

meaning of the world and human existence within it. The rising modern spirit was, as such, also a spirit of solitude. This is why Francesco Petrarch, one of the first people of this sort²³⁵ and a model for many humanists, wrote in the vein of Cicero:

Solitude is sacred, simple, untainted and the purest of all human things. [...] Solitude would not seduce nor flatter anyone, it hides or invents nothing. It is utterly naked and undecorative, it does not offer itself for public display nor does it seek applause, which poisons the soul. [...] It is everywhere, happy and calm, it is a true mountain shelter and a haven against storms. If anyone fails to take advantage of such a refuge what result can he expect but to find himself without a haven, be tossed about in a sea of troubles, live upon rocks, and perish in the waves.²³⁶

Petrarch's words show an arresting desire for peace, a dream of staticity.²³⁷ He often fell back on this tone. He had little desire to push the world forward, to seek new political solutions, though he did take part in public life. His actions were always focused on restoring the Roman ideals of tranquility and reason. He felt the futility of enthusiasm faced by the blind verdicts of fortune.

The conviction that happiness was built on brittle foundations, that death was always lying in wait, and his contempt for the masses meant that the poet's characteristic frame of mind was melancholy mixed with fatigue. We see touches of weary sadness in many of his letters, treatises, and poems.²³⁸

Could this be why he cautioned against the dangers of dancing?²³⁹

With Petrarch the European cultural scene makes room for the individual battered by life, whose main occupation is introspection. This cultivated the Platonic search for the ultimate depths, and a Stoic smothering of passions as the essence of literary work. This stance is communicated by the Latin *otium* (calm, rest, inactivity),²⁴⁰

²³⁵ For Johan Huizinga, Petrarch was a man who straddled the epochs, much like Boccaccio, in whom new and old values appear side-by-side (Huizinga, *Autumn...*, p. 385–386).

²³⁶ Francesco Petrarch, *The Solitary Life*, trans. Jacob Zeitlin, 1924, p. 138.

²³⁷ This ought not to surprise us if we recall Huizinga's words that, in Petrarch's times, "everyday life had an elemental charm and evocative passion, emerging in a wide range of moods, from primitive dissolution and violent cruelty to kind emotiveness; medieval urban life oscillated between such oppositions" (Huizinga, *Jesień średniowiecza*, p. 30). This is also why the poet was so eager to escape the cities for the peace of the countryside.

²³⁸ Kalikst Morawski, "Wstęp," in: Francesco Petrarca, *Wybór pism*, trans. Felicjan Falański, Wrocław 1982, p. XXXVI.

²³⁹ Arcangeli, "Dance under Trial..." p. 133.

²⁴⁰ This appears in many of the ancients – Plato, Epicurus, and particularly Cicero. It signifies a surrender to contemplation, peaceful spirits, rest, and a removal from activity in public life, which Cicero terms *negotium*. He believes the term was first used in a military context, meaning a break from military activities.

which Petrarch repeatedly invokes as an ideal approach to life.²⁴¹ We find a striving for calm reflection, for study. Yet we should stress that this was meant to be study of a new, humanist kind. Garin has pointed out that Petrarch opposed the medieval ideal of religious contemplation. Solitude was meant to bring the individual back to the collective. "Above all, one ought to find oneself, uncover one's own humanity, and then find oneself as a person amid people."²⁴² Petrarch valued concern for temporal things, political virtues, sensory stimuli, but so long as they were carefully considered. He urges care for spiritual existence, thought for the prospect of Eternity, conceived less as a triumph of passivity than as a vital harmony of creatures.

Petrarch was a model for the first generation of humanists; they emulated his love of the ancients, and of the written word. Though in *Salutati* or *Bruni* a love of solitude is far less visible, the longing for *otium* does not vanish. This longing reveals the complicated relationship the people of the late Renaissance had with the countryside. On the one hand, as we saw in *Guglielmo*, they were contemptuous of provincial customs, the coarseness of rural human interaction, the primitive ways of rural folk; yet on the other, the countryside was idealized as the natural heartland, an oasis, a place to escape the hardships of the city, a restless life. This explains the Renaissance love of gardens, changing the landscape of the cities themselves, but also the growing fashion for trips outside of town.

Artists and the wealthy, by now civilized and refined by urban culture, had the time and peace of mind to go and discover the beauty of the world beyond the defensive walls and bring their urban luxury with them; thus, although the countryside remained a place of hardship, drudgery and rural poverty, certain regions were introduced to a civilized life through the money and culture of the elite.²⁴³

The utopian countryside of the humanists was chiefly a spiritual and sublime place, where the tranquility allowed you to experience the depth and beauty of existence, to access a higher reality. This was sought by Petrarch by delving into ancient texts, and in his wake the humanists longed for the same. An interesting knot is tied between the rural *otium* and the rediscovery of the Platonic movement in Greek philosophy. These phenomena intersect, illuminating one another. Even if there is no direct tie between them, the same yearning is at their core.

Petrarch had collected Plato's writings without even knowing Greek. Greek appealed to the people of the *quattrocento*, as it held a promise of a thinking style unlike Scholastic Latin. It was mysterious, more spiritual, and so it became vaunted

²⁴¹ Julia Conaway Bondanella, "Petrarch's Rereading of *Otium* in 'De vita solitaria,'" *Comparative Literature* 2008, No. 60 (1), pp. 14–28.

²⁴² Garin, *Filozofia...*, p. 34.

²⁴³ Delumeau, *Cywilizacja odrodzenia*, p. 240.

knowledge. Salutati, a correspondent of Petrarch's, invited Byzantine scholar Manuel Chrysoloras to Florence. His most outstanding student was Bruni, but other humanists were also rapt listeners to Manuel's tales of Greek culture. The ecumenical councils of the first half of the fifteenth century strengthened contacts and initiated attempts to fill the chasm between the churches of the East and West, above all after the fall of Constantinople, when an exodus of intellectuals moved from Byzantium to Europe. In this exchange key figures were Plethon, who inculcated Florence with a love of Plato, interpreted in a Neoplatonic spirit; George of Trebizond, who was, in turn, an adherent of Aristotle; and Cardinal Bessarion, who attempted to reconcile Aristotelianism and Platonism. During their stay in Italy, they all spread knowledge of Greek writing, and also built a special Eastern atmosphere around philosophy, promising not only intellectual discovery, but also profound experiences. This meant that Greek philosophy, particularly of the kind in the *Ti-maeus*, was, in the eyes of some humanists, a gateway to a mysterious and perfect world: "Plato is the crowning glory of all that prepared by Zoroaster of the Persians, Hermes of the Egyptians, Orpheus and Agloape of the Thracians, and Pythagoras of the Greeks."²⁴⁴

Escaping to the womb of nature – to the country and gardens – and to the arcane knowledge of the ancients were two sides of the same coin, a longing for a mystical elevation that Scholastic rationalism could not provide. Of course, this did not concern the whole of the new elite. There were those who kept up Aristotelian traditions in the spirit of St. Thomas, wanting to think empirically. Yet the fashion for Plato, or in fact Neoplatonism, was sufficiently universal to permeate the entire culture of the second half of the fifteenth century, particularly in Florence. This was where Plethon made a great impression on Cosimo de' Medici, who, we should add, never did convert to Platonism, though he did appreciate it enough to found the Florentine Academy, appointing Marsilio Ficino at its head.

Ficino not only translated the complete texts of Plato and the most important writings of Plotinus, he also wrote commentaries to them. It was mainly in those commentaries that he developed his own philosophy, which turned out to be quite influential. In Ficino, Renaissance culture found its counterweight to rationalism in the arts and politics. In his work, creativity was not a cold calculation, it was derived from passion. Ficino spoke of a spiritual beauty that, importantly for us, was transposed into how the body was apprehended.

Why was Ficino influential? What made the Renaissance delve into mysticism? To quote Garin:

While early humanism was the apotheosis of civic life, the apotheosis of man fully building his freedom of the state on earth, at the end of the fifteenth century there was

²⁴⁴ Swieżawski, *Dzieje filozofii europejskiej w XV wieku*, Vol. 1, p. 60.

a decisive turn toward contemplation and away from the world. The serene affirmation of life, which prevailed in the work of Salutati, Bruni, and Valla, was replaced by Platonism, with its ascetic atmosphere, and by a philosophy conceived as a preparation for death. Undoubtedly, this change in focus was partly caused by the overall political situation in Italy, especially the princes' accumulation of power. [...] The ideal of the republic, conceived as a cooperative effort, as a true society (even if, in practice, it was confined to a small group of people), was replaced by the Emperor, who removed citizens from real political life. Meanwhile, culture, no longer an expression, tool, and program of a class that had come to power and wealth, had become a lovely ornament of a prince's court or a melancholy flight from the world.²⁴⁵

This melancholy flight from the world does not surprise us, not when the ideals of the republic were losing out against the prose of life: personal ambitions, the struggle between factions, the lust for power. In such times optimism is hard to come by, it is difficult to believe that happiness can be reached by earthly means alone. Neoplatonism showed an alternate path. We would not like to put forward a reductionist thesis, that it was a simple consequence of political changes, a kind of pure escapism. Ficino's thoughts cannot be written off as a mere declaration of hopelessness. The point is more that Neoplatonism found fertile soil due to the political transformations. The latter can only be explained through the social appeal of Ficinianism, not its content. Let us try to see what was so fascinating in it, and how it was tied to reflections on dance.

Ficino stressed that bodies in themselves were not beautiful. "What is the beauty of the body? The action, vivacity, and charm of the idea that shines within it."²⁴⁶ In this conceit, physicality is merely the form in which a true, spiritual might is clothed. The aim was not to stop at physicality, but to reach into its depths. In Ficino, as in Plethon, Pico, and Paracelsus, we find an important distinction between the visible body and the imperceptible astral body, an intermediary between the physical body and the soul, simultaneously participating in the cosmic harmony of bodies.²⁴⁷ The astral body is more important than the visible body. The visible body merely stands in for the astral body. As such, it ought to be nurtured, but only as a means to an end. The physical body and all its activity should be geared toward the spiritual.

The transience of the astral body, the immateriality of spiritual beauty, fascinated people of the Renaissance. It was linked to the impression of a certain "transparency" that accompanied beauty. We can almost speak of an absence, a mystical void, with which the beautiful body must be saturated. This is one of the most intriguing elements of the era's visual imagination. As early as Fra Angelico, in

²⁴⁵ Garin, *Filozofia...*, pp. 111, 112.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

²⁴⁷ Swieżawski, *Dzieje filozofii europejskiej w XV wieku*, Vol. 6, pp. 173–176.

The Annunciation (Ill. 19), for example, this transparency becomes nearly tangible, the discernible breath of the void.²⁴⁸ It seems we can speak of the immateriality of the body, and not only the bodies of painted figures, but also of the artist, and the viewer staring at the picture. The event the work of art realizes takes place not on a stage, not as an anecdote, but as a mood – in the light that illuminates the cell. This light is essentially what is corporeal, and not the body it illuminates. Antonello da Messina is similarly evocative, particularly in his portraits, though here the impression of immateriality is not built by the glow of bright light, but the by contrast between luminosity and gloom, extracting the streamlined shapes and mysterious gazes of the figures. Let us have a look at his portrait of the Virgin, which can be viewed in Palermo (Ill. 20). Antonello showed himself as the master of being “elsewhere.” We see this in the eyes of the figures, guiding our focus to the unknown, to eternity. There is no cosmic scale here, only intimate contact. We have spoken of the triumph of the physical body. Here we have the flip side, a corporeal implosion. We fall into the gaze of the subject, the picture sifts through our fingers like sand. The body eludes us. As in Piero della Francesca – when he paints faces in profile, when the subjects narrow their eyes, their gaze evades ours (Ill. 21). These paintings have a remarkably compelling tranquility, a most fleeting staticity. As if the world had eternally stopped. For eternity is the theme of the mystical side of the Renaissance – the eternal body.

Let us try to understand the Renaissance luminosity of bodies, or corporeality of light. Ficino wrote in a letter: “The beauty of the body lies not in the shadow of matter, but in the light of grace and form; not in dark mass, but in clear proportion; not in sluggish and senseless weight, but in harmonious number and measure.”²⁴⁹ These words outline a strategy for reaching eternity. In the wake of the fascination with antiquity, a major role in the Renaissance began to be played by a Pythagorean-Neoplatonic view of the world’s harmonious construction, the beauty of the whole of creation, which God less rules than imbues with his presence. This led to the development of a cult of numbers, perfect proportions, ideal geometrical shapes, by which – at least according to this tradition – we would find the key to the mystery of existence. Being a humanist meant holding the right knowledge – knowing how to recognize the correct numbers, measurements, and shapes, how to live by the right proportions.

If we are to speak of traces of the *vita contemplativa* in Renaissance dance, we should be thinking of geometry and numbers. Guglielmo is the most important point of reference here, which ought not to surprise us when we recall that his treatise was written the latest, at a time when Neoplatonic mysticism was already

²⁴⁸ Georges Didi-Huberman writes beautifully on this fresco in *Confronting Images: Questioning the Ends of a Certain History of Art*, Pennsylvania 2009, pp. 11–22.

²⁴⁹ Marsilio Ficino, *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino: Volume 1*, London 1975, p. 91.



19. Fra Angelico, *Annunziata* (The Annunciation), ca. 1437–1446, fresco

popular. Thus, while in Domenico we have references to Aristotle, *De pratica* stresses Neoplatonism. Above all, we see this in Guglielmo's interest in music, which was unprecedented in the dance literature of the time.

De pratica begins with a long section in praise of music. Music, Guglielmo claims, is the root from which dance grows. Music is built on harmony, the universal foundation of being. Listening to music, we gain admittance to its mystery.



20. Antonello da Messina, *Annunziata* (The Annunciation), 1475



21. Piero della Francesca, *Ritratto di Battista Sforza e Federico da Montefeltro* (Portraits of the Montefeltro Family), ca. 1465

Harmony, Guglielmo writes, enters our minds, and generates “sweet, sympathetic *movimenti*.”²⁵⁰ Their nature is not to be cloistered, and so they try with all their might to escape the mind. This leads to body movements that turn into dance. We thus have a chain – from cosmic harmony, through music, to dance compositions. This last segment is important because it derives from cosmic harmony. Dance is an essential art form, as it serves the contemplation of universal harmony. And this is why, as Guglielmo stresses, it cannot do without music.²⁵¹

Both music and dance involve the notion of harmony, and this, in turn, is intimately linked with numbers and proportion. Thus, dance was nothing other than the embodiment of numbers and proportion. *De pratica* speaks of this directly. The four basic voices in music correspond to the four elements in the universe. Much as the elements harmoniously interact, so too do the musical voices join in a melody. This too is simply numbers and proportions, which translates into dance. “Therefore we maintain,” Guglielmo writes, “this art and science of dancing to be virtue and a natural science, composed, naturally derived, and extracted from the melody.”²⁵²

²⁵⁰ Quoted in: A. William Smith, *Fifteenth-Century...*, p. 126.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

²⁵² Quoted in: *ibid.*

In this regard, just as music is the materialization of mathematics, dance takes place in the land of “the golden number.”²⁵³ We find similar intuitions in Domenico and Cornazano, who devoted many pages to examining the numerical relations between tempos in music, and thus, in dance as well; yet only Guglielmo speaks of them in an overtly Neoplatonic language.

Guglielmo’s theory falls in line with a concept of cosmic dance derived from Pythagoreanism, and then developed by Platonism and Neoplatonism.²⁵⁴ If we read *De pratica* in terms of Ficino’s philosophy, a highly intriguing picture emerges. For the structure suggested by the dancing master is subject to a musical logic, which is a reflection of the logic of proportion and numbers. Dance becomes a kinetic geometry, a reiteration of cosmic harmony, insofar as the body was able. Yet real dance was the incorporeal dance of numbers. This true dance of numbers was represented by performing actual dance steps. Though the former essentially involved constant movement, it was basically the eternal motionlessness of being as a whole. The parts rendered the principle of infinite movement, but the whole was profoundly stable. This is the kind of dance we saw in the Church Fathers, inspired by Neoplatonism. As we can see, the Renaissance did not reject it, it only leveled, to some extent, the mobilizing impetus from the development of civil humanism. The ideal dance of the spheres was a kinetic politics that competed with the dance spectacles.

The dance of motionlessness Ficino mentions, the perfect dance, could not be fully executed in the real dance the dancing masters attempted to describe. This was only a substitute, an imperfect representation of a higher ideal. Thus, if we are to seek the kinetic politics of the Italian Renaissance, apart from the treatises, we ought to consult the iconography of the mid-fifteenth century. Sometimes this is treated as a veritable document of Renaissance dances; it is used by specialists to imagine how people danced in a given period. Yet this was not essentially its role. Iconography testifies less to a real practice than to an ideal.²⁵⁵ Italian art did, of course, borrow from real life, but only to show it was incapable of achieving perfection. As such, it depicts the basic dilemma of dance theory, and even all of Renaissance culture – the conflict between temporal, physical activism and metaphysical, spiritual motionlessness.

²⁵³ The most outstanding book on numerical mysticism remains a work written in the 1930s by Matila C. Ghyka, *The Golden Number*, Rochester 2016.

²⁵⁴ Much has been written on the subject. See: Carter, “Celestial Dance...”; idem, “Number Symbolism and Renaissance Choreography,” *Dance Research* 1992, Vol. 10, No. 1, pp. 21–39; Gunter Berghaus, “Neoplatonic and Pythagorean Notions of World Harmony and Unity and their Influence on Renaissance Dance,” *Dance Research* 1992, Vol. 10, No. 2, pp. 43–70; Jennifer Nevile, “The Relationship between Dance and Music in Fifteenth-Century Italian Dance Practice,” in: Nevile (ed.), *Dance, Spectacle...*, pp. 155–165.

²⁵⁵ This was captured brilliantly by Sharon Fermor in “On the Question of Pictorial ‘Evidence’ for Fifteenth-Century Dance Technique,” *Dance Research* 1987, Vol. 5, No. 2, pp. 18–32.

As far as we can tell, there is no work which more compellingly renders the dual longing of the Italian Renaissance than *Primavera* (*Spring*, 1482) by Sandro Botticelli (Plate I). Let us take a closer look at it, recalling the words of Walter Pater:

Botticelli lived in a generation of naturalists, and he might have been a mere naturalist among them. There are traces enough in his work of that alert sense of outward things, which, in the pictures of that period, fills the lawns with delicate living creatures, and the hillsides with pools of water, and the pools of water with flowering reeds. *But this was not enough for him.*²⁵⁶

Like many people of the Renaissance, Botticelli was not satisfied by everyday life, by earthly reality, even in the most sumptuous or active form. He too deeply experienced the anxieties of his times, seeking shelter in metaphysics.²⁵⁷ Here we should call attention to the community in which the painter grew up – in the Florence of Lorenzo de' Medici. This was a flourishing city, but it was in the shadow of the mighty Medici's authoritarian impulses. In terms of ideas, this city was marked by Ficino's Neoplatonism, but also an Epicureanism discovered in a work that had been circulating among intellectuals, Lucretius' *De rerum natura*.²⁵⁸ Lorenzo himself, according to Tatarkiewicz,²⁵⁹ was also an Epicurean, not a Neoplatonist.²⁶⁰ Why is this important? For in *Primavera*, it seems, there is a touch of Lucretius that plumbs the Neoplatonic soil. This combination of the Epicurean celebration of life and the Neoplatonic affection for contemplation is yet another example of the ambivalence in Renaissance culture.

The young Botticelli landed in the Medicis' sphere of influence, and that of the Florentine academy. We can, therefore, interpret *Primavera* as a portrait of ideal love, as was painted many times before. For Ficino this was a purely spiritual quality. On an allegorical level, everything fits – the mythological figures make reference to abstract concepts: Love, Beauty, Purity, Delight. This is a vision almost as sublime as Guillaume de Lorris. Also similar is the dance of the three Graces in a circle, the part of the picture that interests us most. And as in Guillaume, Botticelli's

²⁵⁶ Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*, London 2005, p. 39, emphasis – W. K.

²⁵⁷ This is surely why, like Pico, he took sides with Savonarola, who inspired a revolt against the power-abusing elite – the despotism of the princes and debauchery of the clergy – in the name of returning to Christian ideals. Savonarola was a warrior, but also a mystic, and this is what attracted Botticelli, who was searching for a path to a higher reality, something more beautiful than ordinary glamor.

²⁵⁸ The exciting story of how this poem's manuscript was discovered in the early *quattrocento* in a monastery is retold by Stephen Greenblatt in *The Swerve: How the World Became Modern*, New York 2011. We find out that all the most important humanists read it – from Poggio and Niccolini, to Valla and Ficino, up to Machiavelli.

²⁵⁹ Tatarkiewicz, *Historia estetyki...*, p. 102.

²⁶⁰ We might recall that Lorenzo's grandfather, Cosimo de' Medici, the founder of the Florentine Academy, was fascinated by Neoplatonism.

canvas harnesses a sensual energy, which prompts us to go beyond a Neoplatonic interpretive key. The picture heaves, radiates, and hypnotizes with movement. When we stare deep into it, its contours slowly blur. The shapes begin to writhe like the pleats on the woman's dress,²⁶¹ swollen with new life. The floral carpet upon which the figures tread seems to gradually absorb the composition. The air trembles to the rhythm of the Graces, clothed only in muslin. Their dance is a riddle. We do not know exactly what it is, as this is not meant to depict a particular dance style, rather the energy of immortal life, and with it, all of being, which lies at the heart of dance. This is no longer harmony, or numbers, or beauty, it is life as an absolute. This is why Venus appears in the center.

In Lucretius' poem, Venus is summoned right from the prologue, for the poet also sees Venus as the Absolute and the source of the most important dance – the dance of being as such. She is not a goddess staring at the world from afar, she is a force that saturates and constitutes the world. At any rate, *De rerum natura* gets by entirely without gods. This is a portrait of the world made up of tiny particles, which are eternal, eternally clashing, achieving no external goal. A portrait of the only world that exists, ever existed, and ever will exist – a world without creator or author. In this world, Venus is not transcendental, for there is no transcendence. She is the warp, the warmth filled with particles, keeping them moving, in an endless dance of matter.

It seems to us that this dance is being performed by the three Graces on the right-hand side of the central character, standing under the myrtle tree. Their dance is both delicate and passionate. It is neither a *ballo* nor a *bassadanza*, neither a *carole* nor a *moresca*. It cannot be ascribed to any set form. It eludes them all, just as the eyes of the pregnant woman and the central character skirt our gaze. Only they are looking at the viewer, but their gazes flow through us, as if we were unable to put up any resistance. We become phantasms (*fantasmati*), along with the dance of the Graces, which, it would have seemed, we understand well, being acquainted with the Renaissance dance treatises. This is why *Primavera* disarms the viewer more than Mantegna's *Parnassus*, where we also have a dance in a circle. *Parnassus* is a disappointingly flat genre scene. Mantegna did not reach the erotic²⁶² nature

²⁶¹ Aby Warburg (*Narodziny Wenus i inne szkice renesansowe*, trans. Ryszard Kasperowicz, Gdańsk 2010, pp. 57–58) believes that the pregnant figure is the goddess of Spring, while the figure touched by Zephyr, with flowers sprouting from her mouth, is Flora. In the popular treatments this is often missed, and the pregnant woman is described as Flora. We have not the sufficient expertise to resolve this dispute, and so we prefer to use a descriptive phrase (“the pregnant woman”).

²⁶² Here we mean erotism in the sense given to the term by Georges Bataille, *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*, trans. Mary Dalwood, San Francisco 1986. Bataille opposed erotism to sexuality. The latter he perceived in terms of extending life, seen as an individual existence. It is a productive activity, part of the “economy of existence.” Erotism, on the other hand, Bataille understood as a gateway to discontinuity, transcending the individual condition.

of being as Botticelli did. This is why *Primavera* remains the most perfect kinetic politics of the Renaissance.

This is a mystical body that becomes political through the cosmic erotic. Temporality and eternity interweave in one moving structure. The dance of the Graces is divine, not only because it is immersed in sensual bliss. This is hunger for life, which has nothing in common with mere lust. This is not about sexuality, it is about touch; in other words, it is a dance of substance. The intricately woven hands of the Graces express this. We can see it in the toes stepping lightly on the carpet of grass. The curves of the bodies, the crooks of the necks, their skimming gazes – this is being conceived as eternal life. This is why, in fact, *Primavera* is not a choreographic document, it is a story of an idea that cannot be materialized. This idea is not purely Platonic, and thus, it is corporeal. The community Botticelli shows is a coexistence of sublime yet material bodies. The kinetic politics depicted here use the intellect to discover cosmic laws and adapt them to the needs of the temporal, but, moreover, they use the body. The complete body, in which physicality, mystical ecstasy, politics and love fuse into a single element. This is the body of the real community, the dream of the Italian Renaissance.

The Legion of the Prince

Botticelli's dream, however beautiful it may have been, was not to come true. Seen from the perspective of events that occurred just after *Primavera* was painted, we might say it prefigures a “melancholy flight from reality” in Italian culture. This was also experienced by dance – theory would not again be practiced for several decades. Analysis of movement would occur elsewhere. Another sort of choreography aroused interest.

The treatises of the dancing masters we have examined were written during a period when the culture of Italian cities was in full bloom. This was a relatively tranquil period, with its own share of conflicts, though these were resolved fairly amicably. The mid-fifteenth century chiefly saw rivalries based on ceremonial forms and resulting in an ongoing attempt to build alliances through arranged marriages. Ceremonial nuptials provided a splendid opportunity to dance, and a demand for experts in this field, which makes Guglielmo's life story, for example, one of constant journeying from one wedding ceremony to the next, from festival to festival, and from one dance celebration to another. Yet the crisis was to come. As Jean Delumeau has shown,²⁶³ the latter half of the fifteenth century was not a time of economic boom, it was a gradual bust. This thesis is confirmed by Peter Burke,

²⁶³ Delumeau, *Cywilizacja odrodzenia*, pp. 51–81.

writing about the refeudalization or the departure of the Italian elite from trade in favor of land investment.²⁶⁴ Refeudalization meant stemming growth, damping the dynamic impulse that marked the turn of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. In these circumstances, “the center of gravity of European trade was [gradually] shifting away from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic.”²⁶⁵ Thus, we should not be surprised at the growing social tensions in Italy, the sharpening of conflicts, and, as a result, the weakening of the role of the city-states. If we have this in mind, we start to understand why the spectacle, and, in fact, humanism as such, at one point ceased to be proof of strength, and became a sort of wishful thinking: “in Renaissance Italy one can point to examples (most obviously that of the Medici) of families ruined for trade by a humanist education; Lorenzo the Magnificent composed poems while the family bank went into decline.”²⁶⁶

The flourishing of sociability and the associated kinetic utopias we have traced ground to a halt at the tail end of the century, as the balance of powers had been upset. Charles VIII had crossed over to the Apennine Peninsula, and was aiming to take Naples. He had Milan on his side. In the upheavals of war, Florence was standing up for a return to the republic, but it was weaker than it had been a century before. The war destroyed Italy for several years, disrupting the relatively carefree half-century prior. Art would continue to prosper, sublime and essential philosophical debates would continue to be held, science would keep moving forward, but all in an atmosphere of unrest and chaos, amid constantly switching alliances and military preoccupations.

In these circumstances, there could be no talk of dance theory continuing to flourish. No more treatises emerged for several decades, at least not as far as we know. The exuberant culture of balls and spectacles began to shrink. This does not mean that people ceased to dance or that dance-related performances were not staged, but compared to the previous period, it was only a shadow of its former self. Confronted with war, another sort of imagination began to prevail, other kinds of kinetic ideals became the points of reference.

Faced with external intervention – the clash between France and Spain for an instrumentally treated Italy – the inhabitants of the Apennine Peninsula began to gain self-awareness, and calls were raised to cooperate to overcome divisions. Italy was increasingly perceived as a whole that required protecting, along with the development of a theory of power conceived as a pragmatic action, in which effectiveness and power are key. Ideas emerged that gave the rulers the right to authoritarian decisions, to treat state institutions instrumentally. Though it is true that, even beforehand,

²⁶⁴ Burke, *The Italian Renaissance...*, p. 252.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 253.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 240.

the existence within the peninsula of both republics and principalities made people unusually aware that the political system (*governo, reggimento*) was not god-given but man-made and that it could be changed. [...] This awareness of the malleability of institutions is central to the contemporary [Renaissance] literature on the ideal city-state.²⁶⁷

The Italian wars brought about a permanent shift in power, increasing this impression still more. Thinking about the state, about the common good, brought a total break with metaphysics. A politics devoid of sentiment developed on rational premises and a knowledge of human nature. The symbol of this politics today is Niccolò Machiavelli. A politics that understood that society had to be governed on a corporeal level, that corporal discipline stood behind effective rule.

Could dance have had a role to play in the eyes of this kind of authority? Only indirectly. Valuable energy and resources were not to be squandered on excessive socializing. The body was to be set for battle, not pleasures. It does seem, however, that there was an intimate link between the kinetic politics of the crisis period, as we find in Machiavelli, and those found in the dance treatises of the Renaissance dancing masters. In a sense, the kinesis we read in his works merely militarized the tendencies we have isolated in this chapter. Machiavelli was therefore the “dancing master” of wartime. His writings depict a “choreography of power.” Let us conclude by tracing this intriguing point.

In the Italian Renaissance, dance is quite clearly perceived as a tool for building autonomy. “Autonomy” is a concept that joins a striving for distinction, setting oneself apart, and empowering the individual existence in the secularization of the public sphere. Humanist dance, as we have written, was a process of elevation, a space in which the corporeal power of the new elite flourished. The sublime kinesis of the elite bodies was based on a synthesis of two qualities that entered a dialectic relationship: dynamics and harmony, movement and stasis, hawkish decisiveness and the tranquility of the gondola. This body that set itself in motion, that pushed itself forward, also knew how to find a link with the universal motionlessness of Being. This was at the heart of the gradual embodiment of agency in the Renaissance – a sense of power that sprang from this dialectic.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 189. Grzybowski called attention to the same process: “Not only, but above all in Florence, the Renaissance was an ideological superstructure of a free city commune, transforming from a city-state to a ‘territorial’ state and heading toward a nation state. The city communes of Italy are, to some degree, ‘artificial’ states – people created them freely, unlike the ‘natural’ ones, which ‘organically,’ as it were, came about in the distant past, the other monarchy-states of the Middle Ages. Being artificial, they were, to some degree, rationally constructed, and not based on (sometimes unconscious) irrational ideology. [...] Finally, being artificial, they were voluntarist constructs, products of conscious actions of people that could be traced back to a time and place” (Grzybowski, “Wstęp,” pp. XXIV–XXV). Though Grzybowski surely exaggerates in assuming the purely rational genesis of the Italian city communes, thus leaving aside the local mythologies, we should take into account his hypothesis of the source of Renaissance political criticism.

In the Italian Renaissance, agency could be perceived in collective terms, as the authority of the community, or individually – as the charisma of individuals who ensured peace to the community. In times of war and violent crisis, Machiavelli believed the power of individuals should be increased – the ruler should be given the power to decide. He took up the arms of an agency which, on the one hand, was described by a sober secular humanism focused on Roman models, and on the other, by a mystical Platonism that exuded a Greek vision of a rationally reconstitutable universal harmony. It was necessary to strip the superfluous ornament from the temporal community in motion, leaving what was effective – the body disciplined through the militarization of the aforementioned dialectics. These bodies required a leader – the Prince.

Machiavelli embodies a moment when a modern grasp of agency as secular and individualized appears. *The Prince* is its portrait – an image of agency, not simply a handbook of political manipulation. We often take a one-dimensional approach to this treatise. In Machiavelli, the ruler seems to be a paper cut-out symbolizing a cynical realism, toppling whatever stands in his way. Yet upon closer reflection, *The Prince* is far more than a lesson in ruthlessness. We find complex emotions under the guise of cynicism. Machiavelli was neither a cold technocrat nor a cynical manipulator, though many have accused him of such. Just like Petrarch a century earlier, he believed in Italy. He was among those enraptured by the myth of Rome, who strove for the transformation of the peninsula in the spirit of its ancient unity. Although “proud of his homeland – Florence and Tuscany – Machiavelli increasingly realized the shared interests of all Italians, sensing the material bond and national unity of the peninsula’s inhabitants.”²⁶⁸ In this regard we can see him as a witness, departing from the particularism of local communities in favor of a national *universitas*. This unity was not to come in his day, and even at present it is not always part of the Italian mindset. Yet this does not mean that the universalist myth ought to be discounted. On the contrary, Machiavelli’s realism always fed upon it, he took good stock of the myth of unity, as is evident from the final chapter of *The Prince*.

What is the myth of Italy? What exactly was this yearning for the Roman republic? What kind of physical movement accompanied it? How can we reconstruct the agency that Machiavelli longed to express? To answer these questions, let us note a fundamental thing. What strikes us in his most famed works, *The Prince* and *Discourses on Livy*, which he created as handbooks for rulers, is the author’s almost purely secular perspective. God vanishes from history, which is filled with bold human feats, mistakes, good or bad alliances, the violence and indecision of individuals. We see this particularly when, in *The Prince*, Machiavelli analyzes

²⁶⁸ Jan Malarczyk, “Wstęp,” in: Niccolò Machiavelli, *Wybór pism*, trans. Jadwiga Gałuszka et al., Warsaw 1972, p. 69.

the deeds of Pope Alexander VI.²⁶⁹ Though he notes that, in the church state, “being exalted and maintained by God, it would be the act of a presumptuous and rash man to discuss them,”²⁷⁰ he almost immediately moves on to analyze the Pope’s activities in politics, portraying him as a refined and ruthless ruler, yet one with extraordinary foresight, passionately defending his earthly interests. The actions of other rulers are likewise scrutinized in terms of the efficacy of their politics in the temporal world – in other words, the success of the states they rule. Machiavelli is not interested in the relationship between secular and sacral history. He does not evaluate rulers’ actions in terms of salvation. Only the success of the political body is important, and this was shaped by real people, not metaphysical forces.

Machiavelli did not see history as a space of total freedom. He was attached to a cyclical rendering of history and a faith in the power of destiny. Nonetheless,

the laws governing the path of history do not exclude the possibility of man shaping his own destiny. Machiavelli believes deeply in man’s capacity here, his rationality, strength, energy, and intelligence (*virtù*), through which, if only he should choose to use them, he will forge his future, creating for himself a life and conditions to appease his desires and make them come true.²⁷¹

Virtù, as many commentators have noted,²⁷² is a key concept in Machiavelli. It is here we find the birthing individualized agency that interests us – the Prince.

Machiavelli demands the ruler combine two sorts of movement – ruthless determination, a persistence in reaching his goals, and specialist knowledge, a critical capacity to analyze all of reality. The figure of the political virtuoso or expert was born. The whole of human activity takes place in the temporal sphere, without

²⁶⁹ Cf. Chapters VII and XI of Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. W. K. Marriott, Createspace 2017.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

²⁷¹ Malarczyk, “Wstęp,” pp. 33–34. If we may briefly digress: his optimism in observing human capabilities means we can put Machiavelli alongside the Neoplatonists, despite all their differences. The latter believed “that the universe (the Earth, and the societies on it) was made of a limited, finite, and discoverable quantity of elements. As their number was limited and finite, there had to be a recurrence of situations and their various combinations. Knowing the elements that make up events, historical situations, we can create certain combinations of elements and situations, and counteract others. Marsilio Ficino applied this reckoning to the universe: if we know the elements of which it is composed, and we have the tools with which it was created, we can repeat the creation process at will. Machiavelli transferred this reasoning to political sociology. Social life and political life are composed of a limited and finite number of determinable elements [which we can learn studying history]. Combinations of these elements, or historical ‘situations,’ must therefore repeat. Yet knowing these elements, we can, to a certain degree, through their combinations, counteract some situations and others, to some extent, create” (Grzybowski, “Wstęp,” p. XLV).

²⁷² Malarczyk, “Wstęp,”; Grzybowski, “Wstęp,”; Isaiah Berlin, “The Originality of Machiavelli,” *Against the Current*, London 1997; Leo Strauss, *Niccolo Machiavelli 1469–1527*, in: Leo Strauss, Joseph Cropsey (eds.), *History of Political Philosophy*, Chicago 1987.

divagations of metaphysical repercussions. Thus, in *The Prince*, Machiavelli compares the ruler to a doctor, who

should keep track of the efficiency of all the state organs, uncovering all their potentially hazardous maladies and illnesses on time. [...] When various parts of the state are attacked by an ailment, to protect the whole one ought to cut off the infected limbs with fire and iron and block the path of infection – restoring normal life to the body.²⁷³

This is a prince who tends to the health of the political body, not the salvation of the political soul. His governance was to be guided by the logic of intervention. This is why Machiavelli devotes so much room to the state of emergency, back before the desired republican system was settled. In this watershed moment the most decisive ruler was required. This state of emergency, when a just state was only being created (a state which, according to Machiavelli reigned in Italy during his time), required the prince be highly responsible and decisive.²⁷⁴ To carry out this mission, *virtù* was required, the virtue of dynamism and self-confidence, but also the knowledge that allowed outstanding individuals to shape reality. We see here, quite clearly, it seems, the link between the body of the prince and the body of the dancer postulated in the treatises.

Isaiah Berlin has claimed that Machiavelli was not a depraved egoist who taught how to exploit people to achieve success. The author's moral indifference was only skin-deep. According to Berlin, Machiavelli showed how inevitable was the choice between a virtuous private life and a successful social life, between private pleasure and public good. Their reconciliation was impossible.

²⁷³ Malarczyk, "Wstęp," p. 39. Isaiah Berlin also points out the medical rhetoric: "In order to cure degenerate populations of their diseases, these founders of new states or churches may be compelled to have recourse to ruthless measures" (Berlin, "The Originality..." p. 44). We should point out that we are using the term "medicine" in a Western manner, chiefly as a battle against an illness, focusing on infected places, and not as care for the holistic well-being of the body, or prevention. Machiavelli's doctor is a decisive, self-assured professional who heroically challenges death. He makes a diagnosis and begins to cure, accepting the risks and counting on a reward – temporal fame. This doctor figure remains an important motif in modern culture and is tied to the activist stance we are analyzing here.

²⁷⁴ In Chapter XXVI of Book I of *Discourses*, Machiavelli expresses his belief in building from scratch, rather than conforming to tradition: "The best remedy whoever becomes prince of either a city or a state has for holding that principality is to make everything in that state anew, since he is a new prince, and so much the more when his foundations are weak and he may not turn to civil life by way either of kingdom or of republic: that is, to make in cities new governments with new names, new authorities, new men [...] besides this, to build new cities, to take down those built, to exchange the inhabitants from one place to another; and, in sum, not to leave anything untouched in that province, so that there is no rank, no order, no state, no wealth there that he who holds it does not know it as from you" (Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov, Chicago 1998, p. 61).

Once you embark on a plan for the transformation of a society you must carry it through no matter at what cost: to fumble, to retreat, to be overcome by scruples, is to betray your chosen cause. To be a physician is to be a professional, ready to burn, to cauterise, to amputate. [...] And there are at least two worlds: each of them has much, indeed everything, to be said for it; but they are two, and not one. One must learn to choose between them, and having chosen, not look back.²⁷⁵

If we accept this interpretation, Machiavelli becomes a moralist standing up for agency as the acceptance of risk, for the political body over the private,²⁷⁶ and the iron discipline that comes with it.

Machiavelli realized that this work came with no promise of fulfillment. Man would never conquer the movement of history.

As in nature, where everything that lives begins, blooms, and grows old, institutions people create have periods of development and collapse. This is the law of everything changing, progress and decadence also mark the limits of how long human works survive, decide upon systems and powers evolving, the fall of states and nations. These constant transformations do not, however, lead to any fundamental breakthroughs or reimaginings of the world or society. Entirely new social institutions are not built, nor does the nature of society essentially change.²⁷⁷

Thus, it is impossible to build the ideal eternal state. Nor is it possible to make people loftier, more noble creatures.²⁷⁸ The aspirations of the Neoplatonists are pipe-dreams. Yet nor is Stoicism any answer, and there can be no returning to the Middle Ages, in a spirit of contemplation. Nor is apathy or a retreat from the world. Man should be forever pushing the political rock uphill, trying to accomplish as much as possible. This persistence, which comes from wisdom, is *virtù*.

There is an aggression in *virtù*, which Machiavelli saw as masculinized. Although man is condemned to fail, he must always lift his head and make a choice, manfully assume the responsibility. He must nurture his masculinity. Here we

²⁷⁵ Berlin, "The Originality...", p. 59.

²⁷⁶ In a less important text of 1521, *Discorso delle cose fiorentine dopo la morte di Lorenzo* (*Discourse on Florentine Affairs after the Death of Lorenzo*), we read this powerful admission of faith: "I believe that the greatest honor that men can have is that which is willingly given them by their Country, and I believe that the greatest good that is done, and the most pleasing to God, is that which is done for your Country. In addition to this, no man is exalted as much in any of his action, as are those who have reformed Republics and Kingdoms with (new) Laws and Institutions. These are, after those who have been Gods, the highest praised" (*Delphi Collected Works of Niccolò Machiavelli*, Delphi Classics 2017, e-pub).

²⁷⁷ Malarczyk, "Wstęp," p. 33.

²⁷⁸ "[Machiavelli] asks for men to be improved but not transfigured, not superhuman. Not for a world of ideal beings unknown on this earth, who, even if they could be created, could not be called human" (Berlin, "The Originality...", p. 57).

might quote a closing passage of *The Prince*, where aggressive male activism finds an outlet: “For my part I consider that it is better to be adventurous than cautious, because fortune is a woman, and if you wish to keep her under it is necessary to beat and ill-use her; and it is seen that she allows herself to be mastered by the adventurous rather than by those who go to work more coldly. She is, therefore, always woman-like, a lover of young men, because they are less cautious, more violent, and with more audacity command her.”²⁷⁹

History shows that the effects of human actions can never fully be predicted. Machiavelli knew this all too well, and so his optimism stayed within certain bounds. Fortune was still staring him in the face. He only had one weapon against it – male audacity. Here we are struck by the parable of fortune as a raging river, tamed by man’s dikes, dams, and canals. Fate and nature stand opposed to man and his rationality. Reality stages resistance, yet man may break it, “commanding” the world with his “audacity.” More plausibly, man less knows how to stage resistance (for femininity as the Other will not be tamed entirely) than he believes profoundly in his abilities. This faith is the essence of heroism according to Machiavelli and his concept of agency, which emerges as an astonishing synthesis of humanist activism (man’s creative activity) and conservative diagnosis (the constant essence of reality).

The Prince is an aggressive, individualized figure of male agency, into which we can read a mobile ideal of sorts, a kinetic world-view. Striving, action, activity, flexibility, agility, decisiveness, mastery, self-control, and discipline are all lauded. In *The Prince*, Machiavelli does not examine a purely material level of existence, he does not explore the real physicality of the ruler. Nonetheless, it seems we can read between the lines; a knowledge of ancient texts tells us that a spirit blessed with *virtù* could hardly live in a dwarven body. By the same token, we must bear in mind that Machiavelli did not admire brute force; the body of the Prince was not to be that of a primitive oaf. The quality he proposed was rationally composed finesse and maneuverability, a capacity to find himself at once in any situation, a sensibility and flexibility. Let us recall the capabilities Domenico demanded of his dancers and students – this is practically the same canon.

In considering the kinetic politics of Machiavelli, we reach a basic dilemma that it brings to the modern political discourse, incorporating the Renaissance’s ambivalence in this department. As we have emphasized, Machiavelli was primarily interested in the body of the community. The Prince circulates in the public space, his authority is intimately linked with the common good. Flexibility and sensibility were to be traits of the political body, which the ruler could merely replicate, but which did not actually need to be incarnated in the individual body. Although the ruler is presented in terms of individual actions, he is not really an individual force. Yet despite all this, *The Prince* was written as a handbook for the ambitious

²⁷⁹ Machiavelli, *The Prince*..., p. 83.

individual²⁸⁰ and the individual point of view of agency decidedly prevails in it. Reading Machiavelli, one gets the impression of inner turmoil between a longing for calm, which is individual by nature, and a love of a mythical republic, or thinking in terms of collective agency. On the one hand, *The Prince*'s protagonist is an autocrat ruling with an iron hand, and on the other, Machiavelli's *Discourses* clearly speak out against tyranny. This does not mean that he unreservedly accepts every republic, yet in reading the whole text, we receive the clear impression that this system – supplemented with attributes of oligarchy and monarchy (especially in times of crisis, such as war) – is his ideal. This is why he particularly admired the republican period in Roman history.

Machiavelli's dilemmas reveal that in a moment of social crisis the ruler's body was also not meant to be the body of the individual, it was the collective – and also that a dynamic individual was desired to lead the collective. This was the context for the kinetic ideal that was to nurture the common good in the perfect community. This ideal was of military origin. It was closely linked with the notion of secular agency (both collective and individualized) animating the state as a political body.

Machiavelli's true *idée fixe* was the army. He spent all his life trying to create a civil army in Florence. This was the only way he saw to make a state secure and functional, for he believed hired forces to be insubordinate, mercenary, and unnecessarily brutal, and that they stoked conflict, as this was their source of profit. Only an army of properly schooled and led citizens would have its own motivation, and would be properly involved in protecting the public welfare. This is also why, fundamentally, the army was a public good in itself. We can read this in *The Prince*, the *Discourses*, and finally, in the *Art of War* dialogue.

As we have said, Machiavelli joined the premise of action and activity with a passion for discipline and order. In other words, as his biographer Maurizio Viroli has written:

Every city, whatever its form of government, [...] has always defended itself with “force combined with prudence.” One without the other is not enough, because prudence without force is insufficient to govern political matters and preserve a state. Force and prudence, then, are the “backbone” of all states past and future.²⁸¹

²⁸⁰ We must bear in mind the circumstances behind the work's creation. After the restoration of the Medici's rule, Machiavelli was removed from public affairs, to which he had devoted all of his energies as the head of the Second Chancellery, tending to the foreign affairs of the republic. He had moved to the countryside in despair, devoting himself to writing, yet in fact dreaming of a return to large-scale politics. *The Prince* was meant to convince a reluctant Lorenzo de' Medici to allow him this. As such, Machiavelli was prepared to give the impression of supporting an individual rule. Yet we cannot believe this was simply posturing when we consider the urgency of the book, how evocative it is, and how it has inspired generations of political theorists.

²⁸¹ Maurizio Viroli, *Niccolò's Smile*, trans. Anthony Shugaar, New York 2010, p. 68.

The princely power used this backbone to put the public good above all else; it was unimaginable without a civil army. As such, the latter also had to epitomize the duality we are describing.

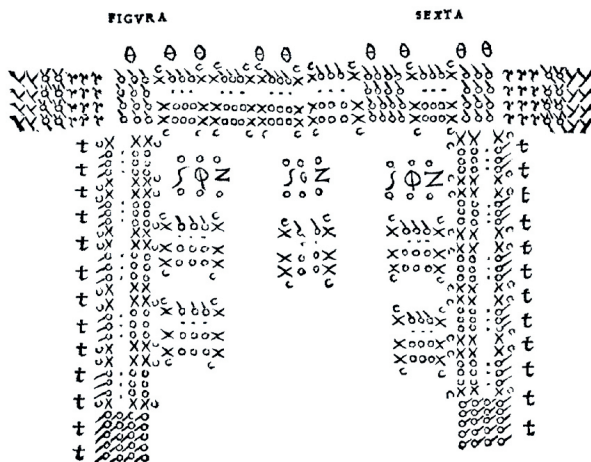
The individualistic aspect of militarized agency comes, of course, in the leader. Drawing from antiquity, Machiavelli carves out an ideal leader that is new and old. The result is an image of a ruthless, extremely insightful wise man. The leader was not a tyrant carrying out individual interests, but a medium personifying the larger agency of the public good. He thus became an instrument of agency, rising above the community and, by the same gesture, essentially constituting an individualized overriding agency – the Prince as an absolute leader.

This collectivist aspect of the kinetic ideal is the community, which is subordinate to the Prince on the battlefield. In Machiavelli this too is new and old. It draws from a Roman model, but adapts it to the modern context of the civil army, in whose creation Machiavelli was aided by a tried-and-tested model – the Roman legion. The key to its efficacy is discipline, which only the Prince can impose.

In Machiavelli, discipline is tied to geometry, which is highly typical of the Renaissance interest in harmony and numbers. Let us take a look at *The Art of War*; not at the main text, but at the concluding “Figures.”²⁸² These are seven astonishing illustrations drawn by a rather unskilled hand, with simple geometric patterns that still show a touch of finesse. Machiavelli created a legend for them, allowing us to decipher the symbols. The simple circle is a troop of foot-soldiers with shields, a circle with a line through it is foot-soldiers with pikes; *x* marks decurions, *y* symbolizes light cavalry, and *t* is for the velites. And so it continues, but we shall not cover all the military details here, for we are chiefly interested in the drawing’s exactitude. Machiavelli places these symbols in a near-obsessive manner. The Roman legion is meant to come alive on paper – it is aggression locked in a cuboid, making a truly remarkable impression. Figure 1 is a large square and four smaller rectangles. Figure 2 is similar. Figure 3 is more complicated. Figures 4 to 6 resemble architectural blueprints (Ill. 22). We have a bird’s eye view of the moving army, as if we were seeing a geometrical treatise. This is an incredible portrait of the kinetic imagination at the beginning of the Modern Era.

The drawings are an attempt to fix on paper the imagined perfection of individuals cooperating. In Machiavelli, the community walks in step. Functions are complementary, but one aim takes precedence, one authority (the Prince), to whose individuality the soldiers should subordinate themselves, just as the Prince’s actions are subordinate to the necessities he encounters, and the political environment, which he must comprehend. That, it seems, is what the drawings’ geometry expresses. This geometry is a form of rational subordination, a longing for harmony – the troops’ movements should be harmonious. This is the sole path, however

²⁸² Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Art of War*, trans. Christopher Lynch, Chicago 2005, pp. 167–178.



22. Niccolò Machiavelli, *Dell'arte della guerra* (*On the Art of War*), 1520, figure 6

utopian, to securing the common good. This is why, among the leaders' most important tasks, Machiavelli includes: "Never lead your soldiers into an engagement unless you are assured of their courage, know they are without fear, and are organized, and never make an attempt unless you see they hope for victory."²⁸³ This combination is striking – a lack of fear and organization. Physical discipline and metaphysical security go hand-in-hand. This is how the dancer-soldier should move: with discipline, that is, harmoniously. Machiavelli stresses: "[Discipline] is so powerful it may overcome the fury and natural obstinacy of the many."²⁸⁴

Machiavelli's ideal of the community in motion is maintaining a geometrical shape, driving the military column onward. Bear in mind that it draws from ancient models, for a similar image of the community will be a recurring motif in our story. The Modern Era will produce multiple variants on this classic tale. The first, tied to *The Art of War*, is exceptionally complex. It merges the aggression of individualized agency with a rare passion for geometry, sending us back to Neoplatonism, and also cosmic harmony. We encounter a duality quite identical to the one we noted in the dancing masters. This is a fundamental duality that is absolutely indispensable for the whole of the Italian Renaissance, which was built on the merging of two irreconcilable convictions. Machiavelli grasped this on one page of the *Discourses*. On the one hand there is a faith in temporality, the persistent work that is posited to organize it, and thus activism, movement, invoking the importance of temporality: "the things of men are in constant motion, they rise and fall."²⁸⁵ On the other hand, the horizon of human activity is fortune, the whole, the fundamental

²⁸³ Ibid., p. 136.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ Machiavelli, *Discourses...*, p. 23.

motionlessness of being, which is immutable: “the world is presently the same as it has ever been.”²⁸⁶ The kinetic ideals of the Italian Renaissance are carved out in the clash between these poles – the march of Machiavelli’s legion and the sensual turns of the Graces on Botticelli’s canvas.

Modern Agency Takes Its First Steps

Throughout the *quattrocento* the court dances blend the ideals of emancipation and discipline. There was no talk of free expression, though the Renaissance did believe, as Guglielmo wrote, “the sweetness and melody is drawn to the exterior when the body is dancing.”²⁸⁷ On the one hand, agency began to be conceived in individualistic terms, while on the other, people of the Renaissance were aware of the cosmos infinitely soaring above the individual. They were aware that agency as the core power of action could not be understood in terms of the parts, only the whole. The individual could only be an image of this whole. Foucault grasped this in writing that the Renaissance was governed by *resemblance*: “The universe was folded in upon itself: the earth echoing the sky, faces seeing themselves reflected in the stars, and plants holding within their stems the secrets that were of use to man.”²⁸⁸ This principle also applied to the Prince, who, in Machiavelli’s work, was chiefly perceived as an embodiment of the whole – the political community.

The spectacle of power designed by the choreographer was meant to embody the power of the whole political body, both the Prince and his subjects. In this sense, Renaissance agency took precedence over the individual. By the same token, Machiavelli’s ruler made a gesture of usurpation in personifying agency. In the early Middle Ages, the king was God’s anointed, his authority boiled down to representing transcendental authority. During the collapse of the feudal system, royal authority had grown weaker. The king was merely *primus inter pares*.²⁸⁹ With the weakening of the position of the wealthy, Italy witnessed the emancipation of the *popolo* and the rebirth of the idea of the republic. This was the space within which the Prince restored individual power. Yet there would be no talk of a return to a figure “anointed by God.” The Prince, and in fact the man of the Renaissance as such, did not want to defer to an outer authority, he sought to become an authority through his own deeds. Here we cross into modern territory. This

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Quoted in: A. William Smith, *Fifteenth-Century...*, p. 126.

²⁸⁸ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, London–New York 2005, p. 19.

²⁸⁹ Our outline is based on: Jan Baszkiewicz, *Myśl polityczna wieków średnich*, Poznań 2009.

does not mean the ruler would no longer appeal to God. The idea was that these appeals would strive to deify the individual.

In Renaissance theory, the Prince was inextricably linked to the collective, political body. This is why there was such a close connection between power and the spectacle. Spectacles were organized for the Prince, but the Prince himself was a spectacle. We could say, to use dance terminology, that the bodies dancing in the spectacle of power participated in the body of power, and the power was materialized through the dancing bodies. The spectacle created a kinetic representation of the Prince as a dynamic community. Yet at the same time, the Prince was essentially the author of the spectacle and its only protagonist. As early as Renaissance Italy, a mechanism evolved that was developed to perfection in the court of Louis XIV. This mechanism was improved further by the Enlightenment and the Revolution. The Prince, regarded as an all-powerful “I,” was the ideal dancer of the above treatises, moving like a gondola and swooping like a falcon. It may have seemed that this rendition of the Prince would have had to have been a figure of the community to be accepted, but things turned out differently – the community began to be a figure of the Prince.

CHAPTER II

Dreams of Harmony in Times of Doubt: The Birth of Court Ballet in France

In the sixteenth century the fashion for dance spread from Italy to other countries in Europe, particularly France. While in the autumn of the Middle Ages Italian cities adapted dance models from regions of modern-day France, in the Renaissance we saw the opposite trend. The French King Charles VIII crossed into the Apennine Peninsula in 1494, initiating live contact with Italian culture. Among the forms which exerted a special fascination was the Renaissance dance described in the previous chapter. The French were enormously impressed by the Italian spectacles, above all those they saw in Milan, ruled by the Sforzas. Behind the military skirmishes was a process important to us here – the French increasingly had a taste for the fine art of staging spectacles. Compared to their French equivalents, the Italian ones were more sophisticated, sumptuous, and complex. *Balli lombardi*, the theatrical dance compositions presented at the Milanese court, were enticing, a touch extravagant, and certainly unique.²⁹⁰ The less spectacular dances also seemed more tasteful in their technique and complexity of form.

The process by which Italian dance culture infiltrated France accelerated when Henri II took the throne, and especially after his nuptials with Catherine de' Medici in 1533. This young queen was responsible for bringing dance teachers from Italy to the French courts, and introducing *balli*, which the French called *ballets*. At the French courts, dance increased in magnitude and splendor. At the height of their glory, Milan and Florence were important centers of power, but they could not compare to Paris. France became a megaphone for Italian ideas, giving them a new

²⁹⁰ Carol Lee, *Ballet in Western Culture: A History of Its Origins and Evolution*, New York–London 2002, p. 37; Jennifer Homans, *Apollo's Angels: A History of Ballet*, London 2010, pp. 3–4.

coloration, drawing from the reservoir of its own humanism, in many respects unlike its Italian counterpart. This process was closely bound up with the religious and political issues that were tearing sixteenth-century France apart. The society was profoundly divided and marked by violence. This encouraged the strengthening of central authority, which met with powerful resistance. The monarchy began seeking ways to break this resistance, producing a rhetoric whereby the body of the community was bound to the body of the monarch. This was particularly evident in ceremonies, an important part of which was the dances, organized during the reign of Catherine's sons – Charles IX and Henri III. Along with these ceremonies came a kinetic politics derived from Domenico and Guglielmo, but with a new level of order and discipline. This, in short, is the history we would like to cover in this chapter. It is a history far more complicated than this summary suggests, and more complex than the dance history textbooks generally reveal.

The Anxieties of Renaissance France

Sixteenth-century France was an arena of extraordinarily complicated and heated debates on philosophical, religious, and political worldviews. Despite the stability of the ruling dynasty, it was forever being torn apart by a variety of conflicts. The sixteenth century was, above all, a time of social upheavals that came with the developing Reformation movement, which in France was combated with special brutality. After the relatively peaceful progress of Protestant operations came the Affair of the Placards, followed by violence. The Reformation drove a deep rift in French society, already profoundly divided in other respects. The distinction between the aristocratic tradition and the new, rising bourgeois elite became more pronounced, its tone set by people from various interest groups. There was also a major quarrel between the elite who, influenced by humanist ideals, had begun apprehending the world in secular categories, and orthodox religion in two incarnations: Catholic and Protestant. These divisions overlapped in a complex fashion,²⁹¹ making France a powder keg.

In the sphere of ideas, the French Renaissance was a web of movements with a peculiar dynamic and a constant ferment. There was a blend of possibly Italian influences and local innovations, which introduced new effects – the importation of Italian culture came under a very French flag. All this gives us the impression of an incessant intellectual whirlwind, raising dust at the slightest sign of unanimity. This whirlwind involved enthusiasts of Greek antiquity, like the famed humanist Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples, who assimilated Aristotle to France, yet was far from

²⁹¹ Jean Delumeau stresses, for instance, that the religious wars in sixteenth-century France were not class wars (Jean Delumeau, *Reformy chrześcijaństwa w XVI i XVII w.*, Vol. I, trans. Paweł Kłoczowski, Warsaw 1986, pp. 106–109).

a sober naturalist. On the other hand was Ramus, for one, who rejected Aristotle, carving out a modern rendition of Scholasticism with a highly structured system. We have thinkers (Bovillus, for instance) saturated with the pathos of humanity, but who saw the summit of humanity not in acts of the will, as Salutati or Valla did, but in scholarly knowledge and contemplation. We have Neoplatonists who, perhaps even more than Ficino, delighted in esoteric speculation (Symphorien Champier). We have realists who owed much to Anthony of Padua's reading of Aristotle, verging on materialism (Jean Fernel), and those who expounded Epicureanism (Denis Lambin de Montreuil, editor of France's first critical edition of Lucretius' *De rerum natura*). We have free thinkers rebelling against religious oppression, and thus often accused of atheism, such as Étienne Dolet and Guillaume Postel. We have those who supported absolutism (the famous Jean Bodin) and those, like Étienne de La Boetie, who struggled against absolutism with all their might.

Sixteenth-century France was a field for polemicists situated on either side of the religious conflict. It was a homeland for pragmatic scholars and doctors, exploring reality with increasingly rational methods. We will encounter hermetic poets with philosophical ambitions, such as Maurice Sceve, hard-to-classify individuals like Michel de Montaigne, and lovers of life and the sensual, people with an enormous appetite for the world, drawn to the corporal and vital. To some extent, Pierre de Bourdeille, seigneur de Brantôme, was such a man, as was, above all, François Rabelais.²⁹²

We have presented this plurality of worldviews to show the kind of murky waters into which the Italian fashion for dance entered. The sieve through which it was strained may have seemed simple in construct – from the city-states to the mighty court of the monarch – but in fact it was highly complex. As we shall see, the kinesis of the French Renaissance was a destabilized space in which compromise was elusive, a space of quarrels and even battles over movement, for this was the French culture of the day. The concept of mobilization is quite handy here, but increasingly difficult to define. The same goes, of course, for reconstructing the most significant dance theories and practices.

The Rise of French Dance Theory

We will recall from the previous chapter that French society in the late Middle Ages was quite fond of dancing. This especially derived from the human potential in the south of France; the favorable climate made it was one of the most populous

²⁹² Our Renaissance panorama of French thought is mainly based on the editor's introduction to: Andrzej Nowicki (ed.), *Filozofia francuskiego Odrodzenia*, Warsaw 1973, pp. 5–69.

places in Europe. On the one hand, this translated into a lively folk culture. On the other, there was a wealth of aristocratic culture, whose exponents could afford all kinds of pleasure, including kinetic recreations. This led to a greater secular influence on official culture. We observe a general interest in the temporal, an appreciation of common-sense ways of thinking, freer forms of contact between people. Dance found acceptance in this new mindset, as we have shown through Thomas Aquinas and Albertus Magnus. There was dancing at events in the cities, mainly in Paris, and in the aristocratic courts, particularly the more refined ones in Provence and Burgundy.

Provence and Burgundy set the foundations of the court culture that became known as French. 1477 is symbolic for this transition, the year when Charles the Bold, the last Prince of Burgundy, died in the Battle of Nancy. In this period, Provence fell within the House of Valois's sphere of influence. France was becoming a hegemony, which had its effect on the realm of culture. In the late fifteenth century came a fairly consolidated state organism, with its own highly specific dance culture.

We know little about the French fifteenth-century kinesis compared to the Italian, but surviving sources suggest it was more straightforward. There was less emphasis on a variety of steps, dance arrangements were less sophisticated. Nonetheless, there were points in common. In both Italy and France we observe a growing interest in couples dances, and a distinction between two basic types of dances. On the one hand there were fast, lively dances derived from folk culture, which are today sometimes termed "high" (*hautes danses*). In Italy these dances included the *piva* and *saltarello*, which were not favored by the dancing masters, but whose tempo was adapted for the purposes of court culture. In France, among the folk-derived dances of the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance, we should mention the *tourdion*, a dance that was popular back in the Burgundy court, and then spread throughout the country, and the *espringale* based on leaps. On the other hand, in either culture we find majestic and calm dances, emphasizing the staticity and elegance of the dancers and stressing high social status. These originated in the medieval *hove danses*. In Italy these dances adhered to a *bassadanza* tempo, which accompanied the *bassadanza* proper, as well as the slower *balli*. In France, however, these were *basses danses*, or "low dances," which were serious and sublime (Ill. 23).

The coincidence of the terms *bassadanza* and *basse danse* is not, it seems, accidental, though the literature clearly shows they were not the same dance.²⁹³ Above

²⁹³ Cf. Jennifer Nevile, *Dance in Europe 1250–1750*, in: eadem (ed.), *Dance, Spectacle and the Body Politick, 1250–1750*, Bloomington–Indianapolis 2008, p. 31. At the same time, it is perilous to speak of a simple progression from a primitive *basse danse* to a sophisticated *bassadanza*. The links between the forms are complicated, they elude an evolutionary model, as Seeta Chaganti convincingly argues



23. Loyset Liédet, miniature illustrating *Chanson de Renaud de Montauban* (Song of Renaud of Montauban) depicting a *basse danse*, ca. 1470

all, the French version was less refined. As Irena Turska comments, “the chief characteristic of the [*basse danse*] was its lack of a set form. [...] A few basic steps [...] were combined in various ways, with tiny steps, practically not lifting the feet from the floor.”²⁹⁴ This simple manner of dancing differed from the compositionally complex and demanding advanced training of the *bassadanze* in Domenico or Guglielmo. As such, we may conclude that, while the principle of distinction through developing special skills prevailed in the Italian courts, in France a simpler and more democratic kinetic pleasure held sway.²⁹⁵ David R. Wilson writes of the liberty, the certain freedom,²⁹⁶ that the *basse danse* somewhat lost over time, though it never achieved the refinement of the Italian *bassadanze*.

The evolution of *basses danses* can be traced by looking at several surviving descriptive texts. For its first stage of development, we have three works. In 1445, an unknown author recorded seven dances that were popular at the French court at the time. This is the first work in French “dance thought,” published in Nancy.

in “Proleptic Steps: Rethinking Historical Period in the Fifteenth-Century Dance Manual,” *Dance Research Journal* 2012, Vol. 44, No. 2, pp. 30–31.

²⁹⁴ Irena Turska, *Krótki zarys...*, p. 83.

²⁹⁵ Nevile also shows that the *bassadanza* was sometimes consciously styled on a French model (Jennifer Nevile, “Dance and Identity in Fifteenth-Century Europe,” in: Ann Buckley, Cynthia J. Cyrus (eds.), *Music, Dance, and Society: Medieval and Renaissance Studies in Memory of Ingrid G. Brainard*, Kalamazoo, MI 2011, pp. 234–235, quoted from: Chaganti, *Proleptic Steps...*, p. 31).

²⁹⁶ David R. Wilson, “The Basse Dance c. 1445–c. 1545,” in: Nevile (ed.) *Dance, Spectacle...*, p. 172.

Then there is a break of several decades, and at the turn of the century we find two other works which are far more in-depth. Around 1495, Parisian printer Michel Toulouze published a handbook in which he described the basic steps of the *basse danse*, with instructions and, above all, forty-eight examples with sequences of steps and music. Compared to the manuscript from Nancy, taking music into account was a novelty; it also allows us to speculate on the nature of these dances. Toulouze's book bears a certain resemblance to a manuscript presently found in Brussels, once part of the library of Margaret of Austria. It is dated 1497–1501. Importantly, it contains even more examples than Toulouze's treatise, fifty-eight in total.²⁹⁷

In the first dance texts written in France we still find the relative simplicity Turska described. There were basically only four steps: a) *pas simple* (simple step), b) *pas double* (double step), c) *desmarche/reprise* (backward step; used as a kind of bow to a partner at the opening of the dance, and then called *desmarche*, or as a transitional step, and then called *reprise*), d) *branle* (a turn left, then right, without lifting the feet from the floor). In the Nancy manuscript we also find: *sault* (a small hop), *pas menus* (a fast step, always in a group of three) and *levée* (probably raising a foot on the spot). These were merely ornaments to accompany the basic canon of four steps.

The dance sequence began with the partners making a respectful bow. Then came a single *branle*, and then a sequence of two simple steps, an odd number of double steps, an optional double simple step, an odd number of *reprises*, and finally a single *branle*.²⁹⁸ This formula was the foundation upon which the dancers created their own combinations. With such simple ground rules, this was not difficult. The handbooks only served as a point of reference.²⁹⁹ They provided basic models that were easy to adapt. The more experienced the dancer, the more freedom they enjoyed, especially as the musical compositions show that the dance and the accompaniment were fairly independent: “the music and the steps each have their own structure, which move in parallel but seldom exactly coincide except at the beginning and the end of dance.”³⁰⁰ This shows the flexibility of the *basse danse* form at this early stage of development, or at least that a strict codification seemed unnecessary to the authors of the first French texts on dance.

²⁹⁷ Data on the *basse danse* handbooks comes from: *ibid.*, pp. 166–167.

²⁹⁸ Chaganti notes something interesting: in the *basse danse* we have alternating steps forward (*single* and *double*) and backward (*reprise*), punctuated with turns to one side (*branle*). According to the author, this corresponds with the dual nature of time. The step backward is a dip into the past, a step forward is a progressive experience. As such, we may even say that the *basse danse* interweaves a medieval sensitivity (a step backward) and a modern progressivism (a step forward), which problematizes an approach to this dance in simple evolutionary categories. The time of the *basse danse* is ambivalent, with no strict vector. It joins dynamism and regressive contemplation.

²⁹⁹ In the Nancy text we are dealing with something like rough notes, and not a polished treatise.

³⁰⁰ Wilson, “The Basse Dance c. 1445–c. 1545,” p. 169. I also provide the structure of the *basse danse* from: *ibid.*, pp. 168–169.

This freedom of dance compositions was, however, gradually restricted in the sixteenth century. While earlier texts in the Burgundy sphere of influence gave the impression of being uncomplicated, free, and even seemed to encourage improvisation, when France gained a hegemony, and then forged close cultural ties with the Italian cities, this was a catalyst for the gradual standardization of the *basses danses*. We see this in the next three texts on the form. First, there is a recorded sequence of fifty-four *basses danses* signed “Scribaldi,” written in 1517 and stored in Turin. Second, we have a comic poem titled *Leges Dansandi* by one Antonius Arena, written in pig Latin and published in Lyons, probably in 1528. The poem is a *basses danses* handbook for students, presupposing that this dance was the ideal form for initiating male-female relations. Finally, in around 1535, probably in Lyons, and most likely published by Jacques Moderne, we have an updated re-edition of Toulouze’s work, in which we find forty-two dance arrangements.³⁰¹

The most important novelty in these source texts is the division between *basse danse commune* and *basse danse incommune*. The former might be called the standard *basse danse*, as it introduced a strictly defined sequence of steps that precisely corresponded to the musical pattern. This meant reducing the demands set for the dancer, who “for the first time [...] did not need to know more than one sequence of steps for the *basse danse*.”³⁰² This simplification was tied to two phenomena. First, the spread of a desire to master the refined court dance, as a symbol of personal sophistication. More and more people wanted to dance like the aristocracy. Second, and perhaps more importantly, dance became a means of unification. There was a demand for a specific kind of dancing, one which could be mastered by as many people as possible. The sources also indicate a striving to reinforce the cultural hegemony: a kinetic model was needed to create a sense of community, but it also operated as an instrument to subordinate individuals to this community. The French dances became less whimsical, and more ceremonial than the Italian ones. Individual creativity no longer prevailed in the combination of steps – it was a collective recreation of their arrangements; not a diversification of the material, but a united, shared basis.

This does not mean we ought to see the *basse danse commune* as an openly political project. In Arena and Moderne we are dealing more with an unconscious manifestation of a wider tendency – a turn toward standardization, the formulaic. This turn was still tentative, only percolating, yet intriguing. This did not mean that variations vanished entirely. Apart from the standard dances, more experienced dancers performed *basses danses incommunes*. For example, in a work attributed to Moderne, there are far more of these than of the *communes* type; they also become

³⁰¹ Quoted from: *ibid.*, p. 173.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 174.

increasingly difficult and refined.³⁰³ Nonetheless, the division itself deserves our attention. In Domenico or Guglielmo we were not dealing with a totalizing main movement opposed to a virtuosity for the select. Everyone had the same requirements, building the political body's sense of power as a relatively uniform whole. After Italian dance culture was adapted to the needs of France, inserted in a society with a more hierarchical tradition, this unity fell apart. In its place came two qualities of movement in court culture: levelled kinesis (now less in the spirit of the elemental folk than of modern standardization) and elitarian kinesis (increasingly focused on display).

The division between mainstream and virtuoso dance is especially visible in Arena's work.³⁰⁴ Its tone is fairly lighthearted, not to say facetious.³⁰⁵ This is a guidebook to good manners, which the author says ought to be learned for one main reason – to win the attraction of the fairer sex. This set the stage for his remarks on grace, being sensitive to the rhythm of the music, and the importance of a respectable appearance. Arena reminds us to dance neither too wildly nor too listlessly. He writes of the necessity of dressing well, and suggests that no expense be spared for the music, that lighting be made adequate, and above all, that there be wine. Eloquence is essential in the conversations between dances, all the ladies must be given a chance to dance during an evening, even if they are less than beautiful, and, finally, he reminds dancers to smile. He also admonishes the reader not to dance with his mouth hanging open (a fly could fly in), not to salivate, not to have a runny nose, not to blow bad breath in his partner's face, especially if it smells of onions or leeks, not to step as though struggling to defecate, and finally, under no circumstances to flatulate. This last advice was mainly, though not exclusively, found in additions to later editions. We will have occasion to return to this physiological aspect of the text. But first, let us have a look at the divisions the author introduces.

We can find three basic kinds of dance in the *Leges Dansandi*. The first is favored by village simpletons:

They run continually without respecting the cadence [the arrangement of steps] and invent everything out of their heads: *singles*, *reprises*, *congés*,³⁰⁶ *doubles* and everything to one single measure. [...] They make a reverence so vigorously that, believe me, they turn up a spadeful of soil with their foot. They do the *branles* boisterously, country-style,

³⁰³ Ibid., pp. 174–176.

³⁰⁴ I base my thoughts on the English translation by John Guthrie and Marino Zorzi: Antonius Arena, "The Rules of Dancing," *Dance Research* 1986, Vol. 4, No. 2, pp. 3–53.

³⁰⁵ This is particularly evident when we look not only into the first edition, but also the supplements in later printings. These are provided in the Guthrie and Zorzi translation.

³⁰⁶ A *Congéess* a swaying movement, without lifting the feet from the floor; it is described by Arena in detail.

and everyone thinks himself a past master of dancing. [...] Peasant folk never keep time when they are dancing, and they know very little about *doubles* and *singles*.³⁰⁷

This dance – spontaneous, vivacious, merry, mostly chaotic and simple – is what Arena holds in contempt. It is the embodiment of everything from which a distinguished person should distance himself. We know this tone from Guglielmo's work. Yet here we should note an accusation which the latter did not make: the country folk dance deplorably because they just make everything up. They do not keep to the cadence, a knowledge of which was a sign of refinement.

At the other end of the spectrum are the dance experts: “they ornament the steps yet are always in time to the music.”³⁰⁸ They are capable of going beyond the formulae of the *basses danses communes*, they experiment with the forms they are given and push dance in new directions. The innovators know more sophisticated cadences and often succumb to the temptation to shine at the expense of other participants using a self-serving strategy: they arrange for the musicians to play dances which are unfamiliar.³⁰⁹ On the one hand, Arena accuses the dance *virtuosi* of excessive vanity; on the other he clearly admires those who are particularly civilized, walking in the footsteps of the “kings, queens, counts and barons [who] all dance themselves and command others to dance.”³¹⁰ For Arena, their dance is a summit of the kinetic hierarchy, a not quite attainable ideal, a measure of perfection. This is also why the author does not, in fact, place himself among them, but one rung below. His handbook is not a lesson in virtuosity, it is a call to come up to the median.

Arena phrases his credo thusly: “It is a fine thing for young men to dance in time and to move their feet neatly and in the right way; and it is proper that refined folk do not make mistakes when they are dancing; to dance badly is a great disgrace.”³¹¹ He continues: “Many gallants who join in the dance do not even know how to do the *basse danse*.”³¹² The *basse danse* was this average to which Arena devotes most of his treatise. Virtuosity is for the chosen ones, while pure spontaneity is merely primitive. This meant seeking a kinetic space between these extremes, a shared, secure, and certain space. This is ensured by the standard *basse danse*. Our forefathers, Arena writes, performed a great variety of dances, but “nowadays, usual practice requires that only the common dances (*communes*) be done.”³¹³ Dancing

³⁰⁷ Arena, “The Rules of Dancing,” p. 19.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 32.

³¹⁰ Ibid., p. 9.

³¹¹ Ibid., p. 8.

³¹² Ibid., p. 9.

³¹³ Ibid., p. 12.

in time and to the cadence of steps, at all costs avoiding mistakes – this is the catchism of *Leges Dansandi*.³¹⁴

Wherefore this lack of ambition? We can only speculate, following the clues left by the author of the introduction to the English translation, Joan Rimmer. First of all, we should note the author's social standing. He came from a wealthy, but not aristocratic family, and thus fell in the middle of the social hierarchy.³¹⁵ Second, when he wrote his poem he was a student of law at the University in Avignon and was writing for his fellow students. They, in turn, came from various environments and often were not even aware of the *basse danse*, to say nothing of the more refined forms. These young people veered dangerously close to provinciality.³¹⁶ They had to be taught; in a witty, satirical way, but taught nonetheless, and discouraged from creativity. As we read in an opening fragment: "I would like to describe the common dances which will suffice when you wish to dance."³¹⁷

In Arena we find a man caught between two worlds, whose kinesis falls between the refinement of the elite, which is an unattainable ideal, yet which, to some degree at least, ought to be emulated,³¹⁸ and the simplicity of the dancing folk. Simplicity is a constant presence in this text, as revealed by the brutal commentaries on physiological acts, which had to be decisively rejected. This meant eliminating a sense of freedom or any disobedience. The result was a sober, composed, quite common-sense sort of dance, a "middle-of-the-road" dance, devoid of higher ambitions.

This down-to-earth approach is found in practically every line of the poem. We see it in the constant reminders that dance is essentially a way of securing a woman's favor. At the very opening, Arena makes a clear declaration that this was his reason for writing the text, a point he often reiterates. How far we are from Guglielmo's ambitions! No ancient deities, no mystic numbers. Merely a set of clear-headed reminders to make the most of life. As we read in an especially significant fragment: "Time flies as quickly as water flows. Dance while you are fleet of foot since when you are dead you will dance no more; in Paradise there are no drums."³¹⁹

There are no drums in paradise, and so nor does anyone dance there. The *basse danse* is thus a purely sensory, non-mystical pleasure. To achieve pleasure, we ought to restrain our physical impulses, submit our bodies to a process of sublimation,

³¹⁴ This religious terminology is no accident. Arena writes: "when you know by heart the steps of which every dance is composed make an effort to memorise each individual dance well, just as you do the *Pater Noster* or the *Credo*" (ibid., p. 15).

³¹⁵ Ibid., p. 3.

³¹⁶ Ibid., p. 4.

³¹⁷ Ibid., p. 11.

³¹⁸ Arena often writes of emulation and practice being the best teachers of dance. In particular we ought to note his recommendation of taking part in banquets held by families who commit a great deal of time to them (ibid., p. 26). We need not add that these were families of the upper crust, as only they could afford such an expense.

³¹⁹ Ibid., p. 10.

but only to ultimately enjoy a physical reward, a kiss, a point with which Arena seems truly obsessed: “So then, you who desire to caress the girls and kiss them long and sweetly, must learn the correct way to dance: a thousand joys flow from the dance.”³²⁰ This is a striking comparison indeed – a “correct” dance and the delight of kisses. Obeying the rules as a source of ecstasy?

A Fashion for Spectacles

Now we need to take a deeper look at the standardization of dance in Arena. What cultural forces caused it emerge? We might note that the hierarchy that can be extrapolated from *Leges Dansandi* is no surprise. The twilight of the Middle Ages in France was a period in which the social and political significance of the central authorities was increasing. The feudal lords gradually grew weaker, but did not go down without a fight.³²¹ This tendency was accompanied by a reinforcement of hierarchical divisions, unlike in Italian cities, where we observed a move toward democracy. French Renaissance society remained bound in the shackles of its hierarchical mindset. This led, of course, to increasingly frequent reevaluations, which mainly involved strengthening the position of the cities. More and more often, it was possible to advance to the upper echelons through hard work and entrepreneurship. Nonetheless, every advance signified less the rise of the middle class than the advance of the individual, who sought to enter an aristocratic class that nurtured its old ethos. We see this clearly in Arena when we consider the idealization of the wealthiest families spending their time on unproductive excesses such as dance. The French bourgeoisie aspired to this model, it dreamed of joining this consumption. This meant that doing business and earning money remained less than prestigious. And yet Arena does mention money. At one moment, offering what he feels to be one of his most precious bits of advice, he writes: “solving the problem thus is worth three hundred ducat; do not forget this and remember me.”³²² This aside is in jest, yet significant. No Italian dancing master expressed a hope to earn such a sum. As we recall, they were highly impressed by material splendor. They relished descriptions of clothing, décor, food. Yet there was no bookkeeping in their writings. In *Leges Dansandi* we find a trace of this.

The dance of a student of law like Arena was a middle-class dance of a man partway there, essentially incomplete. How could his social shortcomings be compensated for? What was the most certain path to social advancement at that time?

³²⁰ Ibid., p. 9.

³²¹ This is described in detail by Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process...*, pp. 195–256.

³²² Ibid., p. 14.

Arena suggested emulating aristocratic lifestyles, though he did not fully believe in its efficacy. In this respect, however, he was an atypical member of the bourgeoisie – he seemed content with his place. Most longed to rise to the sublime aristocracy, becoming *virtuosi* in dance and manners. There was a specific way forward. If we are to reconstruct this, we need to delve into the works of the French humanists of the day who spoke of the hierarchy.

The Renaissance mind was incapable of freeing itself from the notion of hierarchy. There were plenty of texts describing the Chain of Being, and man's place in it was constantly being examined. Italy set the tone. The *Oration on the Dignity of Man* was read, and attempts were made to adopt its pathos. Pico taught that man, though he was between the animals and the angels, was in fact the crowning glory of creation, because he shaped himself. We may recall his activism. In France, this was creatively interpreted. When Bovillus wrote of man as the crowning glory of creation, he foregrounded intellectual capacity. Here we see an important ideal of the French Renaissance – rational, systematic thinking. “For only a man devoted to study is entirely complete, that is, three times a man: a man by nature, a man in terms of maturity, a man by action.”³²³ This was a rationale that opened the opportunity for social advancement through one's abilities, not birthright. Bovillus wrote:

only the wise man is a true man. He alone has elevated his soul from the lower rungs to the summit of reason, alone he has providentially tended to his nature and substance. He is a man not only by nature's good graces [as are a nobleman by blood and a peasant], [...] but above all, he becomes a man through a noble life, through his valor and his deeds.³²⁴

This was seconded by Budaeus: “Nothing is more inborn to a man than intelligence, which is the mother of all invention, thus by natural instinct, the more one's mind towers above others, the more he is ready and yearns to seek out something new.”³²⁵ This implied a new aristocracy of the intelligent and innovative, capable of rationally looking into the substance of the world, of systematic cogitation that allowed them to be creative in the world.

Set against this backdrop the dancer of the *basses danses communes* was a man in only two senses of the word, as broken down by Bovillus: he was a creature with a body and a rational soul, a person “whose body had perfectly developed, who had grown to become a man.”³²⁶ Yet he lacked creativity, which Arena, as we recall, ascribed solely to the experts. As a result, for dance culture to develop,

³²³ Charles de Bouelles, “Człowiek prawdziwy,” trans. Bogusław Sławomir Kunda, in: Nowicki (ed.), *Filozofia francuskiego Odrodzenia...*, p. 78.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 78–79.

³²⁵ Guillaume Bude, “O inwencji,” trans. Andrzej Nowicki, in: Nowicki (ed.), *Filozofia francuskiego Odrodzenia...*, p. 114.

³²⁶ De Bouelles, “Człowiek prawdziwy,” p. 78.

it could not share the objections of the author of *Leges Dansandi* – it placed its hopes on development, creativity, and a far-spanning rationality. As such, it was not the average dancer praised by Arena who triumphed, but the virtuoso, whom he viewed with mistrust. The patronage of the monarch was important in this process; he understood quite swiftly that he ought to use the creativity of the advancing social powers for his own ends. The virtuosity of subjects' bodies could be used to highlight the power of the ruler. As a result, the humanists had very close relationships with the kings of France, and one outcome of this was increasingly complicated dance spectacles.

Medieval France was, of course, familiar with dance as spectacle. We might recall from the previous chapter that important political events were accompanied by ceremonies in which people danced less for the pure pleasure of movement than for show. We might call these ideologized dances. We know next to nothing about the movements they involved. We may only assume they were based on the *carole* and *tresche*, sometimes drawing from the *moresca*. The choreographic details are, however, essentially of secondary importance. It is important that in the fourteenth century we find movement performances with a concrete, though quite simple, main thought, which conformed to the political program of the patrons of the dance profession. The ruler discovered the potential of the dance spectacle for propaganda.

Ideological performances did not have to be held in public. In fact, the most famous dance spectacle in fourteenth-century France was essentially private. The wife of Charles VI, Isabeau of Bavaria, decided to hold a masked ball to celebrate the remarriage of a lady in her court.³²⁷ Part of this was a dance show, in which the king and several courtiers played “savages.”³²⁸ They were meant to perform an ecstatic dance clothed in fantastical costumes, utterly concealing their figures under layers of linen, tar, and hair. And so it went, until the king's brother came too close to one of them with a burning torch. The costume immediately caught fire, which then began spreading to the other dancers. The king was saved only through the quick thinking of one of the ladies, who hid him under her skirts, smothering the fire. One of the courtiers saved himself by leaping into a wine barrel. Four people died, however. The event spread far and wide. The Parisians, who saw it as proof that the rulers were thoroughly corrupt, were near to revolt. The court had to do a penitential procession, and the culprit of the affair was made to fund

³²⁷ This was one of numerous attempts to save the mentally ill king. Charles VI's doctor prescribed that the king be disturbed with work as little as possible, and supplied with entertainment.

³²⁸ The “savage” motif was extremely popular at the time. They were depicted as hirsute and bestial in their movements. In this we might see an image of man without God, in contact with demons and evil. Dances of savages here would be a kind of social exorcism aimed at the pagan element that was still present in the daily lives of much of the society. Cf. Jan R. Veenstra, *Magic and Divination at the Courts of Burgundy and France: Text and Context of Laurens Pignon's "Contre les devineurs" (1411)*, New York 1997, pp. 89–95.

a chapel. For a great many years afterward people spoke of the Ball of the Burning Men (French: *Bal des Ardents*). In the latter half of the fifteenth century this motif appeared in miniatures, of which one attributed to the Master of the Harley Froissart and the Master of Vienna, rendered between 1470 and 1472, is a particularly charming illustration for Jean Froissart's *Chronicle* (Ill. 24). The intensity of the colors and the dynamics of the composition, especially in the center of the picture, give us a good sense of the mayhem and the remarkable energy of the event. The dance of the "savages," threatening and vulgar in their primitive appearance, becomes authentically terrifying when the bodies begin to burn. The courtly form vanishes, revealing the flesh of human bodies.³²⁹ These were the Middle Ages that stereotypes are wont to depict, yet the event also spelled out the medieval search for a form to aestheticize aristocratic physicality. If the fire had not broken out, a spectacle of the triumph of civilization over barbarity would have been enacted. This was a theme that was to be gradually developed and explored.

Though medieval France knew and organized show dances, they were fairly plain compared to the Italian ones. Small wonder, then, that when the kings of Paris began to conquer the Apennine Peninsula, the spectacles organized there were swiftly transplanted to France, with a focus on enhancing technique. This narrative we know from dance history textbooks – Charles VIII dancing with two ladies at a ball in Sienna in 1495, Louis XII bringing a beautiful copy of Guglielmo's work to France in 1499, and finally, Francis I being so taken with the dance culture of Milan after he took the city in 1515, that later, on his way home, he enjoyed a dance practically every evening.³³⁰ The story goes that France was infected by Italian grace, elegance, and rationality in dance, their fascination for the intermedia and *moresche* paved the way for increasingly splendid court entertainments (Ill. 25), with increasingly extravagant masquerades, finally creating a truly original effect – the court ballet. We would not seek to discredit this narrative, but we will be searching deeper than merely the consecutive stages of the French dance spectacle's development.

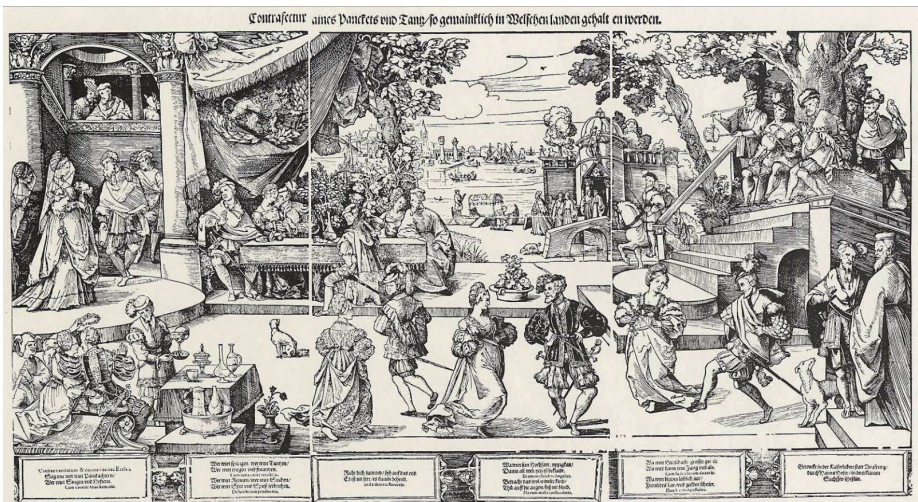
Charles VIII and Louis XII had succumbed to the charms of Terpsichore, but not until Francis I was it made a more complex tool in a political game. This does not mean he took an instrumental approach to dance. On the contrary, he himself was most fond of dancing and watching dance, both of which he found to be a sensory pleasure. This explains his liking for the *ballo* and *moresca*, and above

³²⁹ In a description noted in a chronicle by a monk of Saint Denis we find a highly obscene image of flaming genitalia falling to the floor and accompanying streams of blood (Veenstra, *Magic and Divination...*, p. 91).

³³⁰ Margaret M. McGowan, *Dance in the Renaissance: European Fashion, French Obsession*, New Haven–London 2008 – this has been a basic source of information for this chapter.



24. Master of the Harley Froissart, Master of Vienna, *Le Bal des Ardents* (Ball of the Burning Men), illustration for Jean Froissart's *Chronicles*, ca. 1470–1472



25. Jörg Breu the Younger, *Gartenfest in Venedig* (Feast in a Garden in Venice), woodcut, 1539

all, the masquerade.³³¹ This last may be seen as a crucial link in the development of the dance spectacle. Margaret M. McGowan describes it thus:

Masquerades required a minimum of preparation: some costume designs and their making up in rich materials, and a simple choreography invented to match the chosen theme. A group of twelve dancers or so, dressed alike in silk garments of the same color, might come in dancing steps that were differentiated from social dancing in that – although the basic structures of the dances might be the same [...] mimicking gestures were added to their performance, [...] designed to communicate the meaning of the symbols already inscribed on their costumes.³³²

As such, masquerades held the rudiments of a dance narrative, the grain of approaching dance in terms of a story, continuing a trend that was visible in some *balli* and *bassadanze*, *intermedia* and *moresche*. In these masquerades, the king and his closest circle enjoyed both taking part and watching, as they did the social dances characteristic of various regions of France and other countries. Yet their aim was not merely entertainment.

Francis I understood perfectly that spectacles played a major political role. This is why he made use of them in his international contacts, to show his competitors the might of the French Crown. Some examples are the famous ceremonies at the Field of the Cloth of Gold (*Camp du Drap d'Or*) in 1520, during which a competition for the most sumptuous dance was staged between the rulers of France and England,³³³ and the extravagant masquerades that accompanied the French Crown's contacts with the Habsburgs and the Italian states, including the Papacy.³³⁴ In this respect, the ability to organize a brilliant masquerade was an expression of the internal strength of the king, and with him, the state. Dressed in the most luxurious garb, dancers moved with the utmost mastery, embodying the imagined power of the monarch. The *moresca* or masquerade could have been inspired by a mythical tale, it could have had a subject that seemed utterly divorced from the political reality, but it was in fact a demonstration of mobilization capacities, comparable to a military parade.

Equally political, though in a different respect, were the spectacles regularly organized at the court, less for foreign guests than for the national elite. These were ceremonies tied to important events in the life of the royal family, wealthy marriages, or for no special occasion. McGowan claims that dance became a tool of internal politics here, for managing divisions and conflicts.

³³¹ Francis I simply enjoyed dressing up in all sorts of costumes – he danced as a priest, a Turk, a bear, and even a tree (McGowan, *Dance in the Renaissance...*, p. 135).

³³² *Ibid.*, p. 61.

³³³ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 132–133.

According to a letter written by Catherine de Médicis in 1563 for the edification of her son Charles IX, François I had indulged in court entertainments not only for his own delectation but as a deliberate strategy. It was necessary, he had maintained (and Catherine reported) that restless members of the court be diverted, kept busy, and entertained with dancing, hunting, and other such pursuits, distracting their attention from engaging in harmful plots against the interests of the crown.³³⁵

Though Francis I's rule was fairly peaceful in terms of internal affairs, this was the calm before the storm. Religious, economic, and world-view differences were spreading in society. The conflict between the Protestants and the Catholics was deepening, caused in part by the king himself in the Affair of the Placards, which involved burning such "heretics" as Dolet at the stake, causing the expulsion of Calvin, and, above all, giving the order in 1545 to punish the Waldens for abandoning the true faith, culminating in the Mérindol Massacre. Increasing tensions were felt around the king, tied to the ongoing economic and cultural transformation. Capital became more and more important than land. Paris was swelling, as were other cities, like Lyons and Toulouse. Of course, the great majority of people lived in the country, but in general, trade and business were increasingly what counted in society. Francis I tried to develop contacts with the Levant, he also supported initiatives to colonize the New World. This was part of a game the Habsburgs were to play throughout the century, though it also was part of a general logic of civilizational development. In France, as in Italy, business began to play a more powerful role. This did not mean the collapse of the traditional nobility. On the contrary, the whole century was dominated by the rivalry of noble factions, though this rivalry also faced pressures from the transformation. The noble class was increasingly divided, less and less sure of its position, more and more dependent on social moods and economic trends, though it stubbornly denied it. The religious wars, blending religion, politics, and economics exposed this completely.³³⁶ The situation was highly tense, and this was why, however paradoxical it sounds, there was more and more dancing.

There is an escapism in the French Renaissance fashion for dance, which we do not find in such concentration in the Italian dance of the previous century. This escapism can, to some extent, explain the passion of Francis I and his entourage for creative masquerades. Yet this was also a shift toward spectacular forms of dance as an attempt to shape social relations, to control the increasingly dangerous disagreements, which Catherine described in the letter cited above. Let us have a look at her politics, especially as they pertained to dance, to show this wishful thinking.

³³⁵ Ibid., p. 128.

³³⁶ Cf. Elias, *The Civilizing Process...*, p. 342.

More than dance, Catherine's husband, Henri II, enjoyed military recreations – tournaments, staged castle raids, armed skirmishes of all types. This limited the amount of dance at court, but only to some degree.³³⁷ The king had danced since childhood, and even if it was not his greatest passion, his wife, who had been raised in Italian court culture, would not let him stop. The court began entertaining more and more experts on spectacles from Italy. They were visual artists, such as the famous Francesco Primaticcio, who was mainly a painter, but also a stage and costume designer who moved to Paris in the 1530s. For our purposes, however, the crucial figures were the dancing masters who taught the kings of the House of Valois and their children. There were masters from abroad: Ludovico Palvello, Pompeo Diabone, and Virgilio Bracesco.³³⁸ They helped the courtiers to become better dancers and gave the dance performances the polish they needed. They were the first generation of dance intellectuals to rationalize this field of art for the rulers' purposes. They made dance culture in France more complex. The spectacles became more studied and refined. The form with which Catherine sought to harness the gathering storm could not be primitive. This is why we observe a striking phenomenon – dance culture flourished in the years of religious wars. An extremely idealistic genre of dance, courtly ballet, was forged practically in the fires of war.

We know that, following the sudden death of Henri II in 1559, France found itself at a crossroads. The young King Francis II was weak. The House of Guise grappled for real power against the faction around the King of Navarre. This rift between the nobility was primarily religious, yet it was also a symptom of a general confusion in the French society. The sympathies of the Parisians, for example, were highly varied – initially the House of Guise was cursed, and then a few years on they were supported. The bourgeoisie took no firm stance; having yet to be established, they pooled their resources and exploited the divisions. The influential Catholic Church, on the other hand, backed the House of Guise. Francis II soon passed away, replaced by Charles IX, though this only exacerbated the situation. While it is true that Catherine reigned on her son's behalf, and that she and Chancellor Michel de L'Hospital attempted to introduce conciliatory policies, her tactics were ineffective, as the Massacre of Vassy (1562) was soon to reveal. The first religious war broke out (1562–1563), ending in a frail truce. The kingdom was falling apart from within; Catherine attempted to counteract this by setting off with her son on a grand tour of the country. Dances were held on this tour whenever possible. The king and his entourage danced, the local inhabitants danced in praise of him. Documents preserve traces of numerous balls, masquerades, *moresche*, and highly innovative spectacles.

³³⁷ McGowan, *Dance in the Renaissance...*, p. 145.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 10, 12.

We ought to have a look at the ceremony in Fontainebleau in 1564. It seems hard to believe that only a year after military operations drew to a close, with all the unhealed wounds, such entertainment would have been conceivable,³³⁹ and yet it was. The ceremonies were organized with great pomp. Deferring to Charles's fondness for all things knightly, a great many battles and sieges were staged. A certain piquancy was added by the participation of the Prince de Condé, a leader of the Protestants, by then called the Huguenots. This might have been barely comprehensible, given that fighting skills were often honed in tempestuous times. Yet how might we understand the Prince de Condé dancing in masquerades? Here we touch upon a nerve.

As we have mentioned, among the ruling class were people raised on humanist ideals. Behind the narrative layer of the spectacles in Fontainebleau was the first poet of France of that period, Pierre de Ronsard, who, perhaps more than any other Pléiade author, was attuned to the beauty of movement. Taking a closer look at Ronsard's phrases, we might be able to reconstruct the nerve we mentioned. Violence sullies the body both physiologically and metaphysically. It annihilates it and soils innocence. Blood spilled on the battlefield taints ordinary, sensual joy. At this point the compensation mechanism kicks in. There is a yearning for an ethereal body and movement. This does not mean bodies do not appear in Ronsard, but this is a peculiar physicality. It contains something hopeless, practically hysterical, as in the *Stanzas*:

Your skull will no longer have any skin, and your face, which is now so lovely, will have neither veins nor arteries; you will have only teeth such as are seen in the skulls in cemeteries.

Therefore, while you are alive, mistress mine, change your mind, and do not begrudge me your mouth; very soon you will die, and then you will repent of once having been harsh to me.³⁴⁰

In this fragment we are struck by the juxtaposition of the grotesque imagery (typical for its day) and a longing for the purely sensual. This sensuality may seem to be sheer eroticism, but when we lend an ear to the melodies of Ronsard's poems, when we grasp their mood, we discover how hypnotic, or nearly narcoleptic his world really is. In Ronsard, the erotic is an almost mystical ecstasy, loosing itself from the here and now. It has none of the generic, only the subtle softness of the words embracing the reader. This is eroticism with Lucretian strains, providing a sense of immersion in Being. The body Ronsard adores in his most beautiful verses is

³³⁹ For a description of the ceremony, see: *ibid.*, pp. 157–161.

³⁴⁰ Translated by Malcolm Quainton, in: Pierre de Ronsard, *Selected Poems*, London–New York 2002, pp. 16–17.

one of mystical unity with the whole of creation;³⁴¹ it is an utter denial of the violence his eyes had to witness.

McGowan speaks of a faith in the transformative power of dance as characteristic of the kinesis of the period.³⁴² We can only agree, especially when we look at Ronsard and his activities in Fontainebleau. This was where he created an idyllic pastoral masquerade – a ballet or eclogue – titled *La Bergerie (The Sheepfold)*. The protagonists were male and female shepherds, played by children being brought up in the royal court. Singing and dancing in a circle, holding hands, they praised Catherine and Charles as their hope for the return of a Golden Era. The dance of the court children was as absolutely innocent and carefree as the social knot was tangled. The children's bodies slowly twirling in the shepherds' costumes – hard to imagine an image further from the atmosphere of those times, but this is just why it renders it so perfectly. There is something ghastly in this naive *Sheepfold*, and yet the rift between Ronsard's tale and reality was an attempt to wish this reality different, to make it bearable, as it was equally unreal. Why was violence to be the ultimate reality, if dreaming was equally evocative?

In Ronsard's work we find an ambiguous yearning – for a sense of pure devotion, for belonging. This is a dream of an extrasensory body produced by the kinetic politics of pastoral idealization. As if this shift into the land of fantasy gave power to the real, material body. The innocence of the shepherds becomes that of the ideal subjects. Not those who are at each other's throat, but those who cooperate in the communion of a shared body. There is something erotic in this picture; this dream denies death, while in fact originating from it.

Ronsard's spectacle, much like his poetry, was wishful thinking, a challenge to the world, that was suspended between despair, naivety, and arrogance. This challenge may prompt a condescending smile, yet it also engenders a strange sort of respect in its uncompromising courage. It seems to us that this is the only way to explain the participation of Condé in the ceremonies. The Protestant leader was also engaged in wishful thinking and immersed in hopes. Here he saw eye-to-eye with Catherine, at any rate. The stitch with which the Queen sought to patch reality – the ideological spectacle – was erratic, it tore, yet still she wove the thread of hope. There was a stubborn will to live in plays like *The Sheepfold*, one that was deeply ingrained in the machinations of Catherine and the resistance of Condé. This is surely why they could practically dance together in Fontainebleau.

³⁴¹ On the Orphic and Neoplatonic origins of his work and the notion of the cosmic energy of love as a foundation of being and the dance of the whole of creation as its product, translating into dance motifs in various poems, see: Thomas M. Greene, "Labyrinth Dances in the French and English Renaissance," *Renaissance Quarterly* 2001, Vol. 54, No. 4, Part 2, pp. 1423–1428, 1434–1444.

³⁴² McGowan, *Dance in the Renaissance...*, pp. 209–228.

Regulated Sociability

Idealistic spectacles like *La Bergerie* were undoubtedly escapist, but their creators and their patrons hoped they would show society the way out of the crisis. This meant form, harmony, and grandeur (*magnifique*) were pivotal, intersecting in the plans to structure the spectacle's substance. While Francis I's masquerades retained a ludic quality, and they did have a certain spontaneous energy to them, the spectacles *à la Ronsard* had no such thing. These aimed more for a mastery of a sophisticated composition, the seductive shine of the whole, which was to be as fine-tuned as possible. This is why spectacles became increasingly multifaceted and there were growing demands set before the participants.

The Pléiade circles, with Ronsard among them, as well as Joachim du Bellay and Jean-Antoine de Baïf, spearheaded attempts to refine court spectacles. A typically Renaissance idea emerged – to allude to antiquity. They attempted to make their works evocative in the manner of the Greek theater. They strove for the total synthesis of the arts, for only a total work, combining poetry, music, and dance, could produce the impression of power, seducing the audience and generating a sense of fulfillment; only this union had true authority. Baïf spoke particularly emphatically about the ancient ideal of joining the arts. Among his scripts were those for spectacles organized in 1565 in Bayonne, regarded as the apogee of the king's aforementioned tour of France with his mother. At this early stage, Baïf attempted to create a modern version of the *chorei*. Yet he only fully gave himself to this task in 1571, when Charles IX entrusted him with the direction of the Academie de Poesie et de Musique (Academy of Poetry and Music). It is as if royal patronage were necessary for initiating a discourse of a total work for the stage, prefiguring the later thoughts on opera and, ultimately, the notion of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, which was equally entangled in the dream of power.

We should recall that the notion of the synthesis of the arts did not appear overnight. Before Baïf, Ronsard and Pontus de Tyard had sought correspondences between poetry and music. They longed for the two to strengthen one another. Thus the musicality of their lyrics, and Ronsard's especially. Baïf added dance to the equation. This was his discovery – dance as the equivalent of a musical phrase and a poetic tone.³⁴³ More precisely – his discovery was rhythm as a force to structure all forms of expression. Baïf first longed to make poetry rhythmic and metrical. This gives him a place in the French literary history textbooks. Yet we are interested in his conviction that a poem's rhythm is to be part of music and dance. This led to the creation of a kinetic-acoustic machine, with which Baïf sought to change the stage spectacle. This was not, of course, a soulless machine. Yet of freedom and

³⁴³ For more on the topic, see: *ibid.*, pp. 41–47.

order, he chose the latter, like many of his century, and his tool was rhythm. This fit the policies of the monarch, who viewed himself as the source and guarantor of this order, the subject of the rhythm-generating process.

The work of the members of the Pléiade in spectacles introduced the premise of the kinetic structure – generating rhythm for the dance to give it a compositional coherence, making it conform to a pre-established, theoretical model. This tendency appeared by the 1560s, in the masquerades set up by Catherine and Charles IX, yet the structuring occurred outside of theatrical forms as well. Social dancing also became increasingly regulated and rigid in its forms. This turn toward Order accelerated with the regulation of court life under the successor to Charles IX, Henri III. The new king loathed crowds, confusion, and feeling as though he were not in control. This is why he strove to gain more distance from his subjects. To this end, he introduced more rigorous standards of behavior in his presence, seeking to subject everything to procedures. Dance was apparently one of the king's great passions,³⁴⁴ and it was no exception to this rule.

Henri III “desired his court to be well regulated [...]. In 1585 [the king] created the office of ‘maître de cérémonies,’”³⁴⁵ the symbolic conclusion of years of activities. The balls at the royal court were no longer to be ruled by chance. What did this essentially mean? The dances were arranged in a recurring sequence. Taking a look at it, we can isolate the most important types of social dances of the period,³⁴⁶ though we also note the rigid court ceremony, the effort to logically manage the territory of kinetic pleasures (Ill. 26). By dictate of Henri III, a ball opened with a static, sliding *pavane*, a successor to the *basse danse*. This was a dance of majesty, and also sensuality, whose most perfect rendering Brantôme demonstrated in ca. 1570, performed by Henri III and his sister, Marguerite de Valois, Queen Margot.³⁴⁷ The *pavane* was remarkably popular, even outside the court. By way of contrast, it was generally followed by a quick, peppy *gaillarde*, based on a very simple step, which left room for considerable improvisation, particularly from the male partner (Ill. 27). In the court, however, the *gaillarde* came later. After the *pavane* came time for an *allemande*, a similarly static dance that allowed the courtiers to present their graceful poses and finest attire (Ill. 28). Third came *branle*, a moment to rest from the exacting rules – it was danced in a line, with no clearly set form, based on simple steps, meant to provide the pleasure of being together in a group. The court favored a *branle double*, with a quicker tempo than the *pavane*, while remaining dignified. At the folk or unofficial balls there was also the lively *branle*

³⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 166.

³⁴⁵ Ibid.

³⁴⁶ Described by Irena Turska, *Krótki zarys...*, pp. 94–96. For a more in-depth description, see: McGowan, *Dance in the Renaissance...*, pp. 94–102.

³⁴⁷ Margaret M. McGowan, “Recollections of Dancing Forms from Sixteenth-Century France,” *Dance Research* 2003, Vol. 21, No. 1, p. 10.



26. Unknown, *Un bal a la cour d'Henri III* (Ball at the Court of Henry III), 1570s



Fig. 187 —The Dance called “La Gaillarde.”—Fac-simile of Wood Engravings from the “Orchésographie” of Thoinot Arbeau (Jehan Tabourot): 4to (Langres, 1588).

27. Unknown, illustration for *Orchésographie* by Thoinot Arbeau, woodcut depicting a *gaillarde* dance, 1588

gay, and quickest of all, the *branle de Bourgogne* (Plate II). The *branle* is of particular note, as this was the period’s only collective dance. In the others, the couple was the basic unit, interspersed with solos.

By tradition, after the *branle* the queen would be seated and the quicker dances began, ones requiring the dancers to be fit and technically skilled. Their sequences opened with a *correntes*, also known as the *courantes*, a spry, faster version of



28. South German Master, *Augsburger Geschlechertanz* (Augsburg Mixed Couples Dance), a picture portraying the *allemande* dance, ca. 1500

the *pavane*. According to Turska, the *correntes* “had traits of a stylized pantomime of courtship (the approach, retreat, about turn, trading positions and partners, etc.) and were a full-fledged expression of courtly gallantry.”³⁴⁸ This was not a favorite dance of Henri III, who was most fond of the *volta* that came after the *correntes*.³⁴⁹ This required nearly acrobatic skills, such as airborne twirls, it was very fast and very tiring, and made heads spin – less the dancers’ (anyone who joined this dance would have been well prepared for it) than the moralists’ (the Protestants were its main critics), who found the *volta* to be the most indecent of all dances. Could this have been one reason why it found such favor with the king? Yet the dances did not conclude with the *volta*. The court ball would end with a *gaillarde* for the sturdiest dancers. Following the *volta*, this was a chance to show off technical skills, mainly for the males – the *gaillarde* included a moment when the partners split up, during which the male was meant to dazzle his partner.³⁵⁰ Arena recommended great caution here.³⁵¹ He viewed this as an extravagant novelty. Yet under Henri III, caution was a thing of the past. The *gaillarde* became widespread, though only for those of considerable talent. Their number, however, was continually on the rise.

³⁴⁸ Turska, *Krótki zarys...*, p. 95.

³⁴⁹ McGowan, *Dance in the Renaissance...*, pp. 98–99.

³⁵⁰ We might add that the *volta* and *gaillarde* were the dances that gave professional dancers, who were hired at the courts throughout the Renaissance, room to shine. These professionals only occasionally took part in balls – they mainly prepared dance solos, in which comedy and acrobatics were combined in a single spectacle, more reminiscent of today’s circuses than dance theater. Italian artists from the *commedia dell’arte* tradition were particularly popular here. For more on the subject, see: McGowan, *Dance in the Renaissance...*, pp. 231–236.

³⁵¹ Arena, “The Rules of Dancing,” p. 40.

What does this social ritual tell us? What comes when we juxtapose it with the effort to make the dance spectacle rhythmic? We note that the kinetic logic was increasingly rigid in the French Renaissance. The sequence of the dances could not be left to chance – they moved from slow and majestic to quick and ecstatic, from the building of energy to its release. It had a clear idea, it had discipline. This was how Henri III saw life at court. We may suppose his kinetic politics were driven by personal anxieties, but foremost was the gesture of ritualizing the court balls that depicts the kinetic imagination of the times, shaped by social instability. This was clearly present in the kinesis of the period of religious wars – the desire to structure, define, catalog. Less and less was left to chance, more requirements were set for the dancing body, as in other forms of courtly life. Ceremony, conventions, and physical canons came to the fore.

The complication of conventions was not only characteristic for France. It was also quite visible in Italy, as shown by the numerous handbooks on good manners. Castiglione's *Courtier* is, of course, the key example here, introducing the rigorous demand of the *spezzatura*, the discreet nonchalance. But there were other authors as well – Giovanni della Casa, Annibale Romei, Antonio de Ferraris.³⁵² All of them made grace the crux of good breeding, and this, of course, had a kinetic dimension.³⁵³ These Italians were read throughout Europe. Chief among them was Castiglione, who led the way in verbalizing the era's increasingly complex courtly relations. This game did not derive from a fondness for grace in the abstract; it reflected a more and more intricate social situation, in which divisions became fluid. The significance of individual abilities was ever on the rise, allowing a resourceful person to climb to the heights. But it also became easier to slip downward. All this resulted in an atmosphere of permanent agitation, albeit suppressed by courtly forms, for the entourage of rulers, including the King of France. The *spezzatura* perfectly expresses this constant movement. Emotions were always percolating in the courtiers, forever unsure of their positions, taut as strings, but unable to vent their feelings, and thus they sought to present their dance as entirely effortless. In this striving to give the impression of a total lack of effort,³⁵⁴ we find a nearly inhuman exertion.

To shine at the Parisian court, one had to move in an extremely studied manner, while seeming light-footed and free of affectation. Many years of training were needed for this to happen, even more demanding than the training we described in the context of the Italian Renaissance. This is why it was considered normal among the elite to take dance lessons from a very young age. So it was with Henri

³⁵² Bogdan Suchodolski, *Narodziny nowożytnej filozofii człowieka*, Warsaw 1963, pp. 341–342.

³⁵³ Eugenio Garin, *Philosophy and Civic Life in the Renaissance*, trans. Peter Munz, New York 1965.

³⁵⁴ Castiglione wrote: “the true art is that which seems not to be an art and tries its utmost to conceal it” (quoted in: *ibid.*).

II and his children, and other wealthy figures as well. Italian teachers were indispensable here, as *danse à l'italienne* was synonymous with what was most sophisticated, most artistic.³⁵⁵ This explains the aforementioned Palvello and Diabone being present at court. In their practice we find the sixteenth century's most elaborately codified dance, the most attention to detail. The surviving Italian handbooks, which taught dance finesse to all of Europe, show this splendidly.

As in the texts of the Pléiade, the basic concept is harmony, which brings to mind the Neoplatonic tones we may recall, echoing throughout France in the era, in part through Champier. Among the dancing masters, harmony was addressed, for one, by Rinaldo Corso in *Dialogo del Ballo*, published in 1555.³⁵⁶ He believed that attention to harmony of movement was the key to distinguishing fine, spiritual dance, which could give structure to courtly life (Ill. 29), from provincial dance, or primitive entertainment, deserving only contempt (Ill. 30). This essentially reiterates Guglielmo's argument. Additionally, Corso developed an idea that we also see in Italian theory – the idea of writing dance: “he who dances well is a poet, much as he who writes beautiful verses.”³⁵⁷ This means, in part, the necessity of meeting criteria like those for poets, or writers in general. Dance became a studied form that was governed by certain laws, based on choreographic gestures that were related to rhetorical gestures. A key feature became composition, as a complement to harmony³⁵⁸ and a development of the notion of *disegno*. It brought increasing attention to detail, a yearning to make even the smallest human body movements precise. Compared to the Italian Renaissance, we have a narrowing of the field, moving deeper. Harmony joined with composition yielded a far-reaching kinetic regime.

When we take a look at the works of Fabritio Caroso, one of the best-known dancing masters of the late sixteenth century, the attention to detail becomes striking. True, he was active in the Italian courts, mainly in Rome, but the dance culture he co-created and meticulously described was the same in which Henri III and his courtiers lived – a culture of progressive mastery. The year 1581 saw the release of *Il Ballarino* (The Dancer),³⁵⁹ and nineteen years later, a corrected and supplemented version, essentially a new handbook – *Nobilita di dame* (Noble Ladies),³⁶⁰ a book composed in the form of a dialogue, like many Renaissance works. These texts are

³⁵⁵ We should note that “art” and “artificiality” derive from the same root.

³⁵⁶ Published in 1987 by Alessandro Arcangeli, with his own introduction, as Volume Three in *Antiquae Musicae Italicae Scriptores Veronenses*. It is also briefly described by Gunter Berghaus in “Neoplatonic and Pythagorean Notions of World Harmony and Unity and Their Influence on Renaissance Dance,” *Dance Research* 1992, Vol. 10, No. 2, pp. 61–63.

³⁵⁷ Quoted in: *ibid.*, p. 62.

³⁵⁸ This has been noted by Mark Franko in Chapter One of *Dance as Text: Ideologies of the Baroque Body*, Cambridge 1993, pp. 15–31.

³⁵⁹ An English translation is on-line at: <http://jducoeur.org/IlBallarino/> (accessed 1.03.2015).

³⁶⁰ I use the critical edition of the English translation by Julia Sutton, *Courtly Dance of the Renaissance: A New Translation and Edition of the “Nobilita di dame” (1600) Fabritio Caroso*, New York 1995.



29. Unknown, *Sandrin ou Verd Galant*, woodcut depicting a rural dance, late 16th c.



30. Maarten De Vos, *Has ducunt choreas qui bacchanalia vivvnt* (Here Is a Dance Performed During Bacchanalia), engraving, ca. 1580–1600

emblematic of the period, claims Julia Sutton, translator of *Nobilita di dame*. They most fully define the idiom found in another great dancing master of the time, Cesare Negri, in *La Gratie d'Amore* (The Grace of Love, 1602),³⁶¹ and lesser authors: Livio Lupi (*Libro di gagliarda, tordiglione, passo e mezzo, carari e passeggi* [The Book of Gagliarda, Tordiglione, Passo e Mezzo, Carari e Passeggi],³⁶² 1607), and Prospero Lutii (*Opera bellissima nella quale si contengono molte partite, et passegi di gagliarda* [A Beautiful Work Containing Many Entertainments and the Steps for the Gagliarda], 1587).³⁶³

What most catches our attention in the works of Caroso is a tendency for progressive complications and the systematization of dance. This is visible when we compare *Il Ballarino* and *Nobilita di dame*.³⁶⁴ The demands set before the dancer in *Nobilita di dame* are significantly greater than those in the earlier treatise. Yet the former treatise, when juxtaposed with works by Domenico or Arena, is marked by a greater degree of attention to the details of the performance. Caroso breaks down the dance sequences into single steps, looks minutely at their execution (Ills. 31, 32). Yet this is merely a sketch, as it were, in comparison to the *Nobilita di dame*. Here Caroso fully spreads his pedagogical wings. Nothing escapes his attention: how precisely to doff one's hat, how to bow, to turn to one side, to slide the feet across the floor, to step in various tempos, to invite a lady to dance, to accept an invitation, to sit in expectation of a dance, to take care of one's coat, and how to leave the floor.³⁶⁵ These tips are accompanied by a precise description of seventy-two movements that occurred in the most popular dances of the time. Among these dances Caroso mentions, apart from the forms we have encountered, the subdued *pavaniglia* and the *passo e mezzo* (both of a *pavane* type) and the quick *tordiglione* (a dance related to the French *tourdion*), the *cascarda*, and the *canario*. This repertoire is much greater than in the previous period, and far more developed from a technical perspective. The number of recommendations the experienced teacher provides in dialogue with the beginner is nearly discouraging. Yet only by

³⁶¹ On Negri, and above all his ties to the French court, there is an interesting article by Katherine Tucker McGinnis, "Your Most Humble Subject, Cesare Negri Milanese," in: Nevile (ed.), *Dance, Spectacle...*, pp. 211–228.

³⁶² These are the names of the most popular dances of the day.

³⁶³ Sutton's introduction to the translation of *Nobilita di dame* in *Courtly Dance of the Renaissance...*, pp. 2–3.

³⁶⁴ This is described by Jennifer Nevile, "Rules for Design: Beauty and Grace in Caroso's Choreographies," *Dance Research* 2007, Vol. 25, No. 2, pp. 107–118.

³⁶⁵ Parenthetically speaking, we might call attention to the vast disproportion when it comes to Caroso's requirements for men and women. The former had six general recommendations in terms of ball etiquette, while the latter had fourteen. This trend was seen before, in Guglielmo's treatise, but Caroso suggests a far more thorough grooming of the female body. On the other hand, we should recall that Caroso dedicated most of his dances to particular women, several of whom were his patronesses. Cf. Angene Feves, "Fabritio Caroso's Patronesses," in: Lynn Matluck Brooks (ed.), *Women's Work. Making Dance in Europe before 1800*, Madison, WI–London 2007, pp. 49–70.



31. Giacomo Franco, illustration for *Nobilita di dame* (Noble Ladies) by Fabritio Caroso, drawing, ca. 1600



32. Giacomo Franco, illustration for *Nobilita di dame* (Noble Ladies) by Fabritio Caroso, drawing, ca. 1600

mastering these foundations could one truly become a complete dancer, the kind who could be allowed some freedom. For Caroso was not at all in favor of a total codification of movement. He left room for improvisation,³⁶⁶ for individually chosen ornaments. Yet these were mere additions, the cherry on the cake, to be placed on a rigorously codified foundation – a precise choreography.

Caroso, and with him the elite of the second half of the sixteenth century, perceived dance as a space that was richer, more diverse, but also much more ordered than in the *quattrocento*. The kinesis of the late Renaissance thought in terms of extensive formalization, planning, postulates for a composition as polished as possible, all of which translated into a trained, groomed body that was under complete control. This means we have a movement that operates through attention to detail; it is nuanced. The body was inoculated with a fondness for a complex etiquette. This was meant to bring out its inner essence. This internalization, “habitualization” of court convention must certainly be noted. It was not enough to conform on the outside. The body that had not made convention its alter-ego could not have *spezzatura*. To arrive at that level, one had to love form, live a while with it, never undo its corset, learn in it unto death.³⁶⁷ In this following century this requirement would only be reinforced.

It suffices to glance at the descriptions of dances in *Nobilita di dame* to sense how remarkably demanding dance education was under Catherine de’ Medici and what kind of body was shaped by it. The desire for order was pivotal. We stop short of calling it a bookkeeping of movement, for there could be no talk of soulless bureaucracy in kinesis. Powerful emotions were behind this kind of order. It was underpinned with anxiety, and this is surely why, as in Caroso’s work, it bordered on perfectionism. There is something profoundly moving in the highly insightful description of the proper way to doff one’s cap before a dance at the opening of *Nobilita di dame*. Caroso devotes such attention to few things. Space limitations prevent us from going into too much detail, unfortunately, but a summary seems in order. The correct way to remove one’s hat means that the owner “will not only appear attractive and gracious to all observers, but will also escape any appearance of imperfection.”³⁶⁸ And this is indeed the point – perfection. It is a desire for perfection that is recorded in the dance handbooks of the end of the century, characteristic of the dance protocols of Henri III, a longing that consumed Catherine, and with her Ronsard, Baïf, and Dorat, people of power who on its behalf organized sumptuous spectacles with

³⁶⁶ This is given the term *mutanza*.

³⁶⁷ Caroso speaks indirectly about this in the sixth rule in *Nobilita* (Sutton, *Courtly Dance...*, p. 101), when he stresses that one must keep learning till the end of one’s life, without ever gaining full satisfaction.

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

mythological creatures or pastoral tribes. Sometimes these spectacles were called *magnifique*. This is a fitting moniker, as it evokes a dream, not reality. The kinetic community in Caroso and *La Bergerie* was to be created as a tribute to the ideal of harmony, towering over each body in turn. At the same time, harmony in the real world was unattainable.

The Geometrical “Harmony” of the Fragmented Community

The literature often points out that symmetry was the basic principle of Caroso’s dance theory.³⁶⁹ Yet we must note that this term is being used in a specific manner. As Jennifer Nevile has shown, Caroso’s famous work never uses the word to mean building a mirror-image choreography. Nonetheless, we observe a great proclivity for a rational structuring of movement based on the concepts of grace and beauty.³⁷⁰ These aspirations only increased in the time between *Il Ballarino* and *Nobilita di dame*, being an expression of a broader cultural tendency. We have showed that order was an important attribute of Italian kinetic politics of the previous century, yet in France it acquired added luster, finding expression in a form only hinted at by the Italians – in geometrical ballet (Ill. 33).

McGowan believes that the idea of displaying geometrical figures in dance first appeared at the turn of the century in *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (1499), attributed to Francesco Colonna. It was there, in a dream of the main protagonist, that girls performed a perfectly precise dance, like pawns on a chessboard. A geometrical structure is maintained the entire time, each of the girls’ movements ideally matching the others’. We find a similar motif in Rabelais’ *Les Cinquisme Livre* (1564).³⁷¹ It seems he was depicting the dream of perfect harmony we previously described. In this dance, the bodies became one. Rebellious individuality vanished, along with their risk of schisms. A perfect organism emerged – the harmonious collective body. This idea was politically seductive, and so we ought not to wonder that it appeared in real spectacles as well.

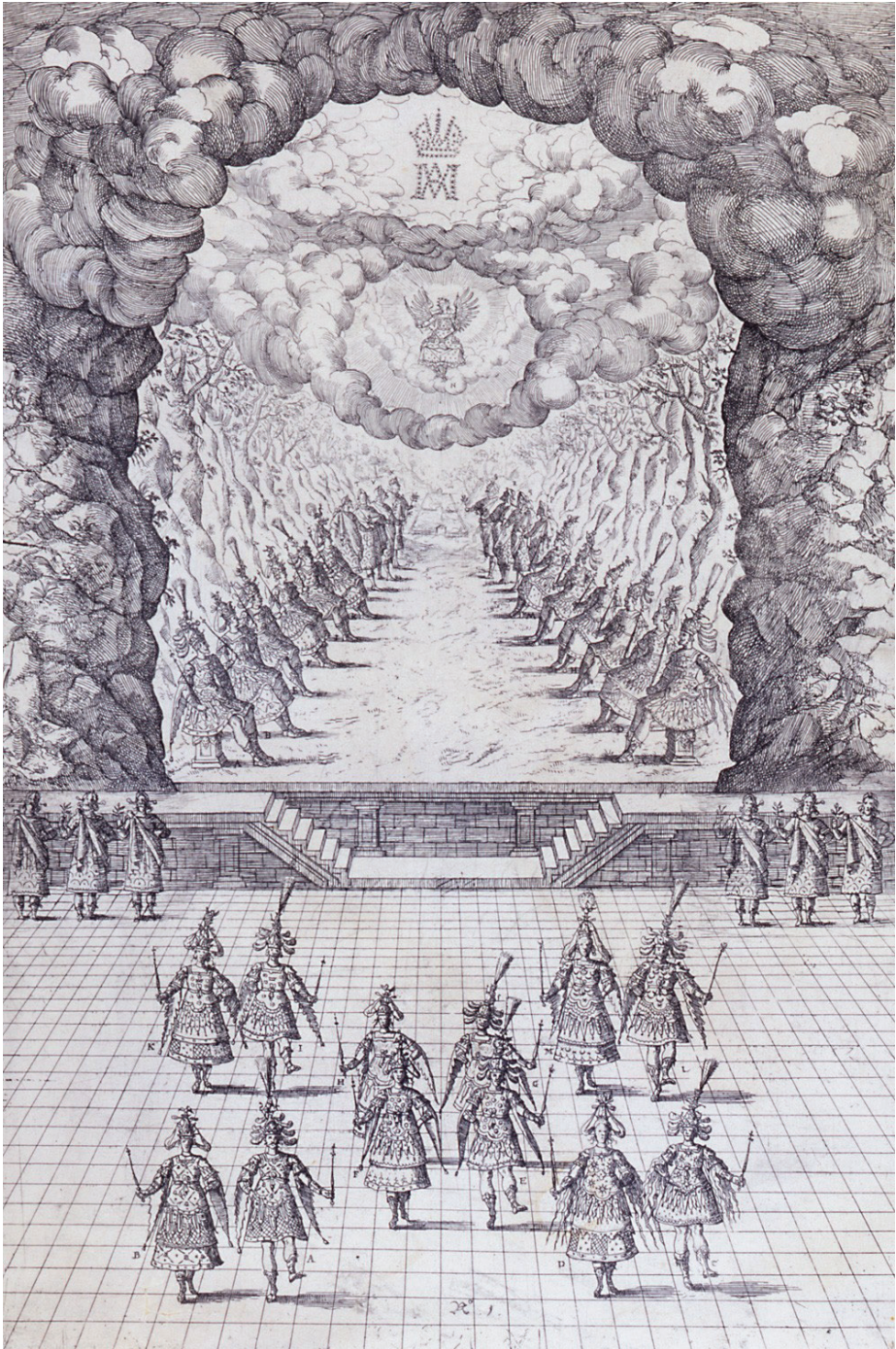
Writing on the famed *Ballet comique de la Royne* of 1581, which dance history textbooks call the first court ballet (*ballet de cour*), Mark Franko recalls that the choreographer, Balthasar de Beaujoyeulx,³⁷² called it *un corps bien proportionne*,

³⁶⁹ See, for example, McGowan, *Dance in the Renaissance...*, p. 59, and Sutton, *Courtly Dance...*, p. 27.

³⁷⁰ Nevile, “Rules for Design...,” p. 107.

³⁷¹ McGowan, *Dance in the Renaissance...*, p. 110.

³⁷² His real name was Baldassare de Belgiojoso. He came from Italy, arriving in France in 1555, to become a court violinist. He demonstrated talent, however, in organizing spectacles, mainly specializing in movement, and was remembered as a choreographer, though not quite in the modern sense of the word.



33. Unknown, engraving depicting a dance spectacle at the Prague court, performed in honor of Maximilian, Prince of Bavaria, 1617

or “a [single] body of ideal proportions.”³⁷³ This brilliantly expresses the essence of the geometrical ballet, perhaps most fully rendered in *Ballet comique*; but before we delve into this and two spectacles that paved the way for it, we must return to the socio-political context, in which a geometrical approach to dance gained popularity.

At the turn of the 1560s and '70s, the atmosphere in France was extremely tense. A third religious war had just ended, but anxieties remained. There were attacks on the Huguenots, who tightened their ranks in response. Admiral de Coligny managed to gain the trust of Charles IX, which elicited a suspicious reaction from his mother, Catherine de' Medici, and the openly hostile faction of the House of Guise, all the more in that the Protestants sought support abroad, in England and the Netherlands. Though a bloodbath had only recently ended, another was on its way. At this stage, however, a fairly desperate attempt was made to prevent it, presided over by Catherine. She decided to give the hand of her daughter, Marguerite, to the young King of Navarre, Henri, one of the most important figures in the Protestant camp. In Catherine's eyes, this arranged marriage would symbolically unite the estranged camps, it was an attempt to form a single political body.³⁷⁴ The dance spectacle was part of this effort.

In August 1572, people from around the country convened in Paris, especially the Protestants, who longed to see their fellow be wed to a member of the royal family. Paris, which was mostly Catholic, greeted them warily. Emotions were tangibly strained.³⁷⁵ This excitement contrasted with the atmosphere in which the ceremonies had been designed, both joyful and highly majestic and tranquil. Two days after the marriage, the Louvre hosted a ballet titled *Le Paradis d'Amour* (The Paradise of Love), the script written by Ronsard, Baïf, and France's first writer of tragedies, Étienne Jodelle, who was also in the *Pléiade*. As we recall, they were guided by the notion of synthesizing the arts; the ballet was meant to be just this sort of synthesis, combining music, with songs performed by the splendid Estienne Le Roy, writings by Ronsard, dance, and chivalric demonstrations. The plot was fairly simple. In the first part, the audience admired the knights defending the gates of paradise from marauding scoundrels, a fairly clear allusion to the religious conflicts. The king and his brothers had the edge among the combatants, heroically pushing the usurpers to hell until Mercury and Cupid intervened, bringing love and peace to the world. This intervention quelled the fracas, paving the way for an extravagant hour-long ballet. This was based on dancing figures who evoked Caroso's beloved “symmetry,” that is, geometrical precision and grace. The intent was clear – the aggrieved sides would be united in a harmonious dance – yet the execution

³⁷³ Franko, *Dance as Text...*, p. 32.

³⁷⁴ On how court ballets may have been an attempt to join aggrieved parties, see Frances A. Yates, *The Valois Tapestries*, London 1959, reprint 1999, pp. 51–88.

³⁷⁵ This is mentioned in McGowan, *Dance in the Renaissance...*, pp. 87–88.

was far from happy, for the spectacle on the whole was dominated by the armed battle, not the unification.

It is hard to wonder at the presence of military motifs in Valois-era spectacles. The entire country had been in a state of permanent mobilization for years. We might say that war was constantly looming on the horizon. Culture, including dance, succumbed to this mood. McGowan makes an interesting remark in this context – she notes the intimate ties between the study of dance and fencing in the sixteenth century.³⁷⁶ The dancing masters quite often taught fencing as well. Both professions meant organizing movement, both developed increasingly refined techniques for its notation. Both in dance and in fencing, the legs were the primary focus, along with the requisite agility and technical precision. Both activities kept the body in a state of readiness to fight. Thus, it to come as no surprise that Charles IX, an enthusiastic knight, divided his time between duels, hunting, and dance entertainments. Yet this was not all. The sixteenth century also ushered in, from our point of view, a quite intriguing proclivity for the ancient *pyrriche* war dance.³⁷⁷ We find the first mention of a warrior dance stylized on antiquity for the marriage of Lucretia Borgia in 1502, but it is only in the midcentury in France that we encounter something resembling a trend.³⁷⁸ The most attractive part of the idea of dancing out an armed conflict was the promise of discipline. The *pyrriche* danced during court spectacles was meant to be a show of strength clothed in the corset of form, and thus fit the general military mobilization and the dream of order. This sense of order was most important – in the Renaissance *pyrriche* the dancing warriors were most admired for maintaining an impeccable battle array. Sword and spear fighting adhered to the rules of geometry.³⁷⁹ It was spurred by the desire for total discipline we observed back in Machiavelli, which arose, we might note, from the Neoplatonic school. The *Laws* was one of the main sources of inspiration for the fashion for the *pyrriche*.³⁸⁰ This was where Plato praised dance as a method of training for war. He may not have addressed the notion of harmony directly, but we can easily find reference to it in his other works, as the Neoplatonists proved. The French Renaissance combined these two ideas – dance as part of a military education and a fondness for geometry – into one whole. The *pyrriche* was meant to be a geometrical

³⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 32.

³⁷⁷ Turska claims this was a dance that hailed from Sparta. It taught “Various types of combat: the attack, spear tossing, protecting oneself with a shield, nimble leaps, for example, for bounding over walls. [...] The collective *pyrriche*, or fights between pairs in a circle, were danced at Olympics and sports stadiums” (Turska, *Krótki zarys...*, pp. 50–51). Another attempt at tracing a genealogy of this dance is found in McGowan; she begins with Plato, and devotes a great deal of space to Ancient Rome (McGowan, *Dance in the Renaissance...*, pp. 124–125).

³⁷⁸ McGowan, *Dance in the Renaissance...*, pp. 122–126.

³⁷⁹ Margaret M. McGowan, “A Renaissance War Dance: The Pyrrhic,” *Dance Research* 1984, Vol. 3, No. 1, p. 60.

³⁸⁰ Ibid., pp. 61–62.

way of training valor, the most perfect, harmonious form of mobilization, meta-physical or otherwise.

In France in the latter half of the sixteenth century we often find dancing soldiers or fighting dancers. This conveyed a constant readiness to fight. In French society, among French men, it was a constant topic, even if not stated outright. The kings who tried to restore knightly ideals – Henri II and Charles IX – embody a widespread tendency. We have mentioned the body of the courtier shaped by the ideal of the *spez-zatura*. It is now time to complicate this picture. For if we wish to speak of courtly conventions, we cannot limit this concept to genteel, delicate, and effeminate forms. This last word, at any rate, was viewed as insulting at the time. The courtiers pursued male decisiveness, physical ability.³⁸¹ This meant that if dance was to find widespread acceptance, it was primarily as a means of keeping fit, as a form of gymnastics.

When we survey the polemical literature of the sixteenth century, we often come across criticism of dance. Religious divisions were reflected in different faiths' responses to it. In general terms, we might say that the Calvinists were opposed to it, as they believed it encouraged sin, made man more bestial, distracted him from the pursuit of salvation. The Lutherans, in turn, were relatively tolerant, as Luther himself confessed there was nothing wicked in dancing entertainment. Yet they could not be said to be enthusiastic dancers. In the Catholic Church, acceptance and condemnation tended to clash.³⁸² Dance was most fully accepted among the religiously neutral, such as Catherine and her sons, and, to some degree, Henri IV of France. We might draw one interesting conclusion from this debate – everyone agreed that, when it came to physical fitness, dance was most advantageous. Even the strict Calvinist theologian Lambert Daneau, one of the era's key religious thinkers, confessed as much in *Traite des danses* (1579), though he added at once that a Christian ought to give less attention to the body than the soul.³⁸³ The criticism concerned forms of entertainment whose ambitions were purely aesthetic. Dance as physical fitness was another thing altogether – a moderate dance performed in appropriate circumstances. This dance was often prescribed by doctors, sometimes clearly on the authority of Plato.³⁸⁴ This was not necessarily a warrior dance. Gen-

³⁸¹ Thus the military critique of dance spectacles, mentioned by McGowan, *Dance in the Renaissance...*, pp. 180–181. For more on the endurance and strength demanded of the body in the early Modern Era in France, cf. Georges Vigarello, “Ćwiczyć, grać,” in: Georges Vigarello (ed.), *Historia ciała*, Vol. 1: *Od Renesansu do Oświecenia*, trans. Tomasz Stróżyński, Gdańsk 2011, pp. 211–214.

³⁸² Alessandro Arcangeli, “Dance under Trial...,” p. 135. On the debate on the value of dance that raged in France in the middle of the century, see p. 136, on Luther see p. 143. On the threat Francis de Sales saw in dance at the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, see: Nicole Pellegrin, “Ciało pospółstwa, pospolite zwyczaje ciała,” in: Vigarello (ed.), *Historia ciała*, Vol. 1, p. 119.

³⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

³⁸⁴ For quite an interesting piece on this topic, see: Alessandro Arcangeli, “Dance and Health: The Renaissance Physicians' View,” *Dance Research* 2000, Vol. 18, No. 1, pp. 3–30. On sixteenth-century France, see pp. 12–14.

tlar forms were preferred, though these too were highly structured.³⁸⁵ Physical excess was best avoided, as were dizziness and becoming swept up and losing control. Yet a society needed some form of physical exercise.

Dance training aimed to put the individual in a state of constant readiness, which was part of a generally acknowledged model of the ideal citizen. This readiness was visible on both sides of the fence. Both the Catholics and the Protestants looked after the body. Thus, both sides danced. Even if among the most radical Calvinist Huguenots, dance was radically condemned, this did not prevent Condé or Henri IV from succumbing to its pleasures, with the notion that they were not vain, but that they could become beneficial in battle.

French society of the latter half of the sixteenth century was highly mobilized and divided. Four days after the wedding of Margot and Henri, and only two after *Le Paradis d'Amour*, came the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre. Thousands of Protestants died. Soon another war erupted. Chaos reigned. The rulers lost control. On the one hand, there was recourse to brutal measures, on the other they engaged in wishful thinking. One panacea for the disintegration of the social body was again the spectacle, more impressive than ever before. This time the pretext was provided by the departure of the Duke of Anjou, the future Henri III, to Poland, where the throne awaited him.³⁸⁶ Polish ambassadors came to Paris (Ill. 34), and a ballet was staged in their honor, *Le Ballet des polonais* (1573). The movement was composed by Beaujoyeux, and we can trace the course of the events on stage owing to *Magnificentissimi spectaculi* by Jean Dorat, which described them in verse.

The creators of *Le Ballet des polonais*, and above all, their patrons, sought to dazzle the Polish messengers. Sixteen figures took part, each symbolizing one of France's sixteen provinces. The point was less the differences between them than their perfect cooperation. "What mattered was the group figure dancing, for the sixteen dancers together, blending their steps and figures to perfection, evoked (according to the text) peace and tranquility in the land."³⁸⁷ Once again, harmony and order took center stage, in spite of everything. Again the choreography had military touches. A Machiavellian motif returns: the army division as the ideal community. According to Dorat, the dancing figures moved like an army.³⁸⁸ Brantôme, who also observed the play, wrote of a "small battalion."³⁸⁹ Geometry thus need not have

³⁸⁵ In Italy, the text most powerfully critiquing excessive exercise is *Del conservare la sanita e del vivere de' genovesi*, by Bartolomeo Paschetti, of 1602. This work is described by Alessandro Arcangeli, in *Medicine, Gymnastics and the Renaissance Sense of the Body's Limits*, available at: https://www.academia.edu/2076996/Medicine_gymnastics_and_the_Renaissance_sense_of_the_bodys_limits (accessed: 1.03.2015).

³⁸⁶ We may add that one of Henri's first requests upon arriving in Poland was that dance entertainments be regularly organized at Wawel Castle (McGowan, *Dance in the Renaissance...*, p. 166).

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

³⁸⁸ I draw this information from: Lee, *Ballet...*, p. 42.

³⁸⁹ McGowan, *Dance in the Renaissance...*, p. 111.



34. Antoine Caron and probably Lucas de Heere (design), a tapestry depicting a ball in the gardens of the Tuileries Palace, organized in 1573 in honor of the Polish diplomats, 1580s

been innocent. Of course, the point in court ballet was quite different from a military parade. The link between geometry and violence was subtle, and the artists themselves were unlikely to have showcased it. It is more the passage of time that has elicited this interpretation. Yet there is no avoiding it was there.

Geometry was meant to heal social wounds, it was a strategy for molding a collective body, for disciplining an imagination in revolt. Yet this was a plan that could not succeed, for the sides were unequal from the outset. The spectacles that were called court ballets promoted unification, but from the top down, unification not with the royal power, but through it. This was evident back in *Le Paradis d'Amour*. The initiative and program came from the royal camp. It strove not for dialogue, but for a condescending enlightenment of the opponent, so that he would unconditionally capitulate before His Majesty. In this respect, it was a purely instrumental tactic, based on a sense of superiority over the opponent. Court ballets were always

a show of strength, and not an invitation to dialogue. The viewers (presumably Huguenots, in the main) graciously invited to the dazzling ceremony were expected to drop to their knees. There was no openness to the other side here, no interest in different points of view, merely a display.

This is a mechanism we know. Distinction drives both the form and the content of court spectacles, part of which is dance. It was not by accident that the *ballets* adapted the complex steps of court dances and were based on content that could only be read by an individual at a proper level of “civilization.”³⁹⁰ Ballet was a manifestation of power, and the royal court was the model of civility. This was a hegemonic gesture, imposing a specific kinetic sensitivity. The more emphatically ballets were present in court culture, the more complicated their allegorical content became – enigmatic figures and motifs emerged. Appearance was important, but so was the number of dancers and the shapes they traced in the space. He who was unable to decode their meaning, or dance in this way, was unrefined, and so did not deserve to rule. A hermeneutic hierarchy developed, with the king at the summit. Only he was able to fully read the performance, for as perfection, as the embodiment of harmony, he was its true transmitter. He was the message, the source, the dogma to be believed.

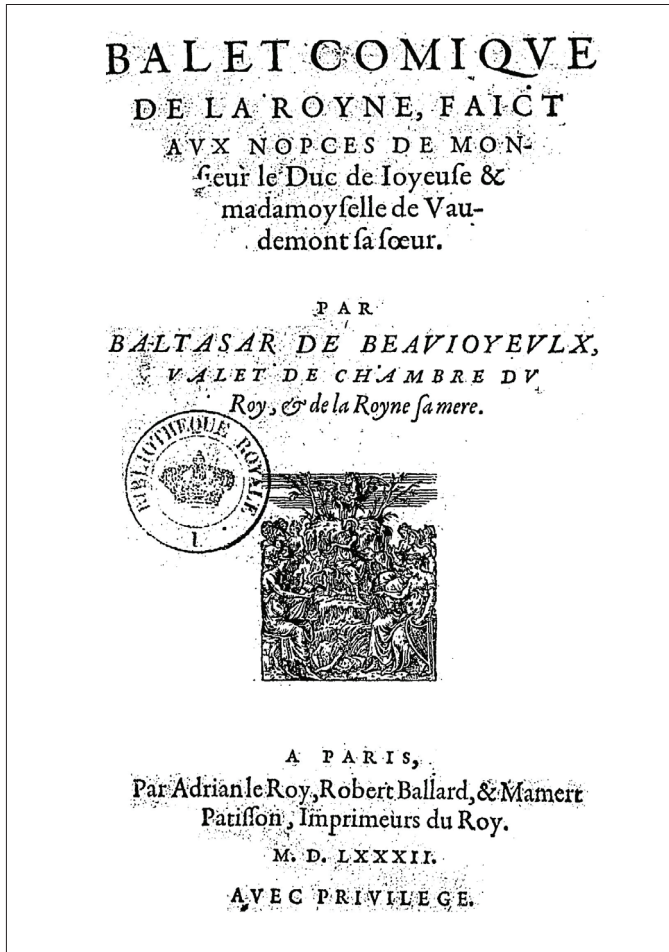
Jennifer Nevile writes in general of the late Renaissance:

The theoretical foundation for all the arts in the sixteenth century, including dance, was Pythagorean cosmology and Neoplatonic philosophy, in which number symbolism played a central role. The Pythagorean/Platonic worldview held that reality in some sense consisted of, and was to be comprehended through numbers. Through this belief that numbers were the principles and elements of all things, philosophers were able to form a unified system, with all parts of nature, including mankind, connected through number and proportion.³⁹¹

We have seen this motif, but we might recall it once more, because it was used quite innovatively in French lands in the second half of the sixteenth century. The House of Valois became number and proportion. While Guglielmo, like Ficino before him, was an idealist, Beaujoyeulx was merely a propagandist. Metaphysics became a mask, an outer scaffolding for the ruler’s purposes. This does not signify the ill intent of the rank-and-file artists. *Ballet des polonais* was a choreographically refined work, surpassing anything that Guglielmo had done in a compositional sense. Yet it was complicit in creating a discourse that was practically absolutist, which is something we cannot say for the Italian’s work.

³⁹⁰ A picture of the details of an Italian late-sixteenth-century dance spectacle is provided by Jennifer Nevile in “Cavalieri’s Theatrical Ballo ‘O che nuovo miracolo’: A Reconstruction,” *Dance Chronicle* 1998, Vol. 21, No. 3, pp. 353–388.

³⁹¹ Jennifer Nevile, “Cavalieri’s Theatrical ‘Ballo’ and the Social Dances of Caroso and Negri,” *Dance Chronicle* 1999, Vol. 22, No. 1, p. 130.



35. Title page of the program for *Ballet comique de la Royne* (Comic Ballet of the Queen) by Balthasar de Beaujoyeux, 1582

Beaujoyeux's most famed work, *Ballet comique de la Royne* (The Queen's Comic Ballet, 1581),³⁹² even more clearly demonstrates the existence of an intimate dialogue between dance and a ruler striving for absolutism (Ill. 35). The ballet was commissioned to commemorate France recovering (only superficially, in fact) from the madness of religious wars. The author of this cure was Henri III. As far as possible, the work was meant to embody the synthesis of the arts, as the choreographer himself stressed in the introduction to the print version of the libretto.³⁹³ The occasion for the show was rather typical: the nuptials of two nobles, the queen's

³⁹² "Comic" here means possessing a narrative, dramatic.

³⁹³ I use the English translation: Balthasar de Beaujoyeux, "Ballet comique de la Reine," in: Selma Jeanne Cohen (ed.), *Dance As a Theatre Art: Source Readings in Dance History from 1581 to the Present*. Second Edition, Princeton, NJ 1974, p. 19.



36. Unknown, *Le Bal des noces du duc de Joyeuse* (Ball for the Wedding of the Duke de Joyeuse), 1581–1582



37. Scenes from *Ballet comique de la Royne* (Comic Ballet of the Queen), print based on an engraving by Jacques Patin, 1581

sister and the Duke of Joyeuse (Ill. 36). As we have mentioned, however, the point was not to celebrate the newlyweds.

The chief protagonist was evident from the very layout of the spectacle. The monarch sat in the best place for observing the stage, accompanied by his mother and his favorite, the Duke of Joyeuse. The content of the spectacle was also mainly addressed to the king. It began with the monologue of a disconsolate young man who barely escaped the Enchantress Circe with his life (Ill. 37). She had cast a spell on him, trapping him in the garden of hollow pleasures. The young man asked quite directly for Henri to release him from his troubles. And so it was, of course. The whole performance was a tale of struggles against the mighty Circe, who confessed at the spectacle's end that the King of France could foil her powers. These struggles were enacted by the mythical gods, yet the plot concluded with the sorceress capitulating before the monarch and those same gods paying him tribute. The whole spectacle might be considered an apotheosis of Henri III. The king's two bodies were united – his physical body and the metaphysical body of the ruler, which was the performance. The ballet celebrated this unity, for the most part, without the king dancing, though he did remain the most important facet of the choreography. The courtiers could only enact certain roles, through which their individuality shone.³⁹⁴ With the king, it was different. He played no characters, he obeyed no geometry, yet he was a character and geometry – the sole linchpin between the world of theater and reality, and thus a guarantor of the legitimacy of the representation on stage.³⁹⁵ Furthermore, he joined motionlessness and action – in remaining unmoved he acted.

Mark Franko has brilliantly reconstructed the essence of kinetic politics expressed in *Ballet comique*.³⁹⁶ Movement in the dance spectacle was subordinate to the message it carried. Dance was purely instrumental. The dancing body was meant to be only a sign, pointing to other content. We are struck by the attention dancing masters in France devoted to presenting the body as an object (Ill. 38). From the beginning of the Renaissance approach to dance we observe an emphasis on the vertical body. An erect posture signified the dancer's self-control and dignity. Court ballet additionally required communicativeness. The erect body was compact, shapely, capable of conveying a message. As such, we ought not to be surprised at the interest in the static pose. We see the subordination of the dancers' bodies through motionlessness: "in geometrical dance it was frequently necessary to strike a significant stillness at the heart of the motion, a posed quiescence in dynamic *stasis*, in order to ensure the legibility of the pattern or the characters to

³⁹⁴ Both courtiers and professional dancers performed.

³⁹⁵ On the unity of the king's two bodies see: Thomas M. Greene, "The King's One Body in the *Ballet comique de la Roynne*," *Yale French Studies* 1994, No. 86, pp. 75–93.

³⁹⁶ Franko, *Dance as Text*..., pp. 15–31.



38. Jacques Patin, design for costumes for the Four Virtues for *Ballet comique de la Royné* (Comic Ballet of the Queen), 1581

which the pattern gave rise.”³⁹⁷ The dancing master gave dancers this pattern in advance, on the ruler’s behalf. The ideological message was reinforced by the frozen image. Stillness was a method of indoctrination. It prompted one to contemplate power. This concerned the dancer, who became an “agent of power”: “his or her body is displayed gloriously while being in the service of a pattern whose meaning transcended and semantically absorbed individual presence.”³⁹⁸ It also concerned the viewer, who was also motionless, and the images they watched were full of *stasis*. This was forever being confirmed, as motionlessness was considered superior. This means we can say that the whole of the spectacle (its center point, the king, also remained motionless) was essentially static.

The sole active impulse in the play was Circe. Activity was depicted as generating divisions, bringing confusion. At any rate, Circe’s movement was basically irrelevant compared to the active power of the king’s motionlessness. Let us return to geometry as a tool for governing the political body. It emerges quite clearly in *Ballet comique* in the form of the final *grand ballet*.³⁹⁹ The choreographer himself described it as follows:

³⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 16.

³⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 31.

³⁹⁹ This term denotes the most impressive dance number in terms of size, the piece that closed a court ballet.

[the *entree* danced before the finale was] composed of fifteen passages, arranged in such a manner that at the end of each passage all faced toward the King; having arrived before his majesty, they danced the grand Ballet of forty passages or Geometric figures. These were exact and considered in their diameter, sometimes square, now round, and with many and diverse forms, and as often triangular, accompanied by some square and other small figures.⁴⁰⁰

We clearly see here the intersection of the ideals encountered so far. Before they began the finale, the female dancers froze in respectful stillness. When their bodies began dancing, their individuality was surpassed by the harmonious geometry. Majestic movement was, in fact, motionlessness. All movements aimed to elevate the central, static subject, the king. He was actually the only one dancing, though without moving a limb. Only he was active, due to the fact that he remained still. The geometric order began with the king, and only this gesture meant introducing universal harmony, reconciling hostile camps, peace. In this sense, harmony was no longer purely metaphysical, in its adoration there was no gesture of humility toward the transcendental authority, a posture of humbling oneself before the superhuman. Harmony was politically defined by the presence of the king. Only the ruler could execute or embody the humanist ideal. Only he was fully present, unlike the bodies in the ballet, which only became points in space,⁴⁰¹ parts of a pattern, whose creator was the dancing master, on behalf of the ruler. We should note the vision of agency that emerges here, as it would shine in all its glory a few decades later – in the times of Cardinal Richelieu, and, above all, Louis XIV. The *Ballet comique* was dance's prelude to absolutism.

Writing Movement

Georges Vigarello shows the kinetic consequences of the process in which the ruler becomes the center orbited by the spheres:

This makes the concept of motor skills change at once: moving from place to place means being subject to the new laws of the universe, the laws of geometry that were popularized by sixteenth-century science. This does not mean this vision excluded all mysterious forces – it more sensed mechanics than invented it, as yet unable to come up with the laws of collision or inertia. Yet for the first time it inscribed the movements

⁴⁰⁰ Quoted from: Beaujoyeux, *Ballet comique...*, p. 30.

⁴⁰¹ Franko, *Dance as Text...*, p. 21.

of bodies in wider geometrized groups, giving them the order, consistency, and visual discipline they were lacking.⁴⁰²

This discipline was the aim of the strategy to bring the space of corporal movement to order, as it appeared in the court ballets.

The progressive discipline of the dancing bodies was accompanied by a gradual transformation of the spaces in which dance spectacles were performed. Initially, dance was performed in the same area as the audience, with only a small distance between the dancers and the viewers. Over time, the division grew greater between them and the spectacle vying for their favor, upon which they graciously set their eyes. This was highly significant, mainly because it built a fundamental inequality when it came to control over the spectacle. The whole of the dance's design – the kinetic pattern that was the essence of the dance⁴⁰³ – was only perceptible from the outside. This whole eluded the dancers. The order was visible only from above, for this was its real source. Thus the static body of the viewer (and, we surmise, the royal authority) brought to life the fullness of harmony. At the moment when shape and figure, and not shared movement, became central to dance, an oppressive kinetic politics was born: although the dancers moved, their movement was, in fact, a passive submission to the gaze. There could be no talk of self-expression.

Peter Burke asserts an interesting hypothesis here:

“Neoplatonism,” as the cult of Plato is generally called, became fashionable in court circles in sixteenth-century Europe, from Paris to Prague, perhaps because a stress on the contemplative rather than on the active life suited the subjects of monarchies (as opposed to the citizens of a republic).⁴⁰⁴

Neoplatonism was indeed quite popular in France during this period, among the Pléiade, for instance. Dance moved from an early-Renaissance mobilization to act to a longing for stability, contemplation, and authority in spectacles. The role of the dancing masters in this process was intriguing. On the one hand, they were a kind of mouthpiece for the ruler; on the other, they attempted to bolster their

⁴⁰² Vigarello, “Ćwiczyć, grać,” p. 223.

⁴⁰³ Franko (*Dance as Text...*, p. 49) contends that space in dance corresponded to depth, to a theoretical dance of harmony, which was the proper remedy for social dissonance. In court ballets, the latter derived from majesty, to which space in dance was meant to perpetually allude.

⁴⁰⁴ Peter Burke, *The Renaissance*, London–New York 1997, pp. 53–54. The author believes we find a similar issue when it comes to the popularity of the Stoics in the latter half of the sixteenth century: “The essentially passive virtue of constancy was more appropriate for the subjects of a monarch than for the politically active citizens of a republic” (*ibid.*, p. 44).

ORCHESOGRAPHIE,
METODE, ET TEORIE
 EN FORME DE DISCOURS ET TABLATVRE
 POUR APPRENDRE A DANCER, BATTRE LE
 Tambour en route forte & diuersité de batte-
 ries, louer du fifre & arigot, tirer des armes
 & esferimer, avec autres honnestes
 exercices fort conuenables
 à la Jeunesse.

AFFIN

*D'estre bien venue en toute Joyeuse compagnie & y monstrer sa dextérité
 & agilité de corps.*

Par Thoinot Arbeau demeurant a Lengres,

Tempus plangendi, & tempus saltandi.
 Eccle 3.



A LENGRES,

Par Jehan des Preys Imprimeur & Libraire, tenant sa bouti-
 que en la rue des merciers dictte les Pilliers.

M. D. XCVI.

Auec Priuilege du Roy.

39. Thoinot Arbeau,
Orchésographie (1589), title
 page of the 1596 edition

own limited power. The dream of order in dance was also a dream of a dancing ruler who brought this order – the author of the dance.

Let us now examine a text that is key not only to French sixteenth-century dance thought, but also, some say,⁴⁰⁵ for the entire modern understanding of the word “choreography” – *Orchésographie* (1589) by Thoinot Arbeau⁴⁰⁶ (Ill. 39), published in the year Henri III was assassinated, a moment when there must have been a vast longing for order and authority in French society. The work is written as a dialogue between an aging dancing master, M. Arbeau, and the young Capriole, who has returned home after several years’ absence, and is annoyed at his lack of dancing

⁴⁰⁵ Andre Lepecki writes in this tone in *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the Politics of Movement*, London–New York 2006.

⁴⁰⁶ I use the English translation: Thoinot Arbeau, *Orchesography*, trans. Mary Stewart Evans, New York 1967.

abilities, especially because, as he says, “without a knowledge of dancing, I could not please the damsels, upon whom, it seems to me, the entire reputation of an eligible young man depends.”⁴⁰⁷ This fairly prosaic motivation differs greatly from those that inspired the Italian treatises, and recalls Arena, yet Master Arbeau seems undaunted. He stresses that:

dancing is practiced to reveal whether lovers are in good health and sound of limb, after which they are permitted to kiss their mistresses in order that they may touch and savour one another, thus to ascertain if they are shapely or emit an unpleasant odour as of bad meat.

This shows that he will not fully agree on the purely sexual nature of the kingdom of Terpsichore. The master concludes his thought as follows: “Therefore, from this standpoint, quite apart from the many other advantages to be derived from dancing [good health and a fit body], it becomes essential in a well-ordered society.”⁴⁰⁸

We can see at once that in the eyes of the sixteenth-century canon (Jehan Tabourot,⁴⁰⁹ the author of the dialogue, was both a man of the Church and a lawyer), dance was less an intellectual journey than a matter of hygiene, good health, and social order. This does not mean that the author ignores the tradition of drawing from the lofty thoughts of the ancient authorities, as many such instances appear in the text.⁴¹⁰ The arguments continue to draw from these sources and aspire to similar ideals as the Italian Renaissance. Dance was still meant to be, above all, harmoniously composed and performed, respecting the principle of the golden mean. This means Arbeau is highly aggravated at all manner of excessive leaps or too-energetic transitions.⁴¹¹ By the same token, the overall tone of the argument is far more sober than Guglielmo’s, or even Caroso’s, all the more in that he is discussing fairly simple ballroom dances.⁴¹² For Arbeau, it is less lofty humanist ideals than social order that counts.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 11.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 12.

⁴⁰⁹ The real name of the author of the *Orchésographie*, from which he made the anagram Thoinot Arbeau.

⁴¹⁰ 1582 saw the publication of *De Saltatione*, the Latin translation of the famous Greek treatise on dance by Lucian of Samosata, which Tabourot would have known quite well – in his outline of ancient dance he practically quotes Lucian.

⁴¹¹ For instance, he loathes the *volta*, which Turska describes as follows: “The man took the woman around the waist with his left arm and made some small hops, one great leap, and a three-quarter turn, and during the large leap he tossed his partner high in the air; this figure was repeated four times. The *volta* enjoyed brief success and swiftly vanished from the dance hall, driven out by fiery protests of moralists” (Turska, *Krótki zarys...*, pp. 95–96).

⁴¹² In the second part of the treatise, Arbeau describes some of the more elaborate dances, which are costumed pantomimes, such as the Maltese *branle* or the hermits’ *branle*, and finally, the elaborate *buffens*, using rapier swords.

According to the *Orchésographie*, dance is mainly a means to an end, an exercise to promote physical discipline, a condition of overall development: “And when you have danced with your mistress return to the great pool of your studies to be enriched thereby, as I pray God may grant you grace.”⁴¹³ An interesting combination: dance and study. Here we ought to mention one of the most intriguing contemporary interpretations of the dialogue, by Andre Lepecki. He argues that the key passage of the text is Capriole’s words to his mentor:

Set these things down in writing to enable me to learn this art. And in so doing you will seem reunited to the companions of your youth and take both mental and bodily exercise, for it will be difficult for you to refrain from using your limbs in order to demonstrate the correct movements. In truth, your method of writing is such that a pupil, by following your theory and precepts, even in your absence, could teach himself in the seclusion of his own chamber.⁴¹⁴

Lepecki’s analysis calls attention to several issues. First, he emphasizes the male-male bond at the root of the modern project of choreography, and thus, in a literal way, of the inscription of dance. In the *Orchésographie*, a young lawyer and a mature clergyman ponder the nature of dance. Though women are present in dance, they play a purely passive and decorative role – they should be pandered to, minded, and treated with manners, yet never asked for their opinion. Women allow a man to enter a society, but a society is always a society of men, who decide who dances and how. It is always the man who initiates the dance, arranges the musical accompaniment, and, obviously, leads; but it is also a man who prepares another man to dance with a woman.

At the same time, it is characteristic that the dialogue is between a lawyer and a priest, and that it revolves around the law,⁴¹⁵ written records, a dance code of sorts, arising through careful consideration. In sum, Lepecki claims, the essence of the work focuses on dance as writing. *Orchésographie* is, at a first glance, a rather monotonous read, describing various dances in a uniform manner. Characteristically, Arbeau reminds his younger colleague that re-creation, not creation, is of prime importance.⁴¹⁶ He dwells on preservation in writing. The above quota-

⁴¹³ Arbeau, *Orchesography*, p. 195.

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁴¹⁵ On how lawyers – mainly Italian ones – perceived dance, see: Alessandro Arcangeli, “Dance and Law,” in: Barbara Ravelhofer (ed.), *Terpsichore 1450–1900: International Dance Conference Ghent, Belgium, 11–18 April 2000. Proceedings*, Ghent 2000, pp. 51–64. Arbeau is, of course, part of this story.

⁴¹⁶ One example is this exchange: “CAPRIOLE: Once I know the separate movements, may I not combine them to my own fancy? ARBEAU: I would then have to explain them to good dancers and it is much better to learn the passages already invented and accepted, as there is a certain grace in some not to be found in others” (Arbeau, *Orchesography*, pp. 84–85).

tion is key because it speaks of this directly: “Set things down in writing to enable me to learn this art.” On the other hand, this record is not soulless automatism. Capriole pleading with the master to develop a method to record dance can be read as pleading for a social bond, for continuity. This is how we might interpret joining the companions of his youth, but also the student, when the master is no more. We see a rejection of the transience of both dance and friendship, and with it, of a world of shared values, a way of thinking. Capriole revolts against the passage of time. He will not lose the old dances. This is no fondness for the antiquary. The sixteenth-century dancer realized he was not an ancient dancer. The Renaissance ideal of restoring old forms had essentially become a hollow formality. The past could not be resurrected, because the social context had changed, along with the culture, and so it would continue to change.⁴¹⁷ Arbeau knew that all comparison between his contemporary dance and ancient forms could only be based on an external analogy. The modern man had an entirely different kinetic sensibility. This bred a deep sense of melancholy and a longing for the companions of youth, the expression of an irreparable loss.

War looms in the background of this text, of course. The old master says: “When I first came to live in the town [...] people talked only of dancing and masquerades and gaiety. [...] But for some time now I have met with nothing but sorrow and that has made me old and dull.”⁴¹⁸ Capriole will not consent to this capitulation and finds the solution in transcribing. Note-taking is a balm for melancholy. Through transcription, a cognizance and rejection of the passage of time, we can elude despair. This is why we may argue that Arbeau’s choreographic project is deeply inscribed in the slowly shaping self-reflexivity of the modern individual, actively trying to transcend the finite nature of his condition.

To explain Capriole’s attempt, Lepecki draws from a famous text by Jacques Derrida, closing *The Margins of Philosophy*:

All writing [...], in order to be what it is, must be able to function in the radical absence of every empirically determined addressee in general. And this absence is not a continuous modification of presence; it is a break in presence, “death,” or the possibility of the “death” of the addressee, inscribed in the structure of the mark.⁴¹⁹

Death is a constant companion of the project of *orchésographie* as the writing of dance. If dance is to accustom one to death, it must be more than [activity of] dancing – it should become choreography, or writing. It is only under the condition of

⁴¹⁷ Arbeau says: “even the dances seen in our fathers’ time were unlike those of today and it will always be so because men are such lovers of novelty” (ibid., p. 15).

⁴¹⁸ Ibid., p. 140.

⁴¹⁹ Jacques Derrida, *The Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass, Chicago 1984, pp. 315–316.

the *iterability* of movement, going beyond the here and now of the dance activity, immortalizing it for the concrete, which means the truly general and thus absent viewer, that one does not succumb to total melancholy.

The problem, of course, was how to write dance. In Arbeau we find simple letters to stand in for steps, the notes of melodies, with the names of dance figures alongside them – writing as a description in words, as coding. At its basis, however, is the striving for immortality Derrida describes. Here we become embroiled in a dilemma that takes us back to the political nature of the Renaissance dance project in France. Lepecki states: “While *dance* is a technique for socializing, while dance is in itself socialization, *choreography* appears as a solipsistic technology for socializing with the spectral, making present the force of the absent in masculine desire.”⁴²⁰ This brings us to a paradoxical situation in which, on the one hand, we hear a plea for writing, a bond, intersubjectivity, and on the other, writing shapes itself in the solitude of a chamber where this bond can only be solipsistically replayed. In this paradox we find a mechanism driving the gradual individualization of dance as a creative activity. Here we find the lone genius of choreography, the Writer of Dance. “With Arbeau, choreography as writing and as a subjectivity-machine mediating absence and presence finds its conditions of possibility by dwelling in studious privacy.”⁴²¹ What was once mainly social – creating a dance – is privatized. Writing facilitates writing, building a new kind of bond – no longer created through being together, but evoked reflexively through an act of creation. In this place, the dancing master and his dancers are split. Previously, *balli* and *basadanze* had been recognized as works of specific authors, but only Arbeau’s student so openly spoke up to his dancing master for the opportunity to invent his own dances, asking: “Once I know the separate movements, may I not combine them to my own fancy?”⁴²² The fifteenth century, and even Arbeau’s generation, was a time of the dancing masters and teachers, who, in their educational mission, created sequences of steps, always as part of an overriding, communal, conventional form. Capriole opens up a different space – a new choreography created in the quiet of his room. In the following chapters we shall see how this space gradually unfolds.

To Lepecki we owe a highly insightful, contemporary-leaning interpretation of Tabourot’s dialogue, yet we might add a few notes to his thoughts, to return to a historical plane. *Orchésographie* is, after all, a work of its time, expressing social tendencies we described in the earlier sections of this chapter. In this treatise we find, for instance, clear marks of distinction, of using dance to build one’s sense of social superiority. This is clearly evident in the condemnation of the bold *volta*, of which Capriole says: “This manner of dancing seems neither beautiful nor honorable

⁴²⁰ Lepecki, *Exhausting Dance...*, p. 27.

⁴²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁴²² *Ibid.*, p. 84.

to me unless one is dancing with some strapping hussy from the servants' hall."⁴²³ It is also most visible in Arbeau's constant reminders to dance in a distinguished fashion, grounded in expertise, and not spontaneous impulse, and finally, a recommendation that reminds us of Arena:

Spit and blow your nose sparingly, or if needs must turn your head away and use a fair white handkerchief. Converse affably in a low, modest voice, your hands at your sides, neither hanging limp nor moving nervously. Be suitably and neatly dressed, your hose well secured and your shoes clean.⁴²⁴

Dance is a matter of the entire presentation, by which social hierarchies are indicated. The late Renaissance dance was no longer strictly about the people who were dancing together, but also always about those who were watching. Domenico had already mentioned the importance of making a good impression. Arbeau expanded on this thought, breaking it down in fine detail; the need for distinction had become far more important. In French society of the sixteenth century, form had become key, and also more elaborate, as we have seen. This was a watershed moment,⁴²⁵ and Arbeau is a symptomatic figure of this turn.

All of Arbeau's remarks have a single care in mind – social order. When he wrote *Orchésographie*, he was a grown adult, a witness to decades of violence and death. This is tied to one other important trait of this treatise, so characteristic of the sixteenth century – military rhetoric. Let us return to Peter Burke, who says of the period:

People are forced by the central power to live at peace with one another and more gradually to exercise restraint in other ways as well. The increasing concern with military discipline (including drill) in the sixteenth century is one argument in favor of this hypothesis [...] and the neostoic movement [in which one might include Arbeau] demonstrates the link between the cult of self-control and the growing interest in particular ancient writers, Seneca in particular.⁴²⁶

Seneca does not appear in Arbeau, though the Greek military theorist Aelianus Tacticus does, along with long passages on military drums and soldier dances and thoughts on fencing. These military motifs are summed up by Capriole: "I have no

⁴²³ Arbeau, *Orchesography*, p. 87.

⁴²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 118–119.

⁴²⁵ Elias writes: "Consideration of the behaviour of people in the sixteenth century, and of their code of behaviour, casts the observer back and forth between the impressions 'That's still utterly medieval' and 'that's exactly the way we feel today'. And precisely this apparent contradiction clearly corresponds to reality. The people of this time had a double face. They stood on a bridge" (Elias, *The Civilizing Process...*, p. 71).

⁴²⁶ Burke, *The Renaissance*, p. 61.

inclination whatever to go to war, still what you have taught me about the dances of war may be of service to me when we engage in military exercises.”⁴²⁷ This is a motif that does not appear so flagrantly in the Italian dancing masters, but which Machiavelli would have appreciated – dance as a preparation for battle, a school of discipline and order, a tool for building a complex hierarchy, necessary not only in a regiment, but above all, at court. It is symbolic here that the last dance described by Arbeau is the *buffens*, which the author partly derives from the *pyrriche*. Thus ends the first modern handbook for inscribing dance – with the clatter of arms in a simulated battle, to prepare dancers for the return of the turmoil of war. In Arbeau’s day, this return was highly likely.

Montaigne’s Movement

Orchésographie expresses a longing for joy and a readiness for the worst. It is an unassuming treatise, yet to some degree it is emblematic of its time. These were dark times, with neither hopes nor illusions. Times when skeptical voices calling for *otium* rang out in full force.⁴²⁸ In Italian humanism, for instance Petrarch, as we have mentioned, this promised a rest from the crush of public affairs, marked by a calm contemplation. In the French Renaissance, drives toward *otium* had a far more dramatic quality. It was motionlessness they dreamed of, a leveling of social divisions, a quelling of blood and flight from death and violence. We sense this in the weariness of Arbeau, in his fondness for order, but to fully understand the Renaissance kinetic politics of *otium* in France in the late sixteenth century, we must look elsewhere. Not to the dance literature, but to the *Essays* of Michel de Montaigne, which allow us to see not only the yearning for peace, but also how the late Renaissance in France tackled the themes of the individual and agency.

Montaigne, as McGowan points out in her above-cited book, was a dancer himself, and hence dance was an important part of his imagination. We mainly find evidence of this in his journal from his journey to Italy, which he undertook in 1580–1581. While there, Montaigne had a good look at the dances, folk or otherwise, noting how they differed from French ones. He even organized a ball, and attended parties organized by others (Ill. 40).⁴²⁹ Yet this does not mean that his dance preferences were more inclusive than his contemporaries. True, unlike Brantôme,

⁴²⁷ Arbeau, *Orchésographie*, p. 46.

⁴²⁸ “The cult of constancy seems to have been at the height of its appeal in the second half of the sixteenth century, when the civil wars in France and the Netherlands made the tranquility of mind recommended by Seneca and other stoic philosophers as necessary as it was difficult to attain” (Burke, *The Renaissance*, p. 54).

⁴²⁹ McGowan, *Dance in the Renaissance...*, pp. 8–9.



40. Hieronymus Francken I, *Carnaval in Venetie* (Carnival in Venice), ca. 1565

he did not believe that only a slow and refined dance was beautiful. He appreciated liveliness and diversity.⁴³⁰ Still, he clearly looked down upon the dancing peasants,⁴³¹ as he did upon those who showed off their dance techniques to shine, as he wrote in Chapter Ten of Book Two of the *Essays*:

as at our balls these men of low condition who keep dancing schools, not being able to imitate the bearing and fitness of our nobility, seek to recommend themselves by perilous leaps and other strange mountebank's antics. And the ladies can more cheaply show off their carriage in the dances where there are various contortions and twistings of the body, than in certain other formal dances where they need only walk with a natural step and display a natural bearing.⁴³²

We might see this as a familiar expression of elitism and conservatism in dance, in the mode of Arena. In Montaigne we see an aversion to folk bawdiness and vulgarity, with all its vain competition. He values noble simplicity more than impromptu novelties. And yet the dance that appears most in his work is not, as one might expect, the *pavane*, but, as Franko concludes,⁴³³ the *branle*. The *branle* is not understood

⁴³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

⁴³² Michel de Montaigne, *Essays*, trans. Donald M. Frame, Stanford 1958, Vol. II, p. 300.

⁴³³ Franko, *Dance as Text...*, p. 60.

as a variant of social dance, but as a metaphor for cosmic movement and flow.⁴³⁴ This is tied to a peculiar existential choreography in the *Essays*. When we grasp the relationship between the *branle* and the dance of existence, we understand what “nobility” the author speaks of in this quote and what “natural step” he ascribes to it in dance. A key kinetic policy of the late Renaissance in France is made visible.

In the first volume of the *Essays*, at the start of Chapter Three, we find these important words: “We are never at home, we are always beyond. Fear, desire, hope, project us toward the future and steal us from the feeling and consideration of what is, to busy us with what will be, even when we shall no longer be. *A soul anxious about the future is most vulnerable.*”⁴³⁵ The last sentence is taken from Seneca. We should value what is, and not merely what could be. The point in life is knowing oneself, taking back time, and not designing a better future, a better system, better coexistence. It is no accident that, in this same chapter, Montaigne lauds subservience to the reigning monarch. Upon their death, one may criticize them as much as one likes, but while they live, we should “suffer them patiently if they are unworthy.”⁴³⁶ In a France torn apart by political conflicts this standpoint is unsurprising, but it was also merely an external symptom of something deeper, which we might call a *branle* to an *otium* rhythm.

Thus, in M. de Montaigne, striving for peace, constancy, and political inactivity derive from a diagnosis of reality that characterizes an eternal excitation. Its first level is political chaos – religious wars and the resulting violence. Yet the excitation delves deeper. Montaigne writes: “The world is but a perennial movement. All things in it are in constant motion, the earth, the rocks of the Caucasus, the pyramids of Egypt – both with the common motion and with their own. Stability itself is nothing but a more languid motion.”⁴³⁷ What Frame translates as “movement” is *branloire*. It derives from the same root as *branle*.

Montaigne says this about the eternal movement of Being: “I cannot keep my subject still. It goes along befuddled and staggering, with a natural drunkenness. I take it in this condition, just as it is at the moment I give my attention to it. I do not portray being: I portray passing.”⁴³⁸ Elsewhere, at the end of *Apology for Raymond Sebond*, we find an even more overt statement:

⁴³⁴ Ibid., p. 62.

⁴³⁵ Montaigne, *Essays*, Vol. I, pp. 9–10.

⁴³⁶ Ibid., p. 10. In Volume III, in turn, we read: “Nothing presses a state hard except innovation; change alone lends shape to injustice and tyranny. When some part is dislocated, we can prop it up; we can fight against letting the alteration and corruption natural to all things carry us too far from our beginnings and principles. But to undertake to recast so great a mass, to change the foundations of so great a structure, that is a job for those who wipe out a picture in order to clean it, who want to reform defects of detail by universal confusion and cure illnesses by death” (Montaigne, *Essays*, Vol. III, pp. 888–889).

⁴³⁷ Montaigne, *Essays*, Vol. III, p. 740.

⁴³⁸ Ibid.

We have no communication with being, because every human nature is always midway between birth and death, offering only a dim semblance and shadow of itself, and an uncertain and feeble opinion. And if by chance you fix your thought on trying to grasp its essence, it will be neither more nor less than if someone tried to grasp water.⁴³⁹

A more “mobile” worldview would be difficult to imagine, but neither does it lead to a negation of the world, rather to an acceptance of its pluralism in all munificence, one that also goes beyond a simple anthropocentrism. Montaigne is far humbler than the thinkers of the Italian Renaissance when he writes:

Presumption is our natural and original malady. The most vulnerable and frail of all creatures is man, and at the same time the most arrogant. He feels and sees himself lodged here amid the mire and dung of the world, nailed and riveted to the worst, the deadest, and the most stagnant part of the universe, on the lowest story of the house and the farthest from the vault of heaven, with the animals of the worst condition of the three; and in his imagination he goes planting himself above the circle of the moon, and bringing the sky down beneath his feet.⁴⁴⁰

Thus Montaigne’s great affection for animals, which, in many respects, he sees as superior to humans. Thus his famous sympathy for cannibals, for which he has been named father of the myth of the “noble savage.” Thus his affection for customs and traditions, not a rigid and rationally developed law. And, finally, it explains his fondness for travel as a way of savoring this diversity. He is never tempted to improve the world, or even himself: “I have not, like Socrates, corrected my natural disposition by force of reason, and have not troubled my inclination at all by art. I let myself go as I have come. I combat nothing.”⁴⁴¹

In one of his more compelling passages, Montaigne declares:

I had nothing to do but conserve and endure, which are noiseless and imperceptible acts. Innovation has great luster, but it is forbidden in these times, when we are hard pressed and have to defend ourselves mainly against innovations. Abstention from doing is often as noble as doing, but it less open to the light.⁴⁴²

In these words we can practically hear the cries of St. Bartholomew’s Day. Being blinded by one idea, an absolute fidelity to it, orthodoxy, the revolutionary enthusiasm of the neophyte – all this terrifies and revolts Montaigne. This comes from the worst of human attributes – pride, which engenders an absolute faith in particular

⁴³⁹ Montaigne, *Essays*, Vol. II, p. 553.

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 401. We recommend comparing this fragment with Pico della Mirandola’s *Oration*, covered in the previous chapter.

⁴⁴¹ Montaigne, *Essays*, Vol. III, p. 988.

⁴⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 953.

projects, convictions of the unimpeachable value of human knowledge.⁴⁴³ Faith in human power only yields suffering, violence, and death. As such, the basic task of every intelligent person is to dampen his ambitions and strivings, to show their illusory nature and their quite possible tragic consequences. This is the source of the radical tolerance recommended by the *Essays*, for it was the only stance that gave justice to a reality that was undeniably pluralistic, and beyond full human comprehension.⁴⁴⁴

In terms of this diagnosis of the pluralistic nature of reality, we might turn our attention to both the form and the content of Montaigne's work, for here we find a radical gesture against standardization. We see movement even in the construction. The philosophy in the *Essays* has no system. It is thought in process, which, "more like an unruly life than a logical demonstration, [...] meanders digressively, combining anecdotes and *aperçus* with arguments and quotations, reprising themes and coming at them from different angles."⁴⁴⁵ This form expresses less the fragmentation of personality into mismatching parts than a constant search for new space for it. A continuity is maintained between the parts in the author's identity, yet we can also trace the live progress of a person who, in the course of contemplating the most diverse matters, matures, speaking more and more assertively in his own, individual voice. Individuality here is not the result of systematic logical operations, it is an idiosyncratic trip, a journey for the very pleasure of journeying. There is movement, but not striving, and a rejection of an instrumental approach to action. Small wonder, then, that Charles Taylor opposes Montaigne to Descartes:

The Cartesian quest is for an order of science, of clear and distinct knowledge in universal terms, which where possible will be the basis of instrumental control. The Montaignean

⁴⁴³ We might call attention to the difference in modern science between Montaigne and the authorities of the following century – Descartes and Bacon. The former wrote, with his customary skepticism: "when some new doctrine is offered us, we have great occasion to distrust it, and to consider that before it was produced its opposite was in vogue; and, as it was overthrown by this one, there may arise in the future a third invention that will likewise smash the second" (*ibid.*, p. 521). "For Bacon and Descartes, in contrast, the Ptolemaic universe had been definitively disproven, and geocentric, commonplace 'experience' that made it plausible was discarded in favor of a truer understanding of the cosmos, one that eagerly moved beyond the finite perspective of the contingent human subject" (Martin Jay, *Songs of Experience: Modern American and European Variations on a Universal Theme*, Berkeley–Los Angeles 2005, p. 31). For Jay, Montaigne is open to the multiplicity of human experience, the uniqueness of every individual, while Descartes and Bacon create "a tacit metasubject of cognition, enjoying a 'view from nowhere'" (*ibid.*, p. 35).

⁴⁴⁴ "I do not at all hate opinions contrary to mine. I am so far from being vexed to see discord between my judgments and others', and from making myself incompatible with the society of men because they are of a different sentiment and party from mine, that on the contrary, since variety is the most general fashion that nature has followed, and in more minds than bodies, inasmuch as minds are of a rarer substance suppler and susceptible of more forms, I find it much rarer to see our humors and plans agree. And there were never in the world two opinions alike, any more than two hairs or two grains. Their most universal quality is diversity" (Montaigne, *Essays*, Vol. II, pp. 597–598).

⁴⁴⁵ Jay, *Songs of Experience...*, p. 25.

aspiration is always to loosen the hold of such general categories of “normal” operation and gradually prise our self-understanding free of the monumental weight of the universal interpretations, so that the shape of our originality can come into view. Its aim is not to find an intellectual order by which things in general can be surveyed, but rather to find the modes of expression which will allow the particular not to be overlooked.⁴⁴⁶

We see that Montaigne was not dreaming of simple inactivity, of the total liberty to be idle.⁴⁴⁷ Lazy motionlessness is unable to give the soul the impression of total peace that he sought to attain. As Lucian had written before him, the spirit without occupation drifts endlessly from thought to thought. Montaigne adds:

[it] gives birth to so many chimeras and fantastic monsters, one after another, without order or purpose, that in order to contemplate their ineptitude and strangeness at my pleasure, I have begun to put them in writing, hoping in time to make my mind ashamed of itself.⁴⁴⁸

Real *otium* thus presupposes work. If inactivity is to be fertile, it must be subjected to intellectual rigor. In this respect, Montaigne never praises simple motionlessness; he is forever at work on gradually calming, ordering, soothing a *kinesis* that is too boisterous and chaotic⁴⁴⁹: “it is a greater thing to make oneself impassible by one’s own efforts than to be so by one’s natural condition – even to combine with man’s frailty a godlike resolution and assurance.”⁴⁵⁰ If, therefore, Montaigne writes of nobility, this is the work on oneself he has in mind – making a step toward *otium* that is modest, yet sure and full of grace.

Franko has shown that Montaigne understood man as a physical being.⁴⁵¹ Moreover, the kinetic aspect of the body was not overlooked in the *Essays*. It appears, for instance, in the context of the limits of human knowledge, which are essentially the limits of articulated language. Words deceive us, they are ambiguous, they demonstrate man’s succumbing to vanity, which creates barriers between societies. As for gesture and movement: “There is no movement that does

⁴⁴⁶ Charles Taylor, *Sources of Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, Cambridge 2012, p. 182.

⁴⁴⁷ This has an entirely physical aspect: “The precepts of resoluteness and constancy do not state that we must not protect ourselves as much as it lies in our power from the evils and troubles that threaten us. [...] So that there is neither any bodily suppleness, nor any move with hand weapons, that we should despise if it serves to safeguard us from the blow that is struck us” (Montaigne, *Essays*, Vol. I, pp. 35–36). This recommendation probably lauds a vivacious, dynamic, and unpretentious dance (perhaps the *pyrriche?*), which, when correctly performed, could, it seems, have been one form of protection from mortal blows.

⁴⁴⁸ Montaigne, *Essays*, Vol. I, p. 25.

⁴⁴⁹ As Montaigne writes: “[it is] peculiar to the judgment to be slow and *deliberate*” (ibid., p. 31, emphasis mine).

⁴⁵⁰ Montaigne, *Essays*, Vol. II, p. 646.

⁴⁵¹ Franko, *Dance as Text...*, p. 53.

not speak both a language intelligible without instruction, and a public language; which means, seeing the variety and particular use of other languages, that this one must rather be judged the one proper to human nature.⁴⁵² We ought to remember this law of the truth of movement. Montaigne dreams of direct, natural communication, and this dream regularly recurs afterward – in English humanism, and in the Enlightenment, above all. Yet unlike the eighteenth-century thinkers, Montaigne was no sentimentalist. Though criticizing a ceremonial attitude, he is not so naive as to posit a return to nature, to dream of a primordial gesture to express a pre-rational truth of the soul. Montaigne's striving for the truth in natural communication does not mean an emotional effusion of the inner conscience, it is sincere, ongoing, humble work upon oneself, which shapes even a person's ordinary grace. This attempt is training to structure one's existence – body and spirit – while preserving simplicity and openness, without overblown mannerisms or airs.

The aim to which every person should aspire, according to Montaigne, is peace with oneself, peace of spirit and mind, an intellectual-kinetic movement that brings no confusion, only a sense of constancy, a soothing motion.⁴⁵³ This requires self-denial, solitude, and self-analysis: "I take great care to augment by study and reasoning this privilege of insensibility, which is naturally well advanced in me. I espouse, and in consequence grow passionate about, few things."⁴⁵⁴ While the "I" in Montaigne is modest, he is not free of coquetry: "I am myself the matter of my book; you would be unreasonable to spend your leisure on so frivolous and vain a subject."⁴⁵⁵ When, in the Enlightenment, Rousseau returns to writing history in the first person, Montaigne's concluding reservations are, significantly, lacking. The modern "I," though seemingly going back to Montaigne, is an "I" sure of its powers. Not so in the *Essays* – naturally, the author sought to leave his portrait for posterity, but it was not a heroic one. Montaigne had no demiurgical ambitions: "Others form man; I tell of him, and portray a particular one, very ill-formed."⁴⁵⁶ Montaigne stood up for the humble, ordinary, modest, and yielding, curious of what was different. Given the revolutionary progress of the centuries thereafter, it could be perceived as reactionary. In a world where mobilization was on the rise, he reminded us to pause: "Greatness of soul is not so much pressing upward and forward as knowing how to set oneself in order and circumscribe oneself."⁴⁵⁷ This

⁴⁵² Montaigne, *Essays*, Vol. II, p. 332.

⁴⁵³ "All the glory that I aspire to in my life is to have lived it tranquilly – tranquilly not according to Metrodorus or Arcesilaus or Aristippus, but according to me. Since philosophy has not been able to find a way to tranquility that is suitable to all, let everyone seek it individually" (*ibid.*, p. 471).

⁴⁵⁴ Montaigne, *Essays*, Vol. III, p. 932.

⁴⁵⁵ Montaigne, *Essays*, Vol. I, p. 2.

⁴⁵⁶ Montaigne, *Essays*, Vol. III, p. 740.

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1039.

was a lesson in movement that the succeeding generations would gradually forget, though they did return to Montaigne.

The *Essays* accompanied the birth of modern France, creating a portrait of a trembling, elusive, still-fluid agency. The individual is thrown into a world they are incapable of understanding. They are merely a microscopic part of a great whole. The latter is, according to Montaigne, the work of an all-powerful God, who is nothing like the portrait created in man's likeness, as depicted by the various religions. God, like the Whole, is unknowable and inconceivable. We can also say He is in eternal motion, in fact, that movement flows from Him. God is the dancing master designing the *bramble* of the world. He is the Agent.

Adhering to the Renaissance perception of the world, Montaigne was convinced there was an intimate bond between the particle (the individual) and the Whole. We cannot fully describe this link, we are incapable of understanding it, which is why we should humbly dance to the tune that is played for us. This concerns all of us, not only the poor and powerless, but also the elite, the ones who hold the political cards. Man is incapable of ascending to a state of agency. He can only usurp it, impersonate it, in the manner of the French kings we have covered. The individual in Montaigne is not an Agent in the sense that we have been using. He is more self-reflexive than ever before, he perceives himself as unique, but this does not yet translate into a conviction of his special inner power. On the contrary, individual existence in Montaigne is deeply conscious of its frailty. This is why he seeks solace in a sense of being subject to the majesty of a cosmic *bramble*.

In these circumstances, the only community to be nurtured is the cautious cooperation of independent, non-invasive individuals. Before joining in dance, they must work considerably on themselves – train themselves to be delicate, humble, attuned to diversity, to learn how conventions, hollow words and gestures can lead us astray. The dance of such individuals is a circle, a dance of equals, so free that the dancers scarcely touch one another, remaining in a joyfully autarkic state, while prancing in a refined manner. These would be neither simpletons nor fops. They would reject both violence and weakness. They achieve naturalness:

We seek other conditions because we do not understand the use of our own, and go outside of ourselves because we do not know what it is like inside. Yet there is no use our mounting on stilts, for on stilts we must still walk on our own legs. And on the loftiest throne in the world we are still sitting only on our own rump. The most beautiful lives, to my mind, are those that conform to the common human pattern, with order, but without miracle and without eccentricity.⁴⁵⁸

It sounds beautiful, we confess, though remarkably vague.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 857.

Dance in the Shadow of War

Montaigne will not be pigeonholed,⁴⁵⁹ much like the epoch in which he lived. On the one hand, the humanist ideals remained intact; on the other, the Renaissance optimism was steadily dimming. French culture was still seeking its identity. At the end of the sixteenth century the passion for order continued, but French culture momentarily divested itself of the aristocratic garb of the last of the House of Valois. The spirit of Montaigne had reached the sphere of power.

When Henri IV ascended to the throne, the era of sumptuous spectacles had ended. France was ravaged by conflicts and short on public funds. Reforms were necessary, and the new king was determined to make them – reforms in a spirit unlike those that had led to the building of courtly ceremony. Elaborate protocol was an obstacle in repairing finances, which is why Henri annulled it. His temperament was far more relaxed than those of his predecessors. He enjoyed being amid people. He enjoyed dancing with them. So it had been since his childhood, and if he had a favorite dance, it should not surprise us to learn it was the *branle*.⁴⁶⁰ Thus, dances were still held at court, but they were different, simpler and more joyous, without the masses of artificial forms (Ill. 41).⁴⁶¹ This meant abandoning geometry in favor of energy and a disorganized *ballets mascarades*. Dances entertained foreign guests, they were held to celebrate the major events in the lives of the royal family and courtiers. Henri provided his son, the future Louis XIII, with a dance education at only four years of age. He also made certain that his second wife, the Italian dance enthusiast Maria Medici, was kept satisfied. “All that without excess expenditure which the king would not have tolerated,” as was approvingly noted by his minister, Duke Sully, a sworn Huguenot.⁴⁶²

In this sort of community, subjects enjoyed more freedom. They could organize games and spectacles on their own accord, and they did not have to be devoted to the king, as his predecessor had expected. This, in turn, translated into more experimental dance performances. The dance theater (if we may permit ourselves this conceptual anachronism) of the Henri IV era was a space where individuality

⁴⁵⁹ His Polish biographer writes: “Montaigne would not be bound by any doctrine. He rejected all efforts to tie him to any movement” (Józef Hen, *Ja, Michał z Montaigne...*, Warsaw 2009, p. 117).

⁴⁶⁰ This is not all that links him with Montaigne. The latter also yearned for peace, for naturalness, he would not abide artifice, or courtly manners. Both also supported religious tolerance, Henri far more effectively.

⁴⁶¹ Before he became king, Henri enjoyed organizing balls and *ballets*. Dance was also a great passion for women of his circles – dance spectacles were organized by his first wife, Marguerite, from whom he was separated, and his sister, Catherine. On the ballets the latter organized during the war with Spain, see McGowan, *Dance in the Renaissance...*, p. 174.

⁴⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 178. On pages 173–178 we find a description of dance under Henri IV.



41. Louis de Caullery, *Bal sous Henri IV* (A Ball During the Reign of Henry IV), ca. 1610

thrived. Elements of improvisation began to appear. Ballets organized by the wealthy began to forego the synthesis of the arts and the near-military discipline of the figures and shapes. Sensual pleasure reigned. This, at least, is the picture that emerges from the few surviving sources. According to Franko, Montaigne served as their patron, as well as a signpost for the development of courtly ballet.⁴⁶³ The key concepts were destabilization, ambivalence, and competition. Yet this did not mean that a longing for Order had dissolved. On the contrary – it was on the rise.

Let us sum things up. The humanist movements in dance, spreading in the sixteenth century from Italy to the north of the Alps, landed in a new social and cultural environment. In a France torn by conflicts and on a winding path toward absolutism, dance reform had to develop differently. While in Domenico's treatise, for example, we find such words as "intellect" and "beauty," in the later authors, such as Thoinot Arbeau, the stress falls on discipline. The dance composed by choreographers a century after the pioneers of the *quattrocento* was increasingly formal, detailed, and instrumental.

What did change [in sixteenth-century courtly dance] was an increasing interest in balance and repetition, the arrangement of elements, and an increasing concern to provide a theory or rules for designing choreographies which were articulated and written down, and conformed to the prevailing theories of beauty in the other arts.⁴⁶⁴

⁴⁶³ Franko, *Dance as Text...*, p. 64.

⁴⁶⁴ Nevile, "Rules for Design"..., p. 115.

These theories increasingly drifted toward classicism. Dance in the sixteenth century betrayed a yearning for order. This snuffed the explosive dynamism we found in the Italian humanist culture.

It is quite natural that, after a period of struggle with previous conventions, art encounters a phase of internal conventionalization. Yet in sixteenth-century dance it seems something else is at stake, something more disquieting.⁴⁶⁵ It is no accident that the shadow of war can be felt in Arbeau's treatise. This shadow falls upon the French culture of this period as a whole. Montaigne is a significant witness here. His skepticism gave rise to an existential choreography in which gentleness and tranquility are the key concepts. This is a flight to a peaceful harbor, while the waves of society rage and roar. We might call it escapism, but it seems reasonable to us when we consider that there seemed nowhere to turn. Though the royal powers made attempts to control the situation, they were too (morally) weak to meet the challenge. Instead of damming the flood, they caused a blood-bath. At the same time, the *magnifique* political harmony they proposed was little more than propaganda. *Magnifique* means magnificent, but also wasteful. Such were the House of Valois, such were their spectacles, such was the dance sponsored by the Renaissance Crown in France. *Magnifique* means great, but also magnanimous. Yet there was a lack of magnanimity in the French society of the time, perhaps more than any other virtue, and thus a ballet of magnanimity, the supposed aim of the courtly spectacle, was only a mirage. Finally, *magnifique* means miraculous. And thus, like a miracle, it was impossible. If real harmony were to reign, it would be necessary to bring about far more radical transformations in governance than what the House of Valois offered. Yet before these could come, an all-consuming unrest would prevail, which set the rhythm for bodies in late-Renaissance France.

⁴⁶⁵ Here we might call attention to a correspondence of principles governing sixteenth-century choreography and the art of creating gardens, which particularly flourished in the latter half of the century. We are particularly intrigued not only by the geometrical obsessions of the architects and choreographers (the regular shapes, straight angles and lines, perfect circles and symmetry), but also the fact that the basic principle of the composition was division between the viewer (presumably the ruler, above all) situated *above* and the static or dynamic spectacles performed at his feet. Cf. Jennifer Nevile, "Dance and the Garden: Moving and Static Choreography in Renaissance Europe," *Renaissance Quarterly* 1999, Vol. 52, No. 3, pp. 805–836.

CHAPTER III

The Sun, *Cogito*, The Machine, The Reed: The Kinetic Aspect of Disputes over Agency in the Time of French Absolutism

At the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in France open conflict was gradually on the wane, which does not, of course, mean that social discord had dissolved. It merely became less bloody, largely through the sober policies of Henri IV, who introduced the Edict of Nantes, but above all, initiated a program of internal reforms to revitalize the country's economic potential. Roads, bridges, and canals were built, farming was supported. This facilitated the repair of state finances, which had been ruined by the wars and extravagant expenditures on excesses that were hallmarks of the rule of the sons of Catherine de' Medici. Yet owing to his treasury deficits inherited from previous rulers, Henri IV was too weak to staunch the internal opposition and lead the government with an iron hand. He was forced to vacillate between the dominant groups in society – on the one hand, acquiring the favor of an increasingly powerful bourgeoisie, which was financially supporting his military efforts (the conflict with Spain and the Duchy of Savoy), and on the other, maintaining the support of the nobility, who had elevated him to the throne. Thus Henri had to be firm against the insubordinate men of wealth, serving to catalyze the “transitional age in which the knightly aristocracy was being gradually replaced by a courtly one,”⁴⁶⁶ while sympathizing more with the nobility than the bourgeoisie.⁴⁶⁷ By the same token, he cleared a path for bourgeois social advancement on an unprecedented scale, with a policy of selling court,

⁴⁶⁶ Elias, *The Civilizing Process...*, p. 173.

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

administration, and justice positions, mainly purchased by the bourgeoisie. This is the strategy Elias calls the “royal mechanism.” The point was that the central position played social divisions to its own advantage. This principle is fundamental to modern absolutism, which hatched throughout the sixteenth century, and which France honed to perfection in the century of Henri IV’s successor, Louis XIII (on whose behalf Cardinal Richelieu introduced absolute rule), and, above all, Louis XIV (with the help of Colbert).

As Elias phrases it: “the hour of the strong central authority within a highly differentiated society [of the kind where the social and political game of the clergy and nobility is joined by the bourgeoisie] strikes when the ambivalence of interests of the most important functional groups grows so large, and power is distributed so evenly between them, that there can be neither a decisive compromise nor a decisive conflict between them.”⁴⁶⁸ We see the first signs of this situation in France in the sixteenth century, and even earlier, through “the entire network of differentiated social functions [...] constantly increasing with the advance of the commercial and monetary integration of society.”⁴⁶⁹ The central ruler gained power by gradually breaking the resistance of the noble, beginning in the late Middle Ages, particularly under Francis I and Henri II. By the same token, it had to contend more and more with the rules of a market economy, taking the bourgeoisie into account. And then the king could not dismiss the old elite, for the nobility retained enormous social and political influence, clearly demonstrated in the conflicts with Catherine and her sons. This caused general social unrest, vented in acts of violence, as described in the previous chapter.

In what follows, we shall be examining the situation in French society at a stage of development that we shall join Elias in calling the “royal function” phase, or, to use more traditional terminology, the absolutist period. Absolutism will be seen in broad categories – as a term for a complex social game, and not an individual tyranny; for an absolute ruler is less a despot than a virtuoso at playing social interests off one another. He catalyzes a new organization of social conflicts, and thus, a new culture. If the state is to develop, it cannot allow the eruption of open conflicts. The key is to maintain a balance, which involves transforming the spaces where competition is waged for the top social positions. Elias thus explained the flourishing of courtly culture, and the development of increasingly sophisticated forms of society. “As social functions and interests become increasingly complex and contradictory, we find more and more frequently in the behaviour and feelings of people a peculiar split, a co-existence of positive and negative elements, a mixture of muted affection and muted dislike in varying proportions and nuances.”⁴⁷⁰ Let us follow this lead.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 320.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 361.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 318.

In seventeenth-century France we have a very delicate equilibrium of conflicts that grows progressively more complicated. The social players, first and foremost the central position, or the crown, realize that “every action taken against an opponent also threatens the social existence of its perpetrator; it disturbs the whole mechanism of chains of action of which each is a part.”⁴⁷¹ Culture, including dance, took part in keeping the *equilibrium*. As such, the kinesis of the epoch is marked by a delicate balance, manifested in intricate and open-ended forms. The kinetic imagination is rendered by a state of delicate balance, expressed in complex forms, their meaning unclosed. This is a proverbial tug of war that manifests itself as the development of dance forms of the period, and of worldviews that enter complex mutual relations. The kinetic space in France of the absolutist period is multifarious, driven by competing ideals; at the same time, however, we observe a close correspondence between what strikes us as opposing views of man, society, and agency. The soil from which they grew was the same, after all. This is a longing for Order, which the state sought to embody. To this end, vagaries were played out, momentary advantages were pursued. This chapter will cover the definition of agency that evolved in these circumstances, and where it took dance.

The Fire Demon

Henri IV did not approve of extravagant and costly spectacles. This did not mean there was a shortage of dance at the Parisian court. We might recall that the king himself was a passionate dancer. As we have mentioned, however, the dance culture he promoted was unlike what emerged during the House of Valois period. It was based on impulses that were far more democratic than those embodied by the ballets his predecessors endorsed (Ills. 42, 43, 44).

The literature often focuses on Henri IV’s solicitude for the people. Historians are fond of recalling that once a week, he said, there was to be a chicken in every pot. The king prized simple customs, ordinary life. He was, after all, raised in the country. This was reflected in his approach to dance – he much preferred the joyful *branle* to the refinement of the pavane. This also explains his fondness for comic, sometimes bawdy performances. These were often staged by professionals, and not courtiers, because the aim was less to show manners and composure than to have a rousing good time.⁴⁷² The *mascarades* were all the rage, while ballets, if they were organized at all, had an earthiness reminiscent of the old *moresche*. Geometry faded into the background. At the same time, as we have stressed, Henri had no intention of claiming

⁴⁷¹ Ibid.

⁴⁷² Margaret McGowan, *Dance in the Renaissance...*, p. 242.



42. Hieronymus Francken II, *Bal (The Ball)*, 1607



43. Hieronymus Francken II, *Feestvierend elegant gezelschap (An Interior Scene with Elegant Figures at a Wedding)*, ca. 1610



44. Hieronymus Francken I, *De hovelingen een wandeling in de tuin* (Courtiers Strolling in a Garden), 16th/17th c.

a monopoly on dance, like the Valois. During his reign, dance spectacles could be organized according to one's taste, as was done by the nobility and the bourgeois alike.⁴⁷³

And yet, underneath this tolerance flickered a need to strengthen the position of the King. Henri IV did not hesitate to annul the influence of the wealthy who could not be subordinated to his social conciliation policy, though he did so reluctantly. He wanted to be more than a nobleman among many nobles. There was no going back to the medieval principle of *primus inter pares* because it could make the kingdom fall apart, which was a real possibility at the time. This is why he took care to demonstrate his majesty, though not ostentatiously. Spectacles were helpful on this count, and the king made liberal use of them in both domestic and foreign policy.⁴⁷⁴

One major influence in maintaining the tradition of courtly ballet in France was Henri IV's second wife, Marie de' Medici. Being brought up in the Florentine court, she was accustomed to dance spectacles. She was responsible for bringing Italian artists to Paris, first and foremost Giulio Caccini, who introduced a new vocal style, the *recitativo*. This served as a foundation for opera, which was just being born. It is speculated that the Italian artists inspired the development of a new dance spectacle

⁴⁷³ Ibid., p. 175.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 176–177.



45. Program for *Ballet d'Alcine* (Ballet of Alcine), or *Ballet de Monseigneur le duc de Vandosme* (Ballet of Duke de Vandosme), an explanation of the meaning of the figures made of the dancers' bodies, 1610

genre – the *ballets melodramatiques*.⁴⁷⁵ This was characterized by dramatic content with a heavy dose of comedy; the text was sung and not declaimed. One such performance was *Le Ballet de Monseigneur le duc de Vandosme* (The Ballet of Mr. Vendôme), also known as *Ballet d'Alcine* (The Ballet of Alcine), of 1610. We shall dally on this piece for a moment, because the departure from the simplicity and formal liberty of the *masquerades* indicates that the lesson of *Ballet Comique* was not forgotten, while a grotesque element became clearly visible, destabilizing the courtly *decorum*, and prefiguring what was to occur in the dance spectacles of Henri IV's son, Louis XIII.

The "melodramatic" story told in *Ballet d'Alcine* is remarkably simple – the sorceress Alcine casts spells that turn twelve knights into fantastical objects: fans, flower vases, instruments, and animals. Only the king can break the spell, and this is the subject of the performance. Similarly, in *Ballet Comique* the sorceress loses her power through the king's mere presence.⁴⁷⁶ The ballet was composed of nine scenes (*entrées*) and a final *grand ballet*. It took a formal approach to the body, which it treated almost like décor. In one scene twelve nymphs represented Alcine, their bodies forming the letters of her name. Viewers also saw writing with bodies in the final dance, when the freed knights assembled into figures corresponding to characters in the ancient alphabet of the druids, decoded in the program accompanying the performance (Ill. 45). These

⁴⁷⁵ For example: Tacjana Wysocka, *Dzieje baletu*, Warsaw 1970, p. 51. George J. Buelow shows, however, that there can be no talk of the *recitativo* having had a direct impact on the French *airs de cour* used in *ballets melodramatiques* (George J. Buelow, *A History of Baroque Music*, Bloomington 2004, p. 155).

⁴⁷⁶ The details of the libretto can be found online at: http://operabaroque.fr/GUEDRON_ALCINE.htm (accessed: 1.03.2015).



46. Giovanni Battista Bracelli, *Alfabeto figurato* (A Figurative Alphabet), illustration for *Bizzarie di varie figure* (The Strangeness of Various Figures), 1624

signs had symbolic value, assembling to form a sort of litany in praise of the ruler. The dancing body was only an allegorical transcript of a significance imposed from the outside (Ill. 46). The laudatory substance had changed little in thirty years. And yet we ought to note the touch of irony, foreign to *Ballet Comique*. There the tone was serious, while in *Le Ballet de Monseigneur le duc de Vandosme* the mood was light. The characters were more dynamic, and the costumes introduced a touch of parody. This demonstrates the ruler's growing authority. Henri IV could take some distance from his image that Henri III could not afford.

The monarch's authority continued to grow throughout the first half of the seventeenth century, despite the resistance of the wealthy. When Henri IV died, he was succeeded by his wife, Marie, because his son, Louis, had not yet come of age. Unrest was reignited, aristocratic grudges were again stoked. A rebellion broke out, and Marie was forced to call the Estates General.⁴⁷⁷ Their discussions yielded little, yet they did show that the kingdom remained unstable and the central powers had to court the opinions of various interest groups. Just as important, the Estates paved the way for the political career of Cardinal Richelieu, their most active spiritual representative. He was considered a reformer at the time, the first French bishop to carry out the resolutions of the Council of Trent. After the Estates' deliberations, Richelieu appeared at court, becoming Secretary of State and one of the closest advisors to the regent. He would have to wait for full power, however.

⁴⁷⁷ They were not to gather again until 1789.

The regency of Marie de' Medici brought internal unrest. It was necessary to strengthen the authority of the Crown, to straighten its course. Among those who comprehended this were Charles d'Albert, a favorite of Louis XIII. In 1617, he persuaded the sixteen-year-old king to stage a palace revolution. This resulted in the assassination of Marie's chief advisor, Concino Concini; the Queen Mother herself was driven into exile. D'Albert was named Duke de Luynes. He understood a symbolic appreciation of the ruler, for his own position was also to be improved through strengthening the crown's prestige. To this end, de Luynes turned to a tested strategy – ballet. He knew of the king's fondness for dance and decided to use it. Though Louis XIII had few personal assets, he was a subtle and technically skilled dancer. This is why, according to de Luynes, dance allowed him to most fully show his charisma, and this he needed to prove to the public. Here we need to back up for a moment.

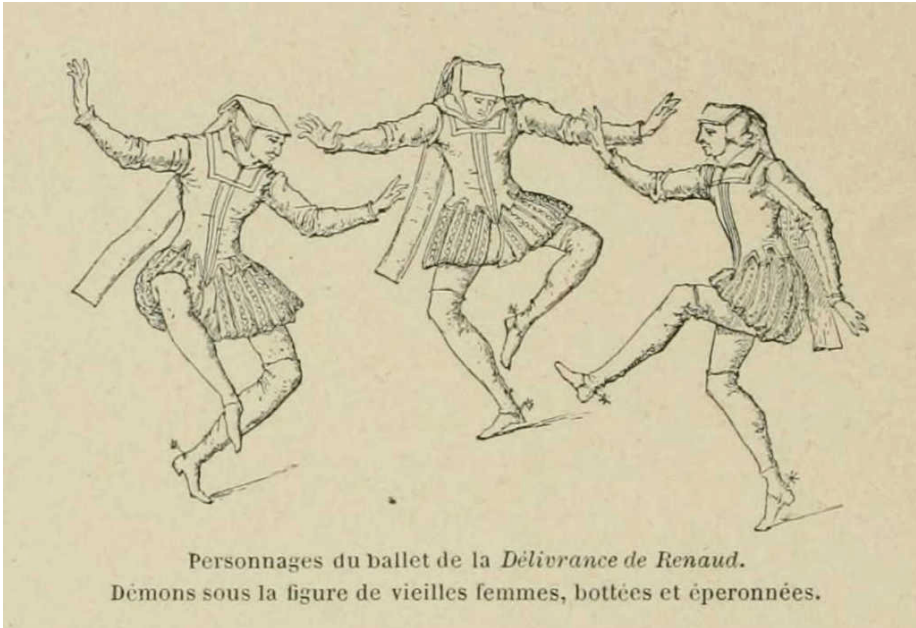
De Luynes probably perceived the propaganda potential in the royal dance several months before the coup, when he appeared alongside Louis XIII in *Ballet de la Délivrance de Renaud* (The Ballet of the Deliverance of Renaud) in 1617 (Ills. 47, 48). This ballet was remarkable in many respects,⁴⁷⁸ primarily because of the King's intriguingly ambiguous role. The plot was based on Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered*. As in *Ballet Comique* and *Alcine*, this was a story of a sorceress who was defeated, in which a key role was played by the king's character. It can be summarized as follows: the unfortunate crusader Renaud (played by de Luynes) is taken by the maleficent Armida (played by a professional dancer, Marais, dressed as a woman). He is put under a love spell in a rocky cavern guarded by demons, led by the Fire Demon (the king). Then the scene changes. Renaud is taken to a mysterious garden, where he finds two knights immune to the sorceress's magic. The crusader looks into a crystal mirror to see how far he has fallen. He rejects the baubles. Armida tries to stop him, enlisting an army of demons, but they take the form of grotesque figures (snails, lobsters, turtles), eventually turning into a group of old men, mercilessly parodying the sorceress. Renaud is free. In the final scene there is a *grand ballet* led by the monarch, this time playing the leader of the crusade. The insinuation was quite evident: "As Godefroy de Bouillon [...] once freed Jerusalem from the Saracens, so Louis frees France from disorder."⁴⁷⁹ It might seem that we are dealing with the same apotheosis of the monarch as in the earlier court ballets. Yet here the symbolic structure is more complex.

Franko has pointed out the ambivalence in *Délivrance de Renaud*.⁴⁸⁰ To his mind, we must take into account the dual role of Louis in this performance. He

⁴⁷⁸ A reproduction of the original libretto and a collection of essays commenting on various aspects of the spectacle is found in the Greer Garden (ed.) anthology, *La Délivrance de Renaud. Ballet dansé par Louis XIII en 1617: Ballet danced by Louis XIII in 1617*, Turnhaut–Washington 2010.

⁴⁷⁹ Lincoln Kirstein, *Four Centuries of Ballet: Fifty Masterworks*, Mineola, NY 1984, p. 41.

⁴⁸⁰ Mark Franko, "Majestic Drag: Monarchical Performativity and the King's Body Theatrical," *Theatre Drama Review* 2003, Vol. 47, No. 2, pp. 71–87.



Personnages du ballet de la *Délivrance de Renaud*.
Démons sous la figure de vieilles femmes, bottées et éperonnées.

47. Scene from *Ballet de la Délivrance de Renaud* (Ballet of the Deliverance of Renaud), 1617



48. Scene from *Ballet de la Délivrance de Renaud* (Ballet of the Deliverance of Renaud), 1617

danced not only the part of the leader of the Knights of the Cross, but also the demon guarding Renaud's captivity. As such, his performance had an ambiguity which Franko interprets as intentional. On the one hand, it indicates the king's versatility that so fascinated Luynes, and on the other, the blurring of the symbolic status of the monarch, which his circles – and above all, Cardinal Richelieu – would try to undermine. This is also why *Délivrance de Renaud* cannot be seen as mere propaganda. This aim did come through in the narrative, but its performance complicated the issue, because ballet is never a strictly narrative event, it is also performative, and thus rooted in an idiosyncratic body. It was Louis's physical idiosyncrasy that allowed him to shine in *Délivrance de Renaud*.

Playing not only the victorious knight, but also the seductive demon, Louis emerged as a complex and ambiguous figure. This was both his weakness and his strength. It was not about a simple show of strength, as this could have made the young king laughable. Louis' strength was not only that of the knight. His strength was in this duality – his strength was also (and perhaps primarily) in his weakness,⁴⁸¹ his delicacy and fluidity. Fire is such an element – it purifies, but it takes no single form. In *Délivrance de Renaud* the royal power was not merely destructive, it had no medieval brutality. As the Fire Demon, Louis XIII became a new kind of ruler – one who seduces. This seductiveness showed itself to be a much stronger mechanism in the new social environment than mere destruction. In being seductive he could negotiate between political agencies. For this he needed decisiveness and delicacy. As detailed by the author of the ballet's libretto, Pierre Durand: "One would have thought that it was to consume his [the king's] enemies that he was covered in flame, were it not for the extreme gentleness of his actions."⁴⁸² This delicacy was tied to the idiosyncratic qualities of Louis' own temperament and body, but it also evolved into an important part of the ruling strategy that the king intuitively adopted. The allegorical spectacle that incorporated the dancing Louis built his charisma. It was a charisma that drew from the elusiveness of the king's temperament, from his profound ambiguity. Through repetition, the theatrical depiction of instability became a show of power.

We can now return to the story's chronological sequence. Louis XIII's dance in *Délivrance* showed a unique kind of charisma. In order to reinforce this, the king's entourage decided to organize more performances. In 1619, De Luynes organized *Ballet de Tancredè* (The Ballet of Tancredè), another piece inspired by Tasso and around the theme of the royal power, capable of overcoming supernatural forces. Faced with increasing opposition at court, he also tried to depict himself as the king's most faithful companion. We repeat, this was not done to reduce his own value. In the spectacle he organized, de Luynes bolstered his authority, linking

⁴⁸¹ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 81.

⁴⁸² See: *ibid.*, pp. 80–81.

himself as closely as possible to the king. Two years later, this identification led to his dancing the part of Apollo in *Ballet d'Apollon* (The Ballet of Apollo, 1621), in which the king was content to play the main blacksmith.⁴⁸³ This usurpation stuck out like a sore thumb; small wonder that the other key players at court (the regent's faction) felt threatened.

The dance festival amid the court rivalry for influence continued, stoked by the king's love of dance. De Luynes died of typhoid during the raid of the Huguenots' Montauban Fortress, "averting" the disaster, as it were, which his ambitions would have assured him with the court opposition. Louis swiftly recovered from the loss of his favorite, in part through more spectacles. His entourage ensured that they were not in short supply. On the one hand, the wealthy simply liked entertainment; on the other, it was widely known that they were a means of securing political interests. This only intensified the battle over symbols.

Following the death of de Luynes, Louis ruled through a council, on which sat Catherine and her former ministers, but also Prince de Condé, who favored a hard line against Protestants. There were more religious conflicts, yet these brought no new results. The country hovered in a state of uncertainty, and this translated into the culture. The debates held were philosophical, but also, and above all, moral ones. We observe a general breakdown of values; the "situation was confused and intricate," as John Stevenson Spink writes.⁴⁸⁴ On the one hand, it favored skeptical viewpoints, and on the other, free thinking. Fame was acquired by such men as Giulio Cesare Vanini, who was burned at the stake in Toulouse, and the poet Théophile de Viau, who was driven into exile for his atheism. The traditional worldview had to give way under the increasing popularity of the new natural sciences, symbolized by Copernicus, Kepler, and Galileo.

There was ongoing ferment in the sphere of ideas. This was reflected, in turn, in politics. The monarch was not yet as powerful as Louis and his inner circle desired. The opposition that came from some of the nobility, which seldom shared free-thinking attitudes, became a real threat. There ensued a remarkably complex struggle for influence. In theory, no one questioned the dominant position of the king, but in practice there could be no talk of total subordination. These strategies were meant to build individual autonomy within the monarchist idiom, but it is too early to speak of absolutism prevailing.

The power struggles typical of the era before Richelieu's ascension to power can be seen in the dance performances covered in depth by Franko.⁴⁸⁵ The *ballets burlesques* form became popular in this period. These were more a mosaic of loosely

⁴⁸³ Julia Prest, "The Politics of Ballet at the Court of Louis XIV," in: Nevile (ed.), *Dance, Spectacle...*, p. 232.

⁴⁸⁴ John Stevenson Spink, *French Free-Thought from Gassendi to Voltaire*, London–New York 2013, p. 6.

⁴⁸⁵ Mark Franko, *Dance as Text...*, pp. 63–107.



49. Costume design for *Ballet des Fées des forêts de Saint Germain* (Ballet of the Forest Fairies of Saint Germain), attributed to Daniel Rabel, 1625

interlocked scenes than a coherent story. The collective scenes often gave way to more sparsely-cast sequences, and when they did appear, the groups were composed to highlight different personalities, and not to build the compact structure of a collective body, as was the case with the geometrical ballets. Franko makes Montaigne the patron saint of the *ballets burlesques*,⁴⁸⁶ showing the importance of the individual performance within them. The fantastically costumed dancers stressed their individuality and creativity. When we add the parodical undertone, and the freedom expressed in the courageous approach to custom, we get a portrait of an almost subversive type of performance.⁴⁸⁷

Examples are *Les Fées des forêts de Saint Germain* (The Forest Fairies of Saint Germain, 1625)⁴⁸⁸ and *Grand Ballet de la douairière de Billebahaut* (Ballet of the Dowager of Balbao's Grand Ball, 1626), one of the best documented *ballets burlesques*. Both took the form of an *impromptu*. In both, the theme was a pretext for the experiments on stage. In each, dynamic movement replaced the previous century's logic of poses. Finally, both were extravagant, not to say excessive, from a visual perspective. Let us have a look at the costumes, which are attributed to Daniel Rabel, for they give us a sense of the *ballets burlesques* better than the text (Ills. 49, 50, 51, 52, 53).

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 62.

⁴⁸⁷ Franko writes of the self-critique of court culture, and even of its cultural dissidence (ibid., p. 69).

⁴⁸⁸ A description is available on-line at: http://operabaroque.fr/BOESSET_FORESTS.htm (accessed: 1.03.2015). For an in-depth analysis, see: Thomas Leconte (ed.), *Les fées des forêts de Saint-Germain, 1625. Un ballet royal de "bouffonesque humeur,"* Turnhaut-Washington 2012.



50. Costume design for *Ballet des Fées des forêts de Saint Germain* (Ballet of the Forest Fairies of Saint Germain), attributed to Daniel Rabel, 1625



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