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## Introduction

Sophie Aymes and Marie-Odile Bernez

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## INTRODUCTION

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“This revelation was a lancing of my spontaneous circular designs, both as a meditative trace and leaving a trace of permanence, of which the dance lives and dies in one act of execution.”(Carolyn Carlson 37)

Following up on the previous volume on “*Gestures and their Traces*”, this new issue of *Interfaces* presents its second selection of essays published in the wake of the conference that was held at the Université de Bourgogne (Dijon, France) in June 2017 (“*Gestures in Texts and the Visual Arts*”). The papers of volume 39 examined the nature of the traces left by gestures and their in-betweenness. This inquiry of the mediating nature of gestures is pursued in volume 40 which focuses on performance, communication and permanence. This is tackled within the broader topic of transmission understood as transmission through gestures and transmission of gestures. The contributors’ essays on painting, video, dance and drama give an insight into the degree of complexity to which “art practices kinetic intelligence” (Bolens 7, our translation). They explore issues of physical translation, mediation between body/mind and screens or canvases, dissemination of a repertoire of gestures and/or rhetorical figures. Their analyses accommodate historicist linearity as well as other temporalities informed by resurgence, feedback loops and reciprocal relationships.

Our selection in both volumes establishes a boundary between traces and transmission that is convenient for thematic reasons yet, arguably, also artificial. As various authors insist, gestures are part of broad multimodal forms of communication (among others see Gallagher; Gibbs). For instance, Morten Schuldt-Jensen compares the orchestra conductor’s transformative performance to an act of translation which leads to the “complete sounding realization of a piece of music” (§ 14), whereby his/her gestures are a non-verbal component of a large array of tools conductors use to communicate with the orchestra. From the perspective of communication and language, David McNeill defines gestures as “material carrier[s]” (98) of meaning along a “continuum” (5) shaped by the reciprocal interactions of its inseparable components, gesture/imagery and language. Or, when considering the

relation between humans and their tools, Patricia Ribault stresses the shuttling interaction between our bodies and their prosthetic extensions (7). Therefore, the word “transmission” in our title does not refer to a unidirectional relation between thought and gesture where the latter would be a mere expressive tool according to the “bodily functionalism” that Guillemette Bolens warns against (16). More generally, the articles in this collection echo and complement some of the aspects developed in volume 39. This is why dancer and choreographer Carolyn Carlson’s description of her calligraphic works as being both ephemeral and permanent was a choice epigraph.

The opening piece of our collection provides a transition with the previous volume. Hélène Ibata’s essay on William Turner’s gestural involvement and on painting as a processual mode of expression focuses on the “pictorial creation as a lived or kinesthetic experience in which vision and movement are fused”, a form of embodied experience which is analysed in phenomenological terms. From the artist’s gaze and mind to the pictorial traces of the brush on the canvas, Ibata surveys the reciprocal interaction between mental processes, medium and gestures that are immanent to the process of creation. This integrated way of thinking gestures is further illustrated by the multimedia artist Christina Lammer. Her essay “Performing Surgery: Exploring gestures in the operating theatre” analyses the balletic aspect of surgical operations during which the choreographic interaction between imaging technologies, the hand and its technological extensions produces a “flow” that unites a team of surgeons in physical contact with the patient’s body. Her camera not only records the medical procedures in an empathetic way but also provides a metamedial comment on and extension of the surgeon’s practice in the sense that filming is construed as a form of surgery and that the camera itself is part of an overall prosthetic apparatus.

The issue of gestures in filming and in films themselves has gained prominence in contemporary cultural studies<sup>1</sup>. The influence of modern technical gestures on contemporary video artists Thomas Hirschhorn and Julien Prévieux is the subject of our next paper, in which Pascale Borrel examines the technological extensions of the human body in videos and performances and more particularly the haptic touch that connects us to the screens of our tablets and smartphones. Whereas Ibata concentrates on the physicality of gestures, both Lammer and Borrel look at the boundary between imaging technologies and the extended body, dematerialized digital images and immediate physical contact with reality. All

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<sup>1</sup> In English, one can mention the *Journal for Cultural Research* which dedicated one issue to “Screen Signs: Cultures of Gesture in Cinema” in 2015 (Volume 19, 2015, Issue 1, Taylor and Francis, Routledge Group, online at <https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/rcuv20/19/1>) as well as a number of articles appearing in *Film-Philosophy*, an open-access journal dedicated to film studies in relation with philosophy. In French, a recent collective anthology, *Geste filmé, gestes filmiques* (eds Christa Blümlinger and Mathias Lavin, Milan/Paris, Mimésis éditions, 2018), examines gestures in classical films, but also their link to the development of modern technology.

three authors inscribe gestures within a continuum, as part of a flux that is seen as the flow of human interactions with the world and with our tools or as the motility of the alienated digital subject.

As Borrel explains, Prévieux refers to the patents filed by technology giants which create repertoires of patented gestures for prototypes that already exist or have not yet been invented. The voice-over in Prévieux's video *What Shall We Do Next? #2* notes that “gestures used to be fleeting and did not leave any evidence that they had ever happened”,<sup>2</sup> a statement that implicitly stresses the controlling drive of digital technologies and their influence over the human sensorium. However, as the video shows, gestures are not only intangible forms of ephemeral and inchoative expression, they are also part of an archived repertoire.<sup>3</sup> This is examined in the next four essays whose authors tackle various aspects of the transmission of gestures as material carrier[s]” of meaning (McNeill 98) and address the relation between typology and singularity, that is to say the duality of gestures. Borrowing once more from music, transmission is here also seen in a performative light and we may follow Svetlana Alpers and Michael Baxandall in *Tiepolo and the Pictorial Intelligence* who “imagine Tiepolo as a performer in need of something to play and taking Veronese up”, adding that the musical tradition before 1800 was “practice internalized in performance” rather than “canonical history” (23). This ties in with the irreducibly singular quality of gesture whose immanent significance (Angelino 24) defies categorization and, in a similar way to images, cannot be reduced to the ancillary role of accompaniment to discursive language. Moreover, as Michel Guérin has noted (8-9), the singularity of the child's gestures, an entirely new beginning, is inscribed within a genetic pattern of inheritance: “gesture has the ability to bring the first time to coincide with every single time” (12, our translation). In other words, its dual nature binds the inchoative with the repetitive, performative singularity and interpretive categorizations.

In her essay “Objecting to gestures in *Macbeth*”, Claire Guéron reflects on the potency of gestures in the Early Modern Period and posits the growing suspicion of signifying gestures in the religious and legal context of the period. She explains how a play such as *Macbeth* records the growing semiotic divide between speech and gesture. Indeed the *gesta/geste* of gestures drawn from medieval heroic narratives as well as the classical ideal of the “perfect coordination of speech and action” derived from rhetorical practice are questioned in early seventeenth-century drama to the extent of a “dislocation of the word/gesture continuum” which is explored by Shakespeare to test its

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<sup>2</sup> Julien Prévieux, *What Shall We Do Next? #2*: <https://vimeo.com/1111013619> (at 2'47'').

<sup>3</sup> As for the notion of inchoative gesture, we refer you to the introduction of *Interfaces* 39 (2018): <http://preo.u-bourgogne.fr/interfaces/index.php?id=478>. As for the link between technological progress and new repertoires of gestures, see also Krajewski (2011; 2014).

dramatic efficacy. A similar type of disjunction is examined by Claudie Servian in her essay on the dichotomy between movement and gestures in modern and postmodern American dance. Her survey takes us back to the rhetorical tenets regulating dance treatises in the classical age as dance gestures were considered to have the same expressive potency as speech. This she opposes to the modernist shift towards interiority and formalism as well as to post-modernist self-reflexivity and emancipation from narrativization and semantic finality.

On the other hand, Paul Bernard-Nouraud and Isabella Woldt emphasize the continuity of gestures whose formal resurgence is analyzed within the framework of Aby Warburg's theoretical construct. In his analysis of the afterlife of gestures in art history, Bernard-Nouveau traces the pictorial dissemination of two contrasted gestures, the raised arms exemplified by Goya's *The Third of May 1808* and the dangling arms of Watteau's *Gilles*, construed as a "non gesture".<sup>4</sup> His enquiry stresses the role of archival classification, its inherent difficulties as well as the dynamics of continuation, following up on Warburg's accretive enterprise in the *Mnemosyne Atlas* and his analysis of gesture as informing works of art and imparting them with an eloquence that evades the strictures of language. In the next essay, Woldt retraces Warburg's "hermeneutics of body movements" in his elaboration of the concepts of *pathosformel* and *Ur-forms* (primordial forms). She contextualizes his record of the survival of gestural expressions in relation to contemporary evolutionary theory and psychology. She notably focuses on the crucial role of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* from Antiquity to the Early Modern Period, and compares the process of transmission and variation to the metamorphosis of Daphne.

The two essays closing this volume serve as a conclusion on the eloquence of gestures and of images. Maurice Geracht's "Reading Gestures in Valentin de Boulogne's Paintings" is the record of a museum encounter with the works of the French seventeenth-century painter whose narrative and rhetorical use of gestures ties in with his capture of the telling moment. In his ekphrastic piece, Geracht describes the way the artist engages and challenges the viewers who respond to the drama played out in front of them. In the final article, Judith Haziot tackles the viewer's engagement from the perspective of cognitive sciences and neurosciences. She explains how they have renewed the analysis of genetic processes in the making of paintings and of the viewers' reception. This coda brings together the focal points of our two volumes on gesture, their representation, their processual nature, the traces that they leave and the role of the artists' and of the viewers' lived experiences.

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<sup>4</sup> This analysis of "non gestures" relies on Deleuze's analysis of the exhausted. See also Sarah Troche's use of the notion in her essay "Francis Bacon et le hasard du geste" (126).

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