

STANDING WITH EASE AND GRACE: OR THE DIFFICULTY OF READING HISTORICAL ACTING TREATISES OBJECTIVELY

General Positions.

1. The military, or gymnasium position, is to place the heels together; toes out, and hands at the side; the ear, shoulder, hip, knee, and ankle appearing to be in a perpendicular line, and the weight equal on both feet.



Full Description of the Military Position.

- a. Heels together, or an inch apart.
- b. Feet at right angles.
- c. Knees together.
- d. Body and head upright.
- e. Shoulders back.
- f. Eyes front.
- g. Arms at the side.
- h. Palms in, and thumbs front.*
- i. Mouth closed (except in vocal exercise).

2. The rostrum position is an easy, upright speaking position, with one foot advanced, and the weight of the body principally upon the foot in the rear.

Full Description of the Rostrum Position.

- a. Body erect and easy.
- b. One foot three or four inches in advance of the other.
- c. Toes turned out in an angle of about 45 degrees.
- d. Arms at rest at the side.
- e. Heel of the foot in advance, in a line with the heel of the other.
- f. Hands relaxed and natural (as they would hang at the side).



3. The reading position is similar to the rostrum, save that the book should be held in the left hand, high enough to keep

* This position is sometimes given with the palms front and thumbs out. (See Figure.)

H.D.L. Potter, Manual of Reading, in Four Parts:
Orthophony, Class Methods, Gesture, and Elocution
New York: Harper Brothers, 1871, p. 24.

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Having grown up with ‘Stand up straight!’ in our ears, most of us would find commands to ‘Stand with ease!’ or ‘Stand gracefully!’ somewhat perplexing. Such commands are not only incongruent in themselves, as grace and ease are not associated with subservient behaviour, but also with our culturally imbued ideas of good posture, which demand a certain upright rigidity of the spine with our weight divided equally over our feet, combined with an underlying virtuous moral attitude. Even the military command ‘Stand at ease!’ does not signify complete relaxation of the rigidity of our posture but is designed, according to WikiHow, to ‘make you pay attention to something without being too stiff.’¹ The sociocultural strength of these ideas wields such an overwhelming power over us that we bring them with us when reading anything, let alone historical treatises on acting. It is therefore natural that we interpret what is written about standing in these works almost exclusively from our own personal understanding of what good posture entails, an understanding so integrated within our being that we are unaware that it is a state we are constantly creating ourselves. Indeed, this was the situation with which I found myself confronted about three years ago, when I began studying some of these treatises seriously in connection with the Summer Academy for Historical Acting at Leiden University, where I was to teach Alexander Technique. What I found in the books contradicted not only current ideas concerning good posture, but also what I saw many historically informed actors and singers doing on stage today. It therefore seemed imperative to me to examine practically what I found within them, while simultaneously investigating the sources of our ideas on posture, both past and present. The interaction between the practical and academic approaches to this material was so deeply enmeshed with one another, that the one could not have happened without the other. For that reason, the integration of these perspectives will form the backbone of this article, thereby illustrating the synergy of such an approach.

Thus I will be describing here both the procedure and progress of the practical side of my research into the question of standing in these treatises, as well as the results of delving into questions of why we stand the way we do today, and how this is different from what actors were doing onstage in the 18th and 19th centuries. In order to do so, I will first speak of my personal background in relation to the question of standing, thereby revealing my own biases, at least to the degree that I can perceive them myself. In this regard it will, in particular, be necessary to go into my training as a teacher of the Alexander Technique and some of the basic ideas concerning movement that I have learned from it. Only after having laid out that basis, will it be possible to discuss the issues and difficulties concerning what is found in the historical acting texts on standing, examining the discrepancies between the descriptions, the illustrations, and how they are often interpreted today. It will also be important in this regard to look at the advantages – from the pragmatic perspective – derived from standing in *contrapposto* as opposed to what is now considered to be good posture. It was only due to all these experiences that I then began a survey on standing in art and acting treatises, discovering links that could be traced back to the Classical Greek sculptures. This resulted in a new understanding of the word *contrapposto*, one that is in contradiction to the meaning with which it often imbued when spoken of in the context of historical acting.

MY PERSONAL BACKGROUND AND BIASES

There are three aspects of my background which are of significance in connection with this topic: my upbringing; my musical training and experiences; and my training and experiences as an Alexander teacher. Given that my upbringing in a hardworking, rather puritanical family was typical for Southern California in the 1950s and 60s, I simply absorbed all of the sociocultural ideals of that society, including the concepts of standing up straight and pulling in my stomach. My professional training in both fields, however, warrants further commentary, as it provided me with much of the basic information and practical experience needed in order to be able to speak about the subject at all.

All translations in this article have been made by the author unless otherwise specified.

1 <https://www.wikihow.com/Stand-at-Ease>: (last accessed 20-10-2020).

I began playing the recorder as a twelve-year old and this soon became a passion, causing me to major in music in college, where I also began reading historical treatises on the performance of music; and to study at the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis, where I ended up teaching all my professional life, with a particular focus on the performance of 16th-century music on renaissance flutes. In my training as a flautist, good posture received great attention, particularly in combination with breathing exercises. In retrospect, I recognize that strength and stability were always paramount in the instruction of both and that asking me to be strong and stable was the equivalent of asking me to be inflexible. Indeed, Shirley Wynne, a baroque dancer who had recovered from a terrible car accident and returned to the stage with the help of the Alexander Technique, recommended that I should pursue it, as at the Schola I ‘was the person most in need of it’. So my first encounter with the Alexander Technique was due to my lack of coordination in relation to my musical activities.

I first came into contact with baroque gesture in the late 80s, early 90s when I had the delight of joining the soprano Sharon Weller, who later came to teach baroque gesture at the Schola, in an ensemble with the harpsichordist Brett Leighton in which she first demonstrated her marvellous talents. The experience made me alive to the expressive possibilities of combining the visual corporal expression of the text with the music to which it was set. The desire to achieve this level of expressivity in my own playing never left me from that moment on, although I was frequently frustrated in my seeming inability to attain it in all that I was doing, particularly in music of the 16th century. It nevertheless always remained my goal.

F.M. ALEXANDER AND THE ORIGINS OF HIS TECHNIQUE

Although I had my first lesson in the Alexander Technique in 1976, and had worked with many teachers, it was not until about the time I encountered baroque gesture, that I also began my training with Donald Weed in the Interactive Teaching Method of the Alexander Technique (ITM Alexander Technique), finally receiving my diploma in 2001. The Alexander Technique, like many types of bodywork, is not only very dependent on a specific understanding of how the body functions, but also on what is considered to be the proper division of labour between the teacher/therapist and student/client/patient, as well as on each individual’s convictions on what one has to do to achieve one’s goal. This is true, of course, for all of the differing fields of body work, but also within each field itself. Therefore what I say about the Alexander Technique will reflect my understanding of Frederick Matthias Alexander’s work, which stems not only from my training, but also from the four books and numerous articles written by its creator. In order to comprehend the usefulness of this work within this project, it will be necessary to first present some background information about Alexander and his Technique, particularly in regard to acting.

Alexander was born in 1869 in Tasmania, and grew up in the rural town of Wynyard. At age of fifteen in 1885/86, he went to Waratah, where he worked as company accountant at the Mt. Bischoff tin mine. While there he became quite involved in the active social life, including horse racing, and the dramatic society. It was probably there that he met James Cathcart, on tour with an acting company, with whom he later studied. The actor had formerly played in a company of Charles Keane, the son of the renowned actor Edward Keane.

In 1889 he went to Melbourne, where he decided he wanted to actively pursue the career of a reciter. This necessitated that he take lessons, which he probably received from James Cathcart. In 1891 or 1892 he also probably had instruction from the Australian elocutionist Fred Hill, the son of the author of *The Oratical Trainer: A System of Vocal Culture* (Melbourne: George Robertson, 1873), Thomas Padmore Hill. This led to Alexander finally being able to give a solo performance on 26 November 1891, of which it was said that he ‘gave a tragic recital with great spirit’.²

2 Rosslyn McLeod, *Up From Down Under: The Australian Origins of Frederick Matthias Alexander and the Alexander Technique* (published by author, 1994), p. 40, as cited in Michael Bloch, *F.M.: The Life of Frederick Matthias Alexander, Founder of the Alexander Technique* (London: Little, Brown, 2004), p. 31.

There followed a period, probably in 1892-93, in which hoarseness became a problem for him. After a particularly important and demanding performance, where in spite of meticulously following his doctor's advice—who could suggest no further course of treatment—he set himself the task of finding out why he lost his voice when reciting, but not in normal speech. By May 13, 1893, however, a newspaper article speaks of him having 'a good voice, wide range of emotional expression, and much dramatic force, [which] should, with careful training, carry their possessor to eminence upon the stage'.³ Thereafter he first spent two years in Tasmania and New Zealand, where he both acted and taught elocution and breathing, gradually building up what would become the basics of his technique. He then returned to Melbourne in 1895, where his primary emphasis was first on establishing a teaching practice. It was not until 1898 that he once again organized a recital for himself, advertising it as the 'the first appearance in Melbourne of F.M. Alexander, the versatile actor-reciter, entertainer and natural elocutionist'. In this, he was supported by four other artists, including James Cathcart. In 1899, together with Robert Young and Edith Page, he organized a series of entertainments with a professional director which were quite successful.

This notwithstanding, he decided to move to Sydney in March, 1900. There, once again, he set up a practice, and was followed there shortly afterwards by Robert Young and Edith Page, again for a series of entertainments in September and October. Early in 1901, Alexander advertised lessons in acting for the first time, offering the students the prospect of appearing in his own production of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. Three performances took place 'under the patronage of His Excellency the Lieutenant-Governor' at the end of June, with F.M. himself in the role of Shylock and Edith Page in that of Portia. The costumes were 'rich and splendid', and all the players were 'audible'. In September, he rented a theatre for two weeks, performing *Hamlet* in the first week (with himself in the role of the Prince, and Edith Page playing Ophelia), and repeating *The Merchant of Venice* in the second.

In December of that year, he announced that he would be opening the Sydney Dramatic and Operatic Conservatorium, mentioning that the famous Delsarte system 'as applied to dramatic expression, deportment, gesture, and vocalization' would be available as a special course. This attempt at founding a school was doomed, as interest was insufficient. He did put on productions of both *Hamlet* and *The Merchant of Venice* again, going on tour to 29 towns in New South Wales.

By the beginning of 1903 he was in financial straits, being taken to court for defaulting on payments for a theatre rental. This notwithstanding, he and about half of his company from the previous year went on tour again in the summer with the two Shakespeare plays. At some point in the first two years in Sydney, Dr. W.J. Stewart McKay, a surgeon who had studied in London, who must have come to one of his performances, arranged to follow a course of lessons with Alexander, saying 'If your teaching is sound, I'll make you; but if it's not, I'll break you'.⁴ Being convinced by the lessons, Dr. McKay not only encouraged Alexander to write something, but was instrumental in having his article 'The Prevention and Cure of Consumption' published in Sydney's *Daily Telegraph* on 12 December 1903, in which he for the first time expressed his belief that one would be able to improve one's breathing and general state of health by shedding some harmful habits which had resulted in the 'decay of the breathing power of mankind'. McKay was trying to convince him to go to London, but Alexander lacked the funds necessary for such an undertaking. It was not until he won a bet at the horseraces in early 1904 that he was able to make the move, travelling to London later that year.

Once in London, he devoted himself entirely to the propagation of his work, through teaching, lecturing, and writing, becoming very successful. It was in this time that his work took on a far broader character, not being solely devoted to improving one's breathing and state of health, but designed to allow the individual to gain constructive conscious control of his or her organism. In London, his professional activity in relation to the theatre was limited to his instruction of actors and, much later in 1933-34, to the production of the two plays from which he had derived such pleasure in his youth, *The Merchant of Venice* and *Hamlet*, in connection with his first training course for teachers of the Technique.

The significance of the fact that Alexander's work stemmed from his experiences as an actor at the end of the 19th century cannot be emphasized enough. It was as if the Alexander Technique linked me to a way of thinking about the organism and movement that had originated from his activities as an actor. Although I had sensed a glimpse of this when I first began teaching the members of the Dutch Historical Acting

3 Ibid., pp. 40–1, or in Bloch, p. 33.

4 F.M. Alexander, 'Autobiographical Sketch', *F. Matthias Alexander: Articles and Lectures*, ed. by Jean M. O. Fischer, (London: Mouritz, 2015), p. 243.

Collective (DHAC),⁵ it was not until the first Summer Academy for Historical Acting in 2018 that we found some palpable written links between the two.

THE ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE

The cornerstone of the I.T.M. approach to the Alexander Technique lies in the idea that our movements are determined by the decisions we make concerning them. Therefore, if we wish to change our movement patterns, we first need to change the thought patterns that give rise these movements. This concept is encapsulated in a thought that accompanies all of our activities, namely that ‘the poise of the head in relation to the body in movement is the key to freedom and ease of motion’.⁶ Interestingly enough, two aspects of this, the concepts of poise or balance and ease of motion are encountered again and again in historical art and declamation treatises, as being the basis for all graceful movement. If this poise, an ability to remain in balance throughout one’s activities was central to acting, is it any surprise that it is such a central aspect of the Alexander Technique?

Fundamental to Alexander’s work, is the idea that if we are to move easily, we must reduce our muscular activity to the minimum needed in order to attain the goal we have in mind. In order to accomplish this he maintained that we must:

- 1) ‘analyse the conditions of use present;’
- 2) ‘select (reason out) the means whereby a more satisfactory use could be brought about;’
- 3) ‘project *consciously* the directions required for putting these means into effect’.⁷

Being able to do this with ever increasing reliability entails the development of our ability to observe our conditions of use, learning how to reason out what is actually necessary to bring about that which we wish to do, and teaching ourselves to direct ourselves in movement according to that which we have reasoned out, rather than that which feels good because it has the comfortable familiarity of habitual use. Like so many things that have value in life, this is easier said than done, in that we rarely question how we carry out our habitual activities in life, for as infants we learned how to use our organisms through built-in behavioural mechanisms, socialization, and imitation.

There are three concepts of the Technique that often cause ‘difficulties’, which I wish to speak about in advance of a discussion of my practical investigation of standing in historical acting, and which I have encountered over and over again, not only in my work on myself, but also as a teacher.

The first is the idea that we can make any movement within the capabilities of a normally functioning human organism which is requested of us. Indeed, most people – barring accidents or congenital defects – have never felt the need to question how we move, as we have no apparent problems in attaining our goals, such as standing, sitting, or walking. This assumption, however, is not based on any concrete evidence, other than the fact that we have learned how to accomplish all basic human activities in some way or another. But our learning process as infants did not involve any conscious reflection about the mechanical necessities of the said activities – how could it, as nobody is born with an instruction manual? – but instead was part of the innate process of growth which we underwent in society. In this sense, our choices were powered by our organisms and the lure of imitating people we admire (or fear), but were not a result of reflective cognitive decision-making about the most effective way of carrying them out. Because of the success of this process in our past, we do not call into question our ability to carry out any simple sequence of directions that we so desire. Indeed, Alexander wrote that it was a practically universal delusion ‘that because we are able to do what we “will to do” in acts that are habitual and involve familiar sensory experiences, we shall be equally successful in doing what we “will to do” in acts which are contrary to our habit and therefore involve sensory experiences that are unfamiliar’.⁸ This is of great significance when doing embodied research, as it means that no matter how closely we read a text, we cannot be sure of accurately carrying out that which we understand the text to say, unless we have some sort of external check in the form of mirrors or, preferably, observation

5 For more information concerning the Dutch Historical Acting Collective, see <https://jedwentz.com/dhac/> (last accessed 01-11-2021).

6 For further information about the I.T.M. approach to the Alexander Technique, see Donald L. Weed, *What You Think Is What You Get: An Introductory Textbook for the Study of the Alexander Technique*, 3rd edition (Exeter, Devon: Short Run Press, 2004); for greater detail about this concept, see chapter 4.

7 F.M. Alexander, *The Use of the Self* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1985) p. 39. First published in 1932 by London: Methuen & Co. Ltd.

8 Ibid., p. 39.

by experts or video recordings.⁹ A great deal of time in the Alexander Technique is devoted to attaining this skill of being able to do what we ‘will to do’ in acts that are contrary to our habit as part of the process of learning to apply conscious control to our basic activities. For in doing this, we gain facility in choosing and carrying out the means we have reasoned out as being best to attain our ends. If we are able to do this in standing, sitting, and walking, we will then be able to transfer our ability to ‘think in action’ to other more complex endeavours.

The second concept – which is important to acknowledge in the context of all embodied research – is that ‘we all think and act (except when forced to do otherwise) in accordance with the peculiarities of our particular psycho-physical make-up’.¹⁰ This concept speaks to the home truth that we cannot perceive the world except from our own perspective, built up over time, which is a product of how our organism in all of its aspects has learned to carry out activities within our specific sociocultural environment. Because we cannot effectively move through life if we have to reflect on every individual action required of the nervous system for a specific movement, we always carry out the same instructions for a specific activity, until some external input, such as pain or a desire to reach a specific goal, suggests that there is a more favourable way to proceed. Altering these timeworn behavioural patterns, however, takes intense focus, as we are often changing lifelong habits, so ingrained that we are not even aware that there are any other possibilities for executing the task at hand.

A corollary of this is that our personal body-maps often do not match up with reality, and that we move according to them and our psycho-physical ideas of how we function. An example of this is that roughly 70–80% of the individuals who come to me for lessons, as I did myself when I first began lessons, initially have an incorrect conception of where their shoulder and hip joints are. This means they are forcing their organisms to find possibilities of movement which do not correspond to the mechanics of their bodies. Thus, their movements take place according to uncoordinated and inefficient protocols. As a result, almost no one is able to carry out a movement as described by a teacher or a book, historical or not, to its fullest intent, as each person’s body-map is different from everybody else’s.

The only way of getting beyond this, at least to a certain degree, is learning about the basic locomotive structures of the human body and how they interact with one another. This provides us with objective information for comparison with our own body-map, a means of finding the discordances between our ideas and reality. Knowing theoretically where our muscles and bones lie gives us the possibility of recognizing key points of our body, thereby encouraging awareness of what we are doing, and aiding us in the process of reasoning out how to execute movements efficiently. Alexander, however, saw the increased body awareness only as a by-product of the development of an individual’s capacity to give the directions reasoned out as being the best for a certain activity and to carry them out as directed, not merely as a product of greater knowledge of body mechanics. Needless to say, anatomical knowledge is also of great value to the Alexander teacher – or indeed for any bodyworker – as it is an important tool in the observation and analysis of movement patterns.

The difficulty herein, as for anyone desiring to change habitual behaviour patterns, lies in the fact that we receive no stimulus to do familiar actions in unfamiliar ways, as that feels wrong to us. As Alexander wrote about his own path of discovery, that if he were to ever achieve the changes in use that he desired, he

must subject the processes directing his use to a new experience, the experience, that is, of being dominated by reasoning instead of by feeling, particularly at the critical moment when the giving of directions merged into ‘doing’ for the gaining of the end I had decided upon. This meant that I must be prepared to carry on with any procedure I had reasoned out as best for my purpose, even though that procedure might *feel wrong*. In other words, my trust in my reasoning processes to bring me safely to my ‘end’ must be a genuine trust not a half-trust needing the assurance of *feeling right* as well.¹¹

We all know how difficult it is to change a habit, whether it be one of movement, dieting, exercising, that we are again and again faced by the temptation to go down the path we have always taken and feel comfortable with, in spite of all of our rational knowledge that it will lead us directly to the difficulties we are trying to avoid. The Alexander Technique proposes a procedure which may be applied to any aspect of our life, one which operates on the entire psycho-physical organism and enables us to place a wedge at the critical

9 Of course, it is also impossible to recreate any performative occasion from the past because the differences in sociocultural conventions over time are ineluctable.

10 F.M. Alexander, *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1987), p. 93. First published by London: Methuen & Co., in 1923,

11 Alexander, *The Use of the Self*, p. 45.

moment of ‘doing’, so that we have a space in our mind to decide to inhibit the habitual reaction to a stimulus and make a new decision against our habit. It is this moment of inhibition, of ‘non-doing’, which is fundamental to the Alexander Technique. As today’s society is focused on achievement, on ‘doing’, this concept of stopping before reacting to a stimulus is particularly foreign to us. We shall see, however, that just this aspect can be very effective when trying to practically realize descriptions of movement in historical acting treatises.

MY FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH THE ATTITUDES

I first began giving some classes in the Alexander Technique within the DHAC in 2016. Initially the classes were largely devoted to introducing some of the basic concepts, such as those enumerated above, first in sitting or standing, and then afterwards in activities of their choice, such as declamation, singing, etc. Sometime in 2017, the wish was expressed that I work with them on the attitudes, for which some of Johannes Jelgerhuis’ drawings were used as a blueprint.¹² This immediately provided some examples of the complexities mentioned in the previous section, for all of us were surprised at the outcome; indeed, it led to some disturbing recognitions on all of our parts.

Although all had received training in gesture, including standing, I could see that what the individuals were doing was not that which was depicted in the drawings; there were some radical disparities in their mode of standing, in spite of the fact that all were doing their very best to recreate the drawings. This in turn was clearly a product of the fact that ‘we all think and act [...] in accordance with [...] our particular psycho-physical make-up’, which takes us back to Alexander’s universal delusion ‘that because we are able to do what we “will to do” in acts that are habitual’ that ‘we shall be equally successful’ in those that are not. Although the participants had embodied a behaviour which they thought corresponded to the sources, they not only could not execute the attitude displayed in the picture, they even at times had difficulties seeing that the depicted image was different than that which they had been doing.

Common to all of the participants, and also to many others whom I have seen executing baroque gesture, was that in order to stand in the *contrapposto* called for in the treatises, they not only placed their weight on one foot, but also shifted the hip of the weight-bearing leg off to the side, thereby creating an angle in the line drawn from the shoulder to the hip joint and continuing down to the foot, while largely maintaining a frontal view of the torso. What was so strikingly different in the illustration, is that there was a straight line from the neck down through the hip joint to the foot, and that there were various shadings of the torso. For me, this contradiction was a catalyst to study the sources to see what they said about standing. I was offered an immediate opportunity, as I was to teach Alexander Technique at the 2018 Summer Academy for Historical Acting at Leiden University, where I also decided to partake in the acting classes, as I had long wished to explore this cauldron of expressivity, but had felt inhibited by the fact that I was an instrumentalist, rather than a singer.

THE 2018 SUMMER ACADEMY FOR HISTORICAL ACTING

The program of the Summer Academy was designed to teach basics of historical acting, with Austin’s *Chironomia* as a starting point, for with its comprehensive discussion of rhetoric and declamation, its notation and examples, even one with illustrations, it befitted the task. To this were added daily sessions on expression of the passions with the face based on Charles Le Brun’s *Conférence sur l’expression générale et particulière des passions* (1668), declamation according to John Walker’s *Elements of Elocution* (1781) and *The Melody of Speaking Delineated* (1787), and the attitudes as discussed by Johannes Jelgerhuis in his *Theoretische lessen over de gesticulatie* (1827).¹³ My work was primarily in conjunction with the class on Austin’s *Chironomia*, so in preparation for the Summer Academy, I read the entire treatise with particular emphasis on the question of standing, as that

12 See Laila Cathleen Neuman, ‘Staging Siméon: Exploring the acting style of Johannes Jelgerhuis through artistic research’, in *European Drama and Performance Studies*, forthcoming.

13 Charles Le Brun’s *Conférence sur l’expression générale et particulière des passions* (Amsterdam and Paris: Bernard Picart, 1698), declamation according to John Walker’s *Elements of Elocution* ([n.p.]: printed for the author, 1781) and *The Melody of Speaking Delineated* (London: printed for the author, 1787), and the attitudes as discussed by Johannes Jelgerhuis in his *Theoretische lessen over de gesticulatie* (Amsterdam: Meyer Warnars, 1827).

was how I wished to begin. I also learned the ‘The Miser’ by John Gay, for which Austin not only notated the gestures, but also provided an illustration of them for each line. By doing the latter, I was forcing myself into the situation of the actors, having to take that which I found in the treatise and apply it to my own organism, thereby involving myself in the same process that all the others were undergoing.

In reading Austin’s chapter on the ‘Position of the Feet and lower Limbs’, it immediately becomes apparent that grace and ease of motion are of prime importance. Standing is not seen as rigidity, but as an activity which can easily and gracefully be varied with no apparent effort:

The gracefulness of motion in the human form, or perhaps in any other, consists in the facility and security with which it is executed. And the grace of any positions [...] consists in the apparent facility with which they can be varied. Hence in the standing figure, the position is graceful when the weight of the body is principally supported on one leg, whilst the other is so placed as to be ready to relieve it promptly and without effort.¹⁴

In my career as a musician, I have been taught various ways to stand, and all of them involved some form of rigidity, some form of grounding. Here in Austin’s first description of standing gracefully, he does speak of the necessity of supporting the weight of the body, primarily ‘on one leg’, suggesting that this increases not only the grace of the stance, but also facilitates varying and changing it. Thus one is not putting down roots in order to be grounded, but is in a momentary attitude that can be quickly altered in accordance to the demands of the situation.

He then goes on to describe in more detail what he means by this:

The body must then be supported, if grace be consulted, on either limb, like the Apollo (see Ill. 1), the Antinous (see Ill. 2), or other beautiful and well executed statues. The foot, which at any instant sustains the principal weight, must be so placed, that a perpendicular line let fall from the hole of the neck shall pass through the heel of that foot. Of course the centre of gravity of the body is for the time in that line, whilst the other foot assists merely for the purpose of keeping the body balanced in this position, and of preventing it from tottering.¹⁵

He further notes that Leonardo da Vinci called ‘this hole or hollow of the neck, *the middle point between the shoulders*, and in another passage, *the little well of the neck*’ (See Ill. 3).¹⁶ Thus in discussing standing, he not only makes reference to two well-known Antique statues, which educated readers would know from engravings, but also indicated that this mode of standing was that preferred by the master painter Leonardo. At this moment of time, I followed up all of these references, but only saw the straight leg over the foot. Indeed, I, too, was only concentrating on the outward appearance, just seeing that it was different than what my colleagues were doing, i.e. that they were doing it ‘wrongly’.

14 Gilbert Austin, *Chironomia* (London: T. Cadwell and W. Davies, 1806), p. 295.

15 Ibid., pp. 296–297.

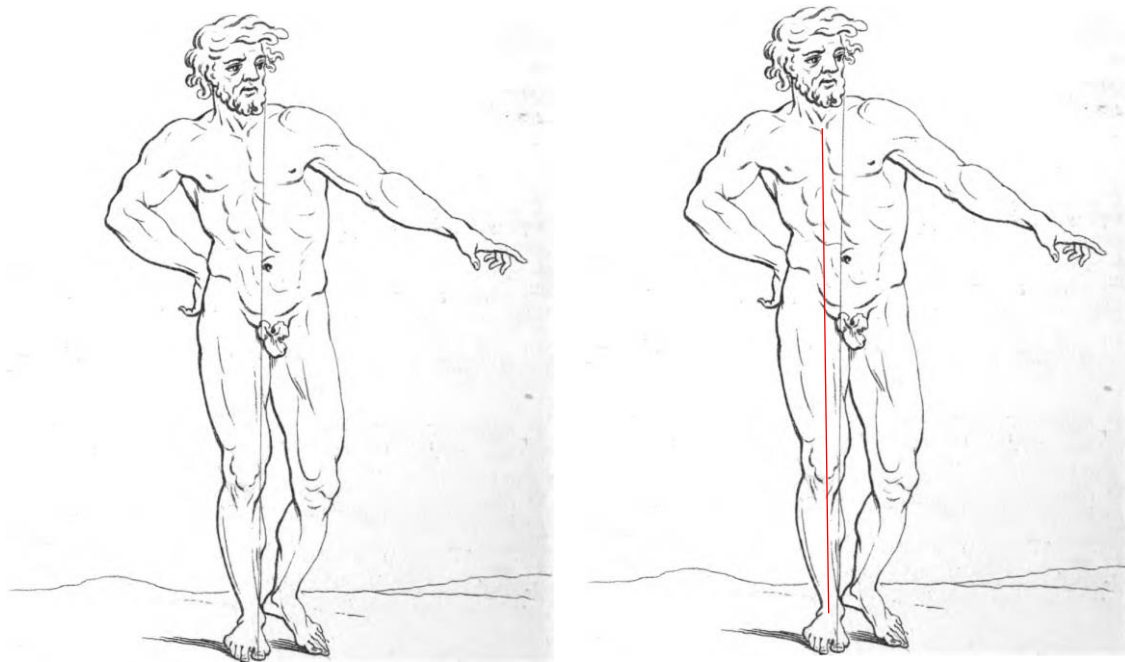
16 Ibid., p. 296.



Ill.1: Apollo Belvedere, Vatican Museums, Vatican City
By Livioandronico2013 - Own work, CC BY-SA 4.0
(<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=36412498>)



Ill. 2: Antinous of Delphi, Delphi Archaeological Museum, Delphi, Greece
By Ricardo André Frantz (User:Tetraktys) - taken by Ricardo André Frantz, CC BY-SA 3.0,
(<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=2959804>)



Ill. 3: *A Treatise on Painting* by Leonardo da Vinci, translated by John Francis Rigaud (London: Senex and Taylor, 1721), Plate 6.

https://books.google.ch/books/about/A_Treatise_on_Painting.html?id=9d4sAAAAYAAJ&redir_esc=y

These pictures reminded me strongly of the illustrations in the early anatomic atlases of the time, for example that of Govard Bidloo with illustrations by the painter Gerard de Lairesse (see Ill. 4).



Ill. 4: Govard Bidloo, *Ontleding des Menschelyken Lichaams*, illustrated by Gerard de Lairesse (Amsterdam: widow of Joannes van Someren, 1690), Plate 87. Courtesy of the U.S. National Library of Medicine.

Contrary to modern symmetrical, frontal depictions of the skeleton in medical books, these skeletons were presented in activity, showing them in movement, even if it is just standing with their weight on one leg next to their own coffin, as with de Lairese's standing figure. The head is facing slightly right, the torso shading to the left, the weight over the heel of the right foot, which is turned to the right, the left leg extended forward, the foot also at an outward angle, the arms at different angles and elevations. There is nothing of the orderly presentation of a modern medical book. This illustration alone reveals the great disparity between the present-day understanding of the organism, and how it works, and that of earlier times.

Two things struck me when trying to apply this knowledge when practicing John Gay's 'Miser'. First of all, I – like all my colleagues – had difficulties maintaining my centre of gravity over a single foot. I, too, deep down within me, was seeking some fixed, stable position for standing. As a result, after the first few ideal moments, I either applied a great deal of force and remained upright, or let my hip extend out to the side, and applied a great deal of force to remain upright. Neither was conducive to the grace of the figure and the ease of moving quickly according to the needs of the poem. I also immediately noticed, however, that when I was truly poised with my centre of gravity over the heel of one foot, my arms somewhat raised (one more than the other), my voice, without altering anything in the act of speaking itself, was much louder and more resonant than when I was standing in my normal fashion. This is something that was readily apparent to others and obviously would have been a great advantage to orators and actors in a time without microphones. Thus this mode of standing also has great pragmatic virtue in this regard in comparison to that of today. In the summer academy, I discovered that this was indeed something I could teach others and have since learned that it is of great benefit to singers.¹⁷

THE LINK BETWEEN F.M. ALEXANDER AND FRANÇOIS DELSARTE AND THE ACTING OF THEIR TIME

During the course of the summer academy, I became more and more convinced of the affinity between Alexander's work and historical acting, but found it difficult to articulate what I was experiencing. It was as if this style of acting had had some sort of seminal force upon the development of his Technique, that it, as it were, had served as a catalyst. Together with Jed Wentz, in a rare free hour during the academy, a search was begun online about Alexander's activities as an actor, which had never really interested me during my training as a teacher of the Technique. What we discovered was nothing less than a 'smoking gun': in his second publication on his Technique, 'Speech Culture and Natural Elocution', intended in part as advertising for his teaching, he cites Andrew Comstock in the third sentence as writing 'perhaps there is not one individual in every ten thousand whose articulation is *perfect*'.¹⁸ This was exciting, as Comstock in his book, *A System of Elocution*, reprinted 'all that is valuable [...] on the subject of gesture' in Austin's *Chironomia* 'in the compass of just a few pages'.¹⁹ In truth, it was almost the entire second part of the book (albeit lacking most of the footnotes), re-formatted, and with inferior illustrations. The connection between Alexander and Austin via Comstock thus seemed clear, at least during the time period in which I began doing research on Alexander's work as an actor, through re-reading his early works for indications of acting practices, and examining sources on acting and elocution which may have served as an influence upon him. In truth, however, he may have only known that quotation from a footnote in Thomas Padmore Hill's *The Oratorical Trainer: A System of Vocal Culture*, which was written by the father of Fred Hill from whom he had received instruction in declamation.²⁰ By the time I realized that, however, my investigations into Alexander's work in this period, both as an actor and as a teacher, had revealed that the influence of his training in acting and declamation on his Technique was far greater than heretofore realized.

As mentioned above, in 1901 Alexander also advertised himself as teacher of the Delsarte Method. At that time the use of the Method of François Delsarte (1811–1871) was all the rage in acting circles throughout the world. As Delsarte's younger brother Camille (1818-1877) had immigrated to Australia in the early 1850s,

17 I also made the personal experience at the academy of how we are all also affected by social mores concerning the use of the voice. Women today are constrained to keep their voice low, if they want to be taken seriously, giving them a relatively small range for expressing themselves in comparison to men. I began experimenting with this, together with the new mode of standing, with the result that I now have far greater resonance and flow throughout my range, as well as a richer palette of colours at my disposal.

18 Andrew Comstock, *A System of Elocution with Special Reference to Gesture, to the Treatment of Stammering, and Defective Articulation*, (Philadelphia: by the author, 1843), p. 30.

19 *Ibid.*, p. iv.

20 Thomas Padmore Hill, *The Oratorical Trainer: A System of Vocal Culture*, 7th edition, (Melbourne: George Robertson, 1873), p. 25.

Alexander may have encountered it through work with one of the émigré's students, but the more likely point of contact would seem to have been through his work with his acting teacher, James Cathcart. Cathcart, namely, had played the gravedigger in a performance of *Hamlet* in London in 1873, in which Steele MacKaye, the American actor who had promoted Delsarte's work in the United States and also throughout the world after the death of Delsarte, had played the title role.²¹ Like Alexander, Delsarte seemed as a young man to have a promising career on stage in front of him, both as a singer and actor, and like Alexander his hopes were crushed by having difficulties with his voice. Also like Alexander, he took that as a challenge to be overcome and – after acting at the Royal Opera-Comique as a *Comdién du Roi* from 1830-1832 – became an internationally known voice teacher and performer, notwithstanding his damaged instrument. An excerpt from a review of a concert on 23 September 1849 is suggestive of his prowess as an actor/singer:

One knows that Delsarte is one of the best demonstrators of this part of lyric tragedy. He teaches the attitude, the gesture, the [facial] expression, including the emotions that a lover, warrior, or a tyrant tormented by remorse must feel. [...] The veiled organ of Delsarte, his entirely exceptional voice, if it is a voice, has something of the baritone, of harmony, and of the tenor with his head voice. At the moment when one believes this voice to be weak, broken, about to die out, profoundly tragic sounds, full of energy arise, from it.²²

He seems to have been equally effective as an actor as a singer, relying on his imagination and his body mapping of movement in relation to the expression of the passions to form his histrionic power:

He spoke the beautiful scene from Gluck's *Orphée*, «Soyez sensible à mes pleurs», and the sung air of Thoas, «De noirs pressentiments mon âme intimidée», from *l'Iphégenie en Tauride*, by the same author; and one does not know what one should admire more, this ancient lament, this so stunning harmony, or the manner, the perfect method of the lyric tragedian, poet, orator, as [Alphonse de] Lamartine described him a while ago, upon hearing him sing for the first time.²³

The success of his teaching method can perhaps be measured by its longevity, in that through his American disciples, a more mechanical version of his work came to inform what was later to become contemporary dance. One of those, who came under this influence through her mother, was Isadora Duncan (1877–1927), who lauded Delsarte as 'the master of all principles of flexibility, and lightness of body', who 'should receive universal thanks for the bonds he removed from our constrained members'.²⁴

In what follows, I wish to look at certain aspects of the work of these two actors that are related to the field of acting, searching out commonalities, which then may be examined in terms of the increased attention that was being directed to posture in association with general good health during the 19th century. In particular, I will be looking at aspects of Alexander's work which seem to be quintessential elements of his Technique, but stem from earlier acting practices, particularly those of Delsarte.

SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES OF ALEXANDER'S AND DELSARTE'S APPROACH TO THE BODY

1. THE UNITY OF THE ORGANISM

First of all, both of them were led to their investigation of how the body works because of the failure of their voices, so absolutely necessary for their success on stage. Further, in spite of the ever-evolving

21 Jeroen Staring, *Frederick Matthias Alexander 1869–1955: The Origins and History of the Alexander Technique*, (Nijmegen: Radboud Universiteit, 2005), p. 248.

22 'On sait que Delsarte est un des meilleurs démonstrateurs de cette partie de la tragédie lyrique. Il enseigne le maintien, le geste, le regard et jusqu'aux émotions que doivent éprouver un amant, un guerrier, un tyran bourrelé de remords. [...] L'organ voilé de Delsarte, sa voix tout à fait exceptionnelle, si c'est une voix, tient du baryton, du concordant, et du Ténor par les sons de tête. Au moment où l'on croit cette voix faible, cassée, prête à s'éteindre, il en surgit des intonations profondément tragiques et pleines d'énergie.' Henri Blanchard, 'Auditions musicales', *Revue et Gazette musicales de Paris*, XVI/39, (30-09-1849), p. 307.

23 'Il a dit la belle scène d'Orphée de Gluck «Soyez sensible à mes pleurs», et l'air chanté de Thoas, «De noirs pressentiments mon âme intimidée», dans *l'Iphégenie en Tauride*, du même auteur; et l'on ne savait qu'admirer le plus, de cette mélodie antique, de cette harmonie si impressionnante, ou de la manière, de la méthode parfaite du tragédien lyrique, poète, orateur, comme le qualifiait, il y a quelque temps, Lamartine qui l'entendait chanter pour la première fois.' Blanchard, *ibid.*

24 As quoted from an interview in the *New York Herald* (Feb. 20, 1898) by Hillel Schwartz, 'Torque: The New Kinaesthetic of the Twentieth Century', *Incorporations (Zone)* 6, 1992, p. 72.

concepts of Cartesian Dualism from the 17th century on, in which body and soul came to be increasingly perceived as two distinct and perhaps even warring entities, each of these artists remained convinced of the unity of the organism. Whereas Alexander maintained that ‘the mental and physical are so inextricably combined that we cannot regard the one without the other’, which is also clearly indicative of their indivisibility,²⁵ Delsarte, a devout believer in the Augustine Trinity, held that

the three jointly necessary principles [life, soul and spirit] are united among one another consubstantially; they only have one indivisible essence [...] The three fundamentals of our being mutually penetrate and reverberate with one another. Without this, there would not be the unity, and the unity results precisely from that which each borrows from his compeers.²⁶

Similar passages may be found in numerous acting treatises, including Austin in his *Chironomia*, in which he writes that ‘the parts of the human figure which are brought into action in gesture, cannot, in truth be considered separate: for every muscle, every nerve, over which men can exercise voluntary action, contributes in some measure to the perfection of the gesture.’²⁷ Indeed in a footnote to this statement he goes even further, saying that

if the nerves and muscles assume the degree of tension suited to any passion, the mind will sympathize with the bodily action. And if the mind is affected by a particular passion either involuntary or by choice, as when actors endeavour to conceive it strongly; the muscular action and nervous sensibility excite to the expression of gesture: such is the effect of their mutual sympathy.²⁸

Like Delsarte, Austin speaks of the body acting upon the mind, and vice versa, that working ‘from outside in’, as well as ‘from inside out’ were both effective approaches depending on the context.²⁹ Students of the Alexander Technique often point to this aspect of Alexander’s thinking as being ahead of his time, far in advance of later body working techniques. We see here, however, that it was part and parcel of the acting tradition from which he stemmed. In addition, modern neurophysiology demonstrates time and again the ineluctable truth of this unity.

2. THEIR FIRST INVESTIGATIONS

Both Delsarte and Alexander attributed their difficulties with their voices in part to a faulty use of their larynxes. Delsarte was specifically taught that it was necessary to raise his larynx in order to sing a c” in chest voice, as was customary in France from the 17th century up until the 1830’s. It was also believed in medicine that it was the sole source for the production of a higher pitches. Using a mirror, Delsarte experimented until he could first sing high notes without having his larynx move, and then went even further and demonstrated that he could move his larynx down, while the pitch went up. Later in discussing it, he told of how he always looked at people’s larynxes after that, wondering how people used them. One day he saw a man who was unpacking a cart. Every time he lifted a box, his larynx went up in proportion to the weight of the box. Delsarte then realized that the larynx was like an infallible thermometer of the sum of the efforts involved.³⁰

Similarly, when Alexander began his investigation of his faulty use, he observed himself in the mirror. He noticed three faults when he was reciting: he gasped in air, he pulled his head back, and he lowered his larynx. It was when he began preventing these habitual movements that he made progress. He much later characterized this with the formula, ‘Let your neck be free, so that your head may move forward and up, so that your back may lengthen and widen.’³¹

25 F. M. Alexander, *Man’s Supreme Inheritance*, (Long Beach CA: Centerline Press, 1988) p. 33.

26 ‘Ces trois principes [la Vie, l’Esprit, l’Âme] co-nécessaires entre eux sont consubstantiellement unis; ils n’ont qu’une essence indivise. [...] Ces trois bases de notre être se pénètrent en se réverbérant mutuellement. Sans cela il n’y aurait pas d’unité, et l’unité résulte précisément de ce que chacun d’eux emprunte à ses congénères.’ Alain Porte, *François Delsarte: Une anthologie*, (Paris: Éditions de l’I.P.M.C., 1992; facsimile Cœuvres-et-Valsery: Ressouvenances, 2012), p. 97.

27 Austin, p. 294.

28 Ibid., p. 294.

29 For an examination of this concept as it appears in the works of Aaron Hill, see: Jed Wentz, ‘And the wing’d muscles, into meanings fly: practice-based research into historical acting through the writings of Aaron Hill’ in *European Drama and Performance Studies*, forthcoming.

30 For a description of his experiments, see Porte, *François Delsarte*, pp. 154–190; and Franck Waille, *Corps, arts et spiritualité chez François Delsarte (1811-1871): Des interactions dynamiques*, (Lille: Atelier National de Reproduction des Thèses, 2011), pp. 222–230, or https://scd-resnum.univ-lyon3.fr/out/theses/2009_out_waille_f.pdf (last accessed 30-12-2020).

31 For a description of the ‘evolution’ of his technique, see Alexander, *The Use of the Self*, pp. 23–48.

It is striking that both lost their voices, and both focused on the tension in their necks in their original investigation, Delsarte on that in front in connection with the larynx, Alexander on that the back, related to the pulling back of his head. In addition, both recognized that manner in which they used their larynx was causing their vocal problems. And finally, they both demonstrated their independence of mind, by choosing to proceed empirically, by just observing themselves in the mirror, creating theories, and then asking their mind to control the actions of their bodies to achieve the behaviour they desired.³²

3. WHISPERED VOWELS

Delsarte remarked in one of his lectures that he considered ‘a’ in French to be inappropriate for basic exercises, saying that since market criers with ‘o’ in their wares had the fullest voices and that the space in the back of the mouth was larger with ‘o’ than with ‘a’, the vowel ‘o’ must be a better vowel for them than the ubiquitous Italian ‘a’. He concluded that ‘it is very certain that a voice formed under the auspices of the vowel O must be safe from all fatigue’.³³ This suggestion is reminiscent of one frequently utilized component of an Alexander lesson: the whispered ‘ah’. Most likely originally stemming from his training in declamation,³⁴ Alexander came to see it as a way of training inhibition – defined in the context of the Alexander Technique as the ability of ‘receiving a stimulus [...] and of refusing to do anything immediately in response’ – as well as ‘non-end-gaining’. It entailed the following procedure:

1. Noticing where the tongue is and leaving it with the tip touching the lower teeth;
2. Smiling by thinking of something funny [...] in order to relax the lips and free the passages leading to the throat;
3. Opening the mouth by letting the lower jaw move forward and down.
4. Producing the sound of ‘ah’ in a whisper.
5. Closing the lips and let air come in through the nose.³⁵

Although Alexander himself did not describe this exercise in writing, he explained that it called

for a knowledge of the psycho-physical ‘means-whereby’ of the use of the organism *in general*, [...] and to this end a definite technique is employed. The process involved prevents sniffing and ‘sucking in air’, undue depression of the larynx, and undue stiffening of the muscles of the throat, vocal organs, and neck. It also prevents the undue lifting of the front part of the chest during inspiration, [and] its undue depression during expiration.³⁶

Thus an exercise that originally was utilized in singing and declamation, and that Alexander seemingly used in his early days primarily in connection with breathing, came to be one of inhibition. The similarity of the initial experiences of Delsarte and Alexander, their conception of the organism as a unified whole, their common re-thinking of vocal exercises for their own purposes are just a few examples of the tie between their work on the body and their initial training in declamation or singing and acting. Whereas Delsarte’s original search for vocal health evolved into an investigation of the aesthetics of expressivity, in which he attempted to categorize the movements of the body in relation to the passions in accordance with his triune view of the world, Alexander increasingly distanced himself from his original focus on the voice and breathing, observing that by cultivating conscious control – one’s mental self-discipline in regard to the activity of the human organism – that it is also possible to change one’s psycho-physical substance, in ways that in my experience have an enormous impact. Because both of these approaches stem from involvement in acting and, in Delsarte’s case, singing in the 19th and early 20th century, both offer possibilities of lending light to the reading of early works on declamation, singing and acting.

32 In my own work as a teacher of the Alexander Technique, I discovered that a combined approach, i.e. the seeking freedom both in front and in back, is more effective, and results in a greater awareness of the three dimensionality of the organism, leading to increased inner stillness and ease of motion.

33 ‘Donc il est très certain qu’une voix formée sous l’empire de la voyelle O doit être à l’abri de toute fatigue.’ ‘Mémoire adressé à l’Académie des Sciences par F. Delsarte’, *La Gazette médicale de Paris*, 16-05-1840, in Porte, *François Delsarte*, pp. 168–169.

34 Jeroen Staring has pointed out that many 19th century singing treatises recommend whispering exercises, as they lead to a pure sound. See: Staring, Frederick Matthias Alexander 1865–1955, pp. 239–242. See also: Jean M.O. Fischer, ‘Whispered “ah”’, <https://mouritz.org/companion/article/whispered-ah/> (last accessed 5-11-2020), which in addition provides a bibliography.

35 Paraphrased from Frank Pierce Jones, *Body Awareness in Action: A Study of the Alexander Technique* (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), pp. 21–22.

36 Alexander, *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual*, p. 128.

ALEXANDER'S DESCRIPTION OF STANDING

Having given some indication of the relevance of Alexander's work in relation to 19th-century acting techniques, it is of particular interest now in the context of this article to examine his stance on standing. In 1909, in a pamphlet entitled 'Why We Breathe Incorrectly', he wrote

There can be no such thing as a 'correct standing position' for each and every person. The question is not one of correct position, but of correct co-ordination (i.e., of the muscular mechanisms concerned). Moreover, anyone who has acquired the power of co-ordinating correctly, can readjust the parts of his body to meet the requirements of almost any position, while always commanding adequate and correct movements of the respiratory apparatus and perfect vocal control. Continual re-adjustment of the parts of the body without undue physical tension is most beneficial, as is proved by the high standard of health and long life of acrobats.³⁷

As we will later see, this belief in the 'continual re-adjustment of the parts of the body without undue physical tension' is something we encounter again and again in the descriptions of standing in historical acting, something that one can move in and out of with ease and grace. In 1918, in the second edition of *Man's Supreme Inheritance*, he quotes the above passage and then continues on in the following manner:

From what I have now said, it will be quite evident that the primary principle involved in attaining a correct standing position is the placing of the feet in that position which will ensure their greatest effect as base, pivot, and fulcrum, and thereby throw the limbs and trunk into that pose in which they may be correctly influenced and *aided* by the force of gravity. The weight of the body, it should be noted (see diagram AA),³⁸ rests chiefly upon the rear foot, and the hips should be allowed to go back as far as is possible without altering the balance effected by the position of the feet, and without deliberately throwing the body forward. This movement starts at the ankle, and affects particularly the joints of the ankles and the hips.³⁹

If we recall what Austin wrote about standing, the similarities are obvious: although he uses other words, Alexander is clearly speaking of having the centre of gravity over the foot and specifically, if we take in the evidence of the photos, over the heel. For him it rests primarily on the rear foot. He asks that one allow the hips to go back, while still remaining in balance over that foot and without 'deliberately throwing the body forward'. In my experience, given our current understanding of 'good posture', most people find this unsettling at first. He goes on to say that

When inclining the body forward, there must be no bending of the spine or neck; from the hips upwards the relative positions of all parts of the torso must remain unchanged. When the position is assumed, it is further necessary for each person to bring about the proper lengthening of the spine and the adequate widening of the back.⁴⁰

We shall also see elements of this appear in the recommendations of standing in many of the sources on acting, in particular Aaron Hill. Alexander goes on to describe how standing in this manner also facilitates an easy progression into walking:

This standing position as now explained is physiologically correct as a primary factor in the act of walking. The weight is thrown largely upon the rear foot, and thus enables the other knee to be bent and the forward foot to be lifted; at the same time the ankle of the rear foot should be bent so that the whole body is inclined slightly forward, thus allowing the propelling force of gravitation to be brought into play.⁴¹

This is in accordance with the Austin's remarks about standing, in which he too states, as seen above, that 'in the standing figure, the position is graceful when the weight of the body is principally supported on one leg, whilst the other is so placed as to be ready to relieve it promptly and without effort.' Thus in Alexander's work, which in the end centred on the attainment of constructive conscious control of one's

37 F.M. Alexander, originally in 'Why we breathe incorrectly', 1909; reprinted in Fischer (1995), p. 93.

38 See the illustrations between pp. 278- 279:

<https://archive.org/details/manssupremeinher01alex/page/n8/mode/2up?ref=ol&view=theater>. It is to be noted that the images of the men in this edition of the book have been inverted; in other editions this has been clearly corrected to have the figure with the curved back on the left and that with the straight back on the left.

39 Alexander, *Man's Supreme Inheritance*, pp. 278–279.

40 Alexander, *ibid.*, p. 279.

41 Alexander, *ibid.*, p. 279.

own organism, we can still observe elements of the tradition of vocal production and acting from which it originally evolved.

STANDING TODAY

It was only at this point of my investigation that I began wondering about the standards of posture current today, what exactly they were and where they come from, as obviously those of the acting tradition differed considerably from those I learned in my musical training. First I went online, just to see how the standard is defined today. I chose the following basic instructions advocated by an internationally known medical institution, the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, as a baseline for all further discussion as representative of the accepted norm for today:

- Stand straight and tall with your shoulders back.
- Keep your head level and in line with your body.
- Pull in your abdomen.
- Keep your feet about shoulder-width apart.
- Don't lock your knees.
- Bear your weight primarily on the balls of your feet.
- Let your hands hang naturally at your sides.⁴²

These instructions are accompanied by images of a woman in training clothes in both a frontal and a profile view. The right-to-left symmetry is immediately evident in the frontal perspective, as well as the solid base, in line with the shoulders, provided by the feet in training shoes. From the profile drawing, one sees how the necessity of having her shoulders back and her weight primarily on the balls of her feet causes her lumbar spine to come above the middle of her feet, whereas the back of her head, her shoulders and the back of her heels are in alignment. The contrast between this and the previous illustrations, whether the Apollo Belvedere or Alexander's stances could not be greater. In addition, it is difficult to imagine this woman moving easily and elegantly through the world; she is fixed in a position, rather than exhibiting poise, in all senses of that word. The question thus arises of how this change in posture ideals come about.

Sander L. Gilman in his overview of the history of posture, *Stand Up Straight!*, speaks of how

Posture is simultaneously of the mind and of the body. That is, it is one of the clearest proofs of the absence of any mind-body dichotomy. The way our body imagines itself in the world is the product of our sense of posture and of the cultural meanings attached to that sense. Our personal sense of our body, the way we unconsciously move or remain static in space, is a psychological phenomenon tied to our culture but also to our bodies. If we sense our selves as out of sync with our internal map of our body, we become disorientated; if it remains untested, it becomes our 'norm'.⁴³

He thus takes posture out of the realm of the merely physical, seeing it not only as an attribute of an individual, but an active interaction between all aspects of ourselves to the cultural and social order around us. It is something so basic that we do not question it, and if we do, our entire world is called into question, which explains also why it is so difficult to make any fundamental changes in it. These ideas concerning posture, are

affected by the rules by which one should sit, stand and present oneself in social situations in order to become healthy or beautiful or functional. These rules are generated by the disciplines of the body that exist and overlap in our social world. They define what it means to be 'human' and then how, over time, we have transformed the merely human into a 'modern', civilized citizen.⁴⁴

It is just for these reasons that we find it hard to acknowledge that what we are actually doing in standing is different than what we think we are doing. Our ideal of posture is so deeply embedded both in ourselves and our cultural environment that it is almost beyond our power of perception to notice that it is something

42 'Healthy Lifestyle: Good Posture Tips': <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/multimedia/back-pain/sls-20076817?ps=3> (last accessed 20-10-2020).

43 Sander L. Gilman, *Stand Up Straight!: A History of Posture*, (London: Reaktion Books Ltd, 2018), pp. 18–19.

44 *Ibid.*, p. 19.

– to the extent it is not inherent in our physiology – which we create and therefore also can change. It is also why a completely different concept of standing is frequently rejected out of hand, as being neither safe, morally acceptable nor healthy. Indeed, without my training as an Alexander teacher, I would not even have ‘seen’, both literally and intellectually, that what historically inspired actors were doing on stage did not actually correspond what is found in the treatises.

In Gilman’s presentation of various models of thinking in regard to posture, he cites Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s (1712–1778) Enlightenment views concerning how good posture and easy and elegant movement should be taught. One should let the child

learn to perform every exercise which encourages agility of body; let him learn to hold himself easily and steadily in any position, let him practise jumping and leaping, climbing trees and walls. Let him always find his balance, and let his every movement and gesture be regulated by the laws of weight, long before he learns to explain them by science of statics. By the way his foot is planted on the ground, and his body supported on his leg, he ought to know if he is holding himself well or ill. An easy carriage is always graceful, and the steadiest positions are the most elegant.⁴⁵

Following the Napoleonic wars, in order to set himself and his country off from this French approach to education, Friedrich Ludwig Jahn (1778–1852) set out ‘to make bodily discipline a formal constituent of German national identity’.⁴⁶ He fully believed that ‘the notion of a unified German spirit and body, a body that was clearly defined as bourgeois, was that of the true German citizen’ and built up *Turnvereine*, gymnastic clubs throughout Germany, thereby initiating a ‘movement to create a ‘German middle class across the boundaries, both geographic and religious, that fragmented the German-speaking world into multiple competing states [... and becoming] one of the core ideas of German nationalism’.⁴⁷

In his book *Deutsche Turnkunst* of 1816 he defined posture as follows:

Posture: Foot close to foot! The feet and knees must always be as close together as possible.
Body straight! Stomach in! Breast out! One need pay particular attention to the posture of the torso. By this means the small of the back is pulled in (swayed) and thereby the firm, noble presentation of the body created.
Hands on! Placed flat on the hips, the thumbs to the back, the 4 fingers closed in front.
Mouth closed! Lip on lip!⁴⁸

Interesting here, is that not only physical posture is addressed, but also obedient behaviour: one was required to keep one’s mouth shut. These gymnastic clubs became very popular, not only in Germany, and began to have an effect on how people thought about posture, with many consequences. In particular, this sort of training was adopted by the German army. As Gilman has pointed out ‘Prussian postural training demanded rigidity. For rigid posture was a metaphor for adherence to an authoritarian notion of the state for the new Germany. [...] The plum[b] line as much as the goose step defined the new state and the new court’.⁴⁹ This development of a strong German army was observed and admired from afar and, particularly after their victory over France in 1871 came to be emulated throughout the world. How central it was to German foreign and domestic policy, however, can be seen in a statement by the historian and extreme nationalist, Heinrich von Treitschke, in a lecture held at the University of Berlin:

It is an advantage to a nation when it has a strong and well-organized army, not only because the army is intended to serve as an instrument for foreign policy, but because a noble nation with a glorious history can employ the army for a very long time as a dormant weapon, and because it forms a school for the peculiarly manly virtues of the people, which is so easily

45 ‘qu’il apprenne à faire tous les pas qui favorisent les évolutions du corps, à prendre dans toutes les attitudes une position aisée & solide; qu’il sâche sauter en éloignement, en hauteur, grimper sur un arbre, franchir un mur; qu’il trouve toujours son équilibre; que tous ou ses mouvemens, ses gestes soient ordonnés selon les loix de la pondération, longtems avant que la Statique se mêle de les lui expliquer. A la manière dont son pied pose à terre, & dont son corps porte sur sa jambe, il doit sentir s’il est bien ou mal. Une assiette assurée a toujours de la grâce, & les postures les plus fermes sont aussi les plus élégantes.’ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile ou L’Éducation*, Vol. 1 (Paris, 1762), pp. 182–183; trans. by Barbara Foxley, *Émile or Education*, (London & Toronto: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1911), p. 104.

46 Gilman, p. 284.

47 Ibid., p. 287.

48 ‘Haltung: Fuß an Fuß! Füße und Kniee müffen immer, so dicht als möglich geschlossen sein. Leib gerade! Bauch ein! Brust heraus! Auf diese Haltung des Oberleibes ist besonders Aufmerksamkeit zu verwenden. Durch sie wird das Kreuz eingezogen (hohl) und dadurch allein die feste edle Stellung des Leibes bewirkt. Hände an! an die Hüften flach angelegt, der Daumen hinten, die 4 Finger geschlossen vorn. Mund zu! Lipp! auf Lippe!’ Friedrich Ludwig Jahn, *Die deutsche Turnkunst zur Einrichtung der Turnplätze*, (Berlin: by the author, 1816), p. 16.

49 Gilman, *Stand Up Straight!*, p. 93.

become lost in an age of profit and enjoyment. [...] It is a defect of English civilization that it does not know universal military service.⁵⁰

The similarity this mode of basic military training bears to the posture that came to be perceived as the norm throughout the world in the 20th century, is evidenced by the resemblance of the Mayo Clinic's prescription to that of Jahn's.

NEW APPROACHES TO ANATOMY

In roughly the same time period, a trend towards the 'ideal symmetrical form' in anatomical studies began. The first anatomical studies as we know them, stem from the 16th century, after Pope Sixtus issued a bull in 1482 allowing local bishops to give the bodies of executed criminals and unidentified corpses to physicians and artists for dissection. In 1543 the first modern anatomist, Andreas Vesalius, published *De humani corporis fabrica libri septem* (Basel: Johannes Oporinus). Glenn Harcourt speaks of Vesalius' desire in his book to produce 'nothing less than a normative description of human anatomy', to aide him in his 'attempt to articulate a fundamental notion as to the relationship between the structure of the body and its function'.⁵¹ As he was searching for the ideal norm, it is perhaps not surprising that he turned to the Canon of Polykleitos, which represented the proper proportions of the parts of the body to one another in Greek sculpture, for the choice of his dissecting specimens: 'It is desirable that the body employed for public dissection be as normal as possible according to its sex and of medium age, so you may compare other bodies to it, as if to the statue of Policletus.'⁵²

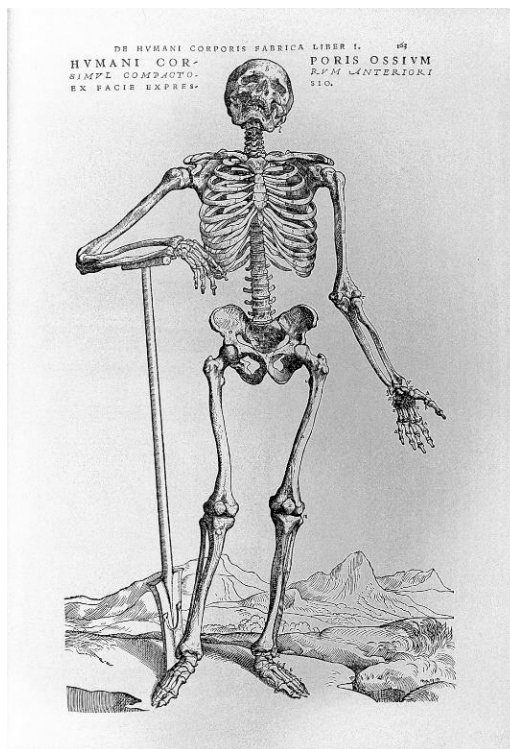
Thus like Austin, who turned to the Antique sculpture as the source for standing, Vesalius used the authority of the pre-eminent Greek artist Polykleitos for corroboration for his anatomical work, whose work served as a the basis for the art theory of the time. It is thus not surprising that the two plates of the human skeleton at the end of Vesalius' first chapter (see Ill. 5 and https://www.researchgate.net/figure/One-of-the-Vesalius-plates-on-the-human-skeleton-with-the-figure-in-an-allegoric-pose_fig13_292672408) likewise both have their 'weight' over one foot, the first further supporting himself by means of a spade, the second by resting his skull on the back of his left hand, which in turn is pushing down on his elbow which is leaning on a sepulchre. They are thus placed in the context of where skeletons are normally found. But as in anatomic atlases up through to the beginning of the 19th century, the skeletons are also partaking in human activities, showing how artists perceived the bony structure holding up the surrounding flesh.⁵³ Neither of Vesalius' skeletons are seen entirely from the perspective of a single cardinal plane, they are all slightly askew, so that one can see portions of the vertebral column through the ribcage and alongside the sternum and manubrium. The limbs are neither presented completely in the frontal plane nor in profile, but such that some natural activity could be emulated. This is also true of the skeleton shown earlier, drawn by de Lairese (see. Ill. 4).

50 Quoted in Gilman, *Stand Up Straight!*, p. 289, from Heinrich von Treitschke, *The Organization of the Army*, trans. Adam L. Gowans (London: Gowans and Gray, 1914), p. 10.

51 Glenn Harcourt, 'Andreas Vesalius and the Anatomy of Antique Sculpture', *Representations*, Winter, 1987, No. 17, Special Issue: The Cultural Display of the Body, p. 12.

52 As quoted in Harcourt, *ibid.*, p. 1, who attributes the translation to C.D. O'Malley, *Andreas Vesalius of Brussels, 1514–1564*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964), p. 343.

53 See Nino Nanobashvili, *Das ABC des Zeichnens: Die Ausbildung von Künstlern und Dilettanti* (Petersberg: Michael Imhof Verlag, 2018) for information about the use of anatomy in the training of artists, which contains many illustrations of skeletons 'in movement'.



Ill. 5: Andreas Vesalius, *De humani corporis fabrica libri septem* (Basel: Oporinus, 1543), CC BY 4.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons.

With increased access to the new tools of dissection, a new knowledge and understanding about the organism was gained, departing from the long-held Galenic convictions and leading to new ideas concerning the mechanics of the body. This in turn influenced the concepts of anatomists, as described by Reinhard Hildebrand:

After the fabric of the human body had become known as a whole [...] and after a new feeling for space had made it possible to chart its cavities and the organs they contain, [...] after certain motions had been function-anatomically investigated [...] and the body recognized as a usefully constructed organism, [...] the attention of anatomists returned to the human body as a whole and its mobility. This meant that it was necessary to learn how to understand the fundamental mechanics of the body, the interplay of forces and economy, the differentiated movements and their expediency.⁵⁴

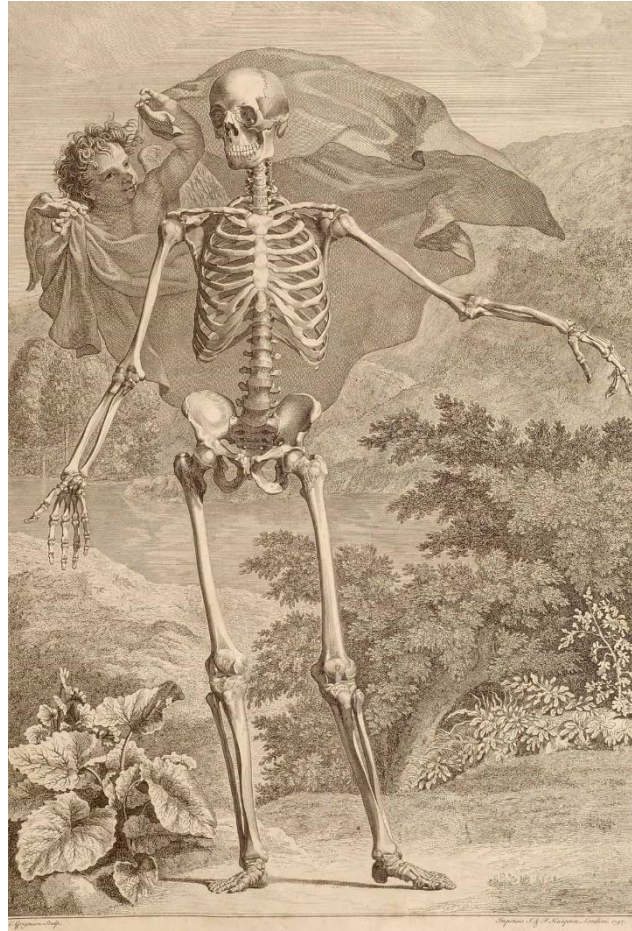
The foremost anatomist of the time, Bernhard Siegfried Albinus (1697–1770), professor of anatomy and surgery, and later medicine, at the University of Leiden from 1721, envisioned this integral organism in his *Tabulae sceleti et musculatorum corporis humani* (1747), with his conception of a ‘homo perfectus’, a figure representing the ideal norm. In order to do this, he carefully chose skeletons which met his criteria. Reinhard Hildebrand writes that for the first figure (see Ill. 6), ‘he chose a skeleton that showed all signs of strength and agility, one that was elegant but at the same time not too delicate, that showed neither juvenile or feminine roundness and slenderness nor uncouth roughness and clumsiness; in short, one whose parts were all beautiful and pleasing to the eye’.⁵⁵ In addition, he corrected things that didn’t meet his idea of perfection and insisted that the skeleton be presented as much in the frontal plane as possible to minimize risk of perspective foreshortening. Taken together with the most aesthetically pleasing proportional relationships between the parts, this represented for him

ideal beauty, strength and health. If the symmetry was disturbed, such an imbalance reflected disease because the symmetry in all parts of the body determined their proper functioning. [...] His desire for symmetry was so great that he demanded that his artist, Johann Wandelaar, fudge the details of bones, thereby eliminating certain ‘vital structures for the sake of symmetry’.

54 Reinhard Hildebrand, ‘Attic Perfection in Anatomy: Bernhard Siegfried Albinus (1697–1770) and Samuel Thomas Soemmerring (1755–1830)’, *Annals of Anatomy*, 187 (2005), p. 557.

55 *Ibid.*, p. 558.

[...] Lastly, according to Albinus the skeleton should convey an expression of beauty true to life and a vitality based on grace, strength and harmony.⁵⁶



Ill. 6: Bernhard Siegried Albinus, *Tabulae sceleti et musculorum corporis humani*, London 1749, Table 1.

A later anatomist, Joseph Bell, complained about this manipulation of the skeleton, saying that ‘it is like a statue anatomized where all the irregularities of substance, all the gradations of bones, ligaments, tendons, and flesh, are rounded down with a studied smoothness: it is a figure suiting more to the eye of the painter than the eye of the anatomist.’⁵⁷ And it is perhaps just because of this that nobody, then or now, comments about a glaring asymmetry in these prints: the manner in which they are standing with the centre of gravity over one foot, as dictated by long-standing traditions in art, as we will see later. This remained true throughout the 19th century, although the feet gradually came to be placed closer to one another. In the 20th century such drawings have come to be replaced by truly symmetrical representations of skeletons – much as if one were looking at a standard model for medical students – and are usually directly in one of the cardinal planes with, perhaps, one forearm in supination and the other in pronation.⁵⁸

NEW FORMS OF BODYWORK

This new anatomic mode of perception gradually led to a new ‘normal’ definition of posture in which symmetry was paramount, such as that presented by Jahn. Over time, a lack of symmetry came to be perceived as unhealthy, something which demands treatment, for example with one of the early forms of physiotherapy, such as German *Krankengymnastik*. Also this was when various contraptions, such as corsets

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 561.

⁵⁷ Joshua Bell, *The Anatomy of the Human Body*, Vol. 1, 2nd edition, (London: printed for T.N. Longman and O. Rees, and T. Cadell and W. Davies), p. ix. For a discussion of Joshua Bell’s views on anatomy, see Lyle Massey, ‘Against the ‘Statue Anatomized’: The ‘Art’ of Eighteenth-Century Anatomy on Trial’, *Art History* 40 (February 2017), pp. 68–103.

⁵⁸ For an example, see <https://cdn.britannica.com/51/54751-050-718E003E/Front-views-human-skeleton.jpg>. (last accessed 18-10-2021)

and backboards, were developed to train a child to sit up straight.⁵⁹ This preoccupation with symmetry and straightness developed to such a degree, particularly in regard to tuberculosis, that Gilman reports that in the beginning of the 20th century ‘the Society of Medical Inspectors of the New York Health Department instituted a system of physical examinations of posture that specifically targeted physical disabilities rather than contagious diseases’.⁶⁰ In 1925, a physician at Columbus University then estimated that 20% of the children had orthopedic deformities, as the children did not match this new ‘normal’.

As a result of this increasing focus on posture, many sorts of body therapies for self development came into being, including the Alexander Technique, the American continuation of Delsarte’s work (now called Delsartism to differentiate it from Delsarte’s own work), Swedish Ling gymnastics, Eastern yoga, German *Krankengymnastik*, etc. One system received particular notice, as it was endorsed by the imperial court in Berlin, that of Elizabeth Marguerite de Varel Mensendieck (1864–1957), better known as Bess M. Mensendieck, who was hired by Kaiser Wilhelm II ‘to improve the posture of his courtiers’.⁶¹ Gilman is of the opinion that

this was, however, not merely an aberration of imperial Berlin, where Mensendieck served as a ‘scientific adviser’ on posture, beauty and health. In mimicry of the Wilhelminian court, the erect body becomes a standard to which a rising middle class (whether in the army or in the drawing room) can aspire, imagining that their bodies are no longer marked as different from those of the elite. Its reform was a type of military retraining of the body for civilian purposes. It made better bodies out of the urban middle class and their slouching postures, since slouching was a sign of innate rebellion against the ‘natural’. The ‘natural’ came to be that which society superimposed on the modern bourgeois body.⁶²

Robin Vehar, in her article on American Delsartism – known mainly for its influence on contemporary dance – and Mensendieck body culture, speaks of how the American forms of Delsarte’s work, came to have a different orientation than that of its founder. Delsarte was investigating the body’s movement capabilities at increasingly deeper levels in order to create a triune inventory of expressive gestures to inform his drive to understand the nature of expression. Later followers, including Mensendieck, took these impressive tables and made rigid exercises out of them, rather than seeing them as a fount of information upon which one could draw when the need rose. Vehar writes that both

Delsarte and Mensendieck formulated extremely orderly systems of movement, one explicitly artistic and the other explicitly mechanical, but both rationalized physical positions and motions. In American contexts, practitioners of each program would increasingly focus on individual personality development, thus merging efficiency and expression. Recovering their similarities enables us to see the third layer; in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, some emancipatory forms of artistic modernism and disciplinary forms of social modernity could work together in mutually constitutive ways.⁶³

Mensendieck grew up in New York and moved to Paris in order to study sculpture. Frustrated by the difference between Greek statues and the models she was sculpting from, she decided to become a ‘sculptor in flesh’. Her path to this was to attend medical school, first in Paris and thereafter in Zurich where she completed her degree. Vehar writes that it ‘was in this period that Mensendieck developed her understanding of the relationship of muscular, skeletal, and neurological systems, and began to focus on the relationship between these systems and proprioception’.⁶⁴ This knowledge served as the basis for her system of exercises, in which – instead of ‘equating gestures with emotions’ – she ‘identified the smoothest, most concise, and most energy-enhancing ways to sit, rise, stand, walk, bend, lift, and breathe. Then, using this knowledge, she helped students learn how to “make his intelligence the engineer for running his body machine *according to the mechanical laws established by nature*”’.⁶⁵

What is astounding about her exercises, however, is how she introduces her basic position – standing – in her first book, *Körperkultur des Weibes (Body Culture for Women)*:

59 See Gilman, pp. 193-200.

60 Ibid., p. 110.

61 Ibid., p. 94.

62 Ibid., p. 97.

63 Robin Vehar, ‘The Expressive Efficiencies of American Delsarte and Mensendieck Body Culture’, *MODERNISM/modernity* 17/4 (2010), p. 820, <https://doi.org/10.1353/mod.2010.0037> (last accessed 07-01-2021).

64 Ibid., p. 830.

65 Ibid., p. 830. The internal quotation is from Bess M. Mensendieck, *The Mensendieck System of Functional Exercises* (Portland, ME: The Southworth-Anthoensen Press, 1937), vol. 1:6, p. 16.

It is of greatest importance that one conscientiously assume the attack position each time. If the exercises are undertaken with a limp body, then the result will be the same as the original position. The expression 'attack position' (instead of 'basic position') was chosen, as each exercise is work and every good execution of work is dependent on how one attacks it (angle of attack). From a poor position of attack comes poorly executed work. Lazy people never assume an attack position in relation to work. In addition, if one assumes the normal position of attack (and executes [it] slowly), an exercise can never become dangerous, because all parts of the body are ordered and prepared for effort.⁶⁶

Firstly, in a book for women, the degree to which this position is couched in military terms is extraordinary. Secondly, it implies that if one does not assume this tense position, one will not succeed in anything. Thirdly, that one is lazy, and morally reprehensible if one does not assume this tense position. Thus this exercise is socially coercive, designed also to inculcate a specific behaviour which is purportedly for physical well-being. Finally, it is highly similar to Jahn's standing position, which as we have seen, came to be associated with the training of the Prussian army.

She opens with a description of the general level of tension required to do the exercise well.

I. Exercise. Firmly energized attack position.

At first the body is loose and unordered, as it is with most people, who never think about the posture of their body. The building up of the energized posture is done by groups from the bottom to the top. This energized attack position is to be compared to the construction of a house of cards. The further one goes in building it up, the more cautious one must be to not relax that which is already constructed.⁶⁷

Contrary to the ease in standing that we find in the description of Austin, necessary to be able to move easily and elegantly from one position to another, Mensendieck has made it very clear that her attack position involves a high level of tension. She then continues with instructions concerning the legs and torso.

1. Group. Position of the legs.

- a) Feet closed together at the heels as in the military.
- b) Stand strongly on the heels and balls of the feet with the weight of the body [over them].
- c) Press the calves firmly back.
- d) Hold the knees firm.
- e) Firmly tauten the thighs.

2. Group. Position of the torso.

- f) Pull in the stomach. (The pulling in happens in such a manner that one tries to pull in the portion of the stomach below the navel from the lower back.)⁶⁸

These instructions are accompanied by three photographs which show a woman in profile, first in a loose, slouchy position, showing what the woman looked like when beginning the exercise program, then a 'straighter', partially energized figure as she would appear after one month, and lastly what a highly energized

66 'Von größter Wichtigkeit ist die jedesmalige gewissenhafte Annahme der Angriffsstellung. Werden die Übungen aus einem schlappen Körper heraus unternommen, so ist das Resultat gleich der Anfangsstellung. Es wurde der Ausdruck "Angriffsstellung" (statt "Grundstellung") gewählt, da jede Übung eine Arbeit ist, und jede gute Arbeitsleistung davon abhängt, wie man sie angreift (Angriffswinkel). Aus einer schlechten Angriffsstellung heraus wird schlechte Arbeit geleistet. Faule Menschen nehmen nie eine Angriffsstellung zur Arbeit an. Außerdem kann bei Annahme der normalen Angriffsstellung (und bei langsamer Ausführung) niemals eine Übung gefährlich werden, weil alle Teile des Körpers geordnet und zur Anstrengung bereit sind.' Bess M. Mensendieck, *Körperkultur des Weibes: praktisch hygienische und praktisch ästhetische Winke* (Munich: F. Bruckmann A.G., 1907), p. 137.

67 '1. Übung. Stramm energisierte Angriffs-Stellung. [...]

Der Körper steht zunächst lose und ungeordnet, wie er bei den meisten Menschen steht, die niemals über ihre Körperhaltung nachdenken. [...] Der Aufbau der strammen Haltung wird gruppenweise von unten nach oben vorgenommen. Diese stramme Angriffs-Stellung ist dem Aufbau eines Kartenhauses zu vergleichen. Je weiter man an- und auf- bauen will, desto vorsichtiger muß man darauf bedacht sein, das schon Aufgebaute nicht zu lockern.' Ibid., p. 142.

68 '1. Abteilung. Stellung der Beine.

- a) Füße an den Fersen militärisch geschlossen. Fig. 6.
- b) Fest auf Fersen und Ballen*) aufstehen mit dem Druck des Körpergewichtes.
- c) Waden stramm nach hinten drücken.
- d) Knie stramm halten.
- e) Oberschenkel stramm anziehen.

2. Abteilung. Haltung des Torso.

- f) Bauch einziehen. [Das Einziehen geschieht in der Weise, daß man sich von der Kreuzgegend aus bemüht, den unterhalb des Nabels gelegenen Teil des Bauches einzuziehen.]

Ibid., pp. 142–143.

attack position would look like after three months.⁶⁹ In the energized positions, as would be expected from her instructions, one finds a high degree of tension throughout the organism, and there is a clear resemblance, both of the photographs and the instructions, to the medical ones we find in the website of the Mayo Clinic.

In 1910 she established her first school in Germany. She returned to the United States after World War I, opening up schools there and throughout the world, and wielded great influence in the world of body culture, an influence that has continued to the current day.

With this succinct history of posture, we have learned something of why we stand the way we do now, namely that at the turn of the 19th century there was a concatenation of socio-political, military, and medical reasons leading to the assumption of a new ‘normal’ posture – or perhaps ‘normed’ posture would be a more appropriate way of describing it – with a higher level of tension. What is striking about these systems is their rigidity, both physical and mental. In contrast, both Delsarte and Alexander were setting up alternative systems which both, although they were extraordinarily different in nature, involved learning to move in manners suited to the intended task, which were designed to help individuals attain their goals. In regard to acting, Delsarte held that

We never really understand an author’s meaning. Every one is free to interpret him according to his individual instinct. But we must know how to justify his interpretation by gesture. Principles must aid us in choosing a point of view in accordance with his individual nature; otherwise incoherence is inevitable. Hence rules are indispensable. But when the law is known, each applies it in accordance with his own idea.⁷⁰

Thus his vocabulary of gestures as represented by his myriad of drawings is not to be understood as a set of exercises, as it was interpreted by his later followers, but as a vocabulary of body language which could be called upon when interpreting a specific text in line with the actor’s own understanding of it. This is so far from seeing it as a set of exercises that when Delsarte’s daughter, Madame Geraldine, came to the United States in 1892, she said that what she saw being done under her father’s name was nothing she had ever observed her father doing. Indeed, in an interview she maintained that ‘the fundamental principle of the master’s instruction was the expression of the artistic “dynamique” (gesticulation), whereas in America certain mechanical movements are made the base of the system’.⁷¹

Alexander was even more radical in that he increasingly distanced himself from his original focus on the voice and breathing, and turned to the general issue of conscious control, i.e. the cultivation of one’s mental self-discipline in regard to the activity of the human organism. By the time he wrote his last book, he was able to maintain that ‘a person who learns to work to a principle in doing one exercise will have learned to do all exercises, but the person who learns just to “do an exercise” will most assuredly have to go on learning to “do exercises” *ad infinitum*’.⁷² For him, the importance lay in developing the conscious control of one’s self, as this was the key in all activity.

We thus also see that at the end of the 19th century there was a trend towards a more regimented, stiff use of the organism and away from the more holistic, more flexible approach that was still exhibited by actors on stage. It is interesting to note in this context that current research shows evidence that activities with flowing motion, rather than stiff, mechanically repeated ones, lead to greater creativity.⁷³ Without the practical experience of interacting with some members of the DHAC about the differences between a Jelgerhuis drawing and their execution, without reading Austin and other sources, it never would have occurred to me to investigate the question of how our current understanding of posture might hinder our understanding of the sources. This background will allow us now to look with a more observant eye at the history of standing in relation to acting.

69 See https://archive.org/details/bub_gb_rd8PAAAAAYAAJ/page/n211/mode/2up (last accessed 03-02-2021), p. 1 of the photos at the back of the book.

70 Mr. L’abbe Delaumosne, *The Delsarte System*, trans. by Frances A. Shaw (Albany, NY: Edgar S. Werner/The Voice Press, 1884), pp. 63–64.

71 Frank T. Charles, « Del Sarte. The only Teacher of His System in France. Talk With a Former Pupil of Del Sarte. », *The Boston Journal* (26-03-1892).

72 F.M. Alexander, *The Universal Constant in Living*, (Bexley: Integral Press, 1941), p. 216.

73 Michael L. Slepian and Nalini Ambady, ‘Fluid Movement and Creativity’, *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 141/4 (2012), pp. 625–629.

A SHORT HISTORY OF STANDING IN ART AND ART THEORY

ANTIQUAE STATUES

As most acting treatises, like that of Austin, look back to Antiquity as a commonly known source for what was considered to be beautiful, let us also begin there with a magnificent bronze statue of a young man in his prime, the Antikythera Youth, probably created in the late Classical era, around 340–330 BCE, and preserved by having gone to the depths of the Mediterranean in a shipwreck (see Ill. 7).



Ill. 7: Antikythera Youth, Bronze. 340—330 BCE, Inv. No. X. 13396, Athens, National Archaeological Museum. Photo: joyofmuseums, CC BY-SA 4.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons

Beth Harris and Steven Zucker see it as exemplary for Greek Classical sculpture with its understanding of human anatomy, musculature and bone structures.⁷⁴ Unlike the images from the Mayo Clinic, the statue is an asymmetric nude, created to delight the eye on account of the beauty of its features, not as didactic image designed to improve the health of the beholder. This does not mean to say that one was only interested in beauty in the Greek Antiquity; to the contrary, the training of both mind and body were clearly advocated as a means of cultivating an individual's moral and physical force. Nonetheless the statues of the Classic era, which were frequently of male nude athletes, exemplified Polykleitos' abovementioned aesthetic theories of the mathematical basis of artistic perfection, which manifested itself, as Galen wrote, 'in the proportions, not of the elements, but of the parts, that is to say, of finger to finger, and of all the fingers to the palm and the wrist, and of these to the forearm, and of the forearm to the upper arm, and of all the other parts to each other.'⁷⁵ The art historian Kenneth Clark described the effect of his careful use of these proportions on the observer, saying that 'his general aim was clarity, balance, and completeness; his sole medium of communication the naked body of an athlete, standing poised between movement and repose'.⁷⁶

74 Beth Harris and Steven Zucker, 'The Antikythera Youth', 1:12: <https://smarthistory.org/antikythera-youth/> (last accessed 19-10-2020).

75 As cited in Horst de la Croix, Richard Tansey and Diane Kirkpatrick, *Gardner's Art through the Ages: 1 Ancient, Medieval and Non-European Art* (San Diego/New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1991, ninth ed.), p. 163.

76 Kenneth Clark, *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1956), p. 36.

Beth Harris and Steven Zucker place the Antikythera Youth in the tradition of Polykleitos, asserting that it was ‘standing in a beautiful example of *contrapposto*’.⁷⁷ David Summers defines *contrapposto*, as a ‘term used in modern writing about art for the posture of a sculpted figure standing at rest with weight shifted on to one leg’, describing Polykleitos’ Doryphoros (see Ill. 8) as ‘an early example of this posture, which displays the human body as a self-contained static system, in balance in the pose itself but visibly arrested and therefore implying past and future movement’, completely in line with Clark’s understanding of Polykleitos’ general aim.⁷⁸



Ill. 8: The Doryphoros of Polykleitos, Archaeological Museum of Naples, copy, original ca. 440 BCE.

Harris and Zucker, however – having acknowledged the beauty of the *contrapposto* of the Antikythera Youth – go on to say that the artist, by extending the figure’s right arm and leg, demonstrates a willingness to ‘*distort* [italics editorial] the body to express a kind of nobility or a kind of emotion’.⁷⁹ Whereas the movement indicated by the extension of the arm and leg are further from the torso than that of the statues by Polykleitos, they by no means bring the body out of balance, nor are the limbs out of proportion. This leads me to ask the question from whence the concept that portrayed movement might represent a distortion might arise. Could it be that now, with our present-day concept of the human body, lack of symmetry – which can be expressive of affect and (e)motion – could be considered a distortion, to be sure one that encapsulates beauty?

I come to this question because *contrapposto* came to be considered the epitome of beauty, not only in Greek and Roman Antiquity, but later throughout Europe after the humanist revival brought it once again to the forefront and has only recently been reduced to the standing on one leg. As David Summers observed:

77 Harris and Zucker, ‘The Antikythera Youth’, 1:20.

78 David Summers, ‘Contrapposto’, *Grove Art Online*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.article.T019246>, 2009, (last accessed 21-10-2020).

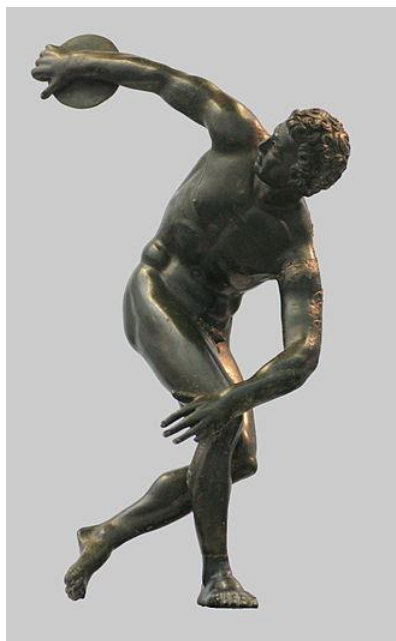
79 Harris and Zucker, ‘The Antikythera Youth’, 1:20.

The modern term retains only a fraction of its earlier meanings. The word ‘contrapposto’ is not simply the past participle of the Italian word meaning ‘to counterpose’; it is more properly a translation of the Latin *contrapositum*, in turn a translation of the Greek *antithesis*, a figure as fundamental to Classical rhetoric as the pose under discussion is to Classical art. It was argued from Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* (1409b–1410a) until modern times that matters are most pleasing and convincing when words are presented in direct opposition to one another.⁸⁰

Thus it is the variety, whether in standing or rhetoric, the parts being in opposition to one another and yet in balance, that is not only attractive but also achieves expressive conviction. Marcus Fabius Quintilianus (c. 35 – c. 100 AD) also spoke of this in his *Institutio Oratoria*, saying that

The body when held bolt upright has but little grace, for the face looks straight forward, the arms hang by the side, the feet are joined and the whole figure is stiff from top to toe. But that curve, I might almost call it motion, with which we are so familiar, gives an impression of action and animation. So, too, the hands will not always be represented in the same position, and the variety given to the expression will be infinite. Some figures are represented as running or rushing forward, others sit or recline, some are nude, others clothed, while some again are half-dressed, half-naked. Where can we find a more violent and elaborate attitude than that of the Discobolus of Myron [see Ill. 9]?⁸¹

Here it is striking that it is not stipulated that the figure should stand on one foot, but only that it not be fixed in a straight position, with the feet close together, the hand at the sides; but rather that a curve should appear in it, that it should almost appear to be in motion. Noteworthy, too, is that the Discobolus of Myron, is chosen to exemplify what is meant; the figure is not only standing on one foot, but bending forwards at the hips, his torso turned almost fully to the right, his right hand with the discus is drawn far back, his left foot pulled behind his right knee, the left hand pulled in front of the right knee, all partaking in the preparation for hurling the discus. One can say with equal truth that everything seems to be in motion as well as everything is in balance over the right foot. And it is in relation to this that Quintilian says ‘a similar impression of grace and charm is produced by rhetorical figures, whether they be *figures of thought* or *figures of speech*’, thereby drawing a comparison between the expressive power of the variety seen in such statues with the rhetorical power of language.⁸²



Ill. 9: Roman bronze reduction of Myron's *Discobolus*, 2nd century AD, Glyptothek, Munich.

80 Summers, ‘Contrapposto’, (last accessed 21-10-2020).

81 ‘ut in statu et picturis uidemus uariari habitus uultus status; nam recti quidem corporis uel minima gratia est: nempe enim aduersa sit facies et demissa bracchia et iuncti pedes et a summis ad ima rigens opus. Flexus ille et, ut sic dixerim, motus dat actum quendam et adfectum: ideo nec ad unum modum formatae manus et in uultu mille species; cursum habent quaedam et impetum, sedent alia uel incumbunt, nuda haec, illa uelata sunt, quaedam mixta ex utroque. Quid tam distortum et elaboratum quam est ille discobolos Myronis?’ Marcus Fabius Quintilianus, *Institutio Oratoria*, <https://www.thelatinlibrary.com/quintilian/quintilian.institutio2.shtml>; trans. by H.E. Butler, https://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Quintilian/Institutio_Oratoria/2B*.html#13_II_13_9-10. (Last accessed 17-10-2021).

82 ‘Quam quidem graludatiam et delectationem adferunt figurae, quaeque in sensibus quaeque in uerbis sunt.’ Ibid., 13, II, 11. (Last accessed 17-10-2021).

And it is just to this that David Summers is referring when as part of his basic article on *contrapposto*, he wrote:

When in 1435 Leon Battista Alberti used the model of Classical rhetorical composition to define pictorial composition, antithesis became a fundamental part. [...] For the sake of the *varietas* of the composition, Alberti recommended that the limbs of individual figures should be contrasted (high and low, advancing and receding) and that the painting as a whole should contain many oppositions (such as nude to clothed, young to old, female to male). For him, *contrapposto* achieved both aesthetic and descriptive ends, providing a formula for the pleasing artificial construction of human movement and a schema for its observation.⁸³

Thus in art theory, based on Antique models, *contrapposto* is not merely limited to standing, but is actually concerned with all aspects of the body, as it lies in the opposition of all parts and features of the body which, together with variety in colour, objects and lighting, provided a structure for the expression of the passions so necessary for a successful *historia* painting. Thus when Alberti speaks of what is necessary in painting a person, he begins with the question of the balance of the whole figure:

I have ascertained precisely that in man the whole body, in each of his positions, is subject to the head, the heaviest member of all. If now the same [individual] will rest with [his] whole body on a single foot, this foot is always set like the base of a column, vertically in respect to the head. Indeed, the face of him who is standing almost always turns toward the direction in which the foot itself is pointed.⁸⁴

Like Leonardo and Austin after him, he is concerned with the plumb line, that it fall over the single foot upon which he is standing, thereby providing him the stability of a column. But he sensibly remarks that if the head, or some other body part moves, this may cause the centre of gravity to shift, requiring that another limb be shifted, so that the figure remains in balance, just as we do in real life:

But I have observed that the movements of the head, at times with difficulty in some directions, are such that [the head] does not always have some parts of the remaining body positioned under itself, through which [parts] the considerable weight [of the head] is sustained, or that [the head] certainly compels, on the opposite side, as a second supporting staff, some member that compensates [for] the weight. We, in fact, observe the same thing while someone sustains with outstretched hand a certain weight after having fixed one of two feet as an axis of balance, so that the entire other part of the body disposes itself from the opposite side to counterbalance the weight.⁸⁵

He then goes on to list how the movements of these figures should be limited, perhaps out of the experience of what it is possible to execute sculpturally, as the concepts stem generally from the bronze or marble Antique statuary, where they determined whether the work would remain standing or not.

I have also understood that the head of one who is standing does not turn further up than where the eyes perceive the middle of the sky; neither does it turn toward one of the two sides further than where the chin arrives to touch the shoulder. In that part of the body, then, in which we wear a belt, we can with effort sometimes bend so that we place the forearm in a straight line with the navel. The movements of the legs and of the arms are freer provided that they are not an obstacle to all the other well-distinguished parts of the body.⁸⁶

83 Summers, 'Contrapposto' (Last accessed 17-10-2021).

84 'Posi mente come l'uomo in ogni suo posare sottostatuisca tutto il corpo a sostenere il capo, membro fra gli altri gravissimo, e posandosi in uno piè sempre ferma il piè perpendicolare sotto il capo quasi come base d'una colonna, e quasi sempre di chi stia diritto il viso si porge dove si dirizzi il piè.' Leon Battista Alberti, *Della Pittura*, 1435/36, 43, https://web.archive.org/web/20090309105714/http://www.liberliber.it/biblioteca/a/alberti/de_pittura/html/libro02.htm (last accessed 03-02-2021); ed. and trans. by Rocco Sinisgalli, *Leon Battista Alberti, On Painting: A New Translation and Critical Edition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 2011, p. 64.

85 'I movimenti del capo veggo quasi sempre essere tale che sotto a sé hanno qualche parte del corpo a sostenerlo, tanto è grande peso quello del capo; ovvero certo in contraria parte quasi come stile d'una bilancia distende uno membro quale corrisponda al peso del capo. E veggiamo che chi sul braccio disteso sostiene uno peso fermando il piè quasi come ago di bilancia, tutta l'altra parte del corpo si contraponga a contrapesare il peso.' Ibid.; trans. by Sinisgalli, *ibid.*, pp. 64–65.

86 'Parmi ancora che, alzando il capo, niuno più porga la faccia in alto se non quanto vegga in mezzo il cielo, né in lato alcuno più si volge il viso se non quanto il mento tocchi la spalla; in quella parte del corpo ove ti cigni, quasi mai tanto ti torci che la punta della spalla sia perpendicolare sopra il bellico. I movimenti delle gambe e delle braccia sono molto liberi, ma non vorrei io coprissero alcuna degna e onesta parte del corpo.' Ibid.; trans. by Sinisgalli, *ibid.*, p. 65.

These limitations are of great significance for historical acting as well, and we will frequently see them repeated in those sources. Not only had they come to represent the standard of beauty, but also they stemmed from similar concerns as those of painting: it was necessary to see the eyes, hands and other body parts in order to be able to read the affective state of the figure or actor. It is very difficult to read a person when those parts which most powerfully express their emotional condition are hidden. Indeed, Alberti goes so far as to suggest that these movements are natural, observable around us, and therefore to be imitated:

In these [movements] I have indeed pointed out this from Nature: that the hands almost never rise above the head, nor the elbow above the forearm; that the foot does not rise in height above the knee, neither that the foot is distant from the other much more than is the space of a single foot. I then examined that if we stretch a hand upward as much as we can, all the remaining parts of that side [of the body] adapt to that movement right to the feet, so that also the heel of the same foot, owing to the movement of the same arm, rises from the ground.⁸⁷

These limitations as to the extent of opposing motions possible within a single figure were recognized by Alberti's contemporaries, although they later became more exaggerated, particularly in regard to the twisting of the torso, which later became classified as one of the features of what we now know as mannerism.⁸⁸ Using these criteria as a basis, taken from the work of an artist who is generally perceived as the initiator of Renaissance art theory, we shall now examine what later artists came to say about these same phenomena, limiting ourselves to three which Austin or Jelgerhuis reference when speaking of standing, Leonardo da Vinci, Karel van Mander and Gerard de Lairese, although many others could have been drawn upon.

Leonardo da Vinci was mentioned above as being cited by Austin for advocating that the well of the neck be over the standing foot. One place he does so is within the context of movement, 'which is created by the destruction of poise, that is by inequality, for nothing moves on its own if it does not leave its equipoise, and the faster it moves, the further one leaves the said equipoise.'⁸⁹ Thus the aim, is not simply to have the well of the neck above the foot, but to remain in balance in relation to the limbs of the body, just as Alberti suggested above. Leonardo defines this poise as follows:

If the figure stands on one of his feet, the shoulder of that side which is standing will always be lower than the other, and the well of the neck will always be above the middle of the leg upon which he stands. The same will happen from whatever line we see the figure, if it is without arms extended far outside the figure, without weight on it, whether in the hand or on the shoulder, or [without] extending the leg which is not standing in front or behind.⁹⁰

Two features of this definition we will see recurring later: firstly, that the shoulder on the standing side will be lower than the other and, secondly, that the neck will be above the 'middle of the leg upon which he stands'. If you stand with a straight leg, that is with your hip joint and knee above your heel, your centre of gravity will be over above the centre of your leg, the shoulder on that side will automatically sink a bit lower. It is a function of our skeletal structure. Thus this definition is in line with Austin's abovementioned comment, based on Leonardo, that 'the hole of the neck shall pass through the heel of that foot'.

Leonardo does go further, however, speaking of what happens should a limb be extended outside the figure, writing that if 'the arm is thrown forwards, the pit of the neck moves outside that foot; and if the leg is thrown backwards, the pit of the neck goes forward, and one moves in this manner in every attitude'.⁹¹ Thus he also comments on how to accommodate limbs that would otherwise draw the figure out of equilibrium.

In addition, he writes of how to make a beautiful, gracious figure, saying that

87 'E veggio dalla natura quasi mai le mani levarsi sopra il capo, né le gomita sopra la spalla, né sopra il ginocchio il piede, né tra uno piè ad un altro essere più spazio che d'uno solo piede. E posi mente distendendo in alto una mano, che persino al piede tutta quella parte del corpo la sussegua tale che il calcagno medesimo del piè si leva dal pavimento.' Ibid.; trans. by Sinisgalli, *ibid.*, p. 65.

88 David Summers, 'Contrapposto: Style and Meaning in Renaissance Art', *The Art Bulletin* 59 (1977) pp. 336-361.

89 'Il moto è creato dalla distruzione del bilico, cioè dalla inegualità, imperocché nessuna cosa persé si muove che non esca dal suo bilico, e quella si fa più veloce, che più si rimuove dal detto suo bilico.' Leonardo da Vinci, *Leonardo: Trattato della pittura*, ed. Ettore Camesasca, (Milan: Tascabili degli Editori Associati, 1995), p. 165.

90 'Se la figura posa sopra uno de' suoi piedi, la spalla di quel lato che posa sarà sempre più bassa che l'altra, e la fontanella della gola sarà sopra il mezzo della gamba che posa. Il medesimo accadrà per qualunque linea noi vedremo essa figura, essendo senza braccia sportanti non molto fuori della figura, o senza peso addosso, o in man, o in ispalla, o sportamento della gamba che non posa innanzi o indietro.' Ibid., p. 165.

91 'gittando un braccio innanzi, la fontanella esce d'esso piede; e se la gamba gitta indietro, la fontanella va innanzi, e così si muta in ogni attitudine.' Ibid, p. 157.

The limbs of the body must be accommodated with grace to the subject of the effect you wish the figure to make. And if you want to make a figure which exhibits loveliness, you must make the limbs gracious and extended, without exhibiting too many muscles, and the few in the subject which you do exhibit must be gentle, i.e. little in evidence, with uncoloured shadows, and the limbs, and particularly the arms, unknotted, i.e. that no limb is in a straight line with the limb that joins with it.⁹²

The stipulation that few muscles be on show, and even then only very gentle ones, is very interesting in the context of acting, in which grace in the figure is demanded, as seen in Austin's description of standing. Grace for him lies in the facility of moving from one attitude towards another, which is commensurate with the idea that the muscles need not be rigid, need not be fired when standing, so that the free foot can easily move the body elsewhere. The whole concept that elegance and ease lie in freedom of motion also is found in the Alexander Technique, but totally denied by the present day's ideas concerning posture which involve much muscular tension and core strength.

Grace for Leonardo also involves the variety of opposites, i.e. should manifest elements of *contrapposto*, allyng the different heights of hips with the inverse ones of the shoulders:

And if it is found that the hip, the lynchpin of man, be higher on the right than the left, in order to stand, make the articulation of the shoulder above fall in a perpendicular line to the highest point of the side [hip], and the right shoulder is lower than the left; and the pit of the neck is always above the middle of the joint of the foot, above which one stands; and the leg which is not standing has its knee lower than the other and near to the other leg.⁹³

These outward superficial aspects of standing in *contrapposto* are often taken into account today in historical acting without recognizing, however, the underlying concept that the centre of gravity should be over the supporting leg. Thus the central defining aspect of this type of standing comes to be overlooked to the benefit of outer secondary movements that originally came about as a result of the initial act of aligning one's centre of gravity with the line drawn from the well of the neck down through the heel of the supporting foot. Nonetheless these opposing aspects, of differing heights of hips, shoulders and knees placement were considered to be components essential to lending grace to a figure. Examining Ill. 3 from the 1721 English translation of Leonardo's treatise, encapsulates all of these different points in a single illustration. In addition to the original vertical line, I have added a red one, which connects the well of the neck with the ankle joint.

Karel van Mander, who in his younger years wrote plays and painted the sets for religious plays, was one of the painters and theorists whom Jelgerhuis mentions as being one of the first to speak of the painting of the passions.⁹⁴ As he spent three years in Rome from 1574–1577, where he read and was inspired by Giorgio Vasari's *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori, e architettori*, it is not surprising that he follows in the footsteps of Alberti and Leonardo with his *Schilder-boeck* of 1604, also writing of standing in the context of motion.⁹⁵ Indeed in his book, he suggests that

5. In order to erect [*planten*] a standing statue, we may draw a straight line from top to bottom, as along a plumb line. This shall be like the string of the bow, formed counter to the sway of the body, and shall descend closely from the hollow of the neck until it attaches [*aenclauwen*] to the weight bearing foot, thus we may build a standing statue.

6. For see, both Man and a column are comparable in posture and position [*standt en stellinghe*]; and as the head, the heaviest part of the body, is supported by the body, it is fitting that the foot be placed underneath it as a foundation. And then, on whichever [foot] the burden comes to fall, that [one] carries the head in such a straight manner that one could drop a plumb line between the two.⁹⁶

92 'Le membra col corpo debbono essere accomodate con grazia al proposito dell'effetto che tu vuoi che faccia la figura; e se tu vuoi fare figura che mostri in sé leggiadria, devi far membri gentili e distesi, senza dimostrazione di troppi muscoli, e quei pochi che al proposito farai dimostrare, falli dolci, cioè di poca evidenza, con ombre non tinte, e le membra, e massimamente le braccia, disnodate, cioè che nessun membro stia in linea dritta col membro che si aggiunge seco.' Ibid. pp. 165–166.

93 'E se il fianco, polo dell'uomo, si trova, per lo posare fatto, che il destro sia più alto del sinistro, farai la giuntura della spalla superiore piovere per linea perpendicolare sopra il più eminente oggetto del fianco, e sia essa spalla destra più bassa della sinistra, e la fontanella sia sempre superiore al mezzo della giuntura del piè di sopra che posa; e la gamba che non posa abbia il suo ginocchio più basso che l'altro e presso all'altra gamba.' Ibid., p. 166.

94 Johannes Jelgerhuis, *Theoretische Lessen*, p. 113.

95 H. Duits, 'Het leven van Karel van Mander. Kunstenaarsleven of schrijversbiografie?', *De zeventiende eeuw*, 9 (1993), 2, p. 121.

96 '5. Om een staende Beelt te planten/ wy mögen
Een recht liny/ als op loot ghewichte/
Van boven nederwaert brenghen ghetoghen/
Dese sal zijn als de Pese des Boghen/

Once again here, we have the comparison to a statue of a standing person whose weight, and thus also his head as being the heaviest portion of his body, must be over the foot which is holding him up. And again, we have the reference to a plumb line falling from the hollow of the neck to the weight-bearing foot. But Van Mander still goes further, in that he too speaks of the need for creating opposing movement within the figure, by having the head and curve of the body be contrary to one another:

8. For the head may well fall or bend to the one or the other shoulder, but that is sometimes good; yet the head and body must lean contrary to one another, or to speak knowledgeably, it is opined that one should diligently avoid having the head hang on the same side that the body is allowed to hang or bend, or else the work shall attest to our ignorance.⁹⁷

Although this form of lending variety to the figure is later found in some acting treatises, it is contrary to what we saw above in Alberti, who speaks of having the head turned in the direction of the foot, as do other theorists, such as Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo, who wrote that this stems from Polykleitos who was following nature.⁹⁸

About a century later, in 1707, Gerard de Lairesse, the most respected Dutch artist of the latter 17th century at the time, published his *Groot Schilderboek*. This was the source for many of Jelgerhuis' observations concerning acting, as he was of the opinion that the manner of thinking of the painter and the actor, something he could speak about with authority as he fulfilled both of these roles in his own person, were 'inseparable'.⁹⁹ One of the first topics discussed in the *Groot Schilderboek* are the three aspects which de Lairesse has selected as standards for beauty in the human figure: well-shaped 'members' (limbs); 'fine, free, and easy motion'; and a 'sound and fresh colour'. It is the motion of the members which concerns us 'which give a figure, motion and life: And this is chiefly obtained by a winding or sway; as when the face is fronting, the body must turn a little sideways, and the legs again fronting. See fig. A. plate 7 [Ill. 10].'¹⁰⁰

Teghen 'tuytswancken des Corpus ghestichte/
 En sal uyt den keel-put af dalen dichte/
 Tusschen den last dragenden voets aenclauwen/
 Soo moghen wy vast een staende Beelt bouwen.
 6. Want siet/ den Mensch end' een Colomne tsamen/
 Worden in standt en stellinghe gheleken/
 En 'thoof als het swaerste let des Lichaemen
 Met 'tlijf ondersteunt zijnde/ moet betamen
 Den voet voor Basis daer onder ghesteken/
 En dan op welcken den last comst ghestreken/
 Die draecht het hooft/ soo recht/ datmen int dalen
 Een loot-streke tusschen beyden mocht halen.'

Carel van Mander, *Het Schilder-Boeck: waer in Voor eerst de leerlustighe Ineght den grondt der Edel Vry Schilderconst in Verscheyden deelen Wort Voorghedraghen*, (Haerlem: Paschier van Wesbusch, 1604), fol. 12r. I am indebted to Jed Wentz for aiding me in translating this and to Chris De Wulf (department of Dutch Studies, University of Zurich) for his perusal and critique of our translation.

97 '8. Want 'thoof mach wel naer den schouder oft dander
 Vallen oft buygen/ maer dat past somtijde/
 Doch hooft en Lijf contrarie malcander
 Moeten helden oft omspreken verstander/
 Is de meyninghe/ datmen neerstich myde/
 Dat thoof niet en hangh op de selve zyde/
 Daer henen men t'Lijf laet hanghen oft buygen/
 Of het werck sal ons onverstandt betuyghen.'

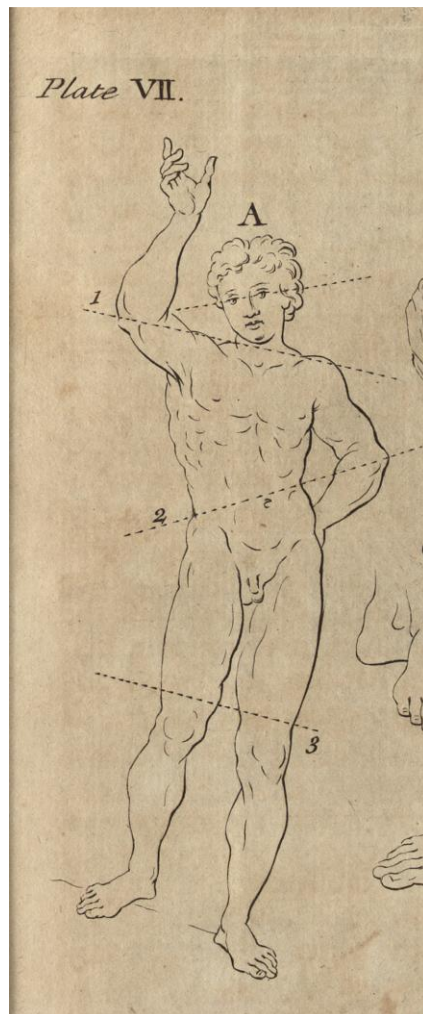
Ibid., fol. 12.

Chris De Wolf pointed out that the final line could also be understood to read 'or else the work shall attest ignorance to us'.

98 Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo, (Milan: Paolo Gottardo Pontio, 1585), p. 293.

99 Jelgerhuis, *Theoretische Lessen*, p. 6.

100 Gerard de Lairesse and John Frederick Fritsch (trans.), *The Art of Painting in All its Branches* (London: S. Vandenberg, 1778), p. 14. Translated from Gerard de Lairesse, *Het Groot Schilderboek* (Amsterdam: Hendrik Desbordes, 1707).



Ill. 10. Gerard de Lairese, *The Art of Painting in All its Branches*, London: S. Vandenberg, 1778, page opposing p. 14.

He went on to say that there should be

a contrast in the inclining poise of the body, from head to foot: For instance, if one shoulder rises, the other must sink; the hips, knees and feet, the same, as in the same fig. A. Wherein 1. the right shoulder rises, 2. The right hip falls. 3. The right knee or foot rising again: and the contrary on the opposite side of the body [... And] that when the right arm and leg advance, the left arm and right leg fall back.¹⁰¹

Thus we can see that from the 15th century onwards that there were various consistent traits which were held to be necessary for beauty and elegance in a standing figure in art, particularly in history painting. These included having the figure stand on one straight leg, with the body's weight over that leg and foot; that the figure be standing easily on that leg, so that it could be seen as being in the course of movement; and that the various parts of the body adapt to this standing pose in such a way that they provided for a seemingly natural variety of opposing parts. In the following, we shall examine how these traits have been absorbed into acting treatises.

STANDING IN HISTORICAL ACTING TREATISES

As standing appears in a specific context in the art treatises, at the beginning of the section on movement, it was easy to approach it from a chronological point of view. As this, however, is not the case

¹⁰¹ de Lairese and Fritsch, *ibid.*, p. 14.

in the works on acting, it will instead be discussed from the perspective of some of the various aspects of standing we found in the art treatises.

STANDING ON A 'BRACED' LEG

In the English sources, we find references to the necessity of standing on a 'braced' single leg, which seems to our ears to be in contradiction with the idea that one be standing in an easy fashion, for example in Austin's *Chironomia*:

The sustaining foot is to be planted firmly; the leg and thigh braced, but not contracted; and the knee straightened; (contraction suits the spring necessary for the dancer, and bent knees belong to feebleness or timidity), the other foot and limb must press lightly, and be held relaxed so as to be ready for immediate change and action.¹⁰²

But according to the Oxford English Dictionary, in the 18th and 19th centuries 'brace' can mean to 'To 'string up' (nerves, sinews, etc.), give firmness or tone to'.¹⁰³ This is very reminiscent of the definition the closed packed position of animal joints, which is the only position in which the bones in a joint match perfectly. In such joints 'the maximum area of surface contact occurs and the ligaments and capsules become taut. The joint is mechanically compressed and cannot be distracted. [...] In these positions, the joint has additional rigidity with a reduction in the need for muscle forces to provide stability'.¹⁰⁴ Thus standing on one leg in this closed pack position ensures a high degree of stability with a lesser degree of muscular activity, exactly what was demanded by Austin for actors, that they be stable and elegant in standing, but prepared for 'immediate change and action'.

This usage was also employed by Aaron Hill in a slightly different context in a letter of 7 April 1749 to an unknown actor, to whom he was giving acting advice concerning the role of Poliphontes:

For example, when (though in the middle of a speech) you find some haughty starts in Poliphontes, if you then, before you spoke a word, in that new walk, would take a breathing time, and, therein, draw your breast a little back, stretch up the neck, and string the nerves quite through your body, and (in that new attitude) pronounce the haughty words, your voice will carry most expressive dignity in a proud stately swell, and you will find, such brace upon your joints restrains your arms from all levity of unmarked motion, and gives the noblest grandeur of a figured majesty.¹⁰⁵

This is reminiscent of what Alexander writes about standing when taken in context with the exemplary photo, in which the man has moved his hips back, thereby allowing his entire torso to extend upwards above the standing leg, which has the effect of drawing the 'breast a little back'. This way of standing, combined with the appropriate expression of passion was seen as lending an air of noble majesty to the figure.

THE TRUNK OF THE FIGURE MUST REMAIN FLEXIBLE

Whereas the attention in the last quotations was on the firm and elegant erectness of the figure, in all of what we have looked at up until now, this was not the be all and end all, but instead a moment of balance from which one could easily continue forth in life. This was also recognized in the acting treatises. For example, Michel le Faucheur wrote in his *Traité de l'action de l'orateur* of 1657 that

one can also not remain immobile like a trunk. For apart from that not being natural, God has made [the body] in such a manner that it can and must turn at times, according to what the soul directs, or what the body itself demands. It [immobility] is disagreeable, because variety, which is befitting in everything, is lacking.¹⁰⁶

102 Austin, *Chironomia*, p. 301.

103 'brace, v.1'. OED Online. December 2020. Oxford University Press.
<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/22377?rskey=VjdUjC&result=5> (last accessed 14-02-2021).

104 L. Don Lehmkühl and Laura K. Smith, *Brunnstrom's Clinical Kinesiology*, 4th Edition (Philadelphia: F.A. Davis Company, 1983), pp. 12–13.

105 Letter of 7 April 1749 to an unknown actor, Aaron Hill, *The Works of the Late Aaron Hill, Esq.* (London: for the benefit of the family, 1753), II, p. 148.

106 'mais il ne faut pas aussi qu'il demeure immobile comme un tronc. Car outre que cela ne luy est pas naturel, Dieu l'ayant composé de telle façon qu'il peut & doit se tourne quelquefois, selon ou que l'ame l'ordonne, ou que le corps mesme le demande: il est desagéable, parce que la variété, qui sied si bien en toute chose, ne s'y trouve pas.' Michel le Faucheur, *Traité de l'action de l'orateur, ou de la prononciation et du geste* (Paris: Augustin Covré, 1657), pp. 197–198.

Thus le Faucheur implies in this remark that something intrinsic to the nature of man desires movement, also within the trunk of the body itself. And that this variety is necessary for all things, thereby bringing us back to *varietas*, the underlying quality of *contrapposto*. Abbé Joseph Antoine Toussaint Dinouart, in his *L'Éloquence du corps* of 1761, goes a step further, in saying that the movement of the extremities stems from the trunk of the body, and that without that central flexibility, the gestures of the hands would not have the desired effect:

But one cannot be too attentive to regulating the movements which stem from the trunk of the body. The flanks and kidneys must accommodate themselves to the gesture, because there is a certain movement of the whole body which contributes greatly to the action, and this movement has a greater role than the hands themselves.¹⁰⁷

And finally, we have Austin, who speaks of how a figure should remain upright and in equilibrium unless something else is demanded of the actor or orator by the text:

The trunk of the body is to be well balanced, and sustained erect upon the supporting limb, except in such attitudes as particularly require its inclination: as veneration, supplication, &c. [...] In every change of attitude the equilibrium, and at the same time the grace of the body, is maintained, by so extending the limbs in contrary directions as to bring the centre of gravity and line of direction over the supporting limb. In kneeling, prostration, and bending forwards, as well in order to preserve grace as to maintain equilibrium, the limbs not immediately advanced are extended behind.¹⁰⁸

This is very much in line with what we find in the art treatises, that one need to respond to the shift of the centre of gravity caused by the movement of body parts, by moving the extremities in such a way that the centre of gravity remains over the supporting leg. It is, however, expressed in terms of the passions which require the most eloquent of attitudes, something that one finds exemplified in the Antique and Renaissance statues and paintings.

At the same time there are warnings that you should not move too much, that the whole body 'should not change either its place, nor its posture at each moment'¹⁰⁹ or that 'supporting oneself alternately, sometimes on one hip, sometimes on another, swinging and bending is an indecency'.¹¹⁰ But like all admonitions, they are both an indication of what was considered to be appropriate, and that going to the extremes of either too much rigidity or too much flexibility was considered to be contrary to decorum.

THE HEAD IN THE CONTEXT OF STANDING

We have seen in the discussions of the artists how important the position of the head in relation to the body parts was considered to be, as due to its weight it had a great influence on the balance of the figures. These discussions are also found in the acting sources, although their reasoning stems in part from other considerations. Dinouart simply says that 'the head should be held straight, not too elevated, nor too low, but in a suitable middle ground which is its natural situation', implying that the actor or orator should remain true to nature.¹¹¹ Le Faucheur says the same thing, but in far greater detail, first speaking of how the placement of the head influences the observer, much more in line with the art treatises:

one must not hold it in an elevated or stretched fashion, which is a mark of arrogance; nor falling on the breast, which renders the voice less clear and less intelligible; nor bend toward the shoulders, which manifests itself as languor; but always straight, according to its natural state.¹¹²

107 'On ne peut être trop attentif à régler les mouvements qui partent du tronc du corps. Les flancs & les reins doivent s'accommoder avec le geste; parce qu'il est un certain mouvement de tout le corps qui contribue beaucoup à l'action, & ce mouvement y a plus de part que les main mêmes.' Abbé Joseph Antoine Toussaint Dinouart, *L'Éloquence du corps, ou l'action du prédicateur* (Paris: G. Desprez, 1761), p. 216.

108 Austin, *Chironomia*, pp. 301–302.

109 'Pour le corps entier, il ne doit changer ni de place, ni de posture à tout moment.' Le Faucheur, p. 197.

110 'Se soutenir alternativement, tantôt sur une hanche, tantôt sur une autre, se balancer & se courber, c'est indécence.' Dinouart, *L'Éloquence du corps*, p. 217.

111 'Il faut tenir la tête droite, sans trop l'élever, ni la baisser, mais dans un juste milieu qui est sa situation naturelle.' Ibid., p. 221.

112 'L'une, qu'elle se doit tenir non élevée & tenduë, ce qui marquerait de l'arrogance, non abattuë sur la poitrine, ce qui rendroit la voix moins claire & moins intelligible, non panchée sur les épaules, ce qui témoigneroit de la langueur: mais toujours droite, selon son estat naturel.' Le Faucheur, *Traité de l'action*, p. 198.

He speaks of how specific movements imply certain passions. In later treatises we will find lists of such descriptions, catalogs of embodied behavior that the actor needs to bring to life through his imagination. He further writes that it is not decorous for the head

to remain immobile, like a statue; [that] it is also not necessary that it move incessantly, nor that it wobble, nor advance frequently during the contention of a discourse, as happens to some people; but in fleeing these extremities, that it turn softly on its neck, when there is necessity, as Nature itself carries it, in order to look at not only that which is in front of one's eyes, but also to throw a glance a times at at those who are on the sides, sometimes on one side, sometimes on the other. And after that, to keep it normally in the posture in which the voice is heard most easily by the largest part of his Auditors, that is, looking into the middle of the auditorium.¹¹³

While the main point of this passage may be the necessity of making eye contact with people throughout a hall, while largely maintaining a frontal projection so that the majority of the audience will hear him easily and distinctly, one detail stands out, namely that the head 'turn softly on its neck'. This brings Alexander to mind, with his emphasis on the freedom of the neck. We find this principle of allowing the head to move freely on top of a flexible neck raised to a level of a maxim in a basic text for actors written by Aaron Hill:

He, who wou'd act, must THINK: — for, Thought will find
The Art, to form the Body, by the Mind.
Weigh, for Example, these few Maxims, right;
And steer your Course, by the befriending Light.
On the rais'd Neck, oft mov'd, but, ever strait,
Turn your unbending Head, with easy State.¹¹⁴

We have Alexander's basic concept of poise represented here, in all of its complexity, that the head remain upward, looking out, while the neck remains free to move, although also always erect. It is represented as being only second to the actors imagination in forming the body to the needs of the the art.

JELGERHUIS: PAINTER AND ACTOR IN ONE

I have left Jelgerhuis for the end of this discussion, as he makes a strong link between the art treatises and those for acting, as he was a professional in both fields. Indeed he saw the movements on stage as being

nothing other than an accelerated succession of stances, as if it were a concatenation of continual painted images of the movement of arms and hands, legs and feet, turning of the head, in the stances of the whole picture, which one does with oneself, in which one now needs to perceive the application of the already learned contrasts. [They] are always useful for tragedy and comedy, though for the latter with movements of smaller dimension.¹¹⁵

Thus in his *Theoretische Lessen*, he moves easily between the two, using the one in support of the other, seeing how the one could be used in the learning the other, as being two aspects of the same thing, the expression of the passions. He was also clear that the choice of an actor's appearance on stage – how he used his arms, hands and head – was of great importance, as it prevented lack of decorum.¹¹⁶ But he remarks upon the insufficiency of the typical descriptions of the time in conveying the actual experience of these actions to the actor, in the following manner:

113 L'autre, qu'il n'est pas bien séant qu'elle demeure immobile, comme celle d'une statuë; Qu'il ne faut pas aussi qu'elle se remuë incessamment, ni qu'elle branle ou qu'elle s'avance souvent dans la contention du discours, comme il arrive à diverses personnes; mais qu'il faut qu'en fuyant ces extrémités, elle se tourne doucement sur son col, quand il en est besoin, comme la Nature l'y porte elle-mesme, pour ne regarder pas seulement ceux qui sont devant ses yeux au milieu d'une assemblée, mais jeter aussi la veuë de fois à autre sur ceux qui sont à ses costez, tantost d'un costé, tantost de l'autre: & après ce la, se tenir ordinairement en la posture où la voix peut estre plus aisément entenduë de la plus grande partie de ses Auditeurs, c'est à dire, regardant le milieu de l'auditoire.' Ibid., pp. 198–199.

114 Aaron Hill, *The Prompter*, NUMB. CXIII, Tuesday December 9, 1735.

115 'dat de bewegingen ten Tooneele, nu niet anders zijn, dan eene versnelde opvolging van standen, of als het ware eene aaneenschakeling van aanhoudende schilderachtige beweging van armen en handen, beenen en voeten, draaijng des hoofds, bij de standen des geheelen beelds, hetwelk men met zich zelve maakt, waarin men nu de toepassing der reeds geleerde contrasten moet waarnemen; altoos van nut voor de Tragedie en de Comedie, doch bij de laatste, in mindere grootheid van bewegingen.' Jelgerhuis, *Theoretische Lessen*, p. 77.

116 'Zich eene zekere houding omtrent armen, handen en hoofd te kiezen, is van veel belang, men voorkomt allen misstand.' Translation: 'Choosing a certain attitude in regard to the arms, hand and head is of great importance; one prevents all flaws.' Ibid., p. 39.

The hand on a sword or on the side, while the other hangs, the head to one side or the other in contrast to the body, the hand in the front of a waist or frock coat, the hat in the other, or the hat underneath one arm, while the other arm hangs; - the hands on the back or over one another, or the one in the coat pocket, and the other in the shirt for the peasant, produces decorum.¹¹⁷

While this was enough to ‘prevent the swinging of the arms during the performance’, Jelgerhuis felt that it left the reader cold, not getting him physically involved with the text. He writes that the reading experience

differs too much [from the physical], as I have experienced myself, when I read VAN MANDER or LAIRESSE, and then found these words: *‘the body does not rest equally on both feet, but only or primarily on one of the two: if one stands on the left, then the hip rises up on that side, and the shoulder descends proportionally, as the right shoulder is elevated, and the right hip has to drop equally much in contrast, the head is gently bent over the right shoulder, while the face is turned to the left side, the right arm moves forward, and the left back, etc; – then I had the greatest difficulty in doing it myself.*¹¹⁸

Here we have the situation of the reader of the time attempting to do exactly what we are doing in 21st century, reading an art treatise and trying to apply it to acting. It is to be noted that what he is reading is from the texts upon which this article is based. And he, just like us, found that it was very difficult to really imagine it just from reading. He, however, did not leave it with that, but tried things out himself:

As soon as I did not take it from this description, I immediately made the image with myself according to the drawing; that is why I consider drawing as the means of well and easily comprehending things like these, [and] why in the following lessons we will turn more and more to drawing for you; - but one cannot approach the goal without some preparation, in that my description here only lists the larger movements, for it has always seemed to me that in the descriptions one has gone too deeply into small matters, which were unnecessary to treat, and which cause confusion in the studies; – for one can feel it easily, that in accordance to whether one chooses to stand on one leg or the other, the hip and shoulder rise and fall there in opposite directions.¹¹⁹

Interestingly enough, this is exactly also what happens today. We read the text and then focus on all of the details of the text: what the head is doing in relation to the shoulders; whether the correct shoulder is up; whether the arms and hands correct for the *contrapposto* with the legs; whether the third and fourth fingers of the hands are properly placed in relation to one another. We do not just look at the drawing and see what happens if we truly embody what we have observed, as Jelgerhuis did. For his experience was that these other aspects of standing came about naturally as a result of standing with the centre of gravity over a ‘braced’ leg, that namely the hip and shoulder automatically adjusted themselves in the appropriate oppositions.

Later in his treatise, Jelgerhuis speaks of the attitudes, with numerous illustrations so that the reader may take the opportunity of trying out these attitudes himself, with all the aspects of class, profession, personality associated with them. He takes the reader along to the Felix Meritis Maatschappij in Amsterdam, ‘a privately funded society of middle-class, educated male burghers’ which devoted itself to the study of the arts and sciences, including a gallery of plaster casts of ancient figures. Just like Adriaan de Lelie before him, with his painting *Dr. Andreas Bonn’s Anatomy Lecture before the Department of Drawing at Felix Meritis* of 1792 (see Ill. 11), where the anatomist was using a nude, live model in the pose of a cast from the collection as his demonstration material, Jelgerhuis was basing his illustrations of the attitudes on these ancient figures. Six such figures are found on plates IX and X, here Illustrations 12 and 13.

117 De hand aan een zwaard of in de zijde, terwijl de andere hangt, het hoofd naar de eene of andere zijde, in tegenstelling des lichaams, de hand in de borst van een kamizool of rok, de hoed in de andere, of de hoed onder den eenen arm, terwijl de andere arm hangt; – de handen op de rug of over elkander, of de eene in den rokzak, en de andere in de borst voor den Boer, geeft welstand... – Deze wenken zijn genoeg, om bij het optreden, het geslinger der armen te voorkomen.’ Ibid., p. 39.

118 ‘dit scheelt te veel, ik heb het bij ondervinding, wanneer ik VAN MANDER of LAIRESSE las, en vond dan deze woorden: *‘het ligchaam ruste niet eenparig op beide voeten, maar of alleen of voornamelijk op een’* van beiden: men stelle op den linker, dan rijst de heup van die zijde omhoog, en de schouder daalt evenredig, daar de regter schouder zich verheft, en de regter heup daartegen zoo veel zakken moet, het boofd [recte: hoofd] wordt zachtelijk over den regter schouder gebogen, terwijl het aangezigt naar de linker zijde gewend is, de regter arm gaat voorwaards, en de linker achteruit, enz.’ Ibid., pp. 39–40.

119 ‘maar zoodra had ik het niet na deze omschrijving geteekend, of ik maakte terstond het beeld met mij zelven, naar de teekening; en vandaar dat ik teekenen voor het middel houde, om zaken als deze, wel en gemakkelijk te kunnen omvatten, waarom wij in de volgende lessen, meer en meer tot voortteekenen zullen overgaan; – maar men kan niet zonder eenige voorbereiding tot het doel naderen, van daar dat mijne omschrijving hier ook maar de grootere bewegingen optelt, want het is mij steeds voorgekomen, dat men in de omschrijvingen te veel afgedaald is tot kleine zaken, die onnoodig waren aan te roeren, en die in de studien verwarren; – want men voelt immers wel, dat naar mate men op het eene of andere been het standpunt kiest, dan de heup en schouder daar rijzen en er tegenover dalen.’ Ibid., p. 40.



Ill. 11: Adriaan de Lelie (1755–1820), Dr. Andreas Bonn's Anatomy Lecture before the Department of Drawing at Felix Meritis (*Voordracht over de anatomie door Andreas Bonn voor het departement der Tekenkunde van Felix Meritis*). Amsterdam Museum, Amsterdam. Photo: Nederlands Institute for Art History.



Ill. 12: Johannes Jelgerhuis, *Theoretische Lessen*, Plate 15.



Ill. 13: Johannes Jelgerhuis, *Theoretische Lessen*, Plate 16.

Figures 3-6 clearly demonstrate the basic *contrapposto* position with the centre of gravity falling in a line from the well of the neck to the heel of the foot of the leg upon which the figure is placing his weight. I have indicated this line in red for greater clarity. Number 1 shows how, in violent motion, the body parts need to be readjusted to keep the centre of gravity over the foot; simultaneously the impression of moving forward is enhanced by the plumb line falling on the front of the foot, thereby implying the torso will need to continue to advance in order to attain a point of equilibrium. Here we find a full representation of the principles exhibited in Antique statues.

Figure Number 2, however, lacks the clarity demonstrated by the others, as within it, Jelgerhuis is trying to demonstrate how one's stance can be improved, by means of superimposing an emended image upon the original one, in order to immediately show

a correction in standing and to embark on the elegance or sway [*draai*] of figures. This is, if remembered well, reminiscent of the excellent engraving of Louis XVI, the King of France. Although the stance is good, the left arm and the left leg are in one line, the right foot turned out, the right arm high and the head is looking in the same line as the body; and still the stance is good.¹²⁰

Here Jelgerhuis gives a list of all of the things that we have seen that are forbidden in standing figures, whether on the canvas or on the stage. If one looks at the original engraving (see Ill. 14) based on the painting by Antoine-François Callet (1741–1823, Ill. 15), one sees a static, lacklustre figure, with too many limbs in straight lines, no shading of the torso, no contrast of movement. Indeed, in Illustration 14, I have added a yellow plumb line from an imaginary well of the neck, which does not fall to the foot at all, but to a place somewhat to its right. Jelgerhuis suggests 'turning the head to 3' and 'moving both of the feet to 1 and 2' in order to 'improve the contrast'. I have placed a yellow plumb line from what I imagine is the well of the

120 'Ik vervolg en toon U N. 2, Plaat 15, om U nog dadelijk correctie in stand te toonen, en te naderen tot den zwier of draai der beelden. Dit is bij goed geheugen, herroepende de uitmuntende gravure naar Lodewijk de 16de, Koning van Frankrijk; schoon de stand goed is, zoo is toch de linker arm en het linker been eenlijnig, de regter voet uitgezet, de regter arm ook, en het hoofd ziet eenlijnig met het lijf; - en toch is die stand goed.' *Ibid.*, p. 67.

neck for the uncorrected , and a red one for the corrected one, the yellow one being slightly to the left of the foot, as it is in the engraving and painting, whereas the red appears as if it might go through the heel of the right foot.¹²¹

What can perhaps serve the reader as indication of what he was aiming for is the painting Callet was emulating: the portrait of Louis XIV by Hyacinthe Rigaud (1659-1743, Ill. 16). The King is standing in a particularly magnificent display of *contrapposto*, with the 'braced' right leg, the head turned away from that leg, the arms not in a line, the head erect and looking toward his audience, to say nothing of his extraordinary wardrobe. As in his time Louis XIV was the model for the French aristocracy, perhaps this painting, with all of its glory, represented on a certain level what the art and acting treatises were trying to describe in words, and what we have been trying to imitate with a completely different model in our heads and in our bodies.



Ill. 14: Louis XVI, 1790, Charles Clément Bervic (1756–1822) after Antoine Francois Callet (1741–1823), Chicago Art Institute, Reference Number 1922.2190.

121 'Dan, wat valt hier optemerken, om het contrast te verbeteren. 1. Draai het hoofd naar 3. 2. Verzet beide de voeten naar 1 en 2.', Ibid., p. 67.



Ill. 15: *Louis XVI, roi de France et de Navarre, revêtu du grand costume royal en 1779*, Antoine-François Callet, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.



Ill. 16: *Portrait of Louis XIV*, Hyacinthe Rigaud, Louvre Museum, Paris.

STANDING WITH THE WEIGHT DISTRIBUTED OVER TWO FEET

The portrait of Louis XVI was not the only one of a regal personage to be disparaged by later observers. For example, in relation to Hans Holbein's portrait of Henry VIII (see Illustration 17), Austin wrote the following:

Rude strength stands indeed with stability, but without grace. Of this description is the portrait of Henry the VIII. mentioned by Hogarth, presented full in front, the arms a kimbo, and supporting his weight equally on both feet. Before a person standing in this manner can change his place, he must make an awkward effort to poise his weight on either leg, in order that he may advance or retire to the other.¹²²

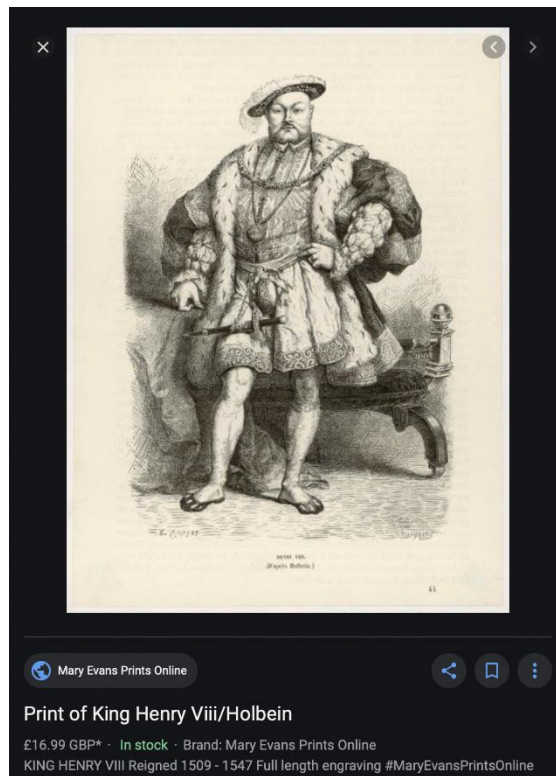


Ill. 17: After Hans Holbein, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons. The original from 1536–1537 was destroyed by fire in 1698; this copy was painted in 1667 and is in the Walker Gallery, Liverpool.

Austin, in agreeing that the figure exhibits rude strength, notes that it also would make for awkwardness in movement, as one would first have to shift one's centre of gravity before making any movement. William Hogarth, in his treatise of 1753, *The Analysis of Beauty*, places a rhetorical question: 'If uniform objects were agreeable, why is there such care taken to contrast, and vary all the limbs of a statue?', using this self-same portrait as his first example (see Ill. 19).¹²³ There are also numerous 18th and 19th-century prints in which the artists have endeavoured to improve the original stance such as, for example, Illustration 18.

122 Austin, *Chironomia*, p. 295.

123 William Hogarth, *The Analysis of Beauty* (London: J. Reeves for the author, 1753), p. 20.



III. 18: <https://www.gettyimages.ch/detail/illustration/henry-viii-king-of-england-portrait-lizenfreie-illustration/961899956?adppopup=true>.

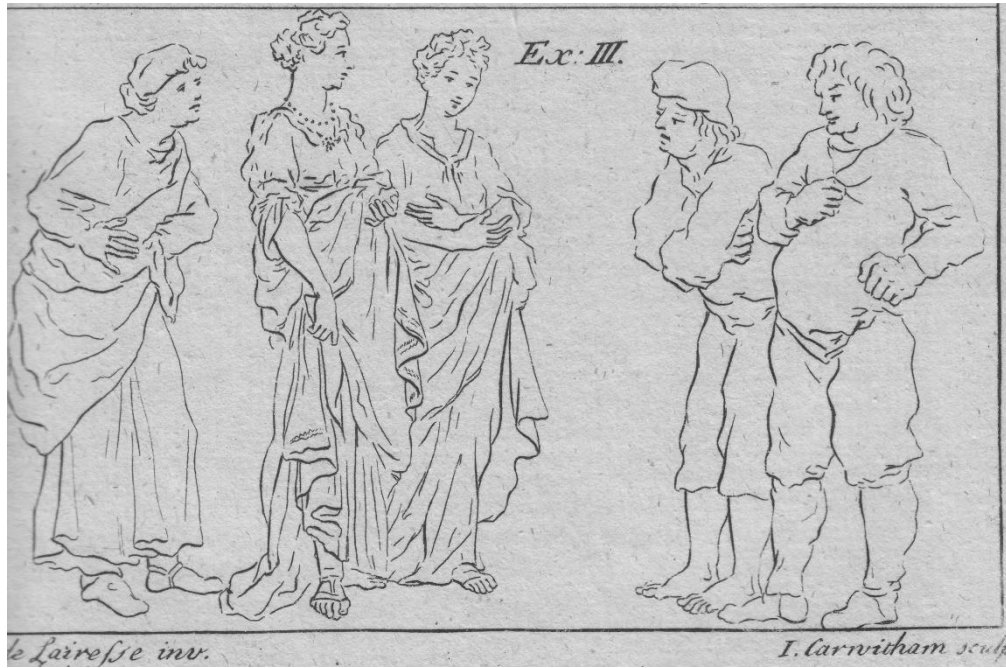
Austin goes yet further in indicating that there are certain activities for which it is necessary to stand on two feet, that ‘a man may indeed stand very firmly on both legs, and it is in his power in moving to leap or spring with both feet together; but though they may both be practised on occasion, yet the continuance of the one is ungraceful, and of the other would be ridiculous.’¹²⁴ In addition, he remarks on how the stance can be indicative either of social standing or profession:

In the various positions of the feet, care is to be taken that the grace which is aimed at be attended with simplicity. The position of the orator is equally removed from the awkwardness of the rustic with toes turned in and knees bent, and from the affectation of the dancing-master, constrained and prepared for springing agility, and for conceited display.¹²⁵

Others make similar observations, for example one of the differences that De Lairese suggests as a means of characterizing peasants is by their way of standing, on two feet, and with a tendency to slouching, as may be seen in Illustration 19.

124 Austin, *Chironomia*, p. 296.

125 Ibid., p. 301.



Ill. 19: Gerard de Laireffe, *ibid.*, Plate XII, Example III, opposite p. 31.

And Hogarth and Austin were in full agreement about the dancing-masters:

There are also strong prejudices in favour of straight line, as constituting true beauty in the human form, where they never should appear. [...] The common notion that a person should be straight as an arrow, and perfectly erect is of this kind. If a dancing-master were to see his scholar in the easy and gracefully-turned attitude of the Antinous (fig. 6, plate 1) he would cry shame on him, and tell him he looked as crooked as a ram's horn, and bid him hold up his head as he himself did. See fig. 7, plate 1 [See Ill. 20].¹²⁶



Ill. 20: William Hogarth, *The Analysis of Beauty*, London: J. Reeves for the author, 1753, Plate 1. Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

¹²⁶ Hogarth, *The Analysis of Beauty*, p. viii.

One must admit that both of the figures in Hogarth's plate are exaggerated (see Ill. 20), as the Antinous is incredibly serpentine in comparison to the original figure (see Ill. 2), and the dancing-master caricature-like, but nonetheless they do make the differences between the elegance sought by orators and actors, as represented by Austin and his reference to Antinous, and that of the symmetry demanded of dancers very obvious. Hogarth goes even further in Plate 2 (see Ill. 21), showing a whole ballroom full of dancers, pointing out that

The best representation in a picture, of even the most elegant dancing, as every figure is rather a suspended action in than an attitude, must be always somewhat unnatural and ridiculous; for were it possible in a real dance to fix every person at one instant of time, as in a picture, not one in twenty would appear to be graceful, tho' each were ever so much so in their movements; nor could the figure of the dance itself be at all understood.¹²⁷



Ill. 21: William Hogarth, *The Analysis of Beauty*, London: J. Reeves for the author, 1753, Plate 2 . Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

That both Austin and Hogarth have a different approach to standing than dancers is not surprising, in that the demands placed on an orator, actor or artist are completely different from those of a dancer. The dancer is constantly moving, with some sort of regular alternation of the legs, often paired either with some opposing alternation of the arms, or a symmetrical use thereof. Pierre Rameau (1674–1748) describes the suitable stance for a dancer (see Illustration 22) in the following manner:

One needs to leave the head straight without being uncomfortable, the shoulders back (which makes the chest seem large and gives more grace to the body), the arms hanging to one's side, the hands neither open nor closed, the waist firm, the legs extended and the feet turned out. I tried to give possible expression to this figure, so that in seeing it, one can pose the body as one should.¹²⁸

127 Ibid., p. 137.

128 'Il faut avoir la tête droite sans être gêné, les épaules en arriere (ce qui fait paroître la poitrine large & donne plus de grace au corps,) les bras pendans à coté de soi, les mains ni ouvertes ni fermées, la ceinture ferme, les jambes étenduës, & les pieds en dehors: je tâché de donner à cette Figure l'expression possible, afin qu'en la voiant on puisse se poser le corps tel qu'il doit être.' Pierre Rameau, *Le maître à danser* (Paris: Jean Vilette, 1725), pp. 2-3.



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Ill. 22: Pierre Rameau, *Le maître à danser* (Paris: Jean Villette, 1725), plate opposing p. 1.

Although holding the head should be straight ‘without being uncomfortable’ and having the shoulders pulled back are similar to the requirements for the actor or the artist, there are distinct differences. The head in standing is expected to be in the same plane as the torso, looking forwards, the arms are hanging to the side, rather than being in some form of opposition. Although Rameau writes that the legs should be extended, one can see in Illustration 19 that the knees are slightly bent, as in the caricature of Hogarth. Rameau goes on to speak of the placement of the feet:

I gave him an attitude in preparation for walking, that is why it has the left foot in front and the right foot ready to leave, whether it be to take a step forward or to the side, as the body is placed above the left, for in this manner the right may move easily. I hope that by taking all these precautions one will not fall object to the ridicule of being cramped or stiff, which we should avoid, or even affectation; decorum requiring only that beautiful naturalness and that easy air that dance alone is capable of procuring.¹²⁹

As in *contrapposto*, he has the weight of the body above the left foot, but it is as preparation for the regular alternation of the legs and feet for walking, not for the *varietas* of contrast. And like all the authors we have been reading, he is interested in that ‘easy air’ which he claims ‘dance alone is capable of procuring’. Not unsurprisingly artists in all of these fields claim their art is superior to the others in attaining grace and elegance.

Interesting in this context is a passage from Kellom Tomlinson’s manual of 1735, *The Art of Dancing Explained by Reading and Figures*, which in describing the second position in dance, puts it into the social context of the time:

129 Je lui ai donné une attitude prêt à marcher, c’est pourquoi elle a le pied gauche devant, & le pied droit prêt à partir, soit pour faire un pas en avant ou à côté, parce que le corps étant posé sur le gauche, par ce moien le droit doit agir facilement; j’espere que prenant toutes ces précautions on ne tombera pas dans le ridicule d’être gêné ou roide, ce que l’on doit éviter, ni même d’affectation; la bienséance ne demandant que ce beau naturel & cet air aisé que la danse seule est capable de procurer.’ Ibid, p. 3.

Position, then, is the different Placing or Setting our Feet on the Floor, whether in Conversation or Dancing; and those for Conversation, or when we *stand* in Company, are when the Weight rests as much on one Foot as the other, the Feet being considerably separated or open, the Knees streight, the Hands placed by the Side in a genteel Fall or natural Bend of the Wrists, and being in an agreeable Fashion or Shape about the Joint or Bend of the Hip, with the Head gracefully turning to the Right or Left, which compleats a most Heroic Posture; and, tho' it may be improper, in the Presence of Superiors, among Familiars, it is a bold and graceful Attitude, called the Second Position.¹³⁰

This description is very similar to that of Rameau. Tomlison then goes one to speak of its possible impropriety in the presence of the members of the upper classes, suggesting that amid one's peers, however, that it was an appropriately graceful manner of standing. Thus also here, we have a suggestion of a class distinction in standing, that the higher classes, orators, actors, and figures of higher stature in paintings would be more likely to stand in *contrapposto* while the lower classes, albeit suitably erect, would divide their weight over both feet.

CONCLUSION, OR WHERE DO WE STAND TODAY?

CURRENT STATUS

The field of historical acting was given a jump start by Dene Barnett with his monumental book, *The Art of Gesture: The Practices and Principles of 18th Century Acting* (1987) and his influence on the productions of baroque opera. Much of what is done today has his work as a direct or indirect source. But the world of historical performance practice has moved on during the last thirty years, the euphoria of 'authentic' performances has dissipated. It is therefore time, with all due gratitude for Barnett's pioneering efforts, to re-examine the sources, to rethink their possible significance. The present case is one example for this. Within his 'practical guide to good posture' Barnett writes that 'when the weight is over the right foot, the legs, torso and head can form a pleasing curve of this kind [see left stick figure] or the reverse curve [see right stick figure] when the weight is over the left foot'.¹³¹ Even with the stick figures, it is clear that the head is not above the foot and that therefore the figures are not really in the equilibrium sought after in the sources, in which the centre of gravity is above the supporting foot. Indeed the photographs in his book, in particular after looking at all of the images in this article, make it clear that Barnett's ideal lay elsewhere.¹³²



Nonetheless, given the starting point of this journey – my surprise that the illustrations were so different not only from what I perceived the actors to be doing, but what they themselves thought they were doing – this is a startling result, as it is a realization that came only later, as Barnett did not originally figure into my research at all. Indeed, without incorporating the Alexander Technique as part of the regular program of the Dutch Historical Acting Collective, this discrepancy between the images and the embodied behaviour would never have been discovered. This dissonance then generated new questions that lay outside of the specific field of historical acting, whose answers however, resulted in new perspectives on many different levels in regard to the extraordinary documentation assembled by Barnett.

First of all, it has enriched the concept of *contrapposto*, shifting it from a mere opposition of body parts, to something that is inherent in an easy maintenance of equilibrium. Instead of focussing on the superficial differences, it centres in on the inherent necessity of the balance, in order to be able to carry out all superficial motions with freedom and ease of motion.

Secondly, it illustrates how such basic ideas as posture are affected by society and therefore also influence our observation skills, making us unable to perceive what we cannot imagine seeing. Bodywork in this field is therefore a necessary part of training one's skills of observation. As we have seen, this leads to new insights on the academic level, as the documents are read with new eyes.

Thirdly, both the societies and the art they have engendered have changed considerably since the 18th and 19th centuries. It is interesting to note that posture seems to be an issue that divides along class and

130 Kellom Tomlinson, *The Art of Dancing Explained by Reading and Figures* (London: by the author, 1735), p. 4.

131 Dene Barnett, *The Art of Gesture: The Practices and Principles of 18th Century Acting* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1987), p. 134.

132 As the book is not online, a link to these photographs is not possible. I do urge you, however to find a copy and examine them yourselves.

stylistic lines, with actors adhering to the Classicist, aristocratic faction against that of the naturalistic, bourgeoisie. Throughout the centuries the actors, who based their attitudes on Antique statuary, were leaning towards idealized visions, while the bourgeoisie, with both feet on the ground, were placing their sights on the basic facts of nature. Because today's society is so influenced by the concept of scientific objectivity, it remains to be seen whether it would even accept this other idea of standing in a theatre production, or whether it is even something inherently necessary to the communication of the content of the play. Or to put it another way, can we through practice gain so much ease in standing in *contrapposto* so that it once again seems natural to both us and the audience, or do we have to be straight and symmetric to be acceptable in a modern-day theatre?

This last question, too, cannot be answered by scholarly research alone, but must be a product of the interaction between actors and theorists, one full of wonder and inquiry, and only relying on the satisfaction, perhaps, of finding a momentary answer.

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