

Towards an Ethics of Gesture

Symposium at Emmanuel College, University of Cambridge, UK, 16 April 2016

Summary

'The gesture is the exhibition of a mediality: it is the process of making a means visible as such. It allows the emergence of the being-in-a-medium of human beings and thus it opens the ethical dimension for them', Giorgio Agamben writes in his *Notes on Gesture*. This symposium takes Agamben's much-quoted statement as a starting point to enquire into what an ethics of gesture might be and what it might look like. It asks whether Agamben's definition of the gestural as 'communication of a communicability' is enough to warrant its belonging to the sphere of ethos, and seeks to mobilise alternative conceptual approaches to gestural ethics from Merleau-Ponty to Lacan, Foucault, Butler and others. It aims at an understanding of what a gestural ethics might imply at specific historical moments, but also how it can be thought, and theorised, as a political force today. Both the visual and the performing arts are privileged sites of gestural display and gestural enquiry. They stage gestures between stillness and flow; they work with the gestural as a signifying practice and a kinaesthetic or participatory experience, and as a mode of gaining knowledge of body and world, self and other. Gestures address; they show; and they show themselves. If they are an often unnoticed part of the fabric of everyday life, they make themselves seen and felt on screen, on stage and in the museum. Reaching towards but abstaining from touch, gestures operate in a space of potentiality. What is the ethical potential of this space? And does this ethical potential not also point towards action, in the sense of the 'gestural act'?

Addressing, among others, choreography by Ted Shawn and Merce Cunningham, and films by François Campaux, George Stevens, Clint Eastwood, and John Maclean, the symposium focuses both on cultural theories of gesture and on case studies from the fields of dance, theatre, performance, film and the visual arts; it brings those fields together with approaches from anthropology, theology, philosophy, and media studies. It is intended to enable intensive discussion across disciplines, in order to move, in the words of Mark Franko, 'towards an ethics of gesture'.

Programme

Emmanuel College, Harrods Room, 16 April 2016

8.30 – 9.00 Registration

9.00 – 9.30 Lucia Ruprecht (Cambridge): Welcome and Introduction

I. Ethics, Dance and Conduct (Chair Lucia Ruprecht)

9.30 – 10.30 Alexander Schwan (Berlin): On the Ethics of Liturgical Gestures in Early Modern Dance

10.30 – 11.00 Coffee

11.00 – 12.00 Jonas Tinius (Cambridge): Rehearsing Conduct: Notes on Art as Ethical Practice

II. Ethics and the Filmic Gesture (Chair Andrew Webber, Cambridge)

12.00 – 13.00 Astrid Deuber-Mankowsky (Bochum): Paradox of a Gesture, Enlarged by the Distension of Time: Merleau-Ponty and Lacan on a Slow Motion Picture of Henri Matisse Painting

13.00 – 14.00 Lunch

14.00 – 15.00 Michael Minden (Cambridge): Ethics, Gesture and the Western Movie

15.00 – 15.30 Coffee

III. Ethics and Gestural Mediality in Performance (Chair Alyce Mahon, Cambridge)

15.30 – 16.30 Carrie Noland (Irvine): Ethics, Staged

16.30 – 17.30 Rebecca Schneider (Brown): Extending a Hand: Gesture, Duration and (Non)Human (Non)Representation

17.30 – 18.00 Closing Remarks

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