The Cardinal continued this severe course of action against noble privilege throughout his reign, using a famed spy network and forceful decisions, such as the order to behead one of the most influential magnates, Henri II of the Montmorency clan, who attempted to stage an uprising against the rise of absolutism in 1632. We join Elias in seeing this execution as the symbolic end of the courtly era.⁴⁹³ It did not perish in silence. It suffices to recall the debate accompanying the 1637 premiere of Pierre Corneille's *Le Cid*. This controversy arose from a quarrel between the autocratic tendencies of Richelieu's camp (to which Corneille belonged for a time, but which smothered his temperament) and the individualistically inclined nobility, whose endeavors were embodied by the tragicomedy's main protagonist. The matter was so vital that the Cardinal ordered the Academy to analyze the work. Mainly formal issues were covered, and the author was accused, for example, of defying the rules of unity, but these were basically matters of secondary importance. The quarrel over *Le Cid* was about authority, and the limits of autonomy, which Richelieu aimed to severely restrict.

To a considerable degree, French absolutism in its modern form dates back to Richelieu. He understood the necessity to radically structure the equilibrium of conflict. To achieve this, he decided upon a fateful tactic – he weakened the nobility and gave relative power to the bourgeoisie. True, Henri IV had “established a new

⁴⁹³ Elias, *The Civilizing Process...*, p. 541.

social group in the *noblesse de robe* – nobility by conferment, serving high ministerial functions⁴⁹⁴ with the Edict of Paulette. Yet it was only Louis XIII, influenced by Richelieu, who made this shift the heart of his policies, while remaining certain that the bourgeoisie did not feel too secure in their newly acquired positions. Men of capital were to be encouraged to be favorable, but also shown that their place was below his royal majesty. This required a specially engineered cultural policy.

It is fascinating to trace how dance functioned outside the courtly circles closed to the bourgeoisie in the first half of the seventeenth century.⁴⁹⁵ The wealthy bourgeoisie clearly aspired to assimilate the ideals of the courtly life, trying to ingratiate their way into the palace spectacles or to organize their own according to the conventions of the nobility. This was part of a wider process of cultural leveling. The bourgeoisie had yet to seek their own symbolic space to counter the traditional structures that Elias grasped:

The aim of its leading groups was not – like that of substantial parts of the bourgeoisie [later] in 1789 – to eliminate the nobility as a social institution. The highest goal of individual bourgeois was, as we have mentioned, to obtain for themselves and their family an aristocratic title with the attendant privileges.⁴⁹⁶

The bourgeoisie wanted to participate in the same culture as the nobility, and this gave rise to imitation. In dance it meant a grassroots attempt to participate in courtly ballet and to make their own performances in its likeness.⁴⁹⁷ But this is not all.

Alongside the “aristocratization” of bourgeois dance life, we observe an opposite reaction. The court, particularly under Louis XIII, was conscious of the need to forge ties with the wealthy bourgeoisie – they needed its money and admiration. This is partly why they began staging court ballets for bourgeois audiences. Successful court performances were shown for admission in Paris, sometimes in the specially arranged spaces of Hôtel de Ville. These shows were accompanied by a suitable ceremony. For Richelieu, it was particularly important that viewers not be seated randomly, but in order, to reflect their social status,⁴⁹⁸ which was meant to generate the impression of a hierarchical order established by the monarch. The event itself was not a present. The bourgeoisie had to make financial contributions and organizational endeavors, whose undertaking was a mark of prestige. The king and his court generally demanded that the performance wait for them, to enhance the ceremonial impression when they finally did arrive. The point was

⁴⁹⁴ Jacek Kowalski, Anna and Mirosław Loba, Jan Prokop, *Dzieje kultury francuskiej*, Warsaw 2007, p. 285.

⁴⁹⁵ Margaret McGowan, “Ballets for the Bourgeois,” *Dance Research* 2001, Vol. 19, No. 2, pp. 106–126.

⁴⁹⁶ Elias, *The Civilizing Process...*, p. 314.

⁴⁹⁷ McGowan, “Ballets for the Bourgeois...” pp. 107–108.

⁴⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

to dazzle the assembled bourgeoisie with magnificence, charm, and skill. As oftentimes before, the ballet was used for self-presentation, with the aspiration to be seen as distinctive. The dancing court sought to make the bourgeoisie understand that it was, in kinetic terms, at least one level higher. The court ballet performed for the bourgeoisie became a show of virtuosity beyond the reach of the viewers, to say nothing of the sets, which further served to dazzle the bourgeoisie. It made them realize that their bodies were not and would not be capable of such mastery. They were meant to believe that the kinesis of the king and his court was of a different nature and origin.

The very act of leaving the palace betrayed the court's dependence on the bourgeoisie. McGowan even suggests that there was an aspect of wooing in the court ballet shows organized for the bourgeoisie: "Performing the most aristocratic of genres in an essentially bourgeois setting was intended to cement court/city relations."⁴⁹⁹ The bourgeoisie had to be reckoned with, and thus the bourgeoisie were worth seducing. In the process, the position of the nobility taking part in the dances became increasingly frail. True, the dances still allowed them to show themselves as more culturally refined. Yet virtuosity for the bourgeoisie was not the same as virtuosity at court. More than a demonstration of autonomy, it became a show, betraying the nobility as an instrument of political manipulation for the king.

The impression of the weakening of the nobility's position in the symbolic space was reinforced by the fact that professional dancers were increasingly replacing the nobility in the ballets for the bourgeoisie, as well as in those staged at court. The more extravagant and sophisticated the spectacle, the greater was the need for special skills. This was the increase in scale and growth of extravagance under Louis XIII. In the 1630s we see the flourishing of a particular form of dance spectacle that combined *ballet burlesque* with the ideological subtext of *ballet melodramatique*. This was a *ballet à entrées*, in which the comic mood still prevailed, though it was no longer as subversive as the performances of the 1620s. The politics of splendor made a comeback. The aim was to build as breathtaking a world of illusion as possible. This is why the technical side of the performances became increasingly important, and professionals were needed to take part. The latter, as bodies for hire, became "agents" of the symbolic power organizing the performances. For them, dance was primarily work, and so they were willing to do as they were told without complaint, quite unlike the nobility.

In the *ballets burlesques* the nobility struggled for autonomy by stressing the play on the imposed conventions. In *ballets à entrées* we also have parody, but the unifying aspect was reinforced. This is picked up by McGowan in the *Ballet du château de Bissestre* (The Ballet of the Castle in Bissestre, 1632), the most famed work of the genre: "The kind of fusion which could be achieved between the parts and

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 120.

the whole was used at the end of this ballet to comment on the qualities of Louis XIII whose power rendered order out of chaos, and harmony from disharmony. Thus, the *Grand ballet 'rejoignant en un corps tant de pieces destachees'* [joining scattered parts into a single body] became a metaphor for the efficacious actions of the monarch.⁵⁰⁰ The anarchist aristocratic subject had to submit to the imposed structure. Ensemble scenes once more became key in this context, including the *grand ballets*, wherein the royal power gave proper form to social chaos.⁵⁰¹ And here the role of professional dancers, taken from the circles of dancing masters and their pupils, became politically significant.

The professionals were hired to show their technical skills and to ensure a high level of performance. They were meant to impress the viewer in the name of the king, and this without a shred of the political ambition visible in the dancing of the wealthy. It was technical ability, not personality that counted. They were to embody the convention perfectly, unlike the dance of the nobility, which aimed to smuggle individuality under the guise of convention. This is why the transition from *ballets burlesques* to *ballets à entrées* reinforced the policy of cultural absolutism. Though light in tone, these were conservative ballets. They aimed to subdue the anarchic impulse and replace it with a performance that was as uncritical as possible. The symbolic pacification of the nobility and the seduction of the bourgeoisie was, to a major degree, executed by the arms and legs of the professional dancers as the kinetic representatives of a monarch that treated both parties equally instrumentally. This is quite visible in a text that is key to understanding the aesthetic of *ballets à entrées: La Manière de composer et faire réussir les ballets* (How to Compose Successful Ballets, 1641) by Nicolas de Saint-Hubert.⁵⁰²

We know next to nothing about the life of the author, though on the basis of the text we might assume that he represented professional dance communities.⁵⁰³ His handbook gives us insight into the attitudes of those who danced not in order to compete for symbols, but to earn a living. The author begins with a traditional apologia for dance, and moves on to themes that are suitable for a dance performance. At the same time, he discreetly deceives the reader, suggesting that these motifs were fresh and original: "If you can find *entrées* and costumes that have not yet been seen, this will enrich your ballet and make your inventiveness more admirable.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 122.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid.

⁵⁰² I am using the English translation by Andrée Bergens: Nicolas de Saint-Hubert, "How to Compose Successful Ballets," in: Selma Jeanne Cohen (ed.), *Dance as a Theatre Art...*, pp. 31–37. The brief treatise is translated practically in its entirety, apart from the final section, where Saint-Hubert reminds the reader that every spectacle should have a head figure of sorts who tends to the whole of the production – someone like a monarch of the play.

⁵⁰³ As McGowan does in "Ballets for the Bourgeois..." p. 115.

So look for a fine new subject of your own devising, since it is the trend nowadays. And may Ovid's *Metamorphoses* no longer be danced as in former times."⁵⁰⁴ As such, it would seem we are dealing with another innovator singing the praises of individualism. Yet this is only on the surface, as indicated by the aside: "since it is the trend nowadays." In essence, Saint-Hubert does not recommend innovation to appease the heart. On the contrary, he stands opposed to experimentation, ambivalence of message, and fiddling with the characters' identities. He disapproves when he notes inconsistencies in a performance. When a character appears on stage, his props must be entirely within a convention. If a dancer plays a water carrier, then he should continually dance the part of a water carrier. Saint-Hubert sees no place for distance from a role or playing on identity. Characters were not to be used as a pretext for individual autonomy.

Let us quote a fragment that is pivotal to our interpretation:

I think it is not right for people to arrive [on stage] in one way and leave in another as most of our dancers customarily do when they impersonate soldiers, villagers, or porters. The soldiers arrive with swords and shields, the villagers with baskets, and the porters with hooks. This is fine, but as soon as they have danced one figure in this attire, they throw swords, baskets, and hooks into the hall in order to be more at ease in their dancing, and one can no longer recognize what they were, which is very bad. They should have signs on their backs to identify them, like those used by painters who, when they have made a poor picture, write the name of an animal so badly represented that it could not be recognized if they had not done so.⁵⁰⁵

Let us take a close look at Saint-Hubert's argument, because it concisely expresses the kinetic politics of the *ballets à entrées*. The dance spectacle was not meant to be a space of individual freedom; it was to communicate a precise message. Saint-Hubert stresses this in the part of the text where he rails against improvisation in dance, and encourages as much time as possible in rehearsal.⁵⁰⁶ The message is to be as legible as possible. It was the ideologized message and not the individual performance that was key. The structure of the choreography was to take precedence over the dancer; this did not, in theory, exclude the possibility of individual virtuosity, but ultimately this virtuosity was not, as with the dancers shaped by the courtly kinesis, a manifestation of their autonomy. It was a sign of their submission to external rules, a perfect conventionality. Thus, if a man danced the part of a villager, he was to dance the whole scene with a basket, and in fact it would be best to place a large sign on his back that read VILLAGER, to eliminate any

⁵⁰⁴ Saint-Hubert, *How to Compose...*, p. 33.

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

ambiguity, to ascribe to him a certain role. This fully reveals the structural mechanism we traced in the previous chapter. The individuality of the dancer is utterly subordinate to the structure of the performance. In terms of the noble dancer, the emphasis on structure over rendition means restricting creativity, lowering status, while for the professional dancer it broadens his role and raises his status. Despite this difference, the nobleman and the professional dancer are equally subject to the highest, invisible authority, the monarch, from whom the dance narrative emanates.

This tendency to politicize dance as a tool for building the ruler's power clearly grew in the days of Richelieu, who, as Turska writes, "in mind of the famed maxim that the primary aim is the king's greatness, and the second the kingdom's power [...] aimed to give ballets political and educational significance."⁵⁰⁷ This was part of the Crown greater cultural policies, quite actively shaped by the cardinal. Richelieu was patron to such artists as the painter Philippe de Champaigne, who immortalized him in a series of portraits, and the poet Guillaume Colletet, who, apart from his literary works, wrote the *libretti* for ballet spectacles with the telling titles of *Ballet de l'Harmonie* (The Ballet of Harmony, 1632) and *Ballet des effets de la Nature* (The Ballet of the Effects of Nature, 1632).

Richelieu's patronage of the arts, including ballet, was not the result of subjective passions. Artists were cogs in his political plans – tools for building a symbolic space orbiting around His Majesty. It suffices to look at the aforementioned examples of de Champaigne and Colletet, in whom we find a classical sensitivity, a kind of majestic academism, a certain rawness, but also the stateliness characteristic of the cardinal himself. Both praised order, clarity, and the servitude to composition which the cardinal attempted to graft onto society. Let us look at the highly telling title of one of Colletet's pieces: The Ballet of Harmony. It would seem that we have a return to Platonic ideals, but its implications were different. Behind this appealing catchphrase was a conventional production. Harmony lost its mystical quality. It became a distant, nearly abstract harmony. The politics of absolutism was impersonal, the rules held sway. Here we might quote a fragment of the founding mandate of the Académie Française (1635), which Richelieu supervised: "to work with as much care and precision as possible to establish the rules of the language precisely." This was the effort Richelieu was making in culture at large – he was cultivating rules to subordinate social forces in general.

Nonetheless, it would be a mistake to see only a dry academism in this striving to regulate. The cultural policies of the first period of Richelieu's government were not a stereotypical courtly classicism; they were an attempt to structure ideological content without sacrificing a sensory appeal. This was not a strictly cerebral approach to a stage production, though a rational turn is clearly visible. This can be

⁵⁰⁷ Turska, *Krótki zarys...*, p. 104.

read in the aesthetic treatises created with the cardinal's approval in the Académie Française community. One of the founding members, Jean Chapelain, penned these telling words: "the condition of achieving likeness in dramatic or representational poetry is the imitation of human action, and it reaches a state of accomplishment in amazement."⁵⁰⁸ This last term, amazement, bears remembering, as the aesthetics of Richelieu's day did not postulate an extreme rationalization of art. Imagination was equally important, and by its very nature, it cannot be made fully subordinate. Imagination is a source of amazement, or sensory pleasure, that Richelieu and his circles had in no way renounced.

Without registering these complex social and political impulses we cannot understand the *ballets à entrées*, just as we cannot understand Corneille's plays and the canvases of the greatest painters of the epoch. Let us recall the disquieting muscle tension and the oddly stiff appearance of the figures in Poussin's *Danse à la musique du Temps* (Dance to the Music of Time, 1634). This is a portrait of dynamic kinesis, yet it is also tempered with uncertainty. The dance of four distinguished figures seems to waver between elegance and obligation. It has a regularity of composition that suggests automatism, yet the movement of the bodies is somehow alluring (let us note the gaze of the woman furthest to the left). We feel that the kinetic imagination that gave rise to the picture is taut, it eludes simple definition, and so too was early classicism. This was quite aptly described by the Polish translator of the writings of its pioneers, including Chapelain: "regulated according to nature and inscribed in the laws of perception and reason, art is also what eludes mental cognition and the intellect, and it is this evasion that generates its triumph and gives rise to aesthetic pleasure."⁵⁰⁹

The fact that classicism was originally torn between the senses and the intellect is clearly shown in the libretti for *ballets à entrées* in the early 1630s. Over time and with the strengthening of Richelieu's government (and thus the increase in central power), however, we find fewer and fewer ambivalent and ironic performances in French culture. They gradually had less room for accidental pleasure, for non-normative imagination. Even when the imagination remained not entirely rational, it had to be law-abiding. Nothing could happen without being legitimized.⁵¹⁰ Richelieu realized that there could be no negotiation in effective absolutist politics. Politics had to embrace all of life. Propaganda was conducted in this spirit, and part

⁵⁰⁸ Jean Chapelain, "Przemowa o poezji przedstawiającej," in: Michał Bajer (ed. and trans.), *Trzy poetyki z czasów Richelieu. Francuski klasycyzm o dramacie*, Gdańsk 2010, p. 45.

⁵⁰⁹ Michał Bajer, "Składnia wyobraźni," in: idem, *Trzy poetyki z czasów Richelieu...*, pp. 19–20.

⁵¹⁰ In this context we ought to recall the dictum that encapsulates this sketch of Chapelain's manifesto: "it strikes me as highly compelling that no actor should enter or exit the stage unless he has sufficient reason" (Chapelain, "Przemowa..." p. 47). It might seem that this statement is ill-suited to conclude a program text, but in fact it expresses the most cherished aspirations of Richelieu and his collaborators – that no one should do as he pleased.

of it was the organization of dance spectacles. They showed less and less joyful energy, and increasing solemnity. As Turska notes, at the end of his life, “[Richelieu] himself wrote the texts for serious ballets in the style of *ballets à entrées*, whose task was to stoke patriotism and the nation’s spirit of morality. The result was works full of pathos and affectation, such as the allegorical ballet *Prospérité des Armes de la France* (The Success of the French Arms, 1641).”⁵¹¹ What Turska saw as pathos and affectation turns out to be the Rule at work, clothed as dance. In the finale of *Prospérité des Armes de la France*, as in the *Ballet comique*, the gods bowed before the king.⁵¹² This time, however, it was not wishful thinking, it was a declaration that corresponded with reality.

Richelieu was building a framework of real power. He had managed to decisively limit the internal opposition, which meant that, when he died, he could anoint Mazarini his successor. The state gained power at the expense of the nobility. A hegemony was born. The ballets of the later Louis XIII epoch were, not coincidentally, about the successes of the French armed forces; nor was it a coincidence that they were held not only at court, but in public theaters as well. And finally, it was not by accident that the choreographies were increasingly presented in a new spatial arrangement: on a proscenium stage, which further stressed the distance between the audience and the performers (Ill. 58). Here we find yet another example of the king “lording over” the society in a very physical manner. Based on the Italian model,⁵¹³ the stage was built according to the laws of perspective, rising well above floor level. This meant that dance felt less and less like a community experience, and it was hard to speak of the audience’s participation, as they were meant to take an increasingly passive role in admiring the show – and above all, the dancers’ technical prowess. As Susan Au has phrased it, the stage was a “distancing appliance.”⁵¹⁴ This shaped new viewing strategies. The ballet was less and less a holistic, three-dimensional structure admired from above, or understood

⁵¹¹ Turska, *Krótki zarys...*, p. 104. *Prospérité...* was conceived by Jean Desmarest de Saint-Sorlin, a founding member of the Académie Française (Peter Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV*, Bath 2003), the music was written by François de Chancy, but the *spiritus movens* was Richelieu. We have not managed to confirm the information, however, that the cardinal wrote the spectacle as a text, as Turska suggests.

⁵¹² Au, *Ballet...*, p. 18.

⁵¹³ Lee concisely outlines the development in theatre stage construction in Italy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in *Ballet...*, pp. 56–58. More interested readers can find source texts describing Italian innovations in stage construction from the mid-sixteenth century: Niccolò Sabatini, *Praktyka budowania scen i machin teatralnych*, trans. Anastazja Kasprzak, Gdańsk 2008 and Joseph Furttenbach, *O budowie teatrów*, trans. Zbigniew Raszewski, Gdańsk 2009. The author of the latter, though German, was instrumental in popularizing the Italian idea of the box stage. Sabatini, in turn, apart from describing the stage, provides a very interesting lecture on the production of theatrical effects using different sorts of machines, giving us insight into the anatomy of the spectacle, so essential to the performances of the Louis XIV epoch.

⁵¹⁴ Au, *Ballet...*, p. 18.



58. Michael Van Lochom, *Le Soir* (Evening), an engraving based on a picture by Jean de Saint-Igny, Louis XIII and his family watching theater in the palace of Cardinal Richelieu, a performance of *Prosperite des Armes de la France* (The Success of the French Army), 1641

through participation; increasingly, it was a two-dimensional picture which was attractive for the technical skills of the professionals. This metamorphosis had a political side. As such, it should come as no surprise that one of its initiators was Richelieu. The year 1637 saw the opening of the theater in Palais Royal, whose construction he had commissioned. It had two halls: one for 600 spectators, the other for 3,000.⁵¹⁵ Three thousand pairs of eyes admiring the success of the French armed forces – what could be more majestic?

⁵¹⁵ Lee, *Ballet...*, p. 58.

The Rise of the Dancing Sun

Richelieu died in December of 1642. Louis XIII followed five months later. Anne of Austria took the throne on behalf of her young son Louis XIV, as a regent. The prime minister was a protege of the cardinal, and then a cardinal himself, Jules Mazarin. He continued the policy of building a powerful state, meant to prevail over all the social classes. This met with some resistance, in part because Mazarin was a naturalized Italian. The nobility did not appreciate the constant winnowing of their political role, while the bourgeoisie and the populace were upset at the rising taxes due to France's embroilment in military conflicts of the Thirty Years' War. The Cardinal was especially unpopular in Paris, where the Fronde rebellion broke out against his rule.

The Fronde showed that absolutism was still far from stable, despite Richelieu's vast efforts on this count. Society remained profoundly divided. The aristocracy did not want to surrender its influence without a struggle. Things went so far that Mazarin and the young king had to flee Paris. It is said that this traumatized Louis XIV, making him shun the capital until the end of his days. It is in this trauma that scholars seek the roots of his move to Versailles, as a stable environment where the monarch could have total control, as opposed to the unpredictable confusion of Paris.

When the Fronde was put down in 1653, the king was fifteen years old. He had begun dancing in court performances two years earlier. He debuted in *Ballet de Cassandre* in 1651.⁵¹⁶ Afterward the young Louis appeared in a wide variety of roles. He played a knight, or an ordinary village dancer. He appeared as a clairvoyant who saw a shining future for the ruler (i.e., Louis), which was in itself a remarkable tactic; he also had occasion to play a woman. These role changes reflected a love of amusement; Louis loved to dance, and he did it well, though this is not all. The ballets of the Fronde period were also a laboratory. The young king was trying on identities, experimenting with his capabilities, impressing audiences with his abundance of talents and diverse repertoire. The ballet was a workshop where he shaped the power of his presence that was so marked in his later appearances, both on stage and in politics. As a result, he appeared as a symbol, which was solidified in the figure of Louis the Sun King (Ill. 59).

To commemorate the suppression of the revolt of the magnates, a great spectacle bearing the title *Le Ballet de la Nuit* (Ballet of the Night; Ill. 60) was staged at court in 1653. This remarkably sumptuous *ballet à entrée* ran for twelve (!) hours. It was composed of many parts, presenting the darkness of night. It contained a great variety of figures: the mythological heroes, shepherds, guttersnipes, witches, and demons often

⁵¹⁶ Prest, "The Politics of Ballet..." p. 233.



59. Louis XIV as the Sun, costume design by Henri Gissey for the *Ballet de la Nuit* (Ballet of the Night), 1653

found in the epoch, but all made way for the rising Sun danced by Louis in the grand finale. The magnates all bowed to him in their allegorical roles – Honor, Grace, Love, Valor, Victory, Mercy, Glory, and Peace prostrated themselves at the monarch’s feet.⁵¹⁷ The extravagance of this staging was only meant to serve the adoration of the king.

Court poet Isaac de Benserade wrote the libretto for the *Ballet of the Night*; he made his debut in this role in *Ballet de Cassandre* and then accompanied the king as the author of court ballet texts for thirty more years.⁵¹⁸ This skilled propagandist and intelligent observer of court life knew how to show the king as more than an

⁵¹⁷ A summary of the ballet can be found in Au, *Ballet...*, p. 19; Lee, *Ballet...*, p. 68; Jennifer Homans, *Apollo’s Angels: A History of Ballet*, London 2010, p. 13. Details at: http://operabaroque.fr/CAMBEFORT_NUIT.htm (accessed: 1.03.2015)

⁵¹⁸ On Benserade’s texts for the courtly ballets, see: Prest, “The Politics of Ballet...,” pp. 233–238. There is also a great deal of interesting information in: eadem, *Theatre Under Louis XIV: Cross-casting and the Performance of Gender in Drama, Ballet and Opera*, New York–Houndmills 2006, pp. 77–128.



60. Henri Gissey, *Ballet de la Nuit* (Ballet of the Night), 1653

inflated allegory. This was why, apart from the monumental roles that Louis danced, such as the Sun in *Le Ballet de la Nuit* or Apollo in *Ballet des Noces de Pélée et de Thétis* (Ballet on the Marriage of Peleus and Thetis, 1654), he also took on less distinguished roles – in *Ballet des Noces*, for instance, he appeared as one of the Furies, and in *Ballet des Festes de Bacchus* (Ballet of the Bacchus Festivals, 1651), as one of the Muses, giving the role of Apollo to his clerk. As with Louis XIII, we can speak of moving between levels of decorum. The king did not limit himself to personifying Majesty. He stooped to playing supporting roles, even to taking the part of a simpleton. This less challenged than reinforced his might. Through this flexibility his power increased, he sealed it in games and even frivolity, which always retained a political undertone. A multifaceted narrative emerges from Benserade's texts, in which the characters the courtiers played were just as important as the real people.⁵¹⁹ The court ballet fed on gossip and intrigue, which often served to dampen overarching aspirations or to flatter ambitions. Receiving a significant part could be an award for services, and thus a way of tying a courtier to the Crown. Taking the role of a shepherd or a woman, the king appeared to be stepping down from a powerful role; yet this was, in fact, an illusion.

⁵¹⁹ Prest, *Theatre Under Louis XIV...*, p. 84.



61. Hieronymus Janssens, *Bal (The Ball)*, 1650s

Despite his dancing charisma in the first stage of his governance, Louis XIV was not yet an absolute sovereign of dance and spectacles, though the role of the court was, of course, key in this regard. As the Fronde showed, society continued to compete, and after its collapse, art remained pluralistic. The magnates' aesthetic initiative had not been crushed. Moreover, it was the magnates who initiated an increasingly refined dance idiom. The court residences were centers for shaping a kinetic sensibility, as were the increasingly popular and numerous aristocratic salons. The magnates who gathered there enjoyed organizing sumptuous spectacles, forever trying to nurture their autonomy. This is the proper context for the dance scene of the epoch – in the 1650s we find further rivalry for taste in France between the aristocracy and the Crown. These power struggles were often waged over lifestyles. The growing division fell between two basic social powers – a) blood aristocracy (*noblesse de sang*) and the wealthy traditional bourgeoisie, versus b) the king and the new elite (*noblesse de robe*) – created a sharp cultural divide. The blood aristocracy did not surrender without a fight, though they did sense their vulnerability. They developed a custom that was to be the source of a new distinction to replace their steadily slipping political position (Ills. 61, 62, 63).

Henceforth it would be with their way of living, of speaking, of acting, of amusing themselves, of enjoying each other's company that the noble elite would unshakably



62. Hieronymus Janssens, *Bal op het terras van een paleis* (Ball on the Terrace of a Palace), 1658



63. Hieronymus Janssens, *Elegante gezelschap converserend, dansend en kaartspelend in een salon bij de muziek van een strijkkwartet* (Elegant Society Chatting, Dancing, and Playing Cards in the Salon to the Music of a String Quartet), mid 17th c.

convince themselves of their own superiority. In place of arms, their touchstone would be provided by refined manners – *bienséances* – and by a corpus of unwritten laws more powerful than any written down.⁵²⁰

As he matured, Louis observed the aristocratic kinesis with some envy, but with admiration as well. When he grew up, he decided to claim the *bienséances* for his own purposes. He probably understood that, using lifestyle, splendor and fashion, he could rule people and exploit them. This was what he would recommend in 1661, to his son, the Great Dauphin Louis: “This society of pleasures, which gives to the courtiers an honest familiarity with ourselves, touches and charms them more than one can say. [...] This way, we hold their minds and hearts sometimes more successfully, perhaps, than by rewards and favors.”⁵²¹ Naturally, rewards and favors should be an important tool in keeping subjects in line, but performances also played a major role, and thus it seemed advisable to monopolize them. This was precisely what the Sun King decided to do in the first years of his reign.

In the first half of the seventeenth century the king’s supremacy in sumptuous ballets was hardly evident, though Richelieu had made great strides in this regard.⁵²² This is why Louis XIV was so sensitive when it came to magnates’ performances. These often had their share of extravagance, creativity, and taste, which seemed to eclipse the royal court. Let us take an example from a cultural history book: “Louis XIV’s visit to the castle of his Minister of Finance, Fouquet, provided an opportunity for one of the most famed baroque festivals. The magnificence of the celebration, spangled with fireworks, was so grand that it sparked the king’s envy and, consequently, the imprisonment of the superintendent.”⁵²³ Even if there is more legend than truth in this claim,⁵²⁴ the king was doubtless impressed by the show, and recognized that he could not tolerate a worthy rival in this field. Nicolas Fouquet was summarily brought to court and jailed for the rest of his life.

The downfall of superintendent Fouquet is highly significant. Colbert biographer Inès Murat highlights this moment as the beginning of a new political epoch, in which Louis XIV truly ruled independently. This, at any rate, was the official version, because he made his important decisions after consulting with the Office Council, where Colbert, Controller-General of the royal finances, was in charge. Colbert’s

⁵²⁰ Benedetta Craveri, *The Age of Conversation*, trans. Teresa Waugh, New York 2006, p. 6.

⁵²¹ Quoted in: Prest, “The Politics of Ballet...,” p. 231.

⁵²² Cf. Sarah R. Cohen, *Art, Dance and the Body in French Culture of the Ancien Régime*, Cambridge–New York 2000, pp. 65–66.

⁵²³ Kowalski, Loba, Prokop, *Dzieje kultury francuskiej...*, p. 304.

⁵²⁴ Fouquet was not only imprisoned because he staged an impressive ballet or because his Vaux-le-Vicomte Villa, designed by Le Vau, Le Brun, and Le Nôtre, was too striking, but because of the suspect financial operations that the probing Colbert uncovered, as detailed by Inès Murat in *Colbert*, trans. Wiera Bienkowska, Warsaw 1988, pp. 92–93.

numerous initiatives, and his great influence on the king, compel us to doubt theses of fully autonomous rule. Yet we can be sure that Louis XIV was far more involved in state affairs than his father had been. No important decision was made without his input. He was the head of the state and he had the final word. Apocryphal tradition attributes to him a famous statement: *L'état, c'est moi*. He never actually said this, but the statement lived its own life, and we shall have cause to return to it later.

In the 1660s, an improved system of absolute rule was orchestrated by Colbert under the watchful eye of Louis XIV. The history of this operation has gone down in the history books, which speak of the expansion of bureaucracy, the creation of a professional army, including a navy, public works to strengthen the domestic market (a network of roads), support of export at the expense of import (mercantilism), attention to industry, or the development of manufacture, more aggressive colonial policies, the centralization of power through a network of stewards monitoring the provinces, improvements to the taxation mechanisms, and, finally, the king's sweeping patronage of scientific researchers and artists.⁵²⁵ Understandably, we will be focusing on his patronage of the arts.

What is political absolutism? Striving for unity in the space of power, creating a single point of reference, a uniform worldview, with the ruler in the center, less as an individual than as a symbol, the embodiment of the super-individual, objective order. If political absolutism was to be entirely effective, this standardization had to encompass gestures, preferences, and pleasures. It also had to have an emotional dimension, to operate on an emotional and instinctual level. The ruler who desires to be an absolute, recognized and adored by his subjects, cannot limit his governance to brutal terror, which is why he desires to be seductive. This is achieved by the creation of myth, a uniform space of special absolutist emotion, joined with a unique corporeality and, naturally, kinesics.

Absolutism must shape people's pleasures in many ways. Richelieu knew this all too well, linking taste with language, and thus with literature, but also with visual sensibilities, or the fine arts. Combined with a kinetic element, there was the spectacle. A movement toward classicism and Academism had already begun under the omnipotent cardinal, though the path was somewhat meandering, as we have seen. It was continued by Mazarin, whose taste was clearly affected by his country of origin, which further complicated the organization of spectacles at court.⁵²⁶ Under Colbert and Louis XIV, the ruler's control over his subjects' tastes reached its apogee. We see the emergence of a true artistic bureaucracy, aiming

⁵²⁵ I take my information on the Louis XIV era from the aforementioned Colbert biography, as well as from Jan Baszkiewicz, *Historia Francji*, Wrocław, Warsaw, Cracow, Gdańsk 1974, pp. 262–325; François Bluche, *Życie codzienne we Francji w czasach Louisa XIV*, trans. Wiera Bieńkowska, Warsaw 1990; Burke, *The Fabrication...*

⁵²⁶ Mazarin was a great enthusiast of the emergent Italian opera, which he actively promoted in France.

to regulate French preferences through the academy system. The 1670s and early 1680s saw the creation or reconstruction of the Académie Française committee, known as the “small academy” (1663), the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture (founded under Mazarin, reorganized in 1663), the Academy of Architecture (1671), the Opera Academy (1671) soon transformed into the Royal Academy of Music (1672), and finally, the first among them, the Academy of Dance (1661), which we shall be examining in detail. Peter Burke demonstrates how centralized and bureaucratized these constructs were, and how deep their mission ran: “In short, what has been called a ‘department of glory’ had been founded to organize the presentation of the king’s image, or more exactly, a moving picture of the main events of the reign.”⁵²⁷ This last phrase is worth lingering on. Louis and his close entourage were after this precisely – a “Louis XIV taste” that would eradicate the divisions found in previous epochs.

The academy system and artistic bureaucracy were meant to structure the space of representation, standardize preferences, and create an image of the king as the greatest of powers, which translated in the image of the monarchy as an institution. This meant intensive codification and selection, to be achieved through sittings, meetings, consultations, verifications, corrections, programs, and plans by bodies of leading artists. The most important literary voice was Chapelain, Charles Le Brun set the tone in painting and sculpture, and Claude Perrault in architecture. In music, Jean-Baptiste Lully gradually moved out in front, essentially gaining a monopoly in 1672. At the Academy of Dance we see more of a team effort, though leaders emerged here as well, such as the royal dance instructor, Pierre Beauchamp. The efforts of all of the above, despite the differences between them, were focused toward one thing – codifying, or basically shaping, the aesthetic sensibility of the Louis XIV epoch.

If we are to understand the kinetic ingredient in the aesthetic sensitivity of the absolutist era, we must trace the king’s dance career. After assuming single-handed rule he continued to appear in court performances with, it seems, increasing consciousness of his own power. An analysis of his roles in the court ballets of the 1660s is provided by Franko, who notes that Louis enjoyed portraying himself not only as a clear symbol of power, but also in roles that seemed to undermine his authority, such as female parts.⁵²⁸ We know, at any rate, that he also played the roles of shepherds in fairly frivolous love scenes, like those found in *Ballet des Muses* (1666), written by Benserade. Here we see a king who was toying with his stage persona perhaps even more freely than Louis XIII, and undoubtedly with more self-consciousness than he had in his youth, for the changes in identity were meant to be interpreted as another

⁵²⁷ Burke, *The Fabrication...*, p. 69.

⁵²⁸ Mark Franko, “Double Bodies: Androgyny and Power in the Performances of Louis XIV,” *TDR: The Drama Review* 1994, Vol. 38, No. 4, pp. 71–82. See also: Prest, *Theatre Under Louis XIV...*, pp. 88–92.

sign of the king's might. The monarch had no desire to be a slave to his own image. He thus made change a part of it, for the Majesty the king personified was perceived as a vital force, a fount of energy. We find this way of thinking at the root of every type of royal dance, in fact, in every royal act. The ruler is a force behind every role. Paradoxically then, as Franko points out, the king showed his power more emphatically as a woman or a shepherd than as the Sun or an ancient hero. The viewer knew he was watching the king. His royalty did not have to be depicted literally in order to take its effect. As the Sun, the king appeared in the shadow of the symbol, while as a "woman" he showed that he was, above all, the king in every situation, power incarnate. Thus, Franko writes that, in the female roles, the king showed less authority than power. We have a "figuration of agency" – as unpredictable as the body itself."⁵²⁹

This is a pivotal moment – subjectivity as power was depicted in court ballets. It was in this role that Louis most wished to appear. This meant making a figuration of agency visible in dance movement, making the center of social life a hyper-subject, one with whom the subjects could identify in their fantasies. The task of the academies was to coordinate the joys and delights that came from the glory of the king. In this context, the glory of Louis was the glory of the kingdom, and thus, of the emerging modern nation state. At the same time, the reverse conclusion could be drawn – the glory of the emerging nation state was also the glory of the king. Colbert particularly stressed the reflection of the state in the glory of Louis XIV. Louis himself accentuated his personal leadership, the absolute power of an individual anointed by God to rule. Colbert, in turn, built the might of the French state as a sovereign, of the state towering over the king as a person: "The true bond that unites all Frenchmen is their common subjection to the king, who wields holy power. This leads to the unifying power of the state, which will slowly and imperceptibly [...] wrest power from the king."⁵³⁰ Louis himself was not entirely blind to this. For him, too, the state became an absolute where he found support, which was something his expansive personality badly needed. Thus we might say: *L'état, c'est MOI*, but also, *Moi, je suis L'ÉTAT*. This means that in the epoch of absolutism "the state as an agency of power" is a condition for the king's efficacy as a subject.⁵³¹

As we recall, Franko argues that the court ballets in which the King danced can be seen as exemplifying a performative approach to power. Here the power did not precede the performance, the performance was a source of power. The ruler

⁵²⁹ Franko, "Double Bodies...", p. 79.

⁵³⁰ Murat, *Colbert...*, pp. 106–107.

⁵³¹ Burke writes of the Sun King: "He was charismatic in every sense – the original sense of having been anointed with chrism, a symbol of divine grace, as well as the modern sense of a leader surrounded by an aura of authority. However, this charisma required constant renewal. This was the essential aim of the presentation of Louis, on his stage in Versailles, as it was the aim of the re-presentation of the king in the media of communication" (*The Fabrication...*, p. 11). In this regard, Louis XIV was indeed a figure of the power apparatus. The real Louis more enacted Majesty than embodied it.

governed only through performances. “Performativity underscores the active exercise of continuity through persistent yet unstable actions of the body natural. This body is fundamentally temporal (mortal) although the identity it confirms through continuity appears a-temporal.”⁵³² This is an extension of a paradox present during the Louis-XIII era – the ruler is a ruler only when the eye of his subjects admires him. Thus Louis XIV missed no opportunity to dance for the bourgeoisie, especially in his youth; moreover, he danced with the richest men’s wives, as if soliciting their admiration. In this way, he less reinforced the power he already had than constantly re-established or re-performed it. The king’s body was then majestic to the full, as it became a theatrical body, as Franko suggests. This theatrical body served aesthetic, political, and ritual functions, but it also remained the fragile body of an individual. As a dance artist, the king was distinctly human, yet distinctly superior as well. The two bodies – physical and divine – were inseparable.

The court ballets showed the ambivalence of a modern sovereign power. On the one hand, they dazzled, on the other they “exposed” the weakness of the king as a man, showing that, as Giorgio Agamben put it, “the sovereign is, at the same time, outside and inside the juridical order.”⁵³³ The king was a masterful dancer, yet the very enactment of roles, exposing himself to gazes, was a weakness, because it meant he could not be utterly in control, all the more so in that the body dancing in court ballets was mediated by a convention that dance contributed by its very nature. The king did not invent his steps, after all; the king danced choreographies created in a conventional language. This is why Franko sums his examination of the king’s dancing body as follows:

Dance and music, rather than belonging with those spectacular effects that reinforce in their blatant magnificence the political message of power’s presence, are actually the formally subversive means through which the performance sustains the ambiguity and contradiction of personal sovereignty, and leaves it with the audience to carry away and contemplate or resolve.⁵³⁴

This issue requires further research.

⁵³² Franko, “Majestic Drag...,” p. 72.

⁵³³ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen, Stanford 1998, e-book.

⁵³⁴ Franko, “Majestic Drag...,” p. 84.

The (Dancing) Bourgeois Gentleman

On the one hand, in the court of the first stage of Louis XIV's rule, dance was a tool for generating an impression of royal magnificence. The dance of the king, the kingdom's lead dancer, was a manifestation of His Majesty's power. On the other hand, despite the fact that the king was central, he needed the theatrical machinery created by the ensemble of artists.

The rule of Louis XIV was based on the people hungry for social advancement. His camp had its share of bourgeoisie whom Louis had recently ennobled. They owed their social prestige to the king, and so they fully identified with the Crown. One example was Colbert, the son of a merchant. At the same time, their sensitivity was unlike the aristocrats'. They were more inclined to common sense than Baroque excesses. Behavioral formalities did not come naturally to them, even if they had to learn the courtly graces in order to advance. They brought a kind of invigorating ferment to the court, though the *noblesse de sang* saw them as tasteless parvenus. There was a spontaneity in them, though this was made "courtly" practically at once. To show this in detail, we ought to go into the work of Molière, who was allowed to spread his theatrical wings under the protection of Louis XIV.

Molière was, along with Benserade, Lully, Racine, and Le Brun, a favorite artist of the king. In one way or another, they were all involved in preparing the court spectacles, and thus, in glorifying the absolute monarchy, building a state propaganda system.⁵³⁵ From the moment he appeared in the royal circles and up until his death, Molière had to find his feet in the imposed conventions of the courtly spectacles. His works include not only the best-remembered character comedies, such as *Tartuffe* or *Don Juan*, but also occasional pieces that are of greater interest for us here, as they contain the most dance. Molière interests us both as an outstanding figure and as a man of his times. As a creator of the apotheosis of Louis XIV, but also as a man who ensured that the courtly classicism was more than just inflated propaganda. He was an artist who would not be assimilated by any social community, and yet he expressed the ambitions of those who had been condemned to operate in the shadows. His work thus shows the dynamic kinesis of a period when courtly culture in France began to feel a strong bourgeois influence. Let us trace how this developed.⁵³⁶

It began with *Les Fâcheux*, which Molière created for Fouquet. This play was first performed during a memorable festivity which was the nail in the influential

⁵³⁵ Burke, *The Fabrication...*

⁵³⁶ A more in-depth look at dance motifs in Molière's work can be found in: Franko, *Dance as Text...*, Chapter 5: "Molière and Textual Closure: Comedy-Ballet, 1661–1670," pp. 108–132. Franko explores the relationship between dance and text in a structural analysis, while we will be mainly dealing with a sociological approach.

superintendent's coffin. Dance history generally remembers it as the first example of a *comédie-ballet*, and thus a new kind of performance, in which dance and theater were more closely intertwined than in the *ballets burlesques*. As Molière himself put it: "to avoid breaking the thread of the piece by these interludes, it was deemed advisable to weave the ballet in the best manner one could into the subject, and make but one thing of it and the play."⁵³⁷ This idea caught on, and from then on, and thereafter for the king, Molière regularly wrote *comédie-ballets*. In this he worked with Lully, who, we might recall, was not only a brilliant composer, but also a splendid dancer, and who particularly adored the lively (and sometimes grotesque) dances in the *ballets burlesques* (it was to Lully that Molière's comedies owe their comic solo sequences). Their stage experiments were accompanied by some dancing masters: Anthoine des Brosses or, more often, Pierre Beauchamp, who assisted with the ensemble choreographies.⁵³⁸ Yet we are interested less in the technical side of the *comédie-ballets* than in their critical potential.

Ensemble sequences were still danced in the comedy ballets, but there were attempts to motivate them dramaturgically. The performances became more coherent, more rooted in reality than Benserade's allegorical and erudite productions. Both forms – the court ballet and the *comédie-ballet* – functioned side by side, forming complex relationships. For our purposes, the most important thing is that the new form, the *comédie-ballet*, stood as a challenge to the recognized, conventional court ballet. It questioned its merits, revealed its weaknesses – above all, its pomp and artificiality. This was not only because the *comédie-ballets* had dramaturgical justifications for their dance sequences, often missing in the court propaganda ballets, but also because of its satirical barbs against the most exalted style of dance. Molière could take a step back from dance – instead of emphasizing technical virtuosity, and the risk of mixing up the steps, or the power of the dancing body, he focused on its fundamental frailty as a physical being. His temperament made him urge audiences to mock the dancers' mannerisms, and not to admire the subtlety of their choreographies.

In the first act of *The Bores*, Molière mercilessly mocks the elegant Lisandre, "not poor, nor from the worst of families," for whom nothing in the world counts apart from music and dance. We meet him when he arrives to present the "little *courante*" to Éraste, the play's main protagonist, unable to get away from the bores at court. The *courante* was the most fashionable dance at court at the time. Turska writes that: "It is, in fact, a livelier and merrier form of the *pavane*, combining

⁵³⁷ Molière, *The Bores*, trans. Thomas Shadwell.

⁵³⁸ John S. Powell, "Pierre Beauchamp and the Public Theatre," in: Nevile (ed.), *Dance, Spectacle...*, pp. 117–135. This article provides a description of Beauchamp's creative path; he emerges as partly driving the development of the classicist performative idiom, in which dance, theater, and music were closely tied.

a stepping motion with little hops.”⁵³⁹ She adds that “the *courante* had aspects of stylized and mimed flirtation (approaching, retreating, turning, changing places and partners, etc.), and was a full expression of courtly gallantry. A novelty in this dance was a decorative hand choreography with opposing movements (the right foot was moved forward when the left hand was raised, and the reverse).”⁵⁴⁰ Here we see a growing refinement of dance choreography, as well as a looming threat of affectation. Molière focused on deriding the latter. Lisandre first sings, and then, to emphasize his all-round talent, he dances, dragging in Éraste as his partner.⁵⁴¹ This tiny scene held a critique of an existence that was over-aestheticized, focused on pleasures, utterly subject to the tastes at court, and thus the kind promoted by the aristocracy. At the same time, by mocking the dance-obsessed Lisandre, Molière was mocking the dance mania as such, and showing the individual to be a victim of fashion – a political tool of whom absolutism took ample advantage. We thus had ambivalence – on the one hand, a critique of the nobility, and on the other, of the monarchy, which the nobility longed to pacify.

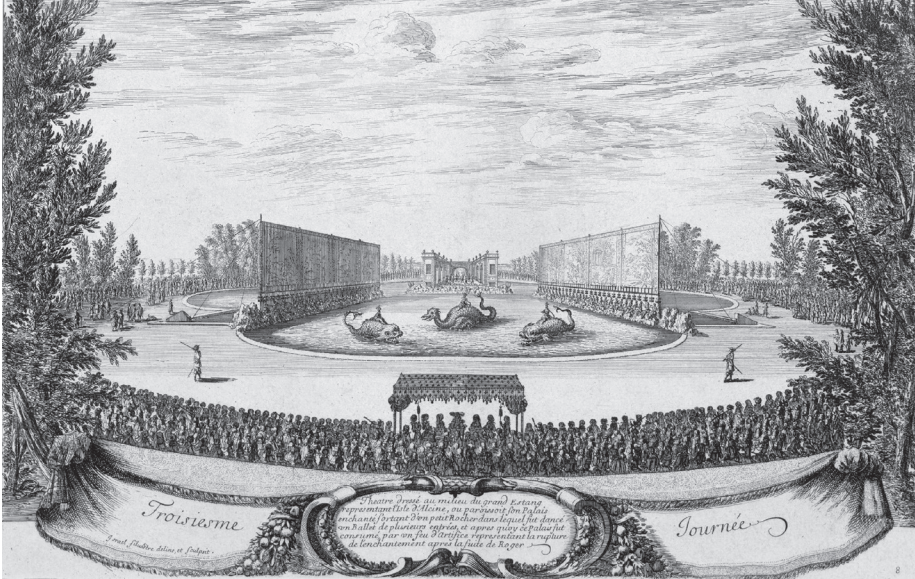
In 1661 it was still too early to grasp all the undertones of Molière’s satire. Molière himself did not develop this motif to the full. The subsequent *comédie-ballets* used dance as a tool to enhance the narrative, not to deride it as a mannered activity. Molière made his contribution to the kinetic experiments of Louis XIV, supplying their dramatic material. The result was spectacles where the ruler could experiment with various identities and, thanks to this experimentation, expand the scope of the ruler’s influence with several aesthetic tropes. As Franko explains, Molière’s sensibility was like the *ballets burlesques*. Yet he generally adapted it to the needs of the king.⁵⁴² In a light comedy ballet, *The Forced Marriage* (1664), Louis appeared as one of the Gypsies. This reiterated the gesture of the nobles from the first half of the century. While in their case, however, taking the roles of social outcasts was a kind of symbolic revolt, the king’s Gypsy dance pacified this rebellion, appropriating it for himself. The same year, Molière was responsible for organizing games in honor of the king and the Queen Mother (in fact the royal mistress), titled *Les plaisirs de l’île enchantée* (The Pleasures of the Enchanted Island) (Ils. 64, 65, 66). These included banquets, tournaments, ballets, and balls, as well as theater productions, including the comedy ballet *The Princess of Elis*, in which the court saw dancing dog trainers, huntsmen, satyrs, shepherds and shepherdesses. Louis XIV was among the dancers. As Benedetta Craveri has soberly commented:

⁵³⁹ Turska, *Krótki zarys...*, p. 95. For more on the *courante*, see: Wendy Hilton, “A Dance for Kings: The 17th-Century French ‘Courante.’ Its Character, Step-Patterns, Metric and Proportional Foundations,” *Early Music* 1977, Vol. 5, No. 2, pp. 160–172.

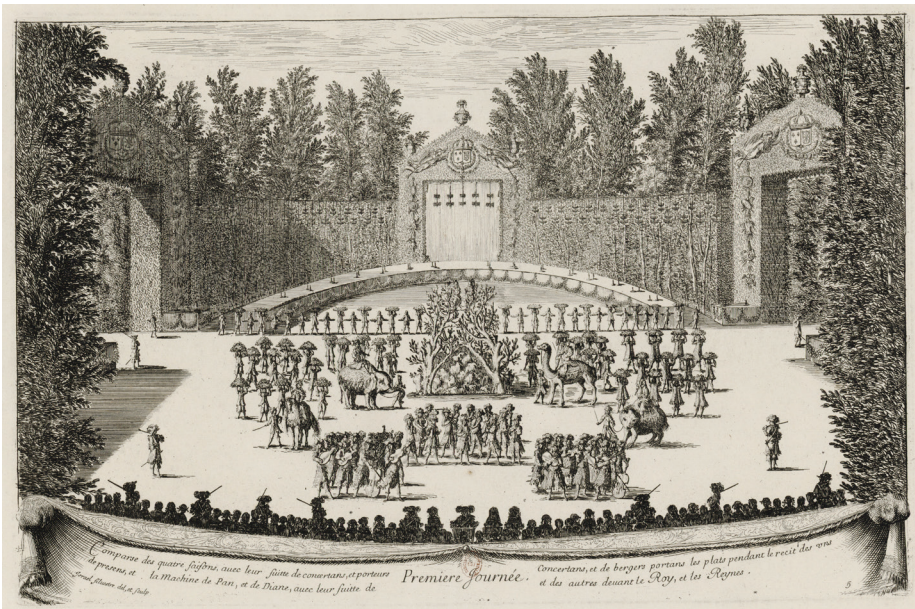
⁵⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴¹ We might add that the *courante* was the king’s favorite dance, which meant the satire could not have been appreciated, yet we have no proof that Louis XIV felt personally offended.

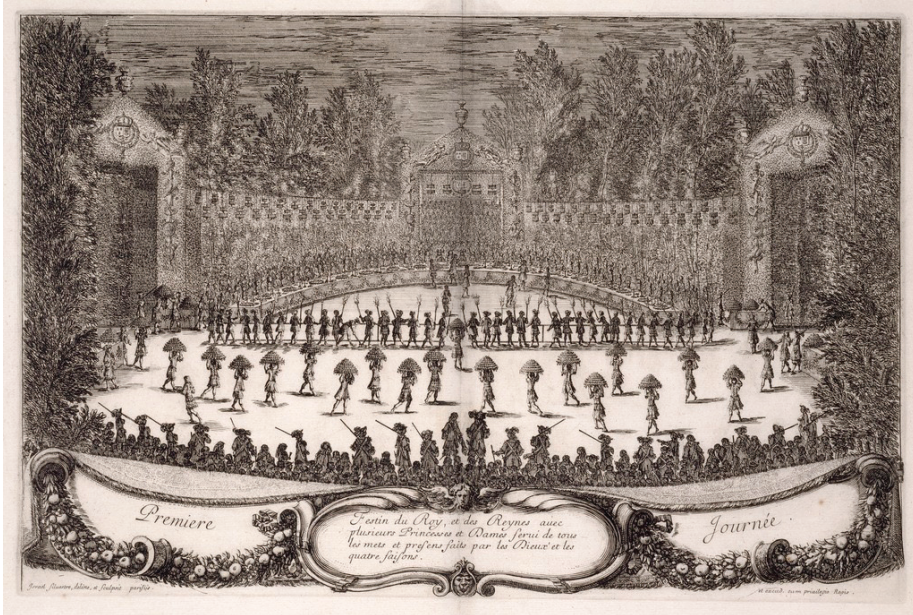
⁵⁴² Franko, *Dance as Text...*, p. 112.



64. Israel Silvestre, *Les Plaisirs de l'Île Enchantée* (Pleasures of the Enchanted Island) engraving to commemorate the ceremonies at Versailles, 1664



65. Israel Silvestre, *Les Plaisirs de l'Île Enchantée* (Pleasures of the Enchanted Island) engraving to commemorate the ceremonies at Versailles, 1664



66. Israel Silvestre, *Les Plaisirs de l'Île Enchantée* (Pleasures of the Enchanted Island) engraving to commemorate the ceremonies at Versailles, 1664

Louis XIV drew on Ariosto, the Italian poet most favored by French nobles, to reintroduce the illusory continuity between feudal custom and the absolute monarchy. In doing so, he turned to his own advantage both the nostalgia of the warrior class and the pastoral fantasy that the nobility had cultivated away from the court and in opposition to it.⁵⁴³

We encounter a similar strategy with the spectacular *Ballet of the Muses* (1666), for which Benserade was responsible; it was made up of thirteen various-sized spectacles, which included ballets, *tableaux vivants*, and Molière's comedies: *Mélicerte*, *Comic Pastoral* and *The Sicilian*. This last ballet concluded with a fairly artificially appended ballet of Moors. Among them, the courtiers could applaud Louis himself (and applaud they did). In essence the king could play anybody, he knew how to take advantage of all the performative conventions, including burlesque, which had once been so politically dangerous.

The king gradually became France's greatest dance virtuoso. As a man, however, he struggled with his corporeal limitations, just like any other dancer. Therefore, for his dance authority to be absolute, he had at one point to perform a truly radical gesture. In 1670, Louis XIV commissioned Molière to write *The*

⁵⁴³ Craveri, *The Age of Conversation...*, p. 245.

Magnificent Lovers. Again, the plot was mundane and sheer pretext, and again, the point was to make a great spectacle – it fit into the centuries-old tradition of the *grand ballet*, in which the monarch was to appear as Apollo at the head of a mighty procession. The fantastical nature of the characters might bring to mind the *ballets burlesques*, and the pathos of the conclusion – Benserade’s court ballets. And yet this was a unique performance – the king had promised to perform, but in the end he did not. This is traditionally blamed on Racine, who is said to have suggested in *Britannicus* that the king ought no longer to perform. This was because the monarch was less and less fit and capable of handling the difficult steps of the latest dances. It looked as though the Sun were beginning to set on the stage. Obviously, the political machine could not allow this. This meant a problem had to be resolved: How can the dancing subject retain his power and yet leave the stage? What was the essence of power if not a dance performance?

Molière came to the rescue in Louis XIV’s majestic retirement from the stage, though surely this was unintentional. He helped not only by writing the king’s final role, but also by “theorizing” on the weakness of dance in the comedy *The Bourgeois Gentleman*, created in that same period. This play is a truly crushing satire on dance aspirations as an attempt to master technique; Molière mocked the body that awkwardly tried to maneuver in the corset of excessive requirements. Even more than in *The Bores*, he demonstrated that power is not a matter of execution or keeping up with trends imposed by the outside world. This emulation is ultimately a sign of weakness, as the king had earlier sensed, not wanting to be a dancing marionette in overdramatic sequences. True strength is in the ability to set kinetic trends, to pull the strings on the puppets in the “box” on stage.

Let us look at the first two acts, which are often accused of having no plot development. There is something that, we believe, offsets this absence – Molière’s kinetic politics. M. Jourdain, as we know, seeks to climb the social ladder. He has no better path than through acquiring noble manners and marrying his daughter to the nobility. Thus, M. Jourdain does not consent to Cléonte, whom Lucile loves; he dreams of a romance with the Marquise Dorimène and seeks to dress like an aristocrat, and we finally encounter him in the company of music, fencing, and dance teachers. These figures are perhaps even more pitiful than Jourdain himself. The latter, at least, has a dream, for which he is willing to pay through the nose, while the others only thrive on his naïveté, like leeches on the money-swollen bourgeois body. They are thus the main *bête noire*, though the social climber also gets what he deserves.

The dance teacher does everything to ingratiate himself to M. Jourdain. He tells bald-faced lies and comes up with absurd theories like: “All of mankind’s suffering, the errors of history, the venality of politicians, the arrogance of generals, all of it

originates in never having learned how to dance properly.”⁵⁴⁴ M. Jourdain accepts these lessons, which means having to master the minuet. The bourgeois aspiring to nobility learns to dance to impress the marquise, but in fact he learns because it is what refined people do, because it is *comme il faut*. This is what Molière seems to deride. Dance, if it is a question of fashion, like the minuet making a splash at the time in the upper spheres, is nothing but *comme il faut* in movement, a fashion that makes people slaves to a formula, and also allows them to buy their position. Molière had always found convention distasteful. He was forever mocking the customs of the salon. It suffices to recall *Les Précieuses ridicules*. But *The Bourgeois Gentleman* is something more, it is a ruthless pamphlet. Through dance, music, and fencing lessons, puppets are created, destroying everything all around for hollow applause. M. Jourdain is not only amusing, he is dangerous, as ultimately he is cruel. This is the result of self-enslavement. Dancing the minuet to the beat marked by the teacher makes a person a slave; even worse, he enjoys his servitude. To this Molière cannot consent. But what does he propose in its place? To show this, we will have to begin with some more general statements.

It cannot be confirmed, but it is supposed that the young Molière fell into Pierre Gassendi’s sphere of influence.⁵⁴⁵ Leszek Kołakowski has called the writer a Gassendist, and there is a point to be made here, as his characteristic Epicurean tone can be felt in-between the lines of Molière’s comedies. The playwright was a connoisseur of life, a lover of sociability, in search of his own, autonomous, unique living space. He was not proposing the libertinism often found in an aristocratic rebellion. We can be certain that Molière did not want to come across as a free thinker, though deep inside he was, to some degree. Nor did he want to reduce human life to a search for pleasure, though he did prize various sorts of delights. His aspirations were of another sort – they might be called “bourgeois gentlemanliness” opposed to the “gentlemanly bourgeoisness” represented by M. Jourdain. Let us pause and look at Molière’s social background – he was the son of a wealthy upholsterer, and thus from the bourgeoisie, the most dynamic estate in French society at the time. From his mother he inherited a fondness for art, and from his father an aversion to the artificiality of complex speculations and intellectual pretensions. Like Gassendi, he came across as a skeptic in many respects, but behind that guise buzzed hopes, ambitions, and longings. Throughout his life, Molière maintained a basic conviction in the value of common sense and sincerity of heart, which he saw as infinitely greater than rationalist sophistry and all

⁵⁴⁴ Molière, *The Bourgeois Gentleman*, trans. Frederique Michel and Charles A. Duncombe, Createspace 2008, p. 10.

⁵⁴⁵ This is mentioned by Pradier, *Ciało widowiskowe...*, p. 274, and also by Leszek Kołakowski in “Piotr Gassendi – chrześcijanin, materialista, sceptyk,” pp. XIV–XV, the introduction to Pierre Gassendi, *Logika*, Warsaw 1964. A great deal of information is also available in Spink, *French Free-Thought...*, pp. 190–196.

variety of grandiose gestures and social skills. "The criterion which Molière seems to have had was a conception of a coherent and co-ordinated life, governed by its own inner principle, spontaneous and therefore natural, ordered and therefore rational."⁵⁴⁶ This sort of life was not meant to be an aristocratic use of life, nor the down-to-earth existence of the lower spheres. It was not to be bourgeois, if we take M. Jourdain as our typical specimen. Molière is the voice of the bourgeoisie that knows its value, rejecting blind emulation; they may not have been plentiful in numbers, yet from the perspective of the march toward full-fledged modernity, they were the most influential. Molière himself did not always fit the described model of natural and rational living, recognizing the taste for libertinism and doubt, which allowed him to construct such multidimensional characters as Don Juan and *Alceste*, with tangible and thought-provoking sensitivity. As J. S. Spink has noted, Molière understood extreme standpoints, he incorporated them into his worldview, but he would not be seduced by them. This is the root of his bourgeoisness – a synthesis of folk culture and aristocratism, a mediation between poles that were opposed at the beginning of the modern epoch. Thus conceived, bourgeoisness corresponds to what will take shape in the eighteenth century, the most important attribute of a modern sensitivity – an appreciation of naturalness, of the heart's susceptibilities, of sincerity opposed to manners.

In a sense, Molière was ahead of his time. He longed for naturalness and spontaneity, but lived in a world that was quite remote from them. The king, who initially seemed to oppose bourgeois common sense, understood what we shall soon show in detail: through the forms he cultivated he could brilliantly neutralize the aristocratic opposition. Naturalness and sincerity were, therefore, not what he was after. Molière's hopes were in vain. This disappointment required a balm, in the form of common sense, which destabilized meaning, spun a web of irony, and allowed the author to slip out of the court's shackles without sacrificing Louis' protection.

If we were to show a dance that Molière particularly admired in the context of nurturing ambiguity, this would be the joyful shepherds who close *The Bourgeois Gentleman* with the "Ballet of the Nations." On the one hand, the author seems to mock the simplicity of the countryfolk. They are depicted as remarkably simple, not to say dim. On the other hand, through the contrast between their dance and the aspirations of M. Jourdain, they seem almost sublime in their simplicity. The dancing villagers are the utter opposite of the mannered, aristocratic ideal, but their idealization is also ironic. This ambiguity is a facet of Molière's common sense, and thus it is only by juxtaposing the text with the coda that we can read *The Bourgeois Gentleman* as Molière's kinetic manifesto. From this standpoint, his kinetic politics bring a refusal to consent to standardizing styles, it is a war

⁵⁴⁶ Spink, *French Free-Thought...*, p. 149.

against the dictates of fashion. It sees its task as nurturing differences in personalities expressed in the Epicurean dance of life, and not the specialized and mannered dance of the court salon. This Epicurean dance is not, we assert, devoid of reflection. Molière realizes that longings for a simple life cannot be fully realized. He both resorts to and derides this utopia. This dual movement – melancholy and satire – is very much his trademark. We observe it in Molière’s masterpieces – in *Don Juan* and *The Misanthrope* – and in the dance aspect of the “Ballet of the Nations.” This is the context for Molière’s laughter – it is not the guffaw of a farce, though this inspired him, nor derision, though he felt this toward the aristocracy.

Laughter is a kind of dance, and a social dance at that. It is a pleasurable movement of the human body that can unite people. In order to occur, it requires an openness to others which is critical, yet sympathetic. Molière understood this perfectly. His laughter was never boorish or cruel. Under the guise of satire was what Tadeusz Boy rather vaguely called “the instinct of a lively man [...] an expression of his temperament and vivacity.”⁵⁴⁷ Molière bears a clear relationship to Rabelais, but also to Montaigne and, through Gassendi, the aforementioned Epicurus, and with him, Lucretius, whom Molière translated into French. We might attempt a sketch of Molière’s philosophy,⁵⁴⁸ bearing in mind that his kinetic politics have nothing systematic about them. They are more like an intuition that flashes in the background of his work, pointing to the communal pleasure of laughter as a foundation. If we can and know how to laugh, we need not know the latest steps and figures, nor do we need a dance teacher, who ultimately does more harm than good. The fashionable *courantes* and minuets lead us astray. A truly healthy personality requires no codified forms to express itself. Its vital energy cannot be crammed into it. A community is born not through sophisticated social forms, but through shared joys and desires. This makes laughter Molière’s kinetic politics.

What does laughter have in common with the king and the end of his appearances in court spectacles? Louis XIV had his own sense of irony. He was, after all, raised by François de La Mothe la Vayer, a friend of Molière’s, and a man whose skepticism and anti-clericalism ultimately cost him the post he had gained through the king’s protection. The young monarch never openly ascribed to libertinism. Yet neither did he remain entirely indifferent to it, at least until his Catholicism awoke in the 1670s. In the decade in question he did not spurn, as we have seen, the pleasures of the senses – on the contrary. Like Colbert, he stood behind Molière and Lully in their quarrel with the “Tartuffes.” He enjoyed himself and lived a full life.

⁵⁴⁷ Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński, “Molier (1622–1673),” in: Molière, *Dziela*, Vol. I, trans. and ed. Tadeusz Żeleński-Boy, Warszawa 1988, p. 42. In this comment we hear a frequent tone in Molière interpretation, deriving from the Bergson-influenced Albert Thibaudet, author of “Le Rire de Molière.” See: Spink, *French Free-Thought...*, p. 214, note 35.

⁵⁴⁸ Over one hundred years ago, such an attempt was made by Ferdinand Brunetière, who is cited by Spink, *French Free-Thought...*, p. 190.

Of course, his version of a full life, given his social standing, was unlike Molière's. It was not everyday common sense, but omnipotent will. And yet the ruler and his jester saw eye-to-eye on one thing – on laughter, and the physical joy it brought. Each man, in his own way, tried to conquer the world with it, to find agency in it. Here convention was an obstacle. This was why Molière scorned it. And Louis? He decided to take total control of it.

It seems quite probable indeed that, by the end of the 1660s, the king was not the nimble dancer he once was. But the worsening of his condition was likely not as dramatic as it is sometimes supposed. For over twenty years, Louis had taken regular dance lessons with Beauchamp, often for several hours a day, and so his abilities were unlikely to suffer from one day to the next. Perhaps he could no longer cope with the more difficult figures, though he could, of course, have appeared in a different repertoire. Moreover, he was only thirty-one when he appeared for the last time. Sources tell us that there were far older dancers at the court, and although thirty was seen as a threshold of decency, this was not a hard-and-fast rule. Beauchamp impressed audiences with his dexterity well into his fifties. Was it, therefore, only convention and age that motivated his decision to cease performing? After all, for many years after Louis XIV danced for pleasure at balls and dance evenings, events that were entirely public at his court.⁵⁴⁹ We find the last mention of the king dancing in 1679, a full decade after his appearance in *The Magnificent Lovers*.⁵⁵⁰ Why, then, did the king retire from court performances so early?

Let us indulge in a bit of pure speculation. Is it not possible that, after over a dozen years of trying out a plethora of roles and dance styles, Louis understood that visible dance is merely an extension of invisible dance, a materialization of inner strength, and that while visible dance could, and even must be imperfect, the invisible body of power never risks imperfection insofar as it remains immaterial? Might it not be true that retiring from the stage was not at all the result of external pressure, but that it was arranged by Louis himself? It was he, after all, who chose the subject for *The Magnificent Lovers*, and the role of Apollo in it, which, ultimately, he did not dance, as if comprehending that a true Sun did not dance. No theatrical convention, not even a choreography with the most finesse, is capable of containing his Majesty, and so all attempts at personally embodying it were in vain. Instead of further putting himself at risk, he occupied the position of the absolute ruler, who pulled the invisible strings tied to dancers' limbs. This marked the birth of a king who did not dance, but watched:

⁵⁴⁹ In essence, everything in Louis' life was a performance. "A prince can get everything he wants except the pleasures of a private life," wrote Jean de la Bruyère in *The Characters*, Createspace 2014.

⁵⁵⁰ Rebecca Harris-Warrick, "Ballroom Dancing at the Court of Louis XIV," *Early Music* 1986, Vol. 14, No. 1, p. 44.

I am the source of all delight,
 And the most vaunted stars
 Whose beauteous circle is around me,
 Are only brilliant and respected
 By the splendour which I give them
 From the car on which I sit
 I see the wish to behold me
 Shared by the whole of nature;
 And the whole world has but its hope
 In the sole blessings of my light.
 Very happy everywhere
 And full of exquisite wealth,
 The lands on which I throw
 The sweet caresses of my glances.⁵⁵¹

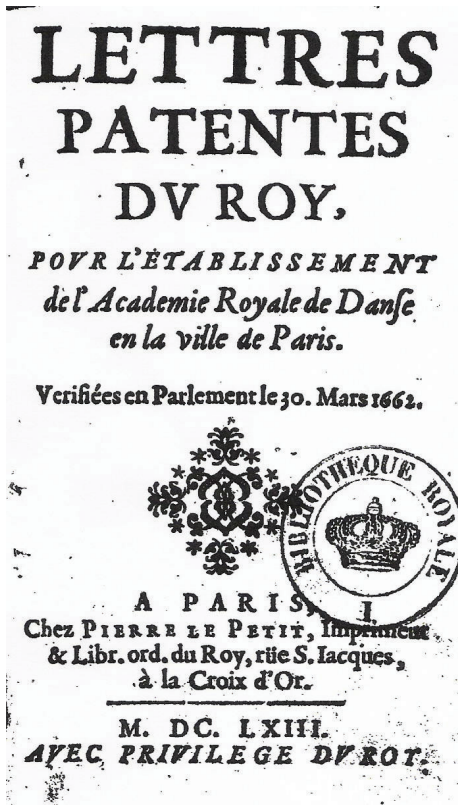
The king who watches is immobile, he is the source of all movement. He uses the aspirations of all sorts of M. Jourdain to subjugate them. We might even say that he makes the model citizen a character from a Molière comedy. The minuet that every citizen was meant to learn was composed in Versailles, whose construction Louis XIV began in 1668, and to which he moved to stay fourteen years later. He ended a process whose origins we traced in Chapter One. Henri III and Louis XIII tried to shine like the sun, but their inner anxieties effectively dampened them. Through his rigorous internal policies and successes abroad, Louis XIV eliminated the shadow. He became the Sun. He was no longer required to flaunt his dance skills. Other dancers did this for him. Or more accurately – he set them all moving according to the rules he set himself.

A Monopoly on Dance

Let us return, momentarily, to the network academies built under Louis XIV. This had its impact on dance. The Sun King did more than any other ruler to put dance under state control. We often hear of the major impact the creation of the Royal Dance Academy (*Académie Royale de Danse*; Ill. 67) in 1661 had on the development of dance culture. We ought then to ponder exactly what role this institution served. In *Lettres patentes* we read that the foundation's aim was: "to re-establish this Art in its initial perfection and to augment it as much as possible."⁵⁵² The word

⁵⁵¹ Molière, "The Magnificent Lovers," in: *The Dramatic Works of Molière*, trans. Henri van Laun, Evanston 1992, p. 192.

⁵⁵² Cf.: Maureen Needham, "Louis XIV and the Académie Royale de Danse, 1661: A Commentary and Translation," *Dance Chronicle* 1997, Vol. 20, No. 2, p. 181. The article contains an English translation of the entire founding document.



67. Print version of *Lettres patentes* establishing the Royal Dance Academy, title page, 1663

“re-establish” is not accidental here. The founding document clearly places the blame for the (largely concocted) downfall of dance customs on the rebelling magnates. We read that:

during the disorders and confusion of the late wars, there were introduced into said Art [of dance], as in all the other arts, such a great number of abuses with the potential to ruin many irreparably; so many ignorant and clumsy persons have permitted these errors to creep into public exhibitions that there are astonishingly few left who are even capable of teaching [dance].⁵⁵³

This meant the aim was to return to the structuring thought that developed in the sixteenth century, and was continued by Richelieu. Louis longed to wrest dance from the grips of the wealthy, giving it to people he trusted and had anointed. This meant a change of the generational guard.

⁵⁵³ Ibid., pp. 180–181.

We ought to note that the impetus behind the decision to create the Academy came from the king himself, as he sought to hold a monopoly on his beloved dance. This is the stance taken by Maureen Needham, for example.⁵⁵⁴ Yet Rose A. Pruiksema has compellingly argued that another and perhaps more important drive was the younger generation of dancing masters. They strove to free themselves from the influence of the musicians' guild, who had claimed the power to award licenses to teach dance before the academy was established.⁵⁵⁵ Yet this does not alter the structural implications of this event. It perfectly fell in line with the moment of transition to the new order, symbolically expressed by a generational revolt and a severance from dance's many centuries of dependence on music.⁵⁵⁶ Just as the young king emancipated himself from his aristocratic advisers, so too the young dance teachers he promoted freed themselves from their guild ties. These were two manifestations of the same process – the building of an absolutist culture in which dance occupied a leading role, though it was under the strict control of the professional community, which was, in turn, controlled by the monarch.

After the founding of the Academy, dance was basically under royal supervision. The dance spectacles organized outside of the court were chiefly replicas of what was staged in the Louvre, at Fontainebleau, and later at Versailles. It was not only the particular performances, but also the dance techniques that were carefully monitored. The Academy was meant to be a place for codifying dance in practice, in part through the certification of dance teachers who completed state exams. The *Lettres patentes* clearly decreed that the dancing masters hired by the king for the Academy would decide upon what would be danced in France, and how. From then on, the Academy's permission was required to teach dance and to choreograph dance compositions. The statute spoke about this clearly in Article VIII, which forbade the presentation of original choreographies without first receiving the Academy's approval in a majority vote.⁵⁵⁷ This meant a system of tight control was created, in the hands of experts delegated by the king. Harsh penalties awaited those who opposed this regulation. The resulting dance oligarchy drew very real profits from the Academy establishment. Even if this was a manifestation of cliquishness in cultural life, found outside seventeenth-century France as well, this decree also provided an example of general systemic re-evaluation occurring in France during the period – the concentration of power in a single center.

With the Dance Academy we have a gesture that aims to rein in the pluralism of kinetic languages, eliminate alternative spaces of dance expression, and thus limit

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁵ Rose A. Pruiksema, "Generational Conflict and the Foundation of the Académie Royale de Danse: A Reexamination," *Dance Chronicle* 2003, Vol. 26, No. 2, pp. 169–187.

⁵⁵⁶ In *The Bourgeois Gentleman* this rivalry between dance and music is brilliantly derided.

⁵⁵⁷ Needham, "Louis XIV...," p. 186.

physical freedom. In place of the old system, based on custom and, essentially, free competition, they created a professional system in which teaching authority was subject to top-down regulations, and creativity in dance was rationed. This was also accompanied by a notable re-evaluation in terms of performance. As we recall, throughout the Renaissance courtiers took part in various kinds of dance performances, often dancing alongside the ruler. They were sometimes accompanied by professional dancers, and there were also times when only professionals appeared. The latter were not, however, key performers in what we might call the rudiments of the dance spectacle. Dance performances were initially a kinetic space of play between the courtiers, or between them and the ruler. It laid the foundation for various sorts of ambiguity, and could be the source of subtle rivalries. Louis XIV's decision to end court ballet performances brought a decisive conclusion to these struggles for dance prestige. This was a key moment. The king would no longer risk the critical gaze of his subjects – the properly trained body of a professional would dance for him.

The king did not relinquish the pleasure of taking part in dance spectacles, but he did decide that this would no longer be the pleasure of him moving; he would set others in motion. In this way he could exercise the full control over the performance he sought to have over the country. This had not been possible when he appeared in the spectacles alongside the magnates, as he was at the mercy of the production as a whole, he was dependent on his partners, he could turn out to be a captive of kinetic proximity. To begin building a truly absolutist government, he needed to create distance. Louis did this through his expert protégés. In relinquishing to the professionals the performative space of the system he had created, he gained full control over it.

From the 1670s onward, it was not courtiers who dominated the dance scene, but dance professionals educated in an increasingly exclusive education/production system. The year 1672 is an important date, as this was when Lully assumed direction from Pierre Perrin of the struggling Royal Opera Academy, soon to be transformed into the Royal Academy of Music, colloquially known as the Paris Opera. It was true that the king ensured that the noblemen appearing on its stage would not bring harm to their reputation, but very few were even interested.⁵⁵⁸ On the one hand, magnates were unable to cope with the increasing technical demands; on the other, they risked becoming playthings for the viewers' gazes in their public appearances, and the audiences were increasingly filled with the bourgeoisie, which had never been the case at the court performances. As such, the aristocrats retired from the stage, contenting themselves with performances at closed private shows and balls. Professionals gained a monopoly on public dance stages, including the Paris Opera dancers like Michel Blondy, Claude Balon, and Marie-Thérèse Perdou de Subligny (Ill. 68) – the first

⁵⁵⁸ Homans, *Apollo's Angels...*, pp. 40–41.



68. Unknown (published by Pierre-Jean Mariette), an engraving depicting Marie-Thérèse Perdou de Subligny, *prima ballerina* of the Paris Opera, 17th/18th c.

dance “stars” we know by name, unlike the great majority of professional dancers from the preceding centuries. Here we must stress that the ballet masters and professional dancers most often came from the lower classes. They owed their social advancement solely to the Crown, which made them perfect tools for royal propaganda.

These circumstances led to the shaping of a modern model, where the key role is played by the professional relationship between the choreographer and the dancer. In the Renaissance dance had been choreographed by experts, but their relation to the performers was a subordinate one. They could not use their bodies as their imaginations dictated, or rather, their task was to tailor the choreographies of steps to the needs of the dancing individuals. In this respect, the dancing master played a purely subordinate role. This does not mean he was not creative. We can say with all certainty, however, that he was not autonomous. Under Louis XIV this began to change. When the king retired from the stage, it was then populated by choreographer-directed bodies who were almost entirely subordinate to the dancing master, and ultimately, to the monarch. On the surface, this evolved from the development of the language of dance, which became increasingly complex, preventing the great majority of courtiers from meeting the demands of the latest choreographies, in which the steps were more and more difficult, involving more and more ornaments: pirouettes, leaps (*caprioles*, *jetés*), movements of the foot in the air (*entrechats*), and motions of the leg not supporting the body (*battements*).⁵⁵⁹ Yet the causes ran deeper – the triumph of professional dancers and masters licensed by the king are the aftermath of the final removal of kinetic initiative from bodies competing with political powers – both of the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie. Like the state, dance was to belong to the king in its entirety.

The king appointed experts who, in turn, selected their corporeal material to shape. As a result, dance was less and less the views of the dancer, a field for expressing his autonomy, and increasingly a space for a physical display that His Majesty used for propaganda purposes. The human body in ballet no longer alluded to the ambiguous space of political difference (as in the *ballets burlesques*, and even in the comedy ballets); its task was to evoke homogeneous recognition and admiration. This was a body that was, in fact, shaped and manipulated by the Crown, the sponsor and administrator of the Academy, and the Opera as well. In this regard, professional dancers were a gift from the king to the nation – they were meant to prove the efficacy and generosity of absolute rulers, to dazzle the public with a technical perfection that could not be achieved without royal benevolence and patronage. They were entirely obedient, serving as raw material. Their virtuosity

⁵⁵⁹ Details of the technical evolution of ballet from the latter half of the seventeenth century to the end of the following century are provided by Sandra Noll Hammond, “The rise of ballet technique and training: the professionalisation of an art form,” in: Marion Kant (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Ballet*, Cambridge–New York 2007, pp. 65–77.

was, in fact, that of the Agent, who set the whole mechanism in motion, just as the pedagogical and creative authority in the caste of choreographers was nothing other than the authority and creativity of their ruler.

His Majesty bestowed power, for he alone possessed it. Like every aspect of the public milieu, dance belonged to him, and only he could control it. As such, it should not astonish us that, in the latter half of the 1670s, Louis XIV was behind the idea to create a specialized notation system to make “the art of dance comprehensible on paper.”⁵⁶⁰ This aim was carried out by the aforementioned Pierre Beauchamp, the monarch’s partner in court ballets, the first official ballet master at the Royal Academy of Music, established in 1669, and then one of three head *mâîtres de ballet* at the Paris Opera.⁵⁶¹ We ought to note the various repercussions of this move. The point, in part, was to spread the glory of the French monarch as far as possible.⁵⁶² Transcribed dance could travel not only throughout the country, but also abroad. In this way, French dance stood a real chance of becoming the prevailing style on the continent in a short period of time, conquering the Italian style, which had reigned for two centuries. This was just what happened. But we can also point to deeper aims, particularly when we take into account the subsequent fate of the project.

Louis XIV and Beauchamp’s idea was later developed by Raoul Feuillet, publishing *Chorégraphie ou l’Art de d’écrire la Danse* (Choreography, or: The Art of Inscribing Dance) in 1700.⁵⁶³ It is from this treatise that we have the word “choreography,” which then pertained to the inscription, and not creation of dance (Ill. 69). Feuillet made Louis XIV’s dream of seizing control of the substance of dance much closer to coming true. This detailed notation system was advanced in its abstraction; it allowed for movement to be structured and standardized:

Feuillet’s notation [...] erased the locality of dance steps in order to place all dancing on the plane of pure geometry where each dance’s specificities could be compared and evaluated. Performing this evaluation, dancers disciplined by the notation enjoyed a consolidated and singular perspective onto the world from which to track their own progress in relation to others.⁵⁶⁴

The move toward discipline evident in this way of thinking means that notation might be seen as the third step taken to regulate and unify dance life, after the founding

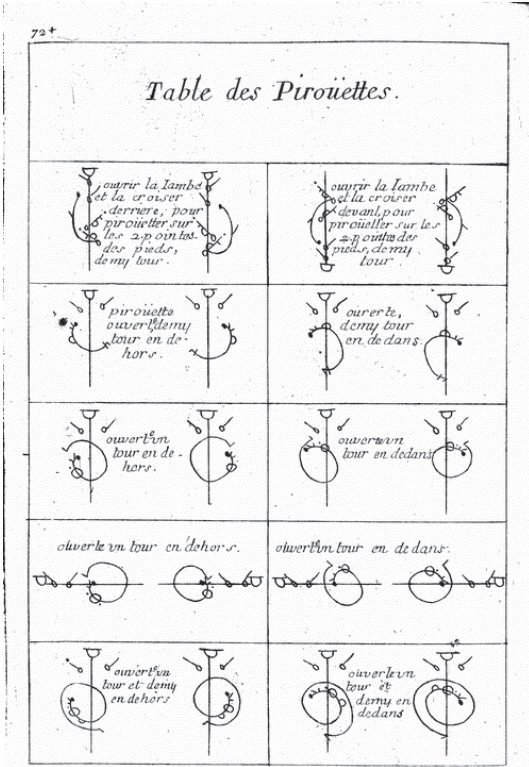
⁵⁶⁰ From: Susan Leigh Foster, *Choreographing Empathy: Kinesthesia in Performance*, London–New York 2011, p. 18.

⁵⁶¹ The other two were Anthoine des Brosses and Hilaire d’Olivet.

⁵⁶² Homans, *Apollo’s Angels...*, p. 19.

⁵⁶³ I have consulted John Weaver’s English translation, titled *Orchesography Or, the Art of Dancing*, London 1706, available on-line at: <https://archive.org/details/orchesographyort09454gut> (accessed: 1.03.2015).

⁵⁶⁴ Foster, *Choreographing Empathy...*, p. 26.



69. Raoul-Auger Feuillet, *Choregraphie*, sample notations of dance steps, 1713

of the Academy and the professionalization of dance performances. It introduced order and eliminated ambiguity, promoting the center that was behind its creation, widely popularizing the dance choreographies it developed. In this way, differences were steadily annulled: “Cultural and historical specificities of particular dances were homogenized by a system that implemented absolute conceptions of space and time. Perhaps for the first time, dance was asserted to be a universal language.”⁵⁶⁵

We ought to note Susan Leigh Foster’s diagnosis of how *Choregraphie* joined absolutism and universalism. Feuillet strove to inscribe movement geometrically, to eradicate freedom of movement. To this end, he removed local idiosyncrasies in favor of a “neutral model,” which, however, had an extremely monopolistic nature.

In our day, dance in the late LouisXIV era is reconstructed through the Beauchamp-Feuillet choreographic notations. The style that emerged from the above-described monopolistic aspirations materializes before our eyes. It has become known as the “noble style,” which has a slightly ironic ring to it. A major role was played by its attentiveness to technical details – the lines the body formed in space,

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 25.



70. Pierre Rameau, *Le Maître à danser* (The Dancing Master), an illustration presenting dancers before the bow, 1725

its posture, the positions of the arms, legs, chest, and head. The details of individual interpretation surrendered to the overall posture in the noble style. Details were, of course, important – it suffices to recall Caroso’s treatise – but the noble style had a much greater physical rigor than what had been seen before, a rigor now associated with classical ballet.

To gain an almost physical sense of the noble style’s rigor, it suffices to open Pierre Rameau’s popular handbook, *Le Maître à Danser* (The Dancing Master) of 1725,⁵⁶⁶ where the stress on precision of movement reaches nearly obsessive heights (Ill. 70). The head was to be raised, though not stiff, the shoulders rolled back, the chest open, the arms loose, the hands ready to move, yet controlled, the waist stable, the feet turned outwards. This is the starting position upon which all of dance was to be built. This made the dancer seem like a precisely designed machine. Precision was the dominant feature not only in the positions, but also in the movement. Rameau

⁵⁶⁶ I have used the English translation, *The Dancing-Master: or, The Art of Dancing Explained* by John Essex, published in 1728 in London. It can be found at: <http://baroquedance.info/sources/rameau/> (accessed: 1.03.2015).

goes into extensive detail about how one should walk. He expounds on how to doff one's cap, praising Caroso as the master of concision. Bowing lessons occupy a good several pages, distinguishing between various types, each with a precision that strikes us as maniacal. The reader learns how he is to move his feet, calves, knees, and hips; how to balance one's weight, how to move across the floor, how to face someone making a bow, how long the bow should last in a given situation, and so on, and so on.

The foundation of the classical dance idiom was five foot positions, which have been the basics of ballet ever since. As Homans points out,⁵⁶⁷ the ballet masters of the absolutist era paid special attention to the feet. On the one hand, this was a particularly erogenous zone in those times, as feet were concealed in public. On the other, the feet were highlighted as the part of the body that anchored the dancer's body. The feet are closest to the ground, and thus, however peculiar this may sound, they are the body's least personal part. The arms and hands, which Rameau also addresses in his treatise,⁵⁶⁸ are the expressive, distinguishing, and idiosyncratic parts. The feet, on the contrary, are a solid base, the least individualized part. Dance training in the noble style thus began with the feet, or the floor. The aim was stability, to make dance's point of departure down-to-earth, both metaphorically and literally. In controlling the feet, physicality as a whole was reined in, making it a rational and structured project.

Let us sum up our observations on dance during the reign of the mature Louis XIV, to move on to situating them in the epoch's philosophical context. It was His Majesty, in fact, who established the notation by the hand of his dance bureaucrats. It was he who made the call to consolidate, he shaped the dancing body and made it move "correctly." The king was the source of the *noble danse*, understood less as a person than as a political power. While in earlier periods there might have been competition, a variety of perspectives and languages, a diversity of bodies (which, according to Franko, was an attribute of the burlesque ballets), and communal dance was based on the concept of cooperation, the dance codified by the Academy and immortalized through notation became (theoretically, at least) a universally uniform dance. The dancers' bodies were treated as geometrical forms which were not, by any means, to begin moving on their own accord. For this, training and the royal school method was needed. Training and method made bodies marionettes in the hands of an invisible guiding force. In Renaissance dance we could see a harbinger of this process, but it was only the classicist noble dance that perfected it.

⁵⁶⁷ Homans, *Apollo's Angels...*, pp. 29–30.

⁵⁶⁸ Rameau devotes the entirety of the second part of the treatise to arm movements, detailing, for example, movements of the wrists.

The *Cogito*, God, and the Machine

It is fascinating to trace the correspondence between Louis XIV's policies and the Cartesian system, which was developing at the very same time. We find a surprisingly similar attempt to build a stable structure on new principles. This correspondence, it seems, is no accident. We see it as a testimony to the shaping of a new cultural force – an absolutist agency, which was expressed both by Louis' political project and the Cartesian school. In both cases, the rationalist subject stepped forward. In both cases it came with radical, individual, even lone quests. Neither could have occurred without an external guarantee. And finally, in both cases the body was reduced to a pliable substance subject to manipulation. This does not mean that we seek to make Louis XIV a disciple of Descartes. We must bear in mind that he was no admirer of the latter. Cartesian criticism was very dangerous politically, though Descartes never overtly dealt with politics, doing everything in his power to present himself as a scholar opposed to all manner of social upheaval. And yet the ruler subconsciously noted an affinity, which he had to categorically deny for the sake of his own prestige. He could not tolerate the criticism Descartes postulated, which could be (and was, in more radical communities) interpreted as a call to undermine traditional authority, encouraging total freedom of thought. At the same time, Louis himself resisted the political authorities before him, dreaming of total freedom. As such, Descartes and the Sun King were, in a sense, cut from the same cloth – they were two reflections of the mighty spirit of the times.

Descartes began his journey into systematic thinking with the hard sciences and, in his enthusiasm for them, attempted to build a system of certain knowledge of the world. This involved a wholesale rejection of scholastic speculation, and of his present-day authorities, at least in the official academic circles like the Sorbonne. Like Galileo, Descartes was disappointed in the futility of academic scholarship, and his philosophy expressed this crisis.⁵⁶⁹ At the same time,

⁵⁶⁹ Owing to a lack of space and competence, we will not be exploring Galileo more thoroughly. Yet we join an expert on the subject in praising his contribution to modern thought, above all in stating that knowledge was not a simple collection of observations, it was an abstract generalization, based on data with the help of mathematics. He saw nature as inscribed in the language of mathematics, and so only a mathematical method could help grasp the principles of the world. This also meant a liberation from pure speculation and the terror of the senses. According to A. Rupert Hall: “the most eloquent and full defence of this process was given by Galileo, whose mathematization of the science of the motion of real bodies furnished a model for physical science generally during the following century” (*The Revolution in Science 1500–1750*, London 2014, p. 12). The Cartesian philosophical method was also built on a faith in mathematics. For more on the role of Galileo in the development of contemporary science, and with it, culture, see, for example, Butterfield, *The Origins...*; Arthur Koestler, *The Sleepwalkers: A History of Man's Changing Vision of the Universe*, London–New York 1990, pp. 357–384; I. Bernard Cohen, *From Copernicus to Newton: The Birth of a New Physics*, New York 1966.

it seemed the crisis could be overcome – again like Galileo, Descartes was fascinated by the opportunities in the process of abstraction and mathematics, and, like him once more, premised his work on systematic scholarly practice, and not a slavish adoration of tradition. Here was an enormous faith in rational thought. Descartes believed that one needed to be ready to topple any dogma if research proved it false. At the same time, he stressed that one ought to discard a naive faith in the testimony of the senses as the sole point of reference in research.⁵⁷⁰ He did not trust their testimony. He suspected that what seemed utterly true to the senses was a deception, the manipulation of dark forces. This suspicion bordered on obsession, but it also allowed him to discover a method that became a cornerstone of modern thinking – methodical doubt. If everything can be an illusion, we ought to accept that it *is* an illusion, he claimed.⁵⁷¹ One ought to always nurture one's suspicions, be critical to the extreme. Nothing should be taken on faith, on the word of old authorities or one's senses, one ought not to succumb to tradition, nor to social pressure, nor to one's impressions, one should continually search for total certainty through faultless measurement – for certitude through reason.

Descartes most methodically laid out his program of striving for clarity based solely on certitudes in *Rules for the Direction of the Mind*. He stated (in Rule III): “Concerning objects proposed for study, we ought to investigate what we can clearly and evidently intuit or deduce with certainty, and not what other people have thought or what we ourselves conjecture. For knowledge can be attained in no other way.”⁵⁷² Something must be absolutely evident to the mind, impossible to undermine from any angle, for it to be included in the corpus of knowledge. To reach certitudes, he systematically breaks things down to their parts (Rule V):

The whole method consists entirely in the ordering and arranging of the objects on which we must concentrate our mind's eye if we are to discover some truth. We shall be following this method exactly if we first reduce complicated and obscure propositions step by step to simpler ones, and then, starting with the intuition of the simplest ones of all, try to ascend through the same steps to the knowledge of all the rest.⁵⁷³

⁵⁷⁰ In his most mature work, he declared: “I will now shut my eyes, stop my ears, and withdraw all my senses. I will eliminate from my thoughts all images of bodily things, or rather, since this is hardly possible, I will regard all such images as vacuous, false, and worthless” (René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. John Cottingham, Cambridge 2017, p. 28).

⁵⁷¹ “I will assume therefore [...] some malicious demon of the utmost power and cunning has employed all his energies in order to deceive me. I shall think that the sky, the air, the earth, colours, shapes, sounds and all external things are merely the delusions of dreams which he has devised to ensnare my judgement. I shall consider myself as not having hands or eyes, or flesh, or blood or senses, but as falsely believing that I have all these things” (ibid., p. 23).

⁵⁷² René Descartes, *The Essential Collection*, trans. John Veitch, Titan Read, Kindle, 2014.

⁵⁷³ Ibid.

If we seek to reach the truth, we must first strip reality down to its bare elements, we must be constantly ready to refute, question, doubt, to select judgments that are entirely clear, which irrefutably foist themselves upon us, and use them as building blocks.

Though less systematic and self-aware, King Louis followed a similar script. He also began with a sense of fundamental crisis, in his case, the Fronde. When he took the throne, he experimented with his own identity, tried it out in various roles, carefully examining the world around him, observing. He would take nothing on good faith, he checked everything on his own. He did not trust authorities, though he superficially respected them. Was his decision to rule independently not a kind of radical doubt? Was it not founded on a belief in the might of human reason?

It is striking that both men, Descartes and Louis XIV, condemned themselves to solitude in making their decision. Descartes was ultimately left without a homeland or a community. This was a condition of the depth of his inquiry. Louis, in turn, said that the king had no friends. There were advisers, there were courtiers, there was family, but only as an individual could he rule. The ruler was a singular creature. This is why Louis had an uneven relationship with Colbert. He needed a competent minister, but he understood that an absolutist reform in politics required one ultimate source of decisions. This is why Louis XIV worked more than any French king before or after him. No decision was made without his input, or so he desired. He wanted control over everything. Descartes was similar – he also believed in acting alone, in the domain of the solitary thinking subject. He too strove for full control, which was, in his eyes, a condition for effectively examining the nature of the world. Both Louis XIV and Descartes cursed their chaotic, restless and often brutal reality in a similar fashion. Essentially, the entire epoch did the same. It was a systemic imperative.

This surveillance of everything that went on is very characteristic of the structure of this [absolutist] monarchy [and Cartesian subject]. It shows clearly how strong were the basic tensions which the king [like the Cartesian subject] had to observe and master in order to maintain his rule.⁵⁷⁴

Descartes' radical doubt and Louis' absolute rule, part of which was, as we have seen, the monopoly on dance, arose from the same tension, the same imbalance that was experienced in the first half of the century. This tension was not easily released, despite the decisive steps each one took. Although Descartes was deluded that he had reached the absolute foundations when he enthused about his discovery of *cogito ergo sum*, it swiftly turned out that critical work could and had to proceed. When he wrote: "I am therefore, precisely speaking, only a thinking thing, that is,

⁵⁷⁴ Elias, *The Civilizing Process...*, p. 341.

a mind (*mens sive animus*), understanding, or reason, terms whose signification was before unknown to me,⁵⁷⁵ the thinking thing, resisting doubt and hence becoming the last rung of critical self-analysis, could be interpreted variously. Human certitude is dynamic. The mind never ceases to dig deeper, for a matter can always be seen from another point of view. This is why Descartes remained restless. Like Louis, who sought to rule independently, he was aware that his personal authority was insufficient, however great it was. The individual is fallible, if only because it has a body. This fallibility is swiftly revealed in a public performance, such as a dance. One false move and all authority lies in ruin. This is why the king retreated from the stage, no longer to dazzle and overwhelm by his person, but through a depersonalized majesty, embodied by bodies for hire. As we shall see, Descartes also mistrusted the body.

In his *Meditations*, Descartes articulated the threat of eternal uncertainty, and tried to deal with it, appealing to a divine guarantee. Where did he get his conviction of the certitude of some things? Was this only another illusion? "It is hard to distinguish between what seems evident to us and what excludes even the slightest doubt."⁵⁷⁶ What to do here? Descartes says that only God can remove our doubts. Were it not for Him, the situation would be hopeless. But because He exists, as demonstrated by the very existence of the notion of God in our minds,⁵⁷⁷ we can assume that what strikes us as absolutely evident *is* so (within the bounds of the world established by God). As such, certainty attained through absolute doubt is guaranteed by the metaphysical Agent. Louis XIV also fell back on the external guarantee of his personal infallibility. On one level, this was the God of the Catholic religion, as Bossuet tirelessly reiterated in his sermons, developing a theory of absolutism as a divine anointment. On another level, however, Louis' guarantee, in a far more modern spirit, was the God of the State, or absolutist political agency. Even if the monarch did not feel infallible as a person, his infallibility was guaranteed by the state. He drew his power from the state, it justified his tyrannical tendencies, such as the revocation of the Edict of Nantes.

Of course, there was a basic difference between Descartes' God and Louis' State. This was in the nature of freedom they promoted. Placing God and man alongside one another did not mean that Descartes believed man was equal to God. On the contrary, there was an infinite gulf between them. This was because man made mistakes. Yet this did not, as Descartes shows in the *Fourth Meditation*, arise from the Lord's manipulation, for an ideally good God could not mislead us. Our errors

⁵⁷⁵ Descartes, *Meditations...*, p. 35.

⁵⁷⁶ Geneviève Rodis-Lewis, *Kartezjusz i racjonalizm*, trans. Stanisław Cichowicz, Warsaw 2000, p. 36.

⁵⁷⁷ Descartes' proof of the existence of God is encapsulated by Rodis-Lewis, *Kartezjusz...*, pp. 36–42. In a nutshell, we might say that a creature as finite and imperfect as man cannot create an idea of the ideally infinite. Such an idea, according to Descartes, must come from God.

result from the fact that we have a faulty command of free will – it goes beyond the limits of the clearly comprehending intellect. We should stress this moment. God is absolutely free. There is nothing that could constrain Him, for if something could, he would not be perfect, and thus, he would not be God. Man, too, is basically free. His will is infinite, for he can always say yes or no, accept or reject.⁵⁷⁸ Descartes stresses this point in a letter to Mesland of December 9, 1645: “When a strong evident reason carries us towards something, so that morally speaking it’s hard for us to turn away from it, speaking absolutely we can do this. We are always free to prevent ourselves from pursuing something that we clearly know to be good, or to refuse to accept an evident truth – just as long as we think that it’s a good thing to show in this way the freedom of our will.”⁵⁷⁹ Yet this freedom is not absolute, for it is merely the freedom to choose. This is because the human intellect, though it has enormous capacity, is not absolute. It includes inborn ideas, it works according to externally imposed principles, is incapable of defining itself, it can only discover or affirm its principles, or struggle against them. Herein lies the tragedy of the human condition, which Descartes perceived, making him far from the optimistic thinker those who mythologize his pan-rationalism make him out to be. According to Descartes, man is fully capable of rejecting what his instinct tells him. This is the essence of his will. Yet this is when he is vulnerable to error, and thus loses true freedom, becoming a prisoner to illusion. “Descartes concluded that we are free only if our actions are in harmony with the created standards of truth and goodness. Freedom thus increases in tandem with the increased perception of goodness and truth. There is also the inverse relation: if the perception of truth and goodness is muddled, our freedom decreases.”⁵⁸⁰ Man is thus only the shadow of God. Only by walking in His footsteps can he be truly active. Freedom is an understanding of our restrictions.

In Louis we find no such reservations. He did not wonder at the paradoxes of his freedom, he did not mark its limits, though neither was he the great autocrat his opponents made him to be. This surely resulted from the fact that the ruler/state relationship is simpler than the man/God relationship. It was easier to form an identification that Descartes would not dare. His religiousness was strong, even mystical to some degree. *Meditations* is also a beautiful religious poem in which

⁵⁷⁸ Ferdinand Alquié states that Descartes characterizes man by “a pure power of decision that he maintains even when good and evil are plain to see, and the ability to come out in defence of either side: ‘when some most evident reason sways us in one direction, indeed – in practice – we cannot really choose the opposite side, and yet – in absolute terms – we can if we wish.’ Descartes goes so far as to state that, in this sense, we provide evidence of greater freedom when we choose the worse though we see the better” (Ferdinand Alquié, *Kartezjusz*, trans. Stanisław Cichowicz, Warsaw 1989, p. 137). As we shall see, freedom thus conceived is a negative freedom.

⁵⁷⁹ René Descartes, *Selected Correspondence of Descartes*, trans. Jonathan Bennett, e-book, <https://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/descartes1619.pdf> (accessed: 17.05.2020).

⁵⁸⁰ Zbigniew Janowski, *Teodycea kartezjańska*, Cracow 1998, p. 169.

the author considers his relation with the Absolute from various perspectives (Meditation IV). It features an intimate amorous relation, while Louis' relation to the state was more matter-of-fact. Louis saw the state instrumentally, to some extent, as his own property, even if he understood that it was only his symbol. This difference did not, however, cancel out a general similarity.

In both Descartes and Louis we find a longing for total autonomy.⁵⁸¹ Even if it had boundaries, both Cartesian philosophy and the (dance) policies of Louis XIV expressed classicist aspirations – an absolutist focus on the subject. It is often said that the odyssey of the modern subject begins with Descartes. Let us recall a famous declaration from *Meditations*: “I will converse with myself and scrutinize myself more deeply; and in this way I will attempt to achieve, little by little, a more intimate knowledge of myself.”⁵⁸² The consequences of this focus on subjectivity was precisely set out by Arendt: “The very ingenuity of Cartesian introspection, and hence the reason why this philosophy became so all-important to the spiritual and intellectual development of the modern age, lies first in that it had used the nightmare of non-reality as a means of submerging all worldly objects into the stream of consciousness and its processes.”⁵⁸³ In his writings, Descartes stresses that God is infinitely more perfect than man, yet by the same token he always appreciates human reason: “the man discovered here is not a fragment of a system, a moment in history, the subject of study: he is something that maintains relations with Being unlike all the other relations of the world of objects, one whose freedom breaks apart any system, which cannot be reduced to an idea of a scientific type. It is metaphysical, in the proper sense of the word.”⁵⁸⁴ Louis thought similarly of himself as a ruler – he believed he was a power unlike all others, which towered infinitely over the rest of society, metaphysical in the political sense of the word.

We would not stress this similarity to such an extent were it not for the important consequences for the turn toward the subject in seventeenth-century culture. Here we have in mind the notorious dualism of the body and mind (or body and soul), which resulted from placing subjectivity in the absolute center. In his doubting, Descartes also questioned his body. The senses were discarded, as their testimonies were always uncertain. There remained pure, non-corporeal thought.⁵⁸⁵

⁵⁸¹ Alquié is again worth citing here: “The will is entirely free. It can suspend our judgement or oppose what is merely dubious. It can deter me from claiming something, and thus, allow me to reject all delusion and trickery. In this way doubt expresses our total autonomy and reveals that, if we so choose, we can avoid being taken in” (Alquié, *Kartezjusz...*, p. 73).

⁵⁸² Descartes, *Meditations...*, p. 24.

⁵⁸³ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 282.

⁵⁸⁴ Alquié, *Kartezjusz...*, p. 155.

⁵⁸⁵ In *The Principles of Philosophy* we read: “For examining what we may be, while supposing all things different from ourselves [{and outside our mind}] to be false; we clearly perceive that extension, or figure, or local motion (or any similar thing which must be attributed to a body) does not belong to our nature, but only to the faculty of thinking; which is therefore known prior to and more certainly

Yet this thought uncovered something that could in no way have derived from it. He had arrived at substances: “For, from the fact that we perceive some attribute to be present, we [rightly] conclude that some existing thing, or substance, to which that attribute can belong, is also necessarily present.”⁵⁸⁶ There are two kinds of substances: thought (a thinking substance), and the body, which Descartes calls an extended substance. The body merely occupies space, moves, and endures. This is why Marek Drwięga responds: “this makes the body little more than an objective structure that can be mathematically defined. Descartes believed that this would allow him to treat the body like a mechanism ruled by the objective laws of physics.”⁵⁸⁷

Yet before we turn to this mechanistic perspective, we should stress that the extended substance and the thinking substance were, according to Descartes, two different qualities. He writes: “It is true that I may have [...] a body that is very closely joined to me. But nevertheless, on the one hand I have a clear and distinct idea of myself, in so far as I am simply a thinking, non-extended thing; and on the other hand I have a distinct idea of body, in so far as this is simply an extended, non-thinking thing.”⁵⁸⁸ Why, then, did Descartes recognize the realness of bodies? The answer is predictable. If thinking, with all its doubts, ended up at God, who was a guarantor of its most evident perceptions, then God, who cannot delude us, guarantees that the body actually exists, though it is utterly different from the soul. Thus, to some degree, the body, or at least the confirmation of its existence, is dependent on thought. The Cartesian man had to confirm his corporeality in an act of reflection. This quite clearly paved the way for treating the body as a project.⁵⁸⁹ It is a line of thought that sheds an important light on the kinetic politics of Louis XIV and, above all, on the turn we have described toward apprehending the dancer’s body as a marionette.

Since bodies exist as extended substances and differ from souls,⁵⁹⁰ it was necessary to form a precise definition of the human body. Descartes attempted to respond to

than any corporeal things; for we have already perceived this [thinking], and yet are still doubting the rest” (René Descartes, *The Principles of Philosophy*, trans. Valentine Rodger Miller and Reese P. Miller, London–Boston 2012, p. 5)

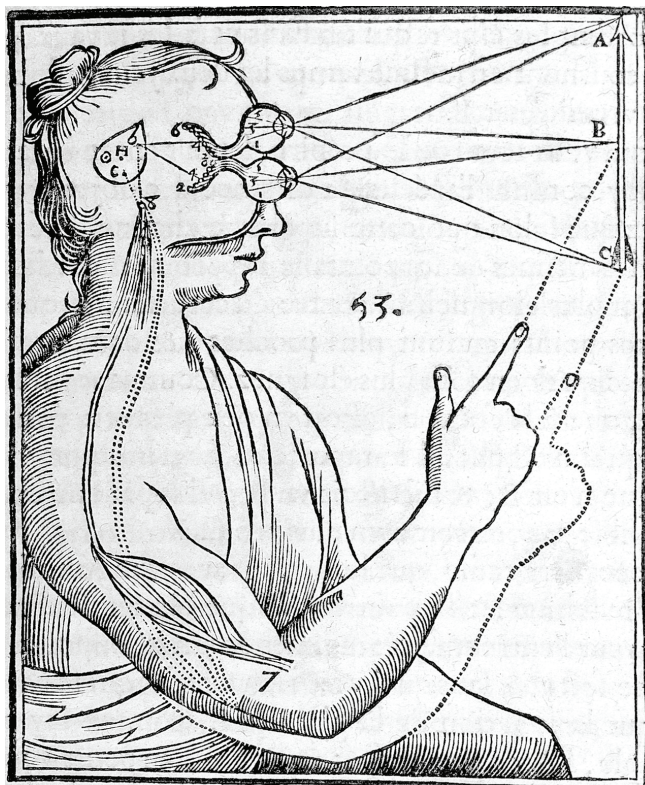
⁵⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁷ Marek Drwięga, *Ciało człowieka. Studium z antropologii filozoficznej*, Cracow 2005, p. 22.

⁵⁸⁸ Descartes, *Meditations...*, p. 54.

⁵⁸⁹ We should stress that Descartes believed the body to be fundamentally imperfect, because it was divided, unlike God and the mind. He mentioned this in *Principles* and *Meditations*. His idea brought about the notion of the body as an object subordinate to the mind.

⁵⁹⁰ Descartes realized the problems that the radical division of the body and soul would bring in the face of our everyday experience of their remarkably powerful bond. His dualism was far from radical, as we see from *Listy do Regiusa*, Warsaw 1996; *The Correspondence between Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia and René Descartes*, Chicago 2007, and *The Principles of Philosophy*. In his correspondence with Princess Elisabeth, Descartes stresses that the body and soul are joined, and that the soul “moves the body and the body acts on the soul” (p. 69). In the *Principles*, similarly: “It can be concluded that a particular body is united with our mind more closely than any other bodies are. This is obvious from



71. René Descartes,
L'homme (Man),
illustration on p. 81,
1664

this issue in the posthumously published⁵⁹¹ treatise *Traité du monde et de la lumière* and the accompanying *Treatise of Man* (Ill. 71). He used an interesting tactic – he decided to speak of an imaginary world, “governed by natural laws (from the real world we know), but where the revelations cannot be applied, as this world was invented by man.”⁵⁹² This tactic allows him to describe the body alone, without metaphysics, and thus apply the new mechanistic world-view to his thoughts on the body.

the fact that pains and other sensations come to us unexpectedly, and that our mind is conscious that these sensations do not proceed from it alone, and cannot pertain to it solely in virtue of its being a thinking thing. Rather, they proceed from it only because it is joined to some other thing which has extension and is mobile, and which is called the human body” (p. 40). Yet the problem remained, how it happened that the body and soul, while joined, were utterly different in nature. Here Descartes developed his famous theory of them meeting in the pineal gland. We struggle to find this satisfactory. For more on the lack of psychophysical unity in Descartes, see: Drwięga, *Ciało człowieka...*, pp. 31–39.

⁵⁹¹ It remained unpublished because Descartes feared the Church’s response to his bold rationalist views, part of which was a conviction of the accuracy of the Copernican theory. These fears were justified, as during the same period, Galileo was sentenced to lifelong house arrest by the Roman Inquisition for openly promoting the heliocentric theory.

⁵⁹² Andrzej Bednarczyk, “Przypisy tłumacza,” in: René Descartes, *Człowiek. Opis ciała ludzkiego*, trans. Andrzej Bednarczyk, Warsaw 1989, p. 135, note 1.

In a summary of the work included in the *Discourse on Method*, he writes:

I contented myself with supposing that God formed the body of man altogether like one of ours, in the outward figure of its members as well as in the interior confirmation of its organs, without making use of any matter other than that which I had described, and without at the first placing it in a rational soul, or any other thing which might serve as a vegetative or sensitive soul.⁵⁹³

We might see this supposition as an image of Descartes' approach to the human body, in which he saw a remarkably complex and precise mechanism.⁵⁹⁴ He saw the body as matter, as complex machinery. This explains the following words in his treatise on man:

I suppose the body to be nothing but a statue or machine made of earth, which God forms with the explicit intention of making it as much as possible like us. Thus God not only gives it externally the colours and shapes of all the parts of our bodies, but also places inside it all the parts required to make it walk, eat, breathe, and indeed to imitate all of those our functions which can be imagined to proceed from matter and to depend solely on the disposition of our organs.⁵⁹⁵

From this standpoint, the body was, on the one hand, like watches, mills, fountains, and on the other, animals, and even the universe. In this regard, Descartes' machine was not utterly artificial, or purely mechanical in our sense of the word. To quote the treatise's publisher, Louis de la Forge: "By the word 'machine' we ought not [...] to understand anything other than a body composed of organic parts, which – when combined – together produce movements; this they could not do if they were separate."⁵⁹⁶ Andrzej Bednarczyk shows that from this approach, "the

⁵⁹³ René Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations*, trans. Elizabeth S. Haldane and G. T. R. Ross, New York 2003, p. 31.

⁵⁹⁴ *Meditations* contains this fragment: "And as a clock composed of wheels and counter-weights no less exactly observes the laws of nature when it is badly made, and does not show the times properly, than when it entirely satisfies the wishes of its maker, and as, if I consider the body of a man as being a sort of machine so built up and composed of nerves, muscles, veins, blood and skin, that though there were no mind in it at all, it would not cease to have the same motions as at present, exception being made of those movements which are due to the direction of the will, and in consequence depend on the mind" (*ibid.*, p. 117).

⁵⁹⁵ Descartes, "Treatise on Man," in: *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes Volume 1*, trans. John Cottingham, Cambridge 1999, p. 99.

⁵⁹⁶ Quoted in: Bednarczyk, "Przypisy tłumacza," p. 135, note 2. Carl Schmitt writing on Hobbes, who saw the state as a machine, noticed: "The sharp differentiation between 'organism' and 'mechanism' finally prevailed [only] at the end of the eighteenth century. [...] Mechanism and the machine therefore [still] had for [Hobbes] and therefore for his age [and thus for Descartes] thoroughly mystical meanings. Ernst Mach said quite correctly that in seventeenth-century rationalism's theory of the physical universe a mechanistic mythology is opposed to the animistic mythology of ancient

divide between natural and artificial machines boils down to the fact that the former are smaller, more abundant, and more capable.”⁵⁹⁷

We should stress that the mechanistic in Descartes did not signify a deprecation of the body; on the contrary, it emerged from a great fascination. Descartes was not alone in this. His epoch, after all, delighted in mechanics and searching for a harmony at work everywhere. This was fully expressed by Henri de Monantheuil in 1599, when Descartes was three years old:

For this world is a machine, and indeed of machines, the greatest, most efficient, most firm, most beautiful. [...] God, whom Plato believed to be the most conscientious and enduring geometer, is also, as we clearly see by the marvels of His work, the wisest, finest, and most powerful mechanic and creator of machines.⁵⁹⁸

This kind of rapture would not have been possible without the development of scientific thought in medicine and anatomy. An enormous interest in anatomy was characteristic of Renaissance artists, yet a key text for the public at large was *De humani corporis fabrica* by Vesalius of 1543 (Ill. 72).⁵⁹⁹ Following this treatise, anatomy studies became more widespread, and though the Church attempted to oppose them, it was increasingly difficult.⁶⁰⁰ Descartes also engaged in practical anatomy (he held animal dissections, watched butchers at work, assisted autopsies in anatomical theaters),⁶⁰¹ yet his knowledge was rather superficial, curiously enough. He would commit errors that Vesalius had already noted.⁶⁰² Nonetheless, his studies of the body did not have purely scientific truth as their aim:

Their significance is not that they could provide up-to-date knowledge of anatomy or physiology. In Descartes’ work in the philosophy of natural sciences they serve an entirely different function and occupy a special place. They are a concrete and visual attempt at application of methods “proper to the guidance of reason and the search for truth in science” to the study of life.⁶⁰³

religions” (*The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes*, trans. George Schwab and Erna Hilfstein, Chicago and London 2008, p. 41, translation altered).

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁸ Henri de Monantheuil, “Świat jest maszyną,” trans. Andrzej Nowicki, in: Andrzej Nowicki (ed.), *Filozofia francuskiego Odrodzenia...*, Warsaw 1972, pp. 339, 340. For more on the universe as a machine, see: Bednarczyk, “Przypisy tłumacza,” p. 136.

⁵⁹⁹ For more on the links between anatomy and art, see: Arasse, “Ciało...,” pp. 402–410. The latter played a major role in building modern man’s physical consciousness.

⁶⁰⁰ This was experienced by Vesalius himself; because of harassment, he resigned from his professorship in Padua and accepted a post as a court doctor for the kings of Spain.

⁶⁰¹ The first *theatrum anatomicum* was opened at the university in Padua in 1594. In 1596, an anatomical theater was created in Leiden.

⁶⁰² Bednarczyk, “Wstęp,” in: *Człowiek...*, p. XIV.

⁶⁰³ Ibid., pp. XXXIX–XL.



72. Andreas Vesalius, *De humani corporis fabrica* (On the Substance of the Human Body), illustration of an autopsy conducted by the author of the work, woodcut, 1555

The conception of the body as a mechanism sends us back to the main principle of the Cartesian method: critical analysis guided by reason. Mechanics is primarily needed to confirm this, and only secondly as practical knowledge. Descartes wrote of the machine of the body not for anatomical or medical purposes, but for philosophy. We might even venture the hypothesis that he needed the body as a *res extensa* in order to speak of the mind, which is capable of creating a description of the body's construction, understanding its functioning principles, and thus guiding it appropriately. An opposite dependency, according to Descartes, does not occur, and thus the emancipation of rational thought was part of the whole intention of these mechanics. The mechanisms of nature can be perfect, but only the mind, which joins man and God, is truly creative. The mind's task is to understand and regulate the body: "This consideration is most helpful, not only for my noticing all the errors to which my nature is liable, but also for enabling me to correct or avoid them without difficulty."⁶⁰⁴ This had far-flung consequences, which the whole of the seventeenth century shared with Descartes, and which we have observed in the dance of the Louis XIV epoch, moving gradually toward rationalization, technical complexity, and physical virtuosity through rationally organized training. The Cartesian machine set in motion – this was the ideal of courtly dance executed by the Academy, the Paris Opera, and the notation system. The monarch, represented by the choreographer, was put in place of Descartes' thinking subject, and the dancer was merely a corporeal mechanism he controlled.⁶⁰⁵

In the Cage of the Minuet

As we have seen, the Cartesian doubting subject is never static. It is a process, not a state. Descartes asked: "But what then am I? A thing that thinks. What is that? A thing that doubts, understands, affirms, denies, is willing, unwilling, and also imagines and has sensory perceptions."⁶⁰⁶ "I think, therefore I am" was thus an expression of an activist world-view. Descartes had reached an absolute principle

⁶⁰⁴ Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Vol. I, trans. Donald A. Cress, Indianapolis 1993, p. 58.

⁶⁰⁵ A legend from seventeenth-century biographer and philosopher Adrien Baillet is sometimes repeated (in Homans, for one: *Apollo's Angels...*, p. 9) that Descartes was, to some degree, interested in dance, to the extent that he choreographed a ballet for the Swedish Queen Christina, with whom he engaged in philosophical disputes. According to this legend it was titled *Ballet de la Naissance de la Paix* and was a stage rendering of the philosopher's geometrical imagination. Richard Watson deals with this fantasy in *Descartes's Ballet: His Doctrine of the Will and His Political Philosophy*, South Bend, IN 2007. It is striking, nonetheless, that such an idea could even emerge in the seventeenth-century imagination. It shows the powerful presence of the dance motif and how closely related dance and philosophy were, whereas today they seldom intersect.

⁶⁰⁶ Descartes, *Meditations...*, p. 19.

that was simultaneously an eternal task to be fulfilled. Thus man stood opposed to other creatures as a rational being, and thus, he acted. Yet this dynamism had a special resonance. Thought as a dynamic process, and its inherent ability to critique and analyze, facilitated creative work, which meant that man was the closest of all creatures to God. Authentic movement was grounded in rationality, not in matter. It is of special importance here that movement first came from the mind, and only then from the body. We stress this through Ferdinand Alquié's remarkably inspiring interpretation:

Our general vision of the World indeed seeks in motion signs of activity, if not activity itself. For Descartes, [physical] motion indicates the absence of true activity. It is natural, and thus devoid of reality. The act, on the other hand, is will, and can only be detected in man or in God. This is why in metaphysics "I think" and God alone are true beings; thus, through technical acts, man can be the subject who transforms the World with this objective and knowable movement whose first cause is God.⁶⁰⁷

We might see this quote as a synthesis of the classicist kinetic politics and a key to the shift in focus between Descartes' generation and his successors, between the young Louis XIV and those who sat on the throne of an absolute monarchy. Doubt is consciousness in constant motion, it is a quest, a press forward, a sensitivity to change, and not the *status quo*; yet this movement gradually dwindled in the latter half of the seventeenth century, as new certainties steadily gained ground. If the new anchor was a non-material, metaphysical agency that used rational tools to structure reality, the physical world was nothing more than a passive mass object to the will of the human subject, whose power guaranteed this agency.⁶⁰⁸ The world of bodies, and, with it, the world of politics, became the subject's plaything, and thus, was essentially static. The body's motion always came from the outside, rendered by God = the Subject = the King, and no one else.

⁶⁰⁷ Alquié, *Kartezjusz...*, p. 51.

⁶⁰⁸ Here we might recall the words of Lewis Mumford: "as opposed to all those processes that involve tradition, historic continuity, cumulative experience, democratic cooperation and reciprocal intercourse with others, Descartes favoured the kind of external order that could be achieved by a *single mind*, like that of a Baroque prince, detached from precedent, breaking with popular customs, all-powerful, acting alone, commanding *unqualified obedience*: in short, laying down the law" (Lewis Mumford, *The Myth of the Machine, Volume 2: The Pentagon of Power*, New York 1974, p. 80, emphasis – W. K.). This is one of the key stages in what might be called the modern drift towards solitude. Mumford sees it in absolutist culture: "to act alone, to occupy the centre of the stage, to displace all rival personalities or groups – this was the underlying tie between the princely despot, the musical *prima donna* [we recall that opera was born in the seventeenth century], the monopolistic financier, and the reflective philosopher. The final effect of this movement was to reduce to a whirl of decomposed atomic particles all the constituent elements of society, and to leave to a single polarizing element, the king or the 'state,' the function of giving some sort of order and direction to the alienated and fragmented individuals that were left" (*ibid.*, p. 81).



73. Jean La Pautre, engraving depicting a ballroom at Versailles, latter half of the 17th c.

This was nowhere more visible than in Versailles, where Louis transplanted his court in the 1680s. At first glance, Versailles seemed constantly pulsing with life. Diverse entertainments were always being organized – theater, feasts, fireworks, concerts, as well as balls and ballets (Ill. 73). Versailles was perhaps France’s most active dance stage. True, the performances were often imported from the Opera, or at least prepared by the Opera ensemble, and thus situated in the aesthetic space “between” the Versailles court and the increasingly bourgeois Paris; nevertheless, the king was their patron. His monopoly on dance endured. The ruler set people’s tastes, used entertainment to govern his subjects’ sensibilities, to shape their kinetic imaginations. Their bodies moved as His Majesty dictated. The court in Versailles became the mature classicist model of the kinetic politics.

Louis XIV’s decisive policies made France the leading European power, brought internal peace, and made society uniform (at the cost of oppressing the Huguenots), thereby constricting public life, subordinating it to the court, as the most important social space. This operation has been described on many occasions.⁶⁰⁹

⁶⁰⁹ A description of this mechanism can be found in the historical works we have quoted, including Elias, Homans, and Craveri, but also – if a reader is interested in the minutia of court life – in the very

To pacify the nobility, the king tied them to him, making the individual's social status dependent on his activeness at Versailles. The point was to replace the chivalrous ideal, which involved a sense of individual honor and a striving for autonomy, with the ideal of the man of court.⁶¹⁰ He gained the title of an *honnête homme*.⁶¹¹ Louis XIV loved war, which meant chivalrous manhood was always in fashion, yet this was a new kind of warrior, at the beck and call of His Majesty and the royal treasury. The army was professionalized, and thus ceased to be a path to political ambitions outside of the royal courts. It allowed one to become an outstanding individual, but not to compete with the king, who had absolute rule over the army. The code of chivalry collapsed, giving way to the officer's code. The same occurred outside of the army. The nobility could no longer secure their ambitions through conspiracies and rebellion, for Colbert's extensive network of clerks and police, mainly composed of the bourgeoisie, would not allow it. Yet the king understood that the nobility could not be left idle, as they remained an important force in society. Their energy had to be somehow channeled. This was the function of the court – finding employment for the nobility, through countless rituals of power.

Longer periods at court changed a man – the warrior became the courtier.⁶¹² When we add that Louis by no means barred the more enterprising members of the lower classes from entering the nobility, we gain a portrait of thoroughly conceived disciplinary space, in which a central subject pulled bodies' invisible strings. Total political passivity came in the guise of constant impetus and activity. We might say that the monarch strove for political inertia, setting Versailles in motion as a complex machine for pacifying social forces which, without tasks to occupy them, could have led to the destabilization of absolutism.

The court pacification of social resistance meant the development of ceremonial life. Conventions, etiquette, and customs became far more complex. Thus began the epoch of the culture of the pose, which spread across the continent:

well-documented work by Wojciech St. Magdziarz, *Uwodziciele władzy. Geneza i organizacja dworu Ludwika XIV*, Warsaw 2013.

⁶¹⁰ Spink has shown that the transition from the chivalric to the courtly ideal was tied not only to the ruler's initiative, but also a shift in economics: "In the middle years of the [seventeenth] century, novels and tragedies carried heroic gallantry to extravagant heights. But in the second half of the century, the independence of the nobility and landed gentry was undermined by the chronic depression of agriculture, which began at that time and lasted until the middle of the following century, and they could no longer face up to an energetic central government" (Spink, *French Free-Thought...*, p. 134.) The nobility was forced to go to the court if it wanted to dream of living at the same level of material comfort as it had. This meant it had to submit to the new rules. "The court had its own moral code; the dominant theme was that of *decorum*" (ibid., p. 135).

⁶¹¹ Craveri mentions this in *The Age of Conversation...* See also: Bluche, *Życie codzienne...*, pp. 33–36.

⁶¹² For more on this subject, see: Elias, *The Civilizing Process...*, pp. 387–396.

The most influential courtly society was formed, as we know, in France. From Paris the same modes of conduct, manners, taste and language spread, for varying periods, to all the other European courts. [...] The absolutist-courtly aristocracy of other lands adopted from the richest, most powerful and most centralized country of the time the things which fitted their own social needs; refined manners and a language [including, we might add, body language] which distinguished them from those of inferior rank. In France they saw, most fruitfully developed, something born of a similar social situation and which matched their own ideals: people who could parade their status, while also observing the subtleties of social intercourse, marking their exact relation to everyone above and below them by their manner of greeting and their choice of words – people of “distinction” and “civility.”⁶¹³

Versailles hosted a society of courtiers ruled by etiquette. Even those who, like the Duke de Saint-Simon, covertly accused Louis of authoritarianism and dreamed of noble autonomy, were eager to do anything to climb the court hierarchy.⁶¹⁴ There ensued a true mania for titles, and gaining them depended on the candidate’s mastery of social skills. This was tied to an extreme ritualization of life: “The place of every courtier is precisely established, as is his role, in every situation.”⁶¹⁵ This also applied to the king. His daily schedule was planned almost down to its minutia. This was a model to be emulated: “The King’s elegance and precision of movement betokened his legendary self-control and a religious respect for etiquette, but they also reflected the agility and grace he had learned from hours spent with dancing masters.”⁶¹⁶

The life of the king was a precisely orchestrated spectacle requiring proper choreography, and so too was to be the life of a courtier. The *noble* dance, as such, reflected existence at court. Versailles was an ongoing kinetic spectacle, in which dancing skills were worth their weight in gold. They could help you climb the hierarchy or meet with ostracism if you were found lacking, as Saint-Simon described in his famous passage on how one M. Montbron boasted of his dance abilities in Versailles, failed on the dance floor, and could not show his face in court for a long time thereafter.⁶¹⁷ Small wonder that the profession of dance teacher flourished; in Paris alone, as Homans submits,⁶¹⁸ there were over two hundred dance schools, educating young noblemen who hoped for success at court and bourgeoisie dreaming of social advancement.

⁶¹³ Ibid., p. 189.

⁶¹⁴ To be persuaded of this, it suffices to read the Duke’s memoirs: Duke de Saint-Simon, *Memoirs*, trans. Francis Arkwright, Ulan Press 2012. It is a pity that this keen observer did not devote more space to court dance.

⁶¹⁵ Bluche, *Życie codzienne...*, p. 23.

⁶¹⁶ Craveri, *The Age of Conversation...*, p. 247.

⁶¹⁷ See: Homans, *Apollo’s Angels...*, pp. 17–18.

⁶¹⁸ Ibid., p. 21.

In France of the absolutist period there was the systemic requirement of mastering the court's kinetic language if one hoped to play a role at Versailles, and thus have social standing. This does not mean that a masterful handling of etiquette was the only road to success. If a person had abilities that the king appreciated in other fields (such as military skills), he did not necessarily have to dance brilliantly. Nonetheless, even civil servants who did not have to gain the king's recognition with their manners felt obliged to master the basic dance skills. Often, like Colbert, they simply enjoyed dancing, as this was one of the most popular recreations. Yet it certainly was not easy.

The kinetic politics at the Versailles court was grounded in the conviction that society was built on a system of rank and distinctions. Court life was a spectacle in which one was obliged to adapt to hard and fast rules. This did not only lead to cynical pretense, however. The rules of behavior became a new kind of truth. Their gravity and power were a matter of real conviction. Participation in the ruler's rituals did not boil down to a manipulation of convention, though this did sometimes happen, as the case of Saint-Simon indicates; it was based on its internalization. The courtiers were not solely after personal gain, though this was surely crucial. Courtly life epitomized something greater than the individual, a common good, which means we can speak of Versailles as a community. "Etiquette 'regulates relations within a small elitarian group,' it demarcates places and hierarchies, distinguishes and discriminates, but increasingly it becomes physical expression, personifying the state in everyone's eyes."⁶¹⁹ Versailles was cruel, but Versailles was loved, because it provided a sense of being part of a metaphysical authority – His Majesty as an agent of power.⁶²⁰

Courtly life as a whole was a kind of endless dance, which took place not only in the ballrooms, but also in the dining halls, in the corridors, and in the sprawling gardens. Versailles was a state of mind and body, a kind of incarnated existence that translated into forms of shared society. Among these we must single out the minuet as the dance quintessence of the kinesis that spread across Europe from Versailles.⁶²¹ In the Louis XIV epoch, society and stage dance were always intersecting. In the various spectacles and balls the same sorts of dances were performed. True, after 1670 it was mainly professionals performing in the spectacles, raising technical standards to new heights, but this had yet to translate into

⁶¹⁹ Georges Vigarello, "Ciało króla," in: idem (ed.), *Historia ciała*, Vol. 1, p. 367.

⁶²⁰ Peter Burke writes that "the center of power was seen as sacred and 'exemplary': a model for others to follow. The court was perceived as the embodiment of political and social order, the microcosm of the order of nature, and the reflection of the supernatural hierarchy" (Peter Burke, "The Courtier," in: Eugenio Garin [ed.], *Renaissance Characters*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane, Chicago 1991, p. 99).

⁶²¹ An interesting image from the dance life in Versailles at the early stages of its creation is found in: Barbara Coeyman, "Social Dance in the 1668 Feste de Versailles: Architecture and Performance Context," *Early Music* 1998, Vol. 26, No. 2, pp. 264–285.

a separate genre. The dance forms on stage merged with social life and vice versa. This meant that the most popular social dance at the turn of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the minuet, was a perfect match for the above-depicted *danse noble*, a regular point on the ballet and opera programs. Let us now examine the social consequences that this brought.⁶²²

The minuet was not the king's favorite dance; he preferred the *courante*. Yet the public liked it, and the minuet dethroned the *courante* at the turn of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, becoming society's dance of choice.⁶²³ In fact, the two dances were essentially quite similar. The *courante* seemed stouter and calmer, the minuet livelier, though it eventually became more subdued – both were built on a principle characteristic of the combination of rhythmic complexity, requiring considerable technical abilities, as well as composure and elegance of execution, masking the complexities so that the dance seemed simple and undemanding. This was the whole idiom of the *danse noble* – the point was to make it seem the difficulties cost the dancer practically no effort. According to witnesses, Louis XIV was very much up to the task, dancing rhythmically complex *courantes*. We have no reason to disbelieve this, though, of course, we could hardly expect less than glowing reviews of the king.⁶²⁴

The minuet owed much of its success to Lully, an Italian who, as we have mentioned, was not only a splendid composer, but also an excellent dancer with a fiery temperament. Because the minuet was initially a vivacious folk dance, it was much to his taste. Lully gave it polish, dressing the minuet in the courtly garb of his melodies, and began inserting it in spectacles of all kinds – court ballets, comedy ballets, operas, and lyrical tragedies, which we shall examine in due time. As we recall, M. Jourdain was learning the minuet, as the dance swiftly made inroads into balls. It was danced after the ceremonial *branle*, which traditionally opened court festivities.⁶²⁵ This does not mean it monopolized the dance floor. Traditional dances

⁶²² In this chapter we focus on the compatibility of kinetic etiquettes, embodied by the minuet, with the politics of an increasingly fossilized absolutism. This means we shall be mainly extracting the disciplinary tones from the minuet. Yet it took on not only a disciplinary aspect, as we will attempt to detail in Chapter Five. Only by juxtaposing these two portraits can we begin to understand the dance's enormous popularity, paradoxically serving to present both submission to the disciplinary mechanisms, and their destabilization.

⁶²³ Rebecca Harris-Warrick, "Ballroom Dancing at the Court of Louis XIV," *Early Music* 1986, Vol. 14, No. 1, p. 45.

⁶²⁴ His great abilities are perhaps most reliably described by Saint-Simon, who was hardly in favor of the King, and who wrote his *Journal* after Louis' death, when criticizing Louis XIV was permissible.

⁶²⁵ We should note that Louis XIV's reign saw the gradual reduction of *branles* at balls. As we know from François de Lauze's reports in *Apologie de la danse* (Apology for Dance, 1623) and Marin Mersenne's *Harmonie universelle* (Universal Harmony, 1636–1637), in the first part of the century balls began with a five-part suite: the slow, stately *premier branle*, a quick, energetic *branle gay*, a calmer *branle de Poitou* (or *branle à mener*), a *branle double de Poitou* and a *cinqueisme branle* (or *branle de Montiradé*), followed by gavottes and couples dances, like the *courante* or sarabande. In the latter half

continued to enjoy a certain popularity – the *pavane*, *gaillarde*, the aforementioned *branle*, and the gavotte. New ones appeared as well – a quicker variant on the minuet, called the *passepied*, the folk-derived *bourrée*, and the dynamic, showy, solo *gigue*.⁶²⁶ But the classical minuet prevailed. Why? Carol Lee offers this answer: “A perfect expression of the artifice surrounding luxurious palace life, the *menuet* was replete with refined and mincing steps that became slower as the century wore on.”⁶²⁷ Let us follow this lead.

Our main source on the minuet is Rameau, who gave it a great deal of attention in *The Dancing Master*, as well as a German handbook by Gottlieb Taubert: *Der Rechtschaffener Tanzmeister* (The Correct Dancing Master, 1717),⁶²⁸ which shows that the fashion swiftly traveled past the borders of France. In both books, the minuet emerges as a dance that required great mastery, precision, and grace. During the courtly balls it was danced in pairs, which could then create larger groups.⁶²⁹ There was a great deal of gallantry in it, the on-the-floor intricate actions illustrating the behind-the-scenes maneuvers being played out at court (Ills. 74, 75). Once again we observe, for example, a major emphasis on the proper bow (as “poor” M. Jourdain experienced). Imperatively, true mastery of the minuet was not a matter of perfectly replicating a planned choreography; it was the ability to put together steps

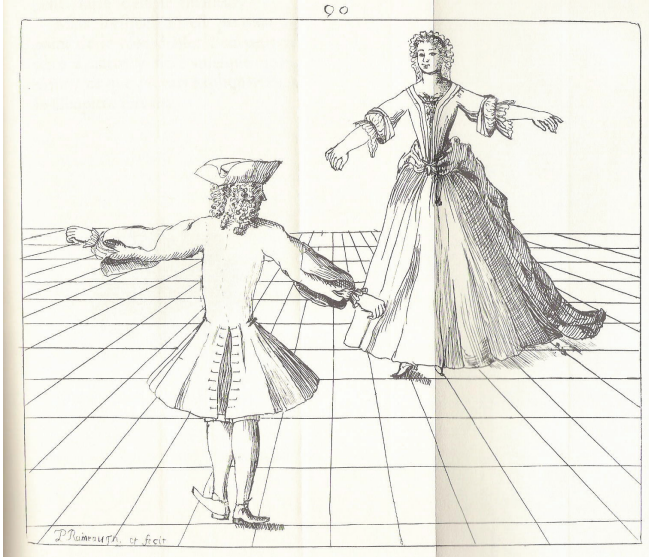
of the century, the suite was reduced to the first three *branles*, as we learn, for example, from *Idée des spectacles anciens et nouveaux* (Principles of Spectacles Ancient and Modern, 1668) by Michel de Pure. The minuet also gained in popularity. At the same time, we can observe a departure from the circle *branle* tradition in favor of a line dance, and a critique of those of its kind that were most ludic. This was part of a greater process of refining dance forms to acquire the sophisticated elegance of Classical dance. See the very interesting article by Richard Semmens, “Branles, Gavottes and Contredanses in the Later Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries,” *Dance Research: The Journal of the Society for Dance Research* 1997, Vol. 15, No. 2, pp. 35–62.

⁶²⁶ Descriptions of these dances are provided by Turska, *Krótki zarys...*, pp. 110–111.

⁶²⁷ Lee, *Ballet...*, p. 73.

⁶²⁸ I have consulted the English translation of fragments from: Gottfried Taubert, *The Minuet*, in: Cohen (ed.), *Dance as Theatre Art...*, pp. 42–51.

⁶²⁹ We should recall that mainly couples dances and only a few solos have survived in Beauchamp-Feuillet notations. This does not mean that group dances were no longer performed. The end of the century saw the rise in popularity of *contredanses*, modelled on English country dances, to be covered in the next chapter. These replaced the *branles*, whose popularity was waning. Yet the *contredanses* were danced at informal meetings, not during official balls, where couples dancing reigned (Harris-Warrick, “Ballroom Dances...,” p. 46). They spread only during the Louis XV period. It was as if his father’s court had no room for the community he introduced. As if he sought to focus the courtiers’ energies on solo displays or apolitical flirting games in couples. This is, of course, speculation, because a lack of notations need not mean that group dances had indeed fallen out of favor, though it does seem probable. We ought to recall that they were more difficult to transcribe in the prevailing notation system. When Carol G. Marsh and Rebecca Harris-Warrick found and published a transcription of the comic masquerade *La Mariage de la Grosse Cathe* (The Marriage of Great Catherine, 1688), rendered in the competing notation system of Jean Favier, it turned out that the spectacle contained group dances this system was more apt for handling (Carol G. Marsh, Rebecca Harris-Warrick, “A New Source for Seventeenth-Century Ballet: ‘Le Mariage de la Grosse Cathos,’” *Dance Chronicle* 1988, Vol. 11, No. 3, pp. 398–428).



74. Pierre Rameau, *Le Maître à danser* (The Dancing Master), an illustration presenting the minuet, 1725

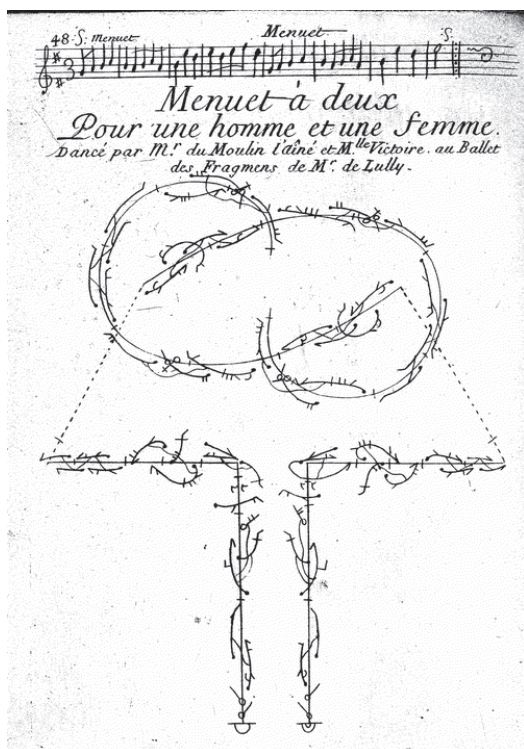
The regular Order of the Minuet continued.

The under written Music is in the Paper contained in this Plate on their Repetition is a second Time between the Plates XX and XXII.

K. T. del. © Publisher's Right, J. G. del.

To the Rt Hon. the Browinlow Lord Burleigh son to the Earl of Exeter, and the Rt Hon. the Lady Margaret Sophia Cecil his sister, this Plate is most humbly Inscribed by their Hon. most obliged Servant
Kellom Tomlinson.

75. Kellom Tomlinson, *The Art of Dancing Explained*, fragment of instructions for the minuet, 1735

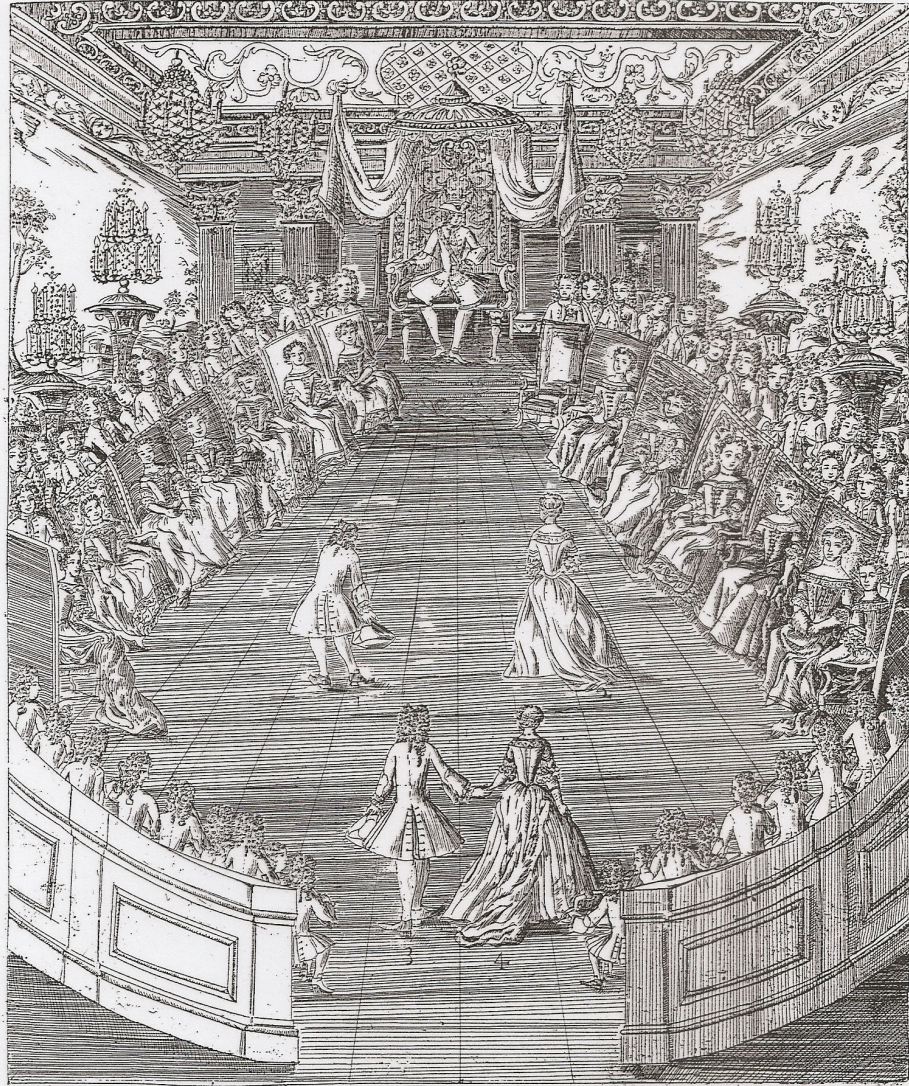


76. Minuet inscribed with
Beauchamp–Feuillet notation

that an entrant learned during a lesson. The minuet was not simply to be executed, though that was what most did; the best dancers lived and breathed the minuet. It carried the promise of liberty, it had a whiff of freedom. And yet this was increasingly part of the illusion, or merely a safety valve.

The minuet was, to a major degree, as much a cage as the other palace rituals: even when improvisation occurred, it was within strict confines. There was no moving about as one pleased. The minuet required an erect posture, a general stiffness of the body; the head alone was free, but only in order to perform the requisite bow, as well as the hands, which were a decorative element, and the main expression of affectation. Although the steps could be mixed, the body gave the impression of a highly nimble marionette. Guided by a sensitive mind, it moved in sliding steps along fanciful, geometrical lines (Ill. 76). It inscribed circles, arcs, and spirals, forming delicate, though codified, relations with a partner. This game, though exciting, was a substitute pleasure, a show of temperance. Love of the minuet entailed consent to kinetic servitude (Ill. 77).

Dancing the minuet, Versailles was a kind of prison with the invisible bars of conventions. This was a highly distinguished society, full of splendor, but claustrophobic as well, as M. Montbron and many others inform us. The endless celebrations



77. Unknown, engraving depicting a ball at the court of Louis XIV, 17th/18th c.

were shrouded by sadness, even despair, perhaps, which increasingly cast a shadow over Louis' reign. Its second half had more failures than successes. France was mired in humiliating wars, though it had not fallen to its knees. Internal tensions returned, particularly over the decision to exile the Huguenots. The king became increasingly religious. The balls and spectacles had not ended, and yet the frivolity that characterized Versailles in its building phases was on the wane. This shift in tone is evident in reading Racine, a poet of emotional claustrophobia. His tragedies,



78. Henri Gissey, costume designs for *Psyche*, a lyrical tragedy by Jean-Baptiste Lully, Molière, Pierre Corneille, and Philippe Quinault, 1671

written in dialogue with the tragic Jansenist vision of mankind,⁶³⁰ which gained popularity in the latter half of the seventeenth century, portrayed an airless, stuffy world, devoid of hope. Racine distilled suffering, setting it in an extremely structured formal universe. This dramaturgical gesture reflected an absolutist longing for order, but Racine also subtly unveiled the court's cruelty; for all the preening, fawning, and refinement, there were knives hidden in every coat pocket.⁶³¹ Some lines of *Phaedra* cut like the sharpest of blades. They were as complex as the steps of the minuet, and just as ambivalent.

The hieratic turn so characteristic of the mature Louis XIV's rule was also reflected in dance performances. After the comedy ballets there was a fashion for pathos. In 1671, an ensemble of Molière, Pierre Corneille, Lully, Beauchamp, and librettist Philippe Quinault staged an enormous ballet tragicomedy: *Psyche* (Ills. 78, 79, 80). There were a great many fireworks, and all manner of effects. There was also dance, of highly varying moods – joyous, showy, and sometimes comedic, but also military dance, or dances of ecstasy (Entr'acte IV) and a dance of despair (Entr'acte I). The spectacle itself lacked the power of Racine's plays, yet it seems that both his tragedies

⁶³⁰ We will return to Jansenism at the end of this chapter.

⁶³¹ A similar lesson, though utterly different in form, comes from reading La Fontaine's *Fables*, written at the same time.



79. Henri Gissey, costume designs for *Psyche*, a lyrical tragedy by Jean-Baptiste Lully, Molière, Pierre Corneille, and Philippe Quinault, 1671



80. Henri Gissey, costume designs for *Psyche*, a lyrical tragedy by Jean-Baptiste Lully, Molière, Pierre Corneille, and Philippe Quinault, 1671

and *Psyche* were borne on the same wave of frigidity that consumed the court. Might it also have had a hand in the death of Molière, who fell out of favor with the king, thus losing the creative freedom that was his *raison d'être*? It was undoubtedly this hieratic approach to culture that stripped patronage from the *commedia dell'arte* troupe with which Molière shared the Théâtre du Palais-Royal stage. This “expulsion” of the Italian comedians was quite significant. France had less and less room for laughter.

When Molière left this mortal coil, Lully already held a monopoly in music. He had the Opera at his disposal, where, apart from the musicians and singers, there were the finest dancers – music and dance spectacles were entirely his domain. Having gained a prominent position, Lully put forward and promoted a new kind of performance – the lyrical tragedy. Its genesis was tied to the Italian opera, whose popularity was on the rise. Lully aspired to give it a French flavor. He wanted to dispose of the Italian mannerism, pomp, the excessive ornament. He yearned to refine the raw material, to place it within the classicist canons. According to Lully, opera was an organic combination of words and music. This was perhaps his greatest ambition – to make the libretti less artificial, as melodic as possible. The Italian *recitativo* was naturalized in his rendition, as was the whole heroic genre. Lyrical tragedies were a new kind of opera – hieratic, sublime, devoid of corporeal freedom. Lully's librettist Quinault showed a predilection for the dramatic. In spectacles like *Cadmus et Hermione* (1673), *Alceste* (1674) and *Amadis* (1684), whose performers included an aging Beauchamp, he tried to follow Corneille and Racine.⁶³² This meant limiting the choreography in favor of the drama. Dance, once again, was most often merely appended.⁶³³

To a considerable degree, dance was reduced to ornament and lost its potential as a space of individuality. It was not utterly mechanical, because, as we shall see in Chapter Five, in the lyrical tragedies it was not, despite all appearances, devoid of a certain emotion; it left some room for personal expression. Yet it was squeezed into the mold of an emotional code imposed from the outside. Nor can we see the construction of a kinetic community in the lyrical tragedies, though they did, of course, include ensemble dances. The performer was essentially a marionette in the hands of the performance's director. This meant a loss of potential for critical dance sequences that Molière used so well, replaced by technical virtuosity, which hampered the body instead of mobilizing it. Of course, the body moved in space, but this movement was far from autonomous – it was dictated by the gaze (of the choreographer, the viewer, and above all, the king), and ingratiated itself to the gaze.

We ought to bear in mind that the professionalization of dance paved the way for social advancement for people who would once have been condemned to anonymity. Lully gathered a group of dance talents from the lower spheres at the Opera.

⁶³² We should note that Racine withdrew from public life in the late 1670s.

⁶³³ Lyrical tragedies will be covered more substantially in Chapter 5.



81. Jean Berain, costume design for the lyrical tragedy *Le Triomphe de l'Amour* (Triumph of Love) by Jean-Baptiste Lully, Isaac de Benserade, and Philippe Quinault, 1681

Critically, he was responsible for bringing in women, when, in 1681, the composer presented the premiere of *Le Triomphe de l'amour* (Ill. 81). This was a historic event – women had appeared earlier at court,⁶³⁴ but this was in ballets organized by noble female protectors (they were seen as feminine games for women), which never led to professional careers. Before 1681, the women's roles in the biggest productions were performed by men *en travesti*. *The Triumph of Love* changed all this.

The academy ensured women had the opportunity to appear in a professional capacity. The Opera's first ballerina was Miss Lafontaine.⁶³⁵ This gave dance spectacles a wider tonal palette. Women brought a softness and delicacy of movement, a precision of gesture. At the same time, however, a paternalistic discourse emerged. A woman required caretaking and attention – a man taught her the steps and designed her choreographies. The woman was treated instrumentally in this process. The ballerina was a plaything, in the literal sense of the word, for the dominant male gaze.

In 1713, the Opera ballet ensemble and the accompanying school were officially created. One hundred and fifty years later it would be called the “pony stable” for

⁶³⁴ For more on the subject: Prest, *Theatre Under Louis XIV...*, pp. 103–127.

⁶³⁵ Lee, *Ballet...*, p. 77.



82. Jean Berain, costume design for the lyrical tragedy *Atys* by Jean-Baptiste Lully and Philippe Quinault, 1676

the hungry appetites of “gentlemen.”⁶³⁶ The male dancer was not cast in this sort of role – of artistically exciting *metresse* – but his body was also treated instrumentally from the opening of the Opera. The subjects behind the movement – the king, the dancing master he delegated, the nobility, and the representatives of the bourgeoisie slowly forming the audience – needed objects to move. These objects could not be their own source of movement, they had to be ready to be set in motion by an external force (Ill. 82). This is why the colorful, lively (Ill. 83) lyrical tragedies were essentially static.

⁶³⁶ Théophile Gautier quoted in: Ivor Guest, *The Romantic Ballet in Paris*, Hampshire 2008, p. 35.



83. Unknown (attributed to Jean Berain, probably published by Pierre-Jean Mariette), an engraving depicting a dancer of the Paris Opera (probably David Dumoulin), 17th/18th c.

The Reign of Order

Let us try to draw some general conclusions from our observations. The apotheosis of absolutist agency led to political inertia in the mature stage of classicism. People's sensitivity in the latter half of the seventeenth century was thus static: "And so it came to pass that Europe [following France's example], lost in contemplation of this wonder, did pause for a moment. For a moment the illusion possessed her that she could cease her toil as she looked on a creation so graceful and so stately that anything more noble in concept, more exquisite in execution she could never hope to behold."⁶³⁷ The incarnation of this celebration of oneself was the royal palaces and, chief among them, Versailles, with its formalized balls, overblown spectacles in praise of His Majesty's power, and classicist art.

On the surface we are dealing with a regression with regards to Descartes' theory, which made man dynamic, stressing doubt and willpower as active factors. Yet

⁶³⁷ Paul Hazard, *The Crisis of the European Mind 1680–1715*, trans. James Lewis May, New York 2013, p. 441.

we ought to recall that Descartes himself voiced views far from activism, particularly in physics. As a doubting *cogito*, man was perceived as active, but as a body he emerged as decidedly passive, because the body was seen as part of a system of eternal movement of a constant sum, reducible to a fundamental divine constant. This is particularly visible in the following passage from *The Principles of Philosophy*:

We also understand that it is one of God's perfections to be not only immutable in His nature, but also immutable and completely constant in the way he acts. Thus, with the exception of those changes which either manifest experience or divine revelation renders certain, and which we either perceive or believe to occur without any change on the part of the Creator, we must not suppose that there are any others in His works, for fear of accusing Him of inconstancy.⁶³⁸

Descartes was suspicious of the concept of change. He saw *res extensa* as a whole to be utterly stable. He thought that the quantity of movement in the world was, on the whole, by necessity, immutable. As such, the movement of a human body was, from a metaphysical point of view, utterly irrelevant. It merely gave man the opportunity to observe the immutable laws of this movement. This is the passive side of the Cartesian doctrine that leads to the essential paradox – the mobilization of the Cartesian subject engenders political passivity.

Political passivity extended to the materiality of bodies. Michel Foucault perceived this, writing:

The classical age discovered the body as object and target of power. It is easy enough to find signs of the attention then paid to the body – to the body that is manipulated, shaped, trained, which obeys, responds, becomes skillful and increases its forces. The great book of Man-the-Machine was written simultaneously on two registers: the anatomico-metaphysical register, of which Descartes wrote the first pages and which the physicians and philosophers continued, and the technico-political register, which was constituted by a whole set of regulations and by empirical and calculated methods relating to the army, the school, and the hospital, for controlling or correcting the operations of the body [such as court rituals, including dance and dance performances]. These two registers are quite distinct, since it was a question, on the one hand, of submission and use and, on the other, of functioning and explanation: there was a useful body and an intelligible body. And yet there were points of overlap from one to the other.⁶³⁹

According to Foucault, the concept that describes this overlap is Order. We might think of Order as the key to the classicist sensibility, the main principle of

⁶³⁸ Descartes, *The Principles of Philosophy...*, p. 58.

⁶³⁹ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish...*, p. 136.

absolutism.⁶⁴⁰ Order was both sought and foisted upon reality. There ensued a holistic cultural trend toward classification, schematization, codification – toward Order. This was the operating principle of the absolutist power acting on behalf of a metaphysical, rationalist Agent – a God of thought, a rational State.

If we observe the work of structuring reality in classicist culture, it should come as no surprise that dance too was made static, orderly, and standardized, subordinate to court etiquette in France, where His Majesty was the guiding principle. His Majesty set things in motion. The moving body was, theoretically at least, utterly dependent on the king, and thus, on Order. The power desired a body that was disciplined to the utmost degree:

Disciplinary control does not consist simply in teaching or imposing a series of particular gestures; it imposes the best relation between a gesture and the overall position of the body, which is its condition of efficiency and speed. In the correct use of the body, which makes possible a correct use of time, nothing must remain idle or useless: everything must be called upon to form the support of the act required. A well-disciplined body forms the operational context of the slightest gesture.⁶⁴¹

Through discipline the perfect dancer could emerge, with all his attention and energy focused on the most precise execution of the complex figures of the minuet. He was a kind of ideal mechanism that was proud of its mechanical nature. This dancer was the perfect courtier, and this courtier was the ideal citizen. He was ideal because he was fundamentally passive, for all the complexity of his steps.

There were various reasons for the culture of stasis expressed by monumental classicism in the second half of Louis XIV's reign. It was not always satisfaction with his accomplishments, but often, as with the conservative Catholic thought favored by part of the society,⁶⁴² an attempt to tame the pride that came with modern Progressivism, *libido sciendi*. Nonetheless, it is striking that in the Louis XIV era, thoughts and actions were geared toward shaping reality according to general laws, and there was a search for Order, less consciously conceived than intuitively desired. Order was the horizon upon which different factions set their sights. It could be variously defined, but the desire was shared. In such a cultural commu-

⁶⁴⁰ Idem, *The Order of Things*...

⁶⁴¹ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*..., p. 152.

⁶⁴² By this I refer not only to the Port Royal group, but also the community of Oratorians, from which Malebranche derived, competing at the court of Louis XIV with the Molinist Jesuits (on the rivalry between the Jesuits and the Oratorians at court, see: François Bluche, *Życie codzienna*..., pp. 129–135). Curiously, the Oratorians supported progressive Cartesianism in the latter half of the seventeenth century, while the Jesuits staunchly remained with traditional Scholasticism. Yet we should note that the Cartesianism of Malebranche and his ilk lost the radical streak of the turn toward the *cogito*, becoming a rationalist Theism, and thus, in fact, a worldview more socially conservative than the Jesuit flexibility.

nity, the basic postulate was stopping the chaotic movement of transience, finding a secure place for everyone. Ideologies of extreme passivity emerged in society, not among the social masses at large, yet bearing a quite overt message.

We especially see the desire for passivity that marks the French culture of the late seventeenth century in the union of absolutism and Quietism – a religious movement which became a flavor of the moment in absolutist France. From both an orthodox Catholic and a Protestant point of view this was heresy to be condemned; it did not endure the persecutions (Bossuet attacked it with special ferocity, competing with Archbishop François Fénelon, who was an advocate of Quietism and for several years brought up Louis XIV's eldest grandson). The popularity of Quietism is intriguing, however, as it shows that openly competing worldviews could share a common source. Quietism was extreme theism founded on the conviction that there was nothing of value in the human world apart from absolute submission to the will of a transcendental God. Absolutism has to oppose this, as Quietism left no room at all for earthly power, for any kind of secular authorities (we should recall that Fénelon's most famous work was *The Adventures of Telemachus*, a pointed critique of the divine right of an absolute monarch in the guise of a mythological tale). Nonetheless, Quietism and absolutism met in the idea of the fundamental passivity of the individual. In Quietism

contemplation [the religious person's greatest task] presupposes *total passivity*. The union with God requires a total neglect of one's own actions; the soul moves only insofar as it is moved by God; it is limited to passive consent (*consent passif*) to God's actions, and everything "[in it] that comes from its own effort and 'selfhood' must be destroyed."⁶⁴³

If we replace the word "God" with "His Majesty" (the state embodied by the king) we have the dream of absolutism. In classicist France the longing for a homogeneous world that would always return to the same state was rampant. Love of God or rational principles were meant to make this a reality. In this sense, the social community was essentially conceived according to medieval categories. It became a, perfectly organized closed set-up.

The static turn in Louis XIV's politics, expressed in the motto "one king, one law, one faith," brought an end to dynamic policies and spontaneity of movement.⁶⁴⁴

⁶⁴³ Leszek Kołakowski, *Świadomość religijna i więź kościelna*, Warsaw 2009, p. 378. For more on Quietism, see: *ibid.*, pp. 344–395.

⁶⁴⁴ We ought to quote a typical statement by Bossuet: "A heretic is one who has his own opinion. What does having an opinion mean? It means following one's own ideas, one's own particular notions. Whereas the Catholic, on the other hand, is what the name signifies, that is to say one who, not relying on his own private judgment, puts his trust in the Church, and defers to her teaching" (quoted in: Hazard, *The Crisis...*, p. 199). If we accept this perspective, we can see classicism is fundamentally Catholic.

Norms established from above began to prevail, immobilizing even political ideas that would have seemed entirely “correct.” Perhaps this absolutist inertia was nowhere so clear as in *Allégorie à la gloire de Louis XIV* by Le Brun. It is striking that the scene we observe on the canvas is, at a first glance, full of life. Yet when we look closer, we see that the center point – the majestic figure of the king – reduces this life to a stable common denominator, the motionless, reigning absolute. The movement of the world, therefore, is merely a celebration of the motionlessness of the metaphysical agency. The conceptual horizon is the static world, which is rigidly structured. In this imaginative landscape, politics could have no trace of *agon*, and had to have everything through a forced contemplation. “The Sun King’s great interior decorator, Le Brun, reveals the extent to which classicist culture in its academic version legitimizes the social hierarchy under the pretense inscribing it ‘in nature,’ naturalizing theoretical categories which are, in fact, ideological.”⁶⁴⁵

This total motionlessness was not the only propaganda strategy, but it was situated in an ideological plane, in an Althusserian sense. The policies of Louis XIV, which were accompanied by a very concrete aesthetic, were not cynical manipulation; they expressed the structure of the epoch’s profound sensitivity, where inertia reigned on many levels. The era of classicism consistently aspired to the rational discovery of the unmovable structure of being. Nicolas Malebranche perhaps most ardently used a philosophical apparatus to find this structure, critiquing the evidence of the senses as a subjective impression. This stance was initiated by his model, Descartes, though the former went further in stabilizing human existence.⁶⁴⁶ The result of this critique was an extremely regulated image of reality. As Ernst Cassirer writes:

⁶⁴⁵ Arasse, “Cielo...,” p. 422.

⁶⁴⁶ Cartesianism acquired static attributes in Malebranche’s rendition on the one hand, and, on the other, in the works of the most orthodox adherents of Descartes’ mechanical philosophy, such as Louis De La Forge. A key factor here was the stress of the Augustinian tones found in Descartes’ writings. This meant stressing the role of God as the source of truth (Cartesianism as fully theocentric occasionalism), and a more caricatured mechanistic reductionism in the approach to the body, which led, in some Cartesian circles, to infamous experiments on animals, who were said to be devoid of souls, and thus incapable of feeling pain. Through these kinds of interpretive strategies, which were not, we emphasize, entirely unjustified travesties, Cartesianism was slowly assimilated by the hierarchy and the universities, becoming, in the eighteenth century, “the philosophy of the bishops and finally of the Jesuits [...] was used to stem the spreading influence of sensationism” (Spink, *French Free-Thought...*, p. 239). Enlightenment thinkers came out against this kind of Cartesianism, which did not keep them from appreciating some of Malebranche’s achievements. They admired his struggle against the illusions of the senses, but admonished the intellectual snares into which he fell. See: Jean Le Rond D’Alembert, “Wstęp do Encyklopedii,” trans. Julia Hartwig, Warsaw 1954, p. 90, or Voltaire, *The Elements of Sir Isaac Newton’s Philosophy*, Gale Ecco 2018. An excellent introduction to Malebranche is Jean-Christophe Bardout’s “Introduction,” in: Nicolas Malebranche, *Poszukiwanie prawdy*, trans. Małgorzata Frankiewicz, Warsaw 2011, Vol. I, pp. VII–LXXIX. Bardout captures the dual, Cartesian/Augustinian origins of this philosophical system.

What then remains as the real nature of the object is not that which the object presented to direct perception [i.e., the dynamic stream of impressions] but certain pure relations which can be expressed in terms of exact and universal rules. These rules, which apply to general relations and proportions, are therefore the fundamental framework of all being. They are the norm from which being cannot deviate and which it cannot abandon without sacrificing its real character as being, that is, as objective truth.⁶⁴⁷

In light of such a worldview, built, we stress, on Cartesian foundations, yet devoid of the dynamism of the doubting *cogito*, the discipline and unification that form the main motif of absolutist politics come as no surprise. Agency works through rules, and rules serve to stabilize. Absolutism was built on the concept of truth as a permanent, ahistorical foundation discovered by the subject moving toward rational reflection. Religious divisions and the conflicts that resulted from them were a testimony to the madness that needed to be reined in. The stultification of social life and imagination seemed, from this perspective, the perfect medicine. All it took was to reach the hard and universal laws, and then to introduce them. Thus, the dynamic Cartesian subject froze in the motionlessness of the rationalist code of the post-Cartesian epoch. As Paul Hazard phrased it:

The classical mind, with the consciousness of its strength, loves stability, nay, if it could, it would *be* stability. Now that the Renaissance and Reformation – big adventures these! – were over, the time had come for a mental stocktaking, for an intellectual “retreat.” Politics, religion, society, art – all had been rescued from the clutches of the ravaging critics. Humanity’s storm-tossed barque had made port at last [...] Life was now a regular, well-ordered affair.⁶⁴⁸

Pascal’s War Against Entertainment

For many people of the absolutist era, order was the work of the Agent who created the Rule. The absolutist subject represents this Order, and thus, the Agent as well. When the subject acquires a guarantee of his power, he establishes rules that allow him to take control over reality. This is the backbone of the absolute ruler’s rational authority, a promise made to the thinking individual through a popular version of Cartesianism, then making the rounds in French society. We might call this an optimistic anthropology, a triumphant classicism. It was expressed by the movement of material body-objects, alluding to the political stasis introduced

⁶⁴⁷ Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, Princeton 1951, p. 284.

⁶⁴⁸ Hazard, *The Crisis...*, p. 3.

by the absolutist subject. From this perspective, spectacles were merely a space of social appeasement. The lyrical tragedies full of minuets were a safety valve. They facilitated the release of human weakness. This is why people so regularly danced, and watched dances – to ease their souls through entertainment. In the *noble* dance the absolutist and profound stasis was revealed as grounding a rich veneer of kinesis. And yet the seventeenth century was also a journey in the opposite direction, though it flew the flag of Order.

Feeling the ground slip under its feet, the traditional aristocracy sought a space where it could cease to feel diminished, and perhaps stigmatize the shallow ways of the *nouveau riche*. This is why next to the nobility who gave themselves to salon life, which could be seen as a soft resistance against the tyranny,⁶⁴⁹ some of the elite began gathering around the renewal of the Catholic Church, which addressed themes characteristic of the religious Reformation, yet tried to remain within orthodoxy.⁶⁵⁰ The aristocracy joined the conservative bourgeoisie here. It was in these circles that an alternative kinetic politics was born, based on a negation of the superficial dance kinesiology of the court.

Part of French society began rejecting worldly existence, which seemed tainted with the sins of pride, aggression, and commercialization. One of the major centers was Port Royal, the “home of the Jansenists.”⁶⁵¹ It nurtured an Augustinian vision of the world, entering into blatant conflict with the competing Jesuit spirituality, and, following the Council of Trent, acquiring an increasingly powerful position in the Church, one characteristic of courtly circles. Social and political divisions were expressed here in terms of feelings, emotions, and standpoints.⁶⁵² It expressed irreconcilable opposition in strictly religious categories. The Jansenists preached predestination and mercy, with roots reaching back to medieval passiv-

⁶⁴⁹ Craveri, *The Age of Conversation*...

⁶⁵⁰ It is not our intention to claim that the spiritual renewal in the seventeenth century was class-based, only that class conflicts and religious disputes were intertwined. We hope that this explanation helps us avoid the accusations of “Goldmann’s distortions” described by Leszek Kołakowski in *God Owes Us Nothing*, trans. P. S. Falla, Chicago 1995, pp. 218–220. We would not like to reduce Jansenism and its accompanying philosophy to sociological issues. We do not claim that this new spirituality only arose from the fact that the aristocracy, “in the process of transition to absolute monarchy, was step by step losing its position and influence to the new centrally controlled bureaucracy and was becoming more and more ‘alienated’ from political reality, but it could not oppose the monarchy which was the economic condition of its very existence” (*ibid.*, p. 218). Reducing the thoughts of Pascal, which we are about to explore, to this dimension would be a major simplification, all the more so in that he derived from the “nobility of the toga.”

⁶⁵¹ This was not the only center. We must also bear in mind the Oratorian community (Malebranche), which was gradually losing influence to the Jesuits at the court of Louis XIV.

⁶⁵² “The Jesuits and Jansenists basically differed in their approach to reality. The Jansenists were a traditional bourgeoisie, disappointed by the new etatist social order. Their attitude toward all worldly events was also hostile, whether feasts, salons, or theater. The Jesuits had supporters among the wealthy and dynamic bourgeoisie and aristocracy, and were confessors to the king” (Kowalski, Loba, Prokop, *Dzieje kultury francuskiej*..., p. 295).

ity, while the Jesuits favored deeds and free will – a modern dynamism. Kołakowski phrased this aptly:

Belief in free will was a natural theoretical disposition in people whose existence was not confined within the narrow limits of lifelong, monotonous, unchanging toil, like the existence of medieval peasants and artisans, but left some room for individual initiative and stressed everybody's personal moral responsibility for his eternal destiny. The doctrine of predestination [to which the Jansenists ascribed], on the other hand, was well adapted to the mentality of people who above all sought and valued moral security and whose main religious need was to be certain that they were possessed of truth and thus elected by God.⁶⁵³

The conflict between the Jansenists and Jesuits was over retreat and charge, passivity and action, rooted in a fundamental difference in visions of the world and man. The Jesuits represented progressivism, activism, an appreciation of worldliness, siding with the ruler.

The optimistic vision of grace and faith in the possibility of salvation [through the individual's deeds] was one of the most important elements of this theological approach. The Jesuits took a positive view of passion, they saw it as essentially good, and stressed its usefulness. Passions could succumb to degeneracy, but basically prompted one to act [which is man's main task].⁶⁵⁴

The Jansenists were quite the opposite, negating ruling ambitions and worldly pleasures. Their profoundest expression was in Blaise Pascal, a philosopher in whom we find a remarkably resonant condemnation of the entertainments of this world.

As Kołakowski has shown,⁶⁵⁵ although Jansenism cannot be regarded as the only key to Pascal's thinking, it is surely a major factor. This is also why we cannot understand Pascal without the Augustinian conviction that man is entirely dependent on God's will,⁶⁵⁶ he has no autonomous power that might lift him up from a fall. Only mercy can bring salvation, and this God grants as He pleases. Key to this doctrine is the conviction of the absolute agency of God and the absolute nothingness of man, who is in no way an autonomous subject. In Pascal's time, this vision competed with the Jesuits' Semi-Pelagianism, which ultimately prevailed in the modern church. It believed that "by properly ordering our conduct and forbearing from prohibited acts, [we can] become *worthy* of, or *deserve*, salvation, that

⁶⁵³ Kołakowski, *God Owes Us Nothing...*, p. 45.

⁶⁵⁴ Kowalski, Loba, Prokop, *Dzieje kultury francuskiej...*, p. 297

⁶⁵⁵ See, in particular: *God Owes Us Nothing...*

⁶⁵⁶ On the influence of Augustine on the Jansenists, see: *ibid.*

is to say, we can *compel* God to save us; he simply has no other choice.⁶⁵⁷ According to the Jansenists, this view was a true assault on God's omnipotence, and as such, was absolutely impermissible. Pascal shared this refusal to accord man an active role in salvation with the Jansenists when he prayed:

Grant, my God, that in a constantly equal uniformity of spirit I may receive all kinds of events, since we know not what we should ask, and since I cannot desire one more than another without presumption, and without rendering myself the judge of and responsible for the results that thy wisdom has rightly been pleased to hide from me.⁶⁵⁸

In Pascal's words we see a powerlessness that he considers a basic factor in the human condition. Not only because his health was ailing, but above all, because of the rational intent that Pascal ushered in, and which revealed a specifically human weakness to him. This is not the total weakness of the most wretched of creatures described by Montaigne, but the weakness of a creature midway up the Chain of Being. Pascal asked himself:

For in the end, what is humanity in nature? A nothingness compared to the infinite, everything compared to a nothingness, a mid-point between nothing and everything, infinitely far from understanding the extremes; the end of things and their beginning are insuperably hidden for him in an impenetrable secret. Equally incapable of seeing the nothingness from where he came, and the infinite in which he is covered.⁶⁵⁹

Paradoxically, reason, which separates us from the animal kingdom, is our burden, and not because it misleads us,⁶⁶⁰ but because it is insufficient. This makes it the source of a highly delusional sense of power, described by Montaigne, a delusion that infected Descartes and Louis, and the whole century with them. In Montaigne it was a burden, because it disturbed the peace, in Pascal it was blasphemy, and utterly blinded people to their true calling. And yet he did not entirely negate reason.

According to Pascal, reason was not to be totally rejected, only kept on a leash. This was what was neglected by Descartes, whom Pascal openly opposed.⁶⁶¹ By this we mean not only the anti-Cartesianism in the famous "wretchedness in ourselves,"⁶⁶² but a total refutation of trust in the *cogito*, which in Descartes led to an anthropocentric standpoint. Though, like Descartes, Pascal thought in terms of

⁶⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 34.

⁶⁵⁸ Blaise Pascal, "Prayer to Ask of God the Proper Use of Sickness," in: idem, *Thoughts, Letters, and Minor Works*, trans. William F. Trotter, Whitefish 2004, p. 377.

⁶⁵⁹ Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, trans. Honor Levi, Oxford 1995, fragment 230, p. 67.

⁶⁶⁰ Pascal strongly believed in the power of reason when it remained within its bounds, in mathematics.

⁶⁶¹ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 201.

⁶⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 38.

the dualism of the body – the soul and the man – the world, the consequences of this dualism differed radically in these two men. In Descartes “the lifeless universe was not a terrifying cave, a sinister cage from which we ought to try to escape and with which we must have as little to do as possible; it was rather a territory to be conquered, a field on which the human will to power would assert itself.”⁶⁶³ Not so in Pascal – though the human body was irrevocably sentenced to destruction as the den of the demon of lust, and the human world was the kingdom of this demon, the world in a biological and physical sense was more of an impenetrable mystery, with which the mind could not contend. Of course, man fully controls what he contributes to the world – mathematics – but this is a mere playing. Only the Whole really counts, the absolute whole, and this is known to God alone:

The whole of the visible world is merely an imperceptible speck in nature’s ample bosom, no idea comes near it. It is pointless trying to inflate our ideas beyond imaginable spaces, we generate only atoms at the cost of the reality of things. It is an infinite sphere whose centre is everywhere and circumference nowhere. In the end it is the greatest perceivable sign of God’s overwhelming power that our imagination loses itself in thought.⁶⁶⁴

Descartes believed in acquiring certain and useful knowledge. Modernity followed his lead. Pascal did not doubt this belief in man’s cognitive capacities. We cannot acquire absolutely certain knowledge, yet this does not mean we should succumb to total skepticism.⁶⁶⁵ It is more about maintaining our place in the universe, keeping in line, recognizing our frailty. Only this can bring the soul the peace it craves: “So let us not look for certainty and stability. Our reason is always disappointed by the inconstant nature of appearances; nothing can fix the finite between two infinities [the greatest and smallest of things] which both enclose and escape it. That being understood, I think we can each remain peacefully in the state in which nature has placed us.”⁶⁶⁶ The problem is that this peace, strangely enough, is not in man’s nature, which Pascal deeply bemoaned, and which shaped his teachings as

⁶⁶³ Kołakowski, *God Owes Us Nothing...*, p. 89.

⁶⁶⁴ Pascal, *Pensées*, fragment 230, p. 70.

⁶⁶⁵ Martin Jay calls attention to this, recalling that Pascal was a creator of probability theory. According to Jay, this arose from the conviction that “although humans can have only an imperfect and uncertain understanding of the workings of nature or of society, opinion never being entirely replaceable by fully accurate knowledge, it was wrong to retreat into a debilitating skepticism. For beneath the surface, patterns did indeed exist, patterns that governed the behavior of large numbers of events, if not each individual one. Although even the latter might ultimately be determined rather than random, humans, fallible as they are, will have to be satisfied with the grosser, approximate patterns that a calculus of probabilities revealed to them and should give up the hope for God-like omniscience” (*Songs of Experience...*, p. 46). We should stress that Pascal explored probability theory before his famous conversion, in his secular phase, and so his interest might be seen as accompanying, not resulting from, his later piety.

⁶⁶⁶ Pascal, *Pensées*, p. 70.

a continuous urging to remain calm, to dissolve, as it were, in one's own frailty, to feel God within us. This ideal state of motionlessness requires man to reject his deepest essence. It is remarkably difficult, it goes against all our tendencies,⁶⁶⁷ but it is necessary.

Here we come to what is for us the key point in Pascal's thoughts on entertainment and worldly existence. Fragment 529 of the *Pensées* contains this passage: "Our nature consists in movement. Absolute stillness is death."⁶⁶⁸ In a slightly earlier fragment, we read: "Nothing is so intolerable for man as to be in a state of complete tranquility, without passions, without business, without diversion, without effort. Then he feels his nothingness, his abandonment, his inadequacy, his dependence, his helplessness, his emptiness. At once from the depths of his soul arises boredom, gloom, sadness, grief, vexation, despair."⁶⁶⁹ This diagnosis contains an oppressive inevitability. It is in the nature of man to be impassioned. We might even say that the human condition is a constant mobilization, for in fact "[w]e never seek [...] things themselves, only the pursuit of them."⁶⁷⁰ We do not act to achieve something, but merely to act. In this sense, our movement is autotelic. For Pascal, however, this signifies that we are tainted. He states outright: "I have often said that man's unhappiness springs from one thing alone, his incapacity to stay quietly in one room."⁶⁷¹ Adhering to the Jansenist diagnosis, Pascal is convinced that, after the original sin and the fall from grace, man became entirely evil, and everything he does on his own goes to prove this evil. Thus, worldly life, time spent being active outside one's room, is time lost. We feel this first-hand, Pascal states, for every one of our deeds only takes us further from ourselves. We are forever pressing forward, while yearning to pause. This engenders a state of great confusion, which reveals our misery:

[People] have a secret instinct which leads them to look for distractions and occupations elsewhere, which derives from their feelings of constant wretchedness. And they have another secret instinct, remaining from the greatness of our original nature [from before the Fall], which tells them that happiness lies only in repose, not frantic activity. From these two opposite instincts arises a confused plan, hidden from sight in the depths of their soul, which leads them to seek repose through activity, and always to imagine that the satisfaction they do not presently enjoy will be achieved if, some obvious difficulties being overcome, they can thereby open the door to peace.⁶⁷²

⁶⁶⁷ "The eternity of things in themselves or in God must always be a source of amazement compared to our own short span. The fixed and constant immobility of nature, compared to the continual flux within ourselves, must have the same effect" (*ibid.*, p. 71).

⁶⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, fragment 529, p. 126.

⁶⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, fragment 515, p. 123.

⁶⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, fragment 637, p. 138.

⁶⁷¹ *Ibid.*, fragment 168, p. 44. We might recall that Capriole dreamed of dancing in the peace of his chamber in Arbeau's treatise. See Chapter 2.

⁶⁷² *Ibid.*, fragment 168, p. 46.

It is hard to imagine a more insightful description of dance life at Versailles.

Here we see Pascal's kinetic pessimism with special clarity. Any activity, including movement, is simply man backsliding in his main task, the contemplation of God's mercy. One cannot reach God working in a temporal sphere. This is an axiom of the *Pensées*, but also an attack on culture that was to recur at various historical stages of critical thought. Is there not a strange familiarity to "The only thing that consoles us for our miseries is distraction, yet that is the greatest of our wretchednesses. Because that is what mainly prevents us from thinking about ourselves and leads us imperceptibly to damnation"?⁶⁷³ Pascal is striking at cultural escapism, condemned centuries later by Adorno and Horkheimer on the one hand, and Heidegger on the other. In this context, dance and any other stage activity is merely an avoidance of thinking.

This is not, essentially, Pascal's innovation; it comes from a clash of worldviews over dance that had been raging practically since the dawn of Christianity. We have described this in previous chapters. The Church had developed two standpoints on dance – acceptance, seeing it as a way of praising the Lord, and condemnation, seeing it as the work of Satan, reducing man to primitive and harmful carnality. In seventeenth-century France this conflict of views and attitudes remained.⁶⁷⁴ Jesuits spoke up for dance in their post-Council evangelizing. Through dance or, more broadly, theatrical performances, people could be recruited for God.⁶⁷⁵ We know this argument all too well – dance is not evil in itself, only when it is used for illicit ends. This is why, in Jesuit colleges like Paris's College de Clermont/Louis Grand, dance lessons were held and dances performed.⁶⁷⁶ The extravagance of the latter could almost compete with the court spectacles – all to praise the Lord, both the one in heaven and the one here on earth. Small wonder, then, that the first real modern dance historian – Claude-François Ménéstrier, author of *Des Ballets anciens et modernes selon les règles du théâtre* (Of Old and Modern Ballets Following the Principles of Theater, 1682) – belonged to this order. Not only did he write about dance, he also, as a man of the church, staged spectacles of various types, including ballet. Opponents of the Jesuits, such as the Jansenists, saw this kind of thing as blasphemy.

Pascal thundered: "All the principle kinds of entertainment are dangerous for Christian life. But among those which the world has invented there is none more to be feared than the theatre."⁶⁷⁷ Thoughts like this were not uncommon in Port Royal. Pierre Nicole, for one, stated: "By its own nature the theater is a school and an

⁶⁷³ Ibid., fragment 33, p. 10.

⁶⁷⁴ Arcangeli, "Dance under Trial...", p. 137.

⁶⁷⁵ See, for example, Henry Schnitzler, "The Jesuit Contribution to the Theatre," *Educational Theatre Journal* 1952, Vol. 4, No. 4, pp. 283–292.

⁶⁷⁶ On the vital presence of music and dance in the arts scene of the English Jesuit college at Pas de Calais in the early seventeenth century, see the regrettably brief outline by William H. McCabe, "Music and Dance on a 17th-Century College Stage," *The Musical Quarterly* 1938, Vol. 24, No. 3, pp. 313–322.

⁶⁷⁷ Pascal, *Pensées*, fragment 630, p. 137.

exercise of vice because it is an act in which [the author] necessarily summons up criminal passions.”⁶⁷⁸ His thoughts on dance were along the same lines. According to the Jansenists, the problem was that dance and theater, especially in their Versailles rendition, stirred the senses, were focused on the worldly, tied to desire, an element of the body, an about-face from the tranquility of God’s love.

In condemning dance and the body, Pascal condemns corporeal mingling. There is no kinetic community here, only the lone individual standing naked before an all-powerful God. We might say that Pascal’s writing is marked by an *odium corporis*.⁶⁷⁹

We should, he thought, love death, because it detaches the soul from the “body impure.” There is in Pascal the suggestion that the human body is not properly human [...] To be sure, the fact that our nature is bestial reveals to us that we have fallen from a better nature; but in our present state it is clear that our body, far from harmoniously and Thomistically coexisting with the soul, is a curse.⁶⁸⁰

This aversion to the body coexists in Pascal’s writings with a peculiar political conservatism, a conviction that the affairs of the world ought to be left alone, for politics is, by its nature, the domain of human insanity. This does not mean a simple acceptance of any power. Pascal clearly came out against tyranny. He condemned governance through strength alone. Yet he was not interested in true political reform. Much as the body binds us to this world, politics lends gravity to temporal affairs, and thus hastens the fall. This is why we ought not to believe that the world can be justly governed. Justice is only possible in God, and the earth should be ruled by the custom that best helps people avoid what Pascal saw as the extreme misfortune of civil war. “His political conservatism (a point strongly stressed by Goldman) fits well into his fundamental despair about the state of the earthly kingdom, which is, after all, the kingdom of the devil.”⁶⁸¹

Pascal’s ideal was a community of original Christians, whose identity was built on the utter negation of this world, the present order, the sinful body.⁶⁸² His writings exude a yearning for such a community, and this is his positive political project, except that it is less real politics than eschatology. Pascal is never truly political, never thinks in terms of being together here and now, of caring for our shared lives on earth.⁶⁸³ And he hardly could, given that he said, “All men naturally hate each other.

⁶⁷⁸ Quoted in: Kolakowski, *God Owes Us Nothing...*, p. 95.

⁶⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

⁶⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

⁶⁸² Pascal surely knew nothing about the liturgical dances of the first Christians.

⁶⁸³ Unless we accept Pierre Bourdieu’s line of reasoning: “what Pascal describes as the ‘wretchedness of man without God,’ that is, without a reason for being, is sociologically attested in the form of

[...] We have founded upon and drawn from concupiscence admirable laws of administration, morality, and justice. But at heart, at the wicked heart of humanity, this *figmentum malum* [evil element] is only covered up, not removed.⁶⁸⁴ In a world thus defined, people do not dance together to create a community. In such a world there is no place for a shared sensation of corporal frailty. Bodies are not homes, they are prisons: “our imprisonment in the body induces us to believe that body is all there is in the universe. *Horror corporis*.”⁶⁸⁵ As we can see, Pascal viewed the body much like Descartes. In both thinkers there was a terrifying gulf between body and soul. In both, the spiritual was the main principle. This is why they saw eye-to-eye in longing for total solitude.⁶⁸⁶

Though the solitudes of Pascal and Descartes differ greatly, they also have something in common – a spiritual activism. Let us return to the Augustinian context of Pascal’s philosophy. As Kořakowski shows, a reliance on Augustine need not result in an aversion to mobility.

Far from justifying passivity, indifference, or moral sloppiness, double predestination is well designed to encourage militancy. It is the ideology of a sect of warriors. [...] The apparent logic of inertia, *ignava ratio*, is contrary to the actual psychological impact of fatalistic and deterministic doctrines once they become the ideological expression of popular movements, and the Calvinists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries proved this no less than the Bolsheviks in our time.⁶⁸⁷

Yet we cannot accuse Pascal and the Jansenists of this sort of activism, given how they stressed that all worldly graces are deceiving. They could be revoked at any minute. There is no guarantee that God has chosen us (and certainly not material success, in which the Calvinists, according to Max Weber, saw evidence that one

the truly metaphysical wretchedness of men and women who have no social *raison d’être*, abandoned to the insignificance of an existence without necessity, abandoned to its absurdity. And one also understands, *a contrario*, the quasi-divine power of rescuing people from contingency and gratuitousness that is possessed, whether one likes it or not, by the social world, and which is exercised in particular through the institution of the State: as the central bank of symbolic capital, the State is able to confer that form of capital whose particularity is that it contains its own justification” (*Pascalian Meditations*, trans. Richard Nice, Stanford 2000, pp. 239–240).

⁶⁸⁴ Pascal, *Pensées*, fragments 243 and 244, p. 75.

⁶⁸⁵ Kořakowski, *God Owes Us Nothing...*, p. 161.

⁶⁸⁶ We seem to find a lack of trust in the social bond in the following excerpt from *Pensées*: “It is unfair that anyone should be devoted to me, although it can happen with pleasure, and freely. I should mislead those in whom I quickened this feeling, because I am no one’s ultimate end, and cannot satisfy them. Am I not near death? So the object of their attachment will die. Therefore just as I should be guilty if I caused a falsehood to be believed, however gently and persuasive I had been and however pleasurably it had been believed, giving me pleasure too, in the same way I am guilty if I make myself loved” (Pascal, *Pensées*, fragment 15, p. 7). Hard to imagine a more shattering indictment of the point of human love.

⁶⁸⁷ Kořakowski, *God Owes Us Nothing...*, pp. 35, 36.

was destined for salvation).⁶⁸⁸ This could lead to despair and paralysis, and in fact, in their darkest moments, this is where Pascal's reflections lead.⁶⁸⁹ Yet we must bear in mind that the demobilization Pascal proposes is not pure passivity, or drifting with the flow. It is an active turn from the world, in which God's grace is revealed. The strength to take such an action is the only sign of Providence's inclination he sees. "We will never believe, with a belief which is efficacious and belongs to faith, unless God inclines our hearts."⁶⁹⁰ This demobilization could not be merely an intellectual gesture; it has nothing to do with philosophy.⁶⁹¹ This is a profound spiritual experience. Pascal's motionlessness is a constant tug of the heart. It is an unquenchable fire, whose flames he saw on Monday, November 23, 1654.⁶⁹² Faith is at its core, but faith is a blessing. "God truly inclines those he loves to believe."⁶⁹³ Here we clearly see Pascal's Augustinianism, which, when experienced profoundly, discourages any kind of audacity or subjective striving.

In the end it seems nothing depends on us. It is God who chooses, God who decides, Pascal assures us. Human existence is only a plaything for the divine Agent. The only problem is that, in Pascal, despite his tirades against human vanity, agency is stamped with modern rationalism. Pascal clothes himself in the garb of a medieval ascetic, yet in the depths of his soul he remains who he was in his youth – a brilliant thinker, not a mystic. Even if "our entire reasoning comes down to surrendering to feeling,"⁶⁹⁴ reasoning remains necessary if this process is to happen. Pascal was not capable of utterly abandoning reason.⁶⁹⁵ Arguing was his element. Thus, for instance, Pascal's famous wager. God not only inclines people, you can also reach God through reason: "Two sorts of people have such knowledge [of God]: those who have a humble heart and who embrace lowliness, whatever their degree of mental power, or those who have sufficient understanding to see the truth, whatever resistance they might have."⁶⁹⁶

⁶⁸⁸ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the "Spirit" of Capitalism*, London–New York 2002.

⁶⁸⁹ "You do not need a greatly elevated soul to realize that in this life there is no true and firm satisfaction, that all our pleasures are simply vanity, that our afflictions are infinite, and lastly that death, which threatens us at every moment, must in a few years infallibly present us with the appalling necessity of being either annihilated or wretched for all eternity" (Pascal, *Pensées*, fragment 335, pp. 139–140). This is the Pascal that Voltaire would have been unable to tolerate.

⁶⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, fragment 412, p. 92.

⁶⁹¹ Cf. a famous division: "Out of all the bodies together we could not succeed in making one little thought. It is impossible, and of another order. Out of all bodies and minds we could not draw one impulse of true charity. It is impossible, and of another, supernatural, order" (*ibid.*, fragment 339, p. 87).

⁶⁹² That was the day of his famous conversion, detailed in the *Diary*.

⁶⁹³ Pascal, *Pensées*, fragment 414, p. 93.

⁶⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, fragment 455, p. 112.

⁶⁹⁵ "Two excesses: Excluding reason, allowing only reason" (*ibid.*, fragment 214, p. 62).

⁶⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, fragment 13, p. 7.

It seems the only way of reconciling these two perspectives – the negation of human autonomy in favor of divine agency and the attempt to salvage rationalism as a method – is to think of agency, of the Absolute in terms of Order. Order can pertain both to the mind and the heart. Although “the heart has its order, the mind has its own,”⁶⁹⁷ the heart’s rationale ought not to be interpreted as irrational love. The heart is faith, and faith is the gift of peace, which is why recalling the heart’s order need not mean appreciating blind emotion, surrendering to instincts, it means humbling oneself before His Majesty, always disciplining an existence focused on metaphysical peace. We should note that Pascal writes of the order of the mind and the *order* of the heart, and not, for example, the order of the mind and the *element* of the heart. He gives himself to the mercy of God, yet at the same time, he unconsciously assumes it to be structured, that it brings Order, that God is an emotional geometer. Here Pascal emerges as a typical man of the classicist era, a representative of absolutist kinesis. His longing for Order is at the root of his refutation of entertainment, his *odium corporis*. The order of the heart takes precedence over the order of the mind, yet both are built on the foundation of transcendental Structure. God is Order. Order is God.

Agency, Order, the Disciplined Body

Two competing kinetic worldviews clashed in the classicist era, and yet a common flame burned in the guise of differences. In Pascal we observe the fundamental mortification of man in the temporal world, to mobilize him toward God’s eternal love. In Descartes the static mechanical body accompanies an extreme dynamism of thought. In the political discourse that developed at the court of Louis XIV, then, we observe a fundamental enlivening of man in the temporal world, only to immobilize him in the political sphere. In each variant the body is deprecated, or, at best, treated instrumentally. In Pascal, secular activity of any sort, including the positive appraisal of sensual movement, is essentially ruled out. If movement is to occur, it must be purely spiritual. Only faith is dynamic. Like Descartes, he is chiefly interested in the spiritual. He sees real creative movement to be the unrest of the critical intellect, moving to the secure shelter of divine certainty. At court, things seemed to be different – faith was to be static, thinking subordinate to political dogmas, and movement strictly material: this meant bodies endlessly performed an elaborate dance – and yet the aim here, too, is static, rational order. At any rate, we observe a longing to be a subject legitimized by a transcendental Agent, a subject who finds peace in serving His Majesty, maintaining complete control

⁶⁹⁷ Ibid., fragment 329, p. 85.

over the body. Pascal was not, surely, and apologist for the monarchy, nor was Descartes, and yet their philosophies and the absolutist ideology expressed the same deep yearning for certainty in times of mounting doubt.

The court's optimism, Descartes' *dubito* and Pascal's pessimism were attempts to introduce this same Order – rational discipline in times of chaos. In every case, the same agency is revealed, of which all the above-mentioned forms of motion and motionlessness are an expression. This agency was highly individualized. Descartes, Louis XIV, and Pascal thought in terms of the individual "I," even if the *Pensées* tell us that it is repulsive. None of the classicist worldviews speak of a true community, we find only solitude. In the classicist era, people believed that the only road to agency, to embody it and find peace, was through solitude. This focus on the thinking "I," the loving "I," the nationalized "I" led to negating the autonomy of the material body, to a kinetic politics based on discipline, agency, and productivity. Negotiations in the intersubjective space were replaced by subjective commands to the body. In his yearning for order, Pascal constantly condemned human vanity, so ample in Louis, also found in the Cartesian method. This explains the rejection of all entertainment, including dance. A person mainly dances as a body and the body is repulsive. Louis and Descartes seemed more inclined toward the body, yet they too saw it as a tool in the hands of an absolutist subject. Thus, classicism was a move toward a rigid kinetic code.

In the social space a classicist Order meant, paradoxically, an increase in mobility. "Louis XIV literally shuffled society: the nobility ceased to be an indispensable criterion of success, among the nobility the matter of lineage was no longer of capital importance. From here on personal services competed with birthright, and public service became of prime importance."⁶⁹⁸ This opening was, however, under tight control. In order to thoroughly curtail the political ambitions of the nobility, the monarch played the bourgeoisie against them. Louis XIV was truly virtuosic in maintaining a delicate balance. On the one hand, he cleared a path for the advancement of the bourgeoisie, for people like Colbert, who owed everything to the crown and thus were highly attached to it. On the other, he skillfully manipulated the nobility so that it did not feel sidelined. Court honors were one of his tools. A complex game was always under way in Versailles, an intricate ersatz political reality. The body was an instrument in this game, and classicism sought to exercise a profound control over it. Manners, etiquette, entertainment – these were all disciplinary mechanisms, political technologies of the body.⁶⁹⁹

Upon a first glance, the kinetic discipline postulated by Beauchamp, Rameau, and other dancing masters of the epoch might seem a rather insignificant manifestation of the culture of Order, quite secondary compared to the philosophy of

⁶⁹⁸ Bluche, *Życie codzienne...*, p. 39.

⁶⁹⁹ On the concept of the "political technology of the body," see Foucault, *Discipline and Punish...*, p. 26.

Descartes and Pascal. And yet the dance theory of the classicist period brilliantly reflects the epoch's characteristic relationship to the body, and expresses the kinesis that marked such great thinkers. Jennifer Homans writes: "Yet *la belle danse* [another name for the noble danse] was very much a classical art in its strict attention to rules and ideals and its devotion to a conception of formal precision, proportion, and human perfection."⁷⁰⁰ The essence of the dance project thus conceived was that formal precision and human perfection no longer drew from the beauty and perfection of the cosmic dance, but from the might and autonomy of a human agency, from an absolutist Order, illuminated from different perspectives by Descartes and Pascal.

With the collapse of the feudal system based on the concept of organic cooperation, or the mutual limitation of social forces, a new kind of structuring force was born from the chaos of history in human consciousness – absolutist agency. In the Louis XIV era, Majesty was installed as the driving force behind society, the source of energy that radiated in every movement, including the movement of the dancing body. The king longed to believe that he, as a person, was this central power, though in fact absolutist agency was not the property of any one individual. The king was merely a medium or agent. Political theory remembers classicism as an epoch in which the modern state assumed a sovereign form. The state began slowly but irrevocably taking precedence over individuals, including the monarch himself.⁷⁰¹ The state was cast as the source of agency. For our purposes, it is absolutely critical that it became most tightly bound to individuality, understood as a model – not to a concrete person but to a model "I." When the stable medieval hierarchy was replaced by dynamic competition, a new foothold was needed. At one time, this had been a cosmos governed by a God that infinitely towered over the human world; in the absolutist era it became the subject conceived as the most active element of creation. Let us recall once more that problematic statement: *L'état, c'est moi*. This "moi" indicates agency, and thus action, elemental power; but it is also a subject, and thus an actor, a human agent. This gives a profoundly symbolic significance to the title of classicism's flagship dance text: *Le Maître à Danser*. The *Maître* is the one who rules. Absolutism marked the beginning of an epoch wherein human power was the Absolute.

⁷⁰⁰ Homans, *Apollo's Angels...*, p. 30. Homans's book contains a very fine description of the various dimensions of the *noble danse* paradigm (see: pp. 20–31). Also worth consulting is Ken Pierce, "Choreographic Structure in Baroque Dance," in: Nevile (ed.), *Dance, Spectacle...*, pp. 182–208. I have not, unfortunately, managed to access Wendy Hilton's *Dance of Court and Theatre: The French Noble Style 1690–1725*, London 1981.

⁷⁰¹ Murat, *Colbert...*, pp. 106–107; Elias, *The Civilizing Process...*, pp. 444–448.

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Technical editor
Rafał Pawluk

Proofreading
Katarzyna Borzęcka
Adam Schorin

Typesetting
Marta Jaszczuk

Jagiellonian University Press
Editorial Offices: ul. Michałowskiego 9/2, 31-126 Kraków
Phone: +48 12 663 23 80, +48 12 663 23 82, Fax: +48 12 663 23 83

Volume I

Courtly Steps

The Virus of Mobilization is an attempt to construct an original approach to the history of dance in early modern Europe. This is not a history of choreographic works, though these do, of course, have their place. Nor is it a history of techniques and styles, though these too are given due attention. The main aim is to analyze the powers that summon dance to life and to respond in part to the question of why people danced the way they did at various stages of modernity's development. What values were expressed through dance, what models of humanity and society were enacted by its means? In search of a reply, the author analyzes texts from the Renaissance, Baroque, Classicism, and the Enlightenment: most of all these are dance treatises, but also philosophical, political, and scientific papers, and works of art. The book has been furnished with numerous illustrations, following the author's intent to reveal the kinetic imagination at various stages in the shaping of modern culture.

Wojciech Klimczyk works as a professor in the Centre for Comparative Studies of Civilisations at the Jagiellonian University. His research focuses on the relationships between culture and embodiment, putting special emphasis on studying dance in its social and political contexts. His books include *Postmodern Eroticism* (Universitas, 2008) and *Visionaries of the Body: A Panorama of Contemporary Dance Theater* (Ha!art, 2010). *The Virus of Mobilization: Dance and the Shaping of Modernity 1455–1795* was originally released in Polish in 2015 by Universitas publishers, and, one year later, was nominated for the prestigious Polish Society of Theater Studies Award and the Prof. Tadeusz Kotarbiński Award for Poland's best work in the humanities.