

# The veil of the body. Emotions and expressive mimesis in Johann Jakob Engel's aesthetic thought

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In the present article, I intend to examine the importance of Engel's mimicry for the corporeal visualization of affects, showing the links with its roots in the early German Enlightenment. If the body serves as a picture of the soul, the aim of this essay is to understand how Engel's mimicry turns this correspondence to its own purpose, enhancing its role as a privileged observatory of the human mind as well as a building site of a historical form of humanity.

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## 1. An unknown science

In his *Deutsche Ethik* of 1720, Christian Wolff hints at the possible utility of a science studying the correspondence between facial expressions and gestures with natural inclinations of the mind<sup>1</sup>. If such a science, by Wolff's own admission, is still unknown, its importance is far from being ignored. A significant attempt in this direction had already been made by Scipione Chiaramonti, one of Wolff's sources, in his *De coniectandis cuiusque moribus et latitantibus animi affectibus* (1625)<sup>2</sup>, republished in Germany by Hermann Conring (1665). The point here was to find a method aimed at bringing to light what is by definition concealed in the innermost recesses of the heart. If it is true that simulations and dissimulations can be fully penetrated only by God, what we can do as finite beings is to make conjectures in order to deduce inner designates from outer signs<sup>3</sup>. In his wake, several authors of the Early

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<sup>1</sup> C. Wolff, *Vernünfftige Gedancken von der Menschen Thun und Laßen*, Renger, Halle 1720, § 216. The most important development of this theme in Wolff can be found in his *Philosophia practica universalis. Pars posterior*, Renger, Francofurti & Lipsiae 1739, §§ 707 ff.

<sup>2</sup> S. Chiaramonti, *De coniectandis cuiusque moribus et latitantibus animi affectibus*, Ginammi, Venetiis 1625.

<sup>3</sup> Ivi, p. 341. For his departure from previous physiognomics, see R. Campe, *Affekt und Ausdruck. Zur Umwandlung der literarischen Rede im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert*, Niemeyer, Tübingen 1990, pp. 292 ff. and 420 ff.

Enlightenment<sup>4</sup>, starting from Christian Thomasius<sup>5</sup>, strived to identify the correspondence between corporeal movements and states of the soul, thus promoting what was called a «prudentia cardiagnostica»<sup>6</sup>.

In order to enhance the precision whereby nature has tied these two dimensions closely together<sup>7</sup>, Georg Friedrich Meier wrote in the second volume of the *Anfangsgründe aller schönen Wissenschaften* (1749), one of the founding texts of modern aesthetics, that «nature designates passions by means of the changes in the body that are essential signs, from which it is easy to conclude whether a man is sad or happy»<sup>8</sup>. Essential signs are signs remarkably similar to the designated object<sup>9</sup>: according to this thesis, therefore, the bodily movements must be similar to the corresponding emotion thanks to the proportionality of their magnitudes<sup>10</sup>. As Meier metaphorically affirmed in the *Theoretische Lehre von den Gemüthsbewegungen überhaupt* (1744), the bodily movements are the perfect “painting” of the motions of the soul<sup>11</sup>. By analyzing this painting, it is possible to lay the groundwork for a “characteristic art” of the passions – an art showing on the one hand which passions lie beneath certain signs and teaching on the other hand which gestures express true and fictitious passions to other people<sup>12</sup>. But how is it possible to depict emotions?

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<sup>4</sup> For a list of these authors, see for example J.G. Walch, *Commentatio de arte aliorum animos cognoscendi* (1723), Bortoletti, Ienae 1733<sup>2</sup>, §§ 1-2.

<sup>5</sup> C. Thomasius, *Neue Erfindung einer wohlgegründeten und für das gemeine Wesen höchstnötigen Wissenschaft / Das Verborgene des Hertzens anderer Menschen auch wider ihren Willen aus der täglichen Conversation zuerkennen*, Salfeld, Halle 1691.

<sup>6</sup> The phrase «prudentia cardiagnostica» is present in the third edition of C. A. Heumann, *Der politische Philosophus*, Renger, Franckfurt 1724<sup>3</sup>, p. 55. On this aspect, see U. Geitner, *Die Sprache der Verstellung. Studien zum rhetorischen und anthropologischen Wissen im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert*, Niemeyer, Tübingen 1992, pp. 107 ff.

<sup>7</sup> On the correspondence with the *ars signata*, S. Meier-Oeser, *Die Spur des Zeichens. Das Zeichen und seine Funktion in der Philosophie des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit*, De Gruyter, Berlin-New York 1997, pp. 344-345. On the relationships with the moralistic tradition, see G. Cantarutti, “Moralistica e fisiognomica. Il carattere e la sua lettura: due tradizioni a confronto”, *Intersezioni*, XVIII/2, 1998, pp. 259-278.

<sup>8</sup> G.F. Meier, *Anfangsgründe aller schönen Wissenschaften*, II, Hemmerde, Halle im Magdeburgischen 1749, § 519.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>10</sup> G.F. Meier, *Theoretische Lehre von den Gemüthsbewegungen überhaupt*, Hemmerde, Halle 1744, § 221.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>12</sup> *Ivi*, § 9.

## 2. Depicting emotions

An articulated response is given by Johann Jakob Engel (1741-1802), a seminal author of the late German Enlightenment, who declares in his essay *Über die musikalische Malerei* (1780): «To depict does not mean to indicate an object by means of merely arbitrary and conventional signs for the intellect, but to make it sensible by means of natural signs. The word “lion” arouses only a representation for my intellect; the picture of a lion actually sets the visible phenomenon before my eyes»<sup>13</sup>.

From this point of view, the poet can be defined as a “painter” in two different senses. Firstly, he is a painter because of the fact that his representations are singular and completely determined, and therefore spark off powerful and easily understood images in the listener’s imagination. Secondly, he is a painter because he creates a correspondence between the sound and the sense of the discourse: «Differently said: [the more he is a painter], the more he produces a similitude with the object itself in the sensation of the signs indicating this object. In still other words: the more he approximates his merely artificial signs to natural ones»<sup>14</sup>. This is precisely the way in which even the musical composer can be rightly labelled as a “painter”: «He has to do what the poet does as a painter in the second sense: he has to render his sounds as imitating and to give them as much similarity with the object as possible»<sup>15</sup>.

Not always, though, is such a painting complete and determined in the same way as when the designated object can be heard: as a matter of fact, the latter can be both audible and visible as is the case with a storm, or not audible at all. In this case, the presence of some general common property between the audible sounds and the designated object is necessary in order for the imagination to move easily from one to the other: «There are similarities not only between objects perceived by a single sense, but also between those perceived by different senses. Slowness or speed, for example,

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<sup>13</sup> J.J. Engel, *Über die musikalische Malerei*, in J. J. Engel, *Schriften. Reden, Ästhetische Versuche*, IV, Mylius, Berlin 1802, pp. 299-341, here p. 300.

<sup>14</sup> Ivi, pp. 301-302.

<sup>15</sup> Ivi, p. 303.

can be found both in a series of sounds and in a series of visible impressions. I want to call such similarities “transcendental similarities”»<sup>16</sup>.

By virtue of these similarities, visible objects may be imitated by the composer as well, albeit with an indeterminacy which cannot be eliminated other than by resorting to words. Depicting emotions, however, requires something more. For not only do the emotions of the soul not have a sound, but they do not even have a colour. How is it possible, then, to imitate the invisible?

### 3. Imitating the invisible

According to Engel there exists a different principle according to which the composer can paint, insofar as he does not imitate with its signs a feature of the object itself but rather an impression that this object engenders in the soul<sup>17</sup>. Even a colour is depictable in this way, since the impression of a sweet colour has something in common with the impression of a sweet tone<sup>18</sup>.

Given that every aesthetic cognition must bear a relation to the appetitive faculty, and therefore elicit in us an inclination or a repulsion, it is necessary to acknowledge in every aesthetic cognition two aspects: the representation of the object and the representation of its relation with ourselves, which makes it lovable or hideous, worthy of esteem or contempt<sup>19</sup>. This duplicity could recall Sulzer’s distinction between the inobjectual and objectual dimension of a perception, whereby the former makes reference to its representative content, while the latter points to the effect of perceptions on the subject<sup>20</sup>. As for the application of this principle to the artistic context, Sulzer argued that a work of art can provide the idea of a certain thing or exhibit an emotional state. In the first case, the artist describes the object as

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<sup>16</sup> Ivi, pp. 304-305.

<sup>17</sup> Ivi, p. 307.

<sup>18</sup> Ivi, p. 308. I cannot examine here the problems concerning musical painting, see ivi, pp. 309 ff.

<sup>19</sup> Ivi, pp. 325-326.

<sup>20</sup> As is known, the inobjectual dimension is linked in particular with the faculty of feeling, «sentir», while the objectual dimension is linked with the faculty of knowing, «appercevoir», see J.G. Sulzer, *Observations sur les divers états où l’âme se trouve en exerçant ses facultés primitives, celle d’appercevoir et celle de sentir* (1763), “Histoire de l’Académie Royale des Sciences et des Belles-Lettres de Berlin”, 1770, pp. 407-420.

he sees it; in the second one, he expresses his own feelings for it<sup>21</sup>. *Tertium non datur*. While Sulzer applied this distinction to poetry, Engel examines its consequences with respect to music: «Now, we define “painting” in vocal music: to present the objective; on the contrary, to present the subjective is not called “painting”, but “expressing”. All in all, both of them are included in our above-mentioned concept of painting. The expression could be explained as a painting of the subjective, a painting of the feeling»<sup>22</sup>.

This is precisely the most authentic task of a composer: the composer is therefore expected to paint feelings rather than objects – the condition of the soul with respect to a certain thing rather than the thing itself. However, the composer is not the only artist to perform such an office. As Meier wrote in the passage quoted at the beginning, it is the movements of the body that exhibit the closest similarity with those of the soul; the mimic art will thus be the most appropriate field in which to study the expression of emotions.

#### 4. From the body-figure to the musical body

In the eighth letter of the *Ideen zu einer Mimik* (1785-1786, 2 voll.)<sup>23</sup>, Engel also detects in mimicry the two sides of imitation identified in the essay on

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<sup>21</sup> J.G. Sulzer, *Allgemeine Theorie der Schönen Künste* (1771-1774), I, Weidmanns Erben und Reich, Leipzig 1778<sup>2</sup>, art. *Gedicht*, pp. 201-208, here p. 205: «Hier zeigen sich zweyerley Fälle, die den Inhalt der Rede bestimmen. Entweder hängt der Dichter dem Gegenstand allein nach, betrachtet ihn von allen Seiten, und drückt durch die Rede das aus, was er sieht; oder er hängt nicht so wol dem Gegenstand nach, der ihn rühret, als der Würkung, die er davon empfindet. Im erstern Fall mahlt der Dichter den Gegenstand, im andern seine Empfindungen darüber». See J.J. Engel, “Ueber Handlung, Gespräch und Erzählung”, *Neue Bibliothek der schönen Wissenschaften und der freyen Künste*, XVI/2, 1774, pp. 177-256, here pp. 179-180. See also H.G.B. Franke, *Ueber Declamation* (1789-1794), I, Dieterich, Göttingen 1789, pp. 47-48. See A. Košenina, *Anthropologie und Schauspielkunst. Studien zur “eloquentia corporis” im 18. Jahrhundert*, Niemeyer, Tübingen 1995, pp. 159-160.

<sup>22</sup> J.J. Engel, *Über die musikalische Malerei*, cit., p. 327. Feeling, in any case, can also become objective; in this case, it is possible to say that the composer paints, see *ivi*, p. 328: «[W]enn Empfindung Gegenstand einer Empfindung ist, und der Musiker drückt jene den Gegenstand aus, nicht diese; so malt er. Oder wenn ein Gegenstand gewöhnlicher Weise eine solche und solche Empfindung, in dem itzigen Fall aber eine verschiedene, vielleicht ganz entgegengesetzte wirkt, und der Tonsetzer hat jene für diese gegriffen; so hat er nicht ausgedrückt, sondern gemalt».

<sup>23</sup> J.J. Engel, *Ideen zu einer Mimik*, Mylius, 2 voll., Berlin 1785-1786. On this work and on its context, see in particular P. Magli, “The System of the Passions in Eighteenth Century Dramatic Mime”, *Versus. Quaderni di studi semiotici*, XXII, 1979, pp. 32-47; D. Bachmann-Medick, *Die ästhetische Ordnung des Handelns. Moralphilosophie und Ästhetik in der Popularphilosophie des 18. Jahrhunderts*, Metzler, Stuttgart 1989, pp. 77-137; D. Bachmann-Medick, “Mimik und Gebärden als sozial-ästhetische Handlungsweisen in der

musical poetry: the representative imitation and the expressive imitation: «By the term “painting” I mean [...] every sensible representation of the thing which the soul thinks; by the term “expression” [I mean] every sensible representation of the conduct, of the disposition in which the soul thinks, of the whole state of the soul induced by this thought»<sup>24</sup>.

There exists, therefore, an extroflexed dimension of the imitation, in which the point is the “enargetic” manifestation of the designated object: this is the typical case with words, in particular poetic words, which arouse the image of the object in the listener’s or reader’s mind; but there exists an introflexed dimension as well, where the point is to render visible what is invisible in the interior workings of the soul. The actor does both these things; and he does both these things through words and gestures. From this point of view, words and gestures are not opposite terms, but move along a continuum spanning a maximum of iconicity and a maximum of expressivity.

On the one hand, even words can express emotions, for example in declamation. Friedrich Hildebrand von Einsiedel states in his *Grundlinien zu einer Theorie der Schauspielkunst* (1797): «There also exists a mimicry for the

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Popularphilosophie des 18. Jahrhunderts”, in A. Montandon (ed. by), *Entwicklung der Kommunikationsvorstellungen in den Schriften über Umgangsformen in den deutschsprachigen Ländern*, Lang, Bern 1991, pp. 141-157; C. Jeschke, “Noverre, Lessing, Engel. Zur Theorie der Körperbewegung in der zweiten Hälfte des 18. Jahrhunderts”, in W.F. Bender (ed. by), *Schauspielkunst im 18. Jahrhundert. Grundlagen, Praxis, Autoren*, Steiner, Stuttgart 1992, pp. 85-111; A. Käuser, *Die anthropologische Theorie des Körperausdrucks im 18. Jahrhundert. Zum wissenschaftshistorischen Status der Physiognomik*, in R. Behrens, R. Galle (ed. by), *Leib-Zeichen. Körperbilder, Rhetorik und Anthropologie im 18. Jahrhundert*, Königshausen & Neumann, Würzburg 1993, pp. 41-60; A. Košenina, *Anthropologie und Schauspielkunst*, cit., pp. 152-182; E. Agazzi, “Medicina e indagini sul corpo tra la ‘Fisiognomica’ di Lavater e la ‘Mimica’ di Engel”, in C. Monti et al. (ed. by), *Körpersprache und Sprachkörper/La parola del corpo – il corpo della parola. Semiotische Interferenzen in der deutschen Literatur/Tensioni semiotiche nella letteratura tedesca*, Studienverlag, Wien-Bozen 1996, pp. 29-44; E. Agazzi, *Il corpo conteso. Rito e gestualità nella Germania del Settecento*, Jaca Book, Milano 2002, pp. 139 ff.; S. Fortuna, “Gestural Expression, Perception and Language: A Discussion of the Ideas of Johann Jakob Engel”, *Gesture*, III/1, 2003, pp. 95-124; H. Lethen, “Die Geste als Ausdruck. Johann Jakob Engels ‘Beobachtungen zur Mimik’”, in A. Košenina (ed. by), *Johann Jakob Engel (1741-1802). Philosoph für die Welt, Ästhetiker und Dichter*, Wehrhahn, Hannover-Laatzten 2005, pp. 137-146; C. Coulombeau, “Langue et ‘langage du geste’: la sémiotique théâtrale comme sémiotique comparée dans la ‘Mimik’ de Johann Jakob Engel (1785)”, *Methodos*, 6, 2006 [online], published 3 May 2006, last access 25 June 2017, DOI: 10.4000/methodos.562. See also the excellent Italian edition J.J. Engel, “Lettere sulla mimica”, ed. by Lucia Sabatano, *Acting Archives Review*, III/6, 2013, pp. 291-643. More in general, see C. Vicentini, *La teoria della recitazione. Dall’Antichità al Settecento*, Marsilio, Venezia 2012.

<sup>24</sup> J.J. Engel, *Ideen zu einer Mimik*, I, cit., p. 79.

ear and the raising or lowering of the voice is on a par with the expression of desire and repulsion, which is the fundamental principle of all gestural and facial recitation»<sup>25</sup>. On the basis of this «physiognomy of the language», as Heinrich Gottfried Bernhard Franke puts it<sup>26</sup>, the actor's words do not limit themselves to designating an object external to the discursive plan, but also point in the direction of the speaking subject, insofar as they designate his inner motions through the way in which they are pronounced in the concrete occurrence<sup>27</sup>: «Declamation – Renatus Gotthelf Löbel writes in the wake of Engel in 1787 – teaches us how to know through words the spirit animating them in that very moment»<sup>28</sup>.

On the other hand, gestures can also be employed to represent something: as in music, though, this potentiality is perfectly achieved only in determined situations, in this case when the designated objects are bodies similar to ours; all the rest produces more or less imperfect sensible representations. But precisely this imperfection allows the body to make itself a “figure”, in the double pictorial and rhetorical sense of the term: as when one attempts to imitate the size of a mountain by stretching one's hands and body upwards, or when one raises one's gaze to the sky to metonymically invoke gods' protection<sup>29</sup>.

The most authentic objects for gestural imitation are anyway emotions. In this case, the accent is not on the extroflexed projection of mimic signs indicating the designated object as an epistemic content, but on their introflexed dimension, which expresses the subjective affection. In contrast with the usual comparison of actorial art with painting – a comparison entailing the “energetic” *vis significativa* of gestures and words – Engel highlights the importance of their “energetic” dimension, in the etymological sense of a force acting in time<sup>30</sup>. For the signs at the actor's disposal to

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<sup>25</sup> F.H. von Einsiedel, *Grundlinien zu einer Theorie der Schauspielkunst*, Göschen, Leipzig 1797, p. 26. Von Einsiedel adds that when the actor directly addresses the spectator's ear, he ceases to be a figurative artist and gets closer to the orator.

<sup>26</sup> H.G.B. Franke, *Ueber Declamation*, II, cit., p. 11.

<sup>27</sup> See J.J. Engel, *Ideen zu einer Mimik*, II, cit., letter 33.

<sup>28</sup> R.G. Löbel, “Einige Bemerkungen über die Deklamation”, in *Denkwürdigkeiten aus der philosophischen Welt*, ed. by K.A. Cäsar, V, 1787, pp. 45-75, here pp. 45; 49.

<sup>29</sup> See J.J. Engel, *Ideen zu einer Mimik*, I, cit., letter 9; II, letter 32.

<sup>30</sup> Ivi, II, p. 73.

designate the motions of the soul are not a gallery of poses one juxtaposed to the other, but rather a musical succession, which designates the aniconic flux of emotions by means of the rhythm of their plastic sequence<sup>31</sup>. Hereby, the actor's recitation is opposed to the fragmentary fixation of stances typical of Lavater's physiognomics, but also to their lability, which the comparison with painting had imposed as late as in Lessing<sup>32</sup>. Rather than a magician of the ephemeral, the actor is thus a professional of the transitory, capable of making passions visible in their continual merging<sup>33</sup>. In this perspective, his body is similar not to the rigidity of a canvas, but to the mobility of a veil, which allows one to hide the smallest pleats of the soul in its folds:

We know the nature of the soul only from its own effects, and certainly we would gain further information about it if we only wanted to observe more zealously the multiple expressions of its ideas and emotions in the body. Since we cannot see it in an immediate way, we should turn all the more zealously and attentively to its mirror, or better, to its veil, which is sufficiently thin and mobile to let us guess its [of the soul] appearance through its [of the veil] folds.<sup>34</sup>

In short, the body does not conceal or reveal the soul, as if it were an opaque surface or a transparent glass, but expresses it in its action, as if it were a «translator»<sup>35</sup>: what is immediately visible in this expression, therefore, is not the body or the soul, but the evolution of their relationship. In order to attain such a result, the actor must become an expert “connoisseur” of the human heart, as already required by Johann Friedrich Löwen's *Kurzgefaste Grundsätze von der Beredsamkeit des Leibes* (1755).<sup>36</sup> This “cardiognostic” cognition becomes tangible in his performance, the study of which can thus shed new light on the investigation of the depths of the mind. With the words

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<sup>31</sup> Ivi, II, letter 32. In this way, the actorial art enables to link the sensible dimension (in the sense of *sensualis* and not of *sensitivus*) and the dimension of duration, typical of the ancient *mousikè*, departing on the one hand from the merely spatial arts and on the other hand from poetry, which targets phantasy rather than the senses (apart from its rhythmical aspect).

<sup>32</sup> G.E. Lessing, *Hamburgische Dramaturgie*, 5. Stück (15. May), Cramer, Hamburg 1767, pp. 33-40.

<sup>33</sup> See J.J. Engel, *Ideen zu einer Mimik*, II, cit., pp. 256 ff.

<sup>34</sup> Ivi, I, p. 24. In contrast to the consideration of the body as a mere structure, Löbel avers that the body is a mirror which shows the smallest traits of the soul, see R.G. Löbel, *Einige Bemerkungen über die Deklamation*, cit., p. 45.

<sup>35</sup> See R.G. Löbel, *Einige Bemerkungen über die Deklamation*, cit., p. 45.

<sup>36</sup> J.F. Löwen, *Kurzgefaste Grundsätze von der Beredsamkeit des Leibes*, Hertel, Hamburg 1755, p. 15.



of Hermann Heimart Cludius, who takes up Engel's anthropological approach: «[The theory of bodily eloquence] gives rise and fresh momentum to psychological researches and observations. It is in itself a part of human knowledge»<sup>37</sup>. For this reason, the actor's body can be regarded as an observatory which enables us to experimentally study the behaviour of the soul. How does this "anthroposcopy" work<sup>38</sup>? How does the actor manage to make his body the visible tip of the iceberg of the soul?

## 5. A gymnasium of humanity

The starting point for Engel is undoubtedly natural mimicry. Indeed, the actor has to take a hint from the expressive forms suggested by nature. This does not mean, however, that he has to totally enter into the passion, because in this way he would be able at best to paint real individuals' emotions, and – Engel writes – «imitating, faithfully representing nature [...] is absolutely not enough»<sup>39</sup>. In fact, nature often errs by excess or defect, so that the simple reproduction of the things in their givenness, has to give way to that artificial "naturalness" which alone is able to elicit illusion. The point is therefore to supply the actor with the instruments to give nature more «precision»<sup>40</sup>, by perfecting the correspondence between feeling and expression within the double grammar, emotional and gestural, of which theatre shows the reciprocal symmetries. In Engel's words: «Only when there is the most perfect agreement between words, tone and movements and all of these perfectly correspond to the passion, the situation and the character, only then the highest degree of truth arises, from which the most perfect illusion derives»<sup>41</sup>. It is this illusion that exerts a powerful influence on spectators, who can go as far as to imitate the actors' postures with their own bodies<sup>42</sup>.

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<sup>37</sup> H.H. Cludius, *Grundris der körperlichen Beredsamkeit für Liebhaber der schönen Künste, Redner und Schauspieler. Ein Versuch*, Bohn, Hamburg 1792, pp. XVII-XVIII.

<sup>38</sup> For this term, see A. Otto, *Anthroposopia seu Judicium hominis de homine*, Hendel, Königsberg 1647. For a comment on its transformation into an «Ausspähungskunst im Inneren des Menschen» (Kant), see R. Campe, *Affekt und Ausdruck*, cit., pp. 420 ff.

<sup>39</sup> J.J. Engel, *Ideen zu einer Mimik*, I, cit., letter 2, in particular pp. 16-17.

<sup>40</sup> Ivi, I, pp. 179 and 330.

<sup>41</sup> Ivi, I, pp. 19-20.

<sup>42</sup> Ivi, I, p. 87. In fact, the spectator's face in this condition is defined as a «mirror» (*Spiegel*) of that of the characters on the stage; his whole body becomes a "figure" of the actor's musical

In order for such an illusion to be produced, the correspondence between psychological and bodily motions is therefore essential<sup>43</sup>. Engel explicitly declares that there exists a connection, valid for all nations, between a given disposition of the soul and a given posture of the body<sup>44</sup>. For example, in the case of having to express reverence, one lowers a part of one's body (mostly, one's head or knees): this lowering serves as an essential or natural sign of the corresponding emotion. According to Engel, mimicry should stick to this natural dimension<sup>45</sup>.

And yet, such a general correspondence is not sufficient, in that the elements of this correlation are too undetermined to guide actors in real cases. As the fictitious correspondent of Engel puts it, there are endless equally correct ways to realize such connections<sup>46</sup>. Socio-historical factors, therefore, come into play: when an actor intends to express a king's or a servant's, a Frenchman's or a Roman's gesture of reverence, he has to equip himself with the necessary historical knowledge, so as to adapt his own poses to the represented characters<sup>47</sup>. What is more, if we consider that the actorial mimicry is the product of a decantation process of natural mimicry, it is clear that the expression of emotions cannot but be achieved in the canons of expressive truth and gestural beauty<sup>48</sup> of the society in which the essential signs are fleshed out into concrete recitative signs.

The analogy between soul and body expressed on the stage is thereby the result of the refinement of the habitual expressive practices, of which the actor provides, as it were, an enlarged and accentuated version, thus

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body, in an intersection between representation and expression which goes beyond the dichotomy of these two planes. In letter 28, Engel lists several cases in which there is an intersection between representation and expression.

<sup>43</sup> To this aim, it is necessary for the actor to bring the obscure regions of physiological gestures into the domain of voluntary actions, so as to master every potentially significant expressive gesture, *ivi*, I, p. 191.

<sup>44</sup> *Ivi*, I, pp. 32 and ff.

<sup>45</sup> *Ivi*, I, p. 39.

<sup>46</sup> *Ivi*, I, p. 31.

<sup>47</sup> *Ivi*, I, 40 ff.

<sup>48</sup> According to Engel, gestures can be seen from two different points of view: either as external changes as such or as signs of the actions of the soul: in the first case, the crucial question which the actor must ask himself: what is beautiful? In the second case: what is true? While more attention is usually paid to the domain of beauty, Engel gives his preference to the problem of truth, *ivi*, I, pp. 73 ff.

establishing a norm that is able to influence and possibly improve, in turn, the spectators' corporeal communication<sup>49</sup>. If Engel's contemporary Ernst Platner affirmed that anthropology deals with the bonds between mind and body in which the "whole man" consists<sup>50</sup>, mimicry enables us to openly bring to light the embodied premises of a certain way of being human. And if mimicry is a musical rhythm, to tune into that rhythm means to tune into a historical form of humanity.

From this point of view, the expression of emotions is a border land, always suspended between soul and body, individual and society, nature and culture – a border land of which Engel's analysis allows us to sketch a tentative map. Beyond the single routes, many of which still provide important hints for the debate on the aesthetics of emotions, one of Engel's most relevant conclusions on this subject is his implicit invitation not to separate the components which make up its constitutive poles. Indeed, it is only in the dialectical tension between these polarities that mimicry turns out to be not only an anthropological observatory, but also an authentic gymnasium of humanity.

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<sup>49</sup> On this aspect, see in particular the mentioned studies of Bachmann-Medick.

<sup>50</sup> E. Platner, *Anthropologie für Aerzte und Weltweise. Erster Theil*, Dyck, Leipzig 1772, pp. XV-XVII. On this much-debated issue, see for a first orientation E. Agazzi, "Alcune riflessioni sul concetto di 'ganzer Mensch' nel tardo Illuminismo tedesco", in Ead., R. Calzoni (ed. by), *Progetti culturali di fine Settecento fra tardo Illuminismo e "Frühromantik"*, *Cultura Tedesca*, L, 2016, pp. 75-99.