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LIFE ON THE THRESHOLD OF THE BODY

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LIFE ON THE THRESHOLD OF THE BODY**ABSTRACT**

The aim of this PhD thesis is defining the human gesture not from the point of view of single meanings but in the attempt to describe the category of gesture itself and in its relation with the human condition.

The first part of the research designs a definition of gesture as the movement that opens the body beyond itself, toward external *objects* (as the actions or the language): identify in the form of a tension, gesture can be described as such only before achieving the *object* it was tending to.

In the second part, an analysis of the medieval monastic rules and Renaissance painting allows to qualify a change of direction: more than being an expression of the body interrupted before the *object*, gesture presents itself as the response to a calling from the *object*, a going toward the world that gets caught into the materiality of the same body.

In this opening of the body toward the world and withdrawing from the being always in action, the gestures discloses a sphere of possibilities in between, a threshold able to put into question the same opposition between the subject and the *objects*.

SYNOPSIS OF THE PhD THESIS**LIFE ON THE THRESHOLD OF THE BODY**

A MOVEMENT IN MOTION • The first attempt to define gesture in philosophy comes by Cicero, whose *Rhetorica*¹ contains the putting alongside of the term *gestus* with the words *motus corporis*.

By doing so, Cicero defines gesture not only as something that strictly refers to the body, but also that should have an irreducible movement within it. Indeed one can say that gesture is always movement: on the one hand this is because the human body is constantly in motion, even in a utopian effort toward its immobility; on the other hand, when considering static gestures such as in paintings or sculptures, what one perceives must not be seen as static images but – through the analysis of Lessing – as meaningful instants (*prägnante Momente*)² of a bodily movement petrified by Medusa's gaze, or a frame of a lost movie within which it would regain its true meaning.

If we can hence affirm the gesture is always a movement, we should recognize at the same time how not all movements are gestures: what is then that *plus* able to transform movement in gesture?

One fundamental source that has been used for this research is Johann Jakob Engel, who in 1785 in *Ideen zu einer Mimik* defined gesture as a form of attraction or repulsion toward an external object,³ referring primarily to real objects in respect to which man would produce a concrete movement. In the very well-known gestural dialogue painted by Caravaggio in *The Calling of St. Matthew*, the hands of the Christ and Peter point to the body of Matthew, which in its concrete presence in the room is object of both gestures. Similarly, having a glass in front of me I can point to it, precisely because it draws my attention with its simple presence. However, if our common idea of gestural

¹ Cicero, *Rhetorica*, Brutus § 203

² Lessing, G. E., *Laokoon. Oder: Über die Grenzen der Malerei und Poesie* . Reclam, Stuttgart 1999, cap.XVI.

³ Engel, „J.J., *Ideen zu einer Mimik* ,(1785), p. 164 [Eine zweite Bemerkung, die Sie bei jeder lebhaften Begierde werden bestätigt finden, ist die: dass sie immer die gerade Linie auf den Gegenstand zu oder von ihm zurücknimmt].

expressiveness is not reduced to an attraction and repulsion toward real objects arranged in the world, how should we define Engel's *object* toward which the gesture tends?

To answer this question, this study refers to two authors of the 20th Century, who have differently faced this problem of the *object*. On the one hand, Jean-Paul Sartre in *L'Être et le Néant*, clearly highlighted how any possible action should be considered as *object*, because still separated from the present condition of the body, and so in gestures I announce the tension toward an action that I can achieve in the future. To give an example, gestures of challenge or seduction gestures should be seen as such precisely because they refer to an *object*-action yet to come. On the other hand, Vilém Flusser in *Les Gestes* describes the language as to be seen as external *object* that the body does not possess, giving birth to all those gestural expressiveness so strongly linked to the activity of speaking,

So, moving from the words of Engel, we could draw a first definition of gesture as the movement of the body that goes beyond itself, tending towards an external *object*.

A CHANGE OF DIRECTION: THE CALLING OF THE OBJECT • If the philosophical literature lacks of a clear definition of gesture, main direct sources of this research have been the medieval monastic rules, in which – even avoiding a definition – gesture is frequently analyzed in relation with the rule of silence.

In 1180 the Welsh abbot Giraldus Cambrensis writes a letter to his superior condemning the lively gestural conversation that seems to allow monks to communicate with each other overstepping the monastic rule of silence. Giraldus writes about the transformation of gesture into something that is no more such; something that - in his words of - would have violated the rule by reintroducing the word into the body, and that we can identify as a language of signs.

Indeed when in the second half of 700, Charles-Michel de l'Épée lays the

foundations for a first coded sign language, he expressed the intention to artificially reconstruct, through the movement of the body, all parts of French syntax, from nouns to prepositions. So the sign is not gesture, because it is no longer *movement* toward the language, but language in *motion*; it is no more tension toward the meaning but has the meaning into itself. And this limit allows us to precise a definition of gesture: defined in the form of tension toward an external *object*, the gesture needs to keep this distance from the *object* as space of tension toward it.

In this perspective this research reconsiders the *Action painting* of Jackson Pollock. In several cases Pollock said that his marks on the canvas were absolutely not abstract or random: with his gesture he was painting figurative landscapes, and he was simply keeping a distance from the same object of the representation. But what would it mean for Pollock to achieve the *object* he was tending to?

To answer this question my research examines the way in which Emmanuel Lévinas has marked in his own philosophy a dialectic between two terms, which are defined as *le dire* and *le dit*. The *saying (le dire)* would be the same act of saying, while the *said (le dit)* would be something already achieved. But what Lévinas marks is that, even though I personally contributed to achieve this *said*, when it is completely *said*, it turns to me to reveal how all my efforts of *saying* were conceived starting from it and because of it.

By achieving something I reveal myself as its instrument, as that, in which all movements were accurately designed starting from the aim to be achieved.

And marking this space of gesture, Pollock seems to want to give up from this condition, to mark him as the one who is still *saying*, and no more as an instrument of *said*.

In this resistance of gesture to being instrument of the world, we can now understand the words of the ceremony of access of the novice in the monastery in the *Monastic Rule* of Benedict, in which he describes how, before entering, the novice had to do one last free gesture, adding then: «Quippe qui ex illo die nec proprii corporis protestatem se habiturum scit»⁴. [And from that day, he is

⁴ Benedict, *The Rule*, LVIII, 25, online edition

aware of not having even more power over his own body]. From that moment the novice should give up any individual gesture: gestures disappear and from now on each movement of the monk donates his body to be instrument of a rule imposed from the outside.

But an analysis of gesture in the medieval literature showed how gesture seems always to be the result of an outer will. On the one hand, we have the *Chansons de geste*, in which the Latin word *gestus* is replaced with the passive form *gesta*, in identifying the hero not as the one who acts, rather as the one on which the story is acted by God; on the other hand the gestures of the possessed, subjected to be instruments of the Evil.

In a general theory of gestural expressiveness in modernity, the powers of God and Evil are here to be substituted by the idea of a *calling of the object*, which allows specifying a change of direction that can clarify the definition of gesture itself. From the outside, actions and language call the body toward a movement that could make them accomplished. In gesture, body responds to the call of this external *object*, which is a kind of siren song of Odysseus into which - to keep itself as gesture – the movement must try not to fall. But what does save our gestures as gestures, while being attracted by the *object*?

THE RESISTANCE OF THE MATTER OF THE BODY • This research takes as starting image of this part the story of the sacrifice of Isaac, in which the action is crystallized by the hand of the Angel, just before being completed, and thanks to this, the movement is considered in the biblical tradition as a gesture, or as the gesture of Abraham that does not sacrifice Isaac. But how should we consider this interruption that give birth to gesture? Indeed, It can not be an interruption that denies the presence of the *object* toward which the gesture was tending, or that marks its achievement as impossible, otherwise the same gesture would disappear, going back to the rank of simple movement. For this reason, to keep gesture as a never satisfied desire, it is necessary to replace the idea of interruption with the one of resistance, which, while

keeping in mind the *object* of tension, would prevent the movement from an inevitable sliding into it.

To understand and locate this resistance, I investigate the results of some experiments conducted around 1835 by the scientist Duchenne de Boulogne, who devised a technique of muscle stimulation to induce the face into different facial expressions. He complained at the same time the impossibility to grasp in its clarity the desired expression *said* from the outside, which remained too sensitive to the materiality of the flesh on which it was impressed. Thus Duchenne showed how the matter of the body with its limit is what makes me fail while being attracted toward a completely *said*, toward that *object* by which I was called.

The matter of the body is what saves me in power: through it, I am not the one that have to achieve the *object*, but that have the *possibility* exactly because can fail. This can explain why, both in Christian and Jewish tradition, Angels have no gestural expressiveness: even when we suppose for a moment that the Angels might have unfulfilled desires, they could not express themselves through gestures, since in any moment of tension towards the *object* of their desire, they would join it immediately without meeting any bodily limit, and being always in action and never in power. Hence, the body underlines how there is no power except in the limits of the matter, and it allows to give a final definition of gesture as the human movement attracted by an *object* that gets caught in the materiality of the body, marking itself as a never achieved possibility of achievement.

LIFE ON THE THRESHOLD OF THE BODY • When George Didi-Huberman wrote his book about Aby Warburg, he clearly describes the presence of an outer impression, by speaking of an unconscious energy that would be looking for the matter of its imprint in gestures, draperies and hair⁵.

Hence, the whole canvas of Botticelli's *La primavera* is crossed by a wind that touches the light dresses; the same wind that elsewhere in Botticelli ruffles the hair of the Venus rising: It is a passion *said* from outside, that *Pathos* of

⁵ Didi-Huberman, G. *L'image survivante*, Les Editions de Minuit, Paris 2002. p.56

Warburg seeking for its imprint among the Centuries; yet it is not completely *said*, since it fights against the resistance of the same matter in which it is imprinted. It is under this light that we should consider the abundance of gestures in Renaissance paintings: all those twisted little fingers that, while *saying* something, seem to resist any meaning. Insubstantial as the dresses of the Nymphs, the gesture strongly manifests the matter of the body in which it is caught, because as there would not be dress without a body to be dressed, there is no gesture without a body to be overstepped.

Furthermore, Didi-Huberman describes the dress of the Nymph, as a sort of *interstitial space* dancing between the body and the atmosphere he lives in,⁶ and we shall now identify it as the space where our gestures live: the first movement goes out of the body, but the same matter of the body holds me from falling into the *objects* in the world, while keeping me in an *interstitial space* between the body and the world.

Every gesture is the expression of this space, ability of the man to live beyond the body, even if not already as instrument of the world. Gestural expressiveness surrounds the body, as a dust of possibilities of the body itself, sculpting and preserving a space between the body and the world.

To grasp a clear manifestation of this space, the final part of the thesis returns to the image with which it opened, even if in focusing attention to another gesture: while indicated by the Christ and Peter - Matthew points to himself. And if Matthew *is* at the same time the one who makes the gesture and the one who *has* in his own body the *object* of the same gesture, it is just because he can go outside, over the threshold of his body, and perceive himself from the outside. Arm and hand clearly manifest the two forces in opposite direction that do not reabsorb themselves, rather opening an interstitial space over the body, alike to the two well-known movements of the camera in *Vertigo* (1958), in which Hitchcock combined a tracking shot backward with a zoom forward, which - even being in opposed direction - do not reabsorb but open up an abyss of vertigo, able to marvellously describe the feeling of the protagonist.

And it is a situation of vertigo that we catch Matthew on the threshold of his

⁶ Didi-Huberman, *L'image survivante*, op. cit., p. 243

body, between the present condition and possibilities, between being just a body and being just instrument of the world: he freezes himself in this interstitial cloud of possibilities that surrounds the body, separating him from the future as from any other *object*. Indeed, if Sartre placed the *subject* surrounded by a *Nothing* that would separate him from *objects* of the world, the gesture shows that the body does not border on the *Nothing*, rather it borders on the possible. The *subject* does not live entirely protected by a separation from this *object*, rather it lives on the same threshold of separation, from where he contracts his being in the world.

So if we have to conclude in answering the first question, *what does the man expose on his body while performing gestures?*, we shall say that in gesture the man exposes himself to feel this vertigo of exposure and communicate it. And it is in this vertigo on the chasm of possible that we grasp the uncertain look of Matthew, who - while indicating himself - tells us the uncertain beauty of his being living on the uncertain threshold of his body.

LIFE ON THE THRESHOLD OF THE BODY

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	p.12
1 • THE FIRST MOVEMENT	
1.1 • GESTURE AND MOTION	p.17
1.2 • GESTURE <i>IN</i> MOTION	p.20
2 • THE SECOND MOVEMENT	
2.1 • MOVEMENT TOWARD THE <i>OBJECT</i>	p.30
2.2 • THE <i>OBJECT</i>	p.32
2.3 • A DOUBLE MOVEMENT	p.36
2.4 • THE WORLD AS PROSTHESIS OF THE SUBJECT	p.38
2.5 • THE FACE OF THE OTHER	p.42
2.6 • THE GESTURE OF CREATION	p.46
2.7 • CREATING THE WORLD OF <i>OBJECTS</i>	p.50
3 • THE END OF GESTURE	
3.1 • REACHING THE <i>OBJECT</i>	p.55
3.2 • THE LOSS OF THE DISTANCE	p.60
3.3 • BEING INSTRUMENT OF THE WORLD	p.64
3.4 • THE CEREMONY OF THE <i>SAID</i>	p.67
3.5 • FROM <i>GESTUS</i> TO <i>GESTA</i>	p.70
3.6 • A CHANGE OF DIRECTION	p.73

4	• THE THIRD MOVEMENT	
4.1	• THE INTERRUPTION	p.77
4.2	• THE DYNAMICS OF ESCAPE	p.79
4.3	• INCORPORATION OF THE INCOMPLETE	p.85
4.4	• THE SYMBOLIC	p.88
4.5	• POWER OF GESTURE AND GESTURES OF POWER	p.89
5	• THE GESTURE AND THE FLESH	
5.1	• SNAPSHOT OF A BALANCE	p.92
5.2	• BEYOND THE FLESH	p.95
5.3	• BEING FLESH	p.96
5.4	• THE RESISTANCE OF THE FLESH	p.106
5.5	• POWER OF THE MATTER	p.109
5.6	• THE IMPRINT OF THE <i>OBJECT</i>	p.113
5.7	• THE WIND OF THE <i>OBJECT</i>	p.115
6.	LIFE ON THE THRESHOLD OF THE BODY	
6.1	• THE INTERSTITIAL SPACE	p.123
6.2	• THE SURVIVAL	p.128
6.3	• THE MAN WITHOUT <i>OBJECT</i>	p.134
6.4	• LIFE ON THE THRESHOLD OF THE BODY	p.139
6.5	• CONCLUSION	p.144
7	• PARTE SECONDA: LA PRIMA PERIFERIA	p. 148
	ESPERIENZE PERFORMATIVE SULLA SOGLIA DEL CORPO	

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«Si vous marchez dehors, à cette heure et en ce lieu, c'est que vous désirez quelque chose que vous n'avez pas».

Bernard-Marie Koltès,
*Dans la solitude des champs de coton*⁷.

INTRODUCTION • IF GESTURE MEANS SOMETHING • In *Antecedente X*, a book published in the mid 70's and focused on the difficulties of composing, the Italian musician Franco Donatoni unexpectedly faced the problem of defining human gesture, in writing:

«È possibile ammettere che il gesto non sia indifferente al significato. In altre parole: è possibile che il gesto voglia dire qualcosa. Se *qualcosa* è altro dal gesto,

⁷ Koltès, B. M., *Dans la solitude des champs de coton*, Les Éditions de Minuit, Paris 1987

allora la difficoltà è manifesta perché la contraddizione è palese»⁸. [One can say that the gesture is not indifferent to its meaning. In other words it is possible for gesture to mean *something*. But if this *something* is other than gesture a problem clearly emerges].

Indeed, in the moment we declare that gesture has the possibility of meaning *something*, it suddenly appears to our eyes that it cannot be absolutely defined as that precise meaning we generally attribute to it.

Usually caught or analyzed under the light of their single meanings, human gestures struggled to find a unique definition for the term *gesture* in itself.

Hence, the aim of this work is to free human gestures from their being just carriers of meanings, to put into question the human possibility of gestural expressiveness in the form of a definition.

And if in this perspective, every single gesture can express something beyond its own meaning, what would the man then expose on his body while performing gestures?

THE TERM *GESTURE* • This PhD thesis worked first of all around the aporia of a clear definition of its principal term.

Despite the frequent use of the word *gestus* in ancient Latin literature, no classical author and grammarian – and even not Marcus Terentius Varro⁹, whose *De Lingua Latina* is often taken as fundamental source of modern etymology – gives a precise and unique definition of it, allowing its use in a bewildering array of contexts to express different meanings.

The Czech-born philosopher Vilém Flusser¹⁰ demonstrates a paradigmatic

⁸ Donatoni, F., *Antecedente X*, Adelphi, Milano 1980. P. 121.

⁹ Varro, Marcus Terentius, *De Lingua Latina*, 45-47 BC. Digital edition: http://www.intratext.com/IXT/LAT0231/_INDEX.HTM

¹⁰ Flusser, V., *Les gestes*, Editions Hors Commerce-D'ARTS, 1999.

example of the problem in his book focused on gestures. In it, while giving a fundamental contribution to a general theory of gesture, Flusser uses the term in referring to constructively very different human activities: in the different chapters he writes about the *gesture* of shaving as the one of speaking, of the *gesture* of calling and the one of love, without giving a definition that would enlighten the reader about the choice of the specific term *gesture* in respect to other possible terms. Indeed, what is the *gesture* of shaving, once described exactly as the *action* of shaving? What is the sense of the words *gesture of speaking*, once presented as something that does not differ from the common idea we can have of the *intention* of speaking?

The aporia about the term exceeds a philosophical analysis to reach the use of the word in our daily life, from the idea of an *intention* that can even stop before the movement (while commonly speaking of doing a *nice gesture*), until the complete *actions* described by Flusser; from a simple body *movement*, to something that is difficult to differ from a *sign*. And no coincidence that the same missing definition of the term moved Robert Hatten in presenting this same question as a major topic in a recent text about the relation between gesture and music:

«What do we really mean by musical gesture? When we speak of a musical gesture, do we refer to physical action? Or motion abstracted from a human source? A sounding motive, or a notated one? Or a shaping of intensity, dynamics, and pacing? Is gesture something that must occur in the experiential present, or can a longer phrase be considered a gesture? Does a gesture have meaningful directed motion [...]? Does a gesture have a direction? A goal? A point of culmination or climax? Can it be encompassed by a single musical event – a single note, or a rest?»¹¹

For this reason a philosophical research on gesture and its relation with the human body should proceed by getting out the metaphor of the use, to strongly

¹¹ Robert Hatten, *Interpreting Musical Gestures, Topics and Tropes. Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert*, Bloomington-Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 2004, p. 93.

overstep this aporia and look for a concrete specificity of gesture. And the first step of a definition of gesture, will inevitably lead to an attempt of its definition in its relation and divergences with the related but different terms *intention*, *movement*, *action*, and *sign*.

THE SECOND APORIA • Beside the lack of a definition of the term at the core of this research, it exists a second aporia in analyzing it in a philosophical perspective, field in which it does not exist a major literature about gestural expressiveness.

At the same time, gesture has usually been regular object of the investigation in anthropological science and iconography, social behaviour and dance. This is the reason why, even in following the purpose of a philosophical definition of gesture in its relation with the human condition, this research moves between different disciplines, precisely to address the term *gesture* and the lack of its philosophical definition from distinctive directions.

The main sources of this work range from the Rhetoric manuals of Latin Era, to the medieval monastic Rules; from Warburg's iconographical analysis of the Renaissance paintings until the examination of the role of the gestural component in silent cinema.

The examples that have been taken are far from wanting to be comprehensive in outlining a history of human gestures or its representation, but have been used as tools to sketch that missing definition of gestural experience in relation to the human philosophical condition.

The work does not proceed in a chronological path, by favouring instead the use of different conceptions of gestures as stones of a theoretical thought to be accomplished. Nonetheless the work has identified some undeniable historical fractures as moments of change in the conception of gesture, which, in the

juxtaposition of different historical and anthropological conceptions have been able to clarify a philosophical theory of gesture.

More specifically, this theory focused on the one hand in the passage from the Middle Ages to modern Era, transition in which a different conception of the body allows to precise the spatial relationship that gestures intertwines with it.

On the other hand, the process of industrialization at the turn of 19th Century, when the emergence of a productive Era allowed putting the gestures under the light of a withdrawal from being already in the world, and thus allows to precise the spatial relationship that gestures create with the world. Hence, the analysis of these two periods opened this double movement between the body and the world to what will become and will be conceived at the end of the thesis as a general theory of gesture as a life on the threshold of the body.

1 • THE FIRST MOVEMENT

1.1 • GESTURE AND MOTION • Although the idea of gesture and the one of movement were given in ancient Greek through the use of the same term *kinesis* (it existed the word *neuma* as well, even if it was strictly referred to gesture in music direction) Latin commonly distinguished the Greek word in the two different terms of *motus* and *gestus*. How should it then be interpreted the birth of two different and specific terms?

In *De Lingua Latina*, usually considered as the main source for ancient etymology, Varro gives up in defining the term *gesture*, while clearly underlining several times a definition of *motus*.

The first time the term *motus* appears, it is in the fifth book, in which Varro sets a general definition of the category of *movement*, to be followed by different examples along the whole work.

«Quare item duo status et motus, utrumque quadripertitum: quod stat aut agitur, corpus, ubi agitur, locus, dum agitur, tempus, quod est in agitu, actio. Quadripertitio magis sic apparebit: corpus est ut cursor, locus stadium qua currit, tempus hora qua currit, actio cursio. Quare fit, ut ideo fere omnia sint quadripertita et ea aeterna, quod neque unquam tempus, quin fuerit motus: eius enim intervallum tempus; neque motus, ubi non locus et corpus, quod alterum est

quod movetur, alterum ubi; neque ubi is agitatus, non actio ibi. »¹². [Therefore likewise there are the two fundamentals, station and motion, each divided into four kinds: what is stationary or is in motion, is body; where it is in motion, is place; while it is in motion, is time; what is inherent in the motion, is action. The fourfold division will be clearer in this way: the body is the runner, the place is the race-course where he runs, the time is the period during which he runs, the action is the running. Therefore it comes about that for this reason all things, in general, are divided into four phases; because there is never time without motion — for even an intermission of motion is time —; nor is there motion where there is not place and body, because the latter is what is moved, and the former is where].

Even though Varro is here strongly underlining how there is no possibility of motion without both categories of body and space (*neque motus, ubi non locus et corpus*), he is undoubtedly still defining a general movement that does not belong rigorously to the human body.

Hence, by dissecting the six survived books of *De Lingua Latina*, the employ of the same word *motus* can be found in three different contexts, embracing the movements of the Sun, the ones that actually refers to the human body, until the dynamics of sea tides.

«Duo motus solis: alter cum caelo, quod movetur ab Iove rectore, qui Graece Dia appellatur, cum ab oriente ad occasum venit, quo tempus id ab hoc deo dies appellatur»¹³. [There are two motions of the sun; one with the heaven it is impelled by Jupiter as the ruler, who in Greek it is called Dia, when it comes from east to west, wherefore this time is called *the day* from this God].

«At in mari, credo, motus non habent similitudines geminas, qui in XXIII horis lunaribus cotidie quater se mutant, ac cum sex horis aestus creverunt, totidem decreverunt, rursus idem, itemque ab his»¹⁴. [But in the sea, I suppose, the motions do not have the twofold likenesses. The motions, which in twenty -four

¹² Varro, M.C., *De Lingua Latina*, Liber V, 1. on-line edition:

<http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/varro.ll5.html>. Editor and Translator: Roland Grubb Kent, 1938. on line edition: <http://www.calameo.com/read/0001070449462c4f882fc>

¹³ Ibid., Liber VI, 2, <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/varro.ll6.html>

¹⁴ Ibid. Liber IX, 19

lunar hours change themselves four times, and when the tides have risen for six hours, and ebb for just as many, they rise again, and in the same fashion ebb after this time].

While writing about movements of *bodies*, Varro means every kind of *body* in motion: different possibilities, among which one can find the movement of the human body as well, and eventually among these last, that precise idea of gestural expressiveness never explicitly quoted in *De Lingua Latina*.

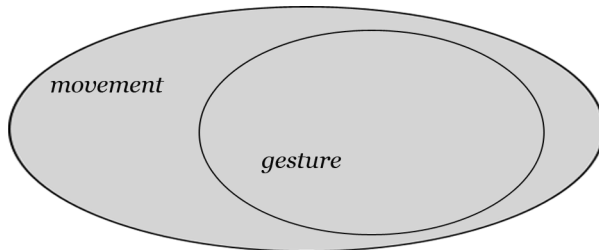
To find a juxtaposition of terms able to clarify the disjoining of the ideas of *motus* and *gestus*, one has to read the pages in which in the same years *De Lingua Latina*, Cicero uses the term *gestus* for the first time in Latin literature: in *Rhetorica*, one of his works consecrated to the culture of performance and public speech, in the purpose of describing the elegance of Sulpicio's orations Cicero puts the term *gestus* alongside the words *motus corporis*.

«Fuit enim Sulpicius omnium vel maxime, quo quidem ego audiverim, grandi et, ut ita dicam, tragicus aratro. Vocum cum magna tum suavis et splendida; gestus et motu corporis ita venustus, ut tamen ad forum, non ad scaenam institutus videretur»¹⁵. [Among the ones I have heard, Sulpicio was the greatest speaker, and the most tragic. The powerful voice was harmonic and clear as well; gestures and body movements were elegant, but of an elegance that seemed in tune with the forum and not with the theater].

In its association with the *motus corporis*, the gesture would so be suggested by Cicero primarily as a kind of movement that strictly refers to the body: if the *motus* described by Varro can belong to the human body as to the stars or the leaves of a tree, *gestus* would be a prerogative of the human body. Cicero seems to suggest *gestus* not as the movement of a body, rather more specifically a movement of the body. Hence, even while commonly using

¹⁵ Cicero, *Rhetorica*, Brutus § 203

expressions such as *gestures of the nature* or *gesture of God*, one can do it only by anthropomorphizing the subject of the same gestures.



Furthermore, through the use of these words, Cicero opens toward a further perspective on an attempt in defining gesture in itself: compared and described as a *motus corporis*, *gestus* does not simply underline its bodily aspect, rather it presents itself as a sub-case or specific declination of the category of movement.

But how is it possible to describe the category of *gesture* as something that has always into itself an irreducible movement?

1.2 • GESTURE IN MOTION • First, if we described gesture as something that strictly refers to the human body, this last is to be considered always in motion, and even in a utopian effort toward its immobility. *Motus*, as underlined by Varro, could easily be found in *bodies* beyond the human body; while *gestus* belong to this last, which could not be thinkable without movement: if Varro's *bodies* can be in motion or stillness, *the body* is always in motion.

The *motion* is indissolubly linked to the idea of a living human body, and this is the reason why in the pages of his book on Aby Warburg – fundamental reference for any research on human gesture – George Didi-Huberman

describes the *movement* as the primary necessary condition of a living body, in underlining a crucial connection between terms.

«Je pourrai dire qu' *il y a un reste de vie* seulement quand je pourrai dire que *cela peut encore bouger*, de quelque façon que se soit. Toute problématique de la survivance passe, phénoménologiquement parlant, par un problème de mouvement organique»¹⁶. [I can say that there is a remnant of life only in saying that one can still move in a way or in another. Phenomenologically speaking, each question about survival passes through an issue of organic movement].

On the other side – and it emerges if we keep focusing on Warburg as well – the gesture has been, and still it is, at the core of iconography and Art history, while we usually recognize as gesture those vivid constellations of poses and positions of hands throughout classical statues, Renaissance paintings or contemporary photos.

Once we have put the *movement* as necessary condition of gestural expressiveness, how should be seen these static gestures that one usually perceives in the stillness of a canvases or a marble block? Are those *gestures* even in a condition of stillness, or should we judge the category of movement in gesture not so necessary as we were thinking?

Perhaps no one more than Gotthold Ephraim Lessing has been able to give a radical contribution within the Aesthetics to this debate on the specific relationship between still image and movement. In 1776, with *Laokoon oder über die Grenzen der Malerei und Poesie*, he released his renowned opposition between the arts of space and the ones of time.

«Gegenstände, die nebeneinander oder deren Teile nebeneinander existieren, heißen Körper. Folglich sind Körper mit ihren sichtbaren Eigenschaften die eigentlichen Gegenstände der Malerei. Gegenstände, die aufeinander, oder deren Teile aufeinander folgen, heißen überhaupt Handlungen. Folglich sind

¹⁶ Didi-Huberman, G., *L'image survivante. Histoire de l'art et temps de fantômes selon Aby Warburg*, Les Edition de Minuit, Paris 2002. p. 191.

Handlungen der eigentliche Gegenstand der Poesie. Doch alle Körper existieren nicht allein in dem Raume, sondern auch in der Zeit. Sie dauern fort, und können in jedem Augenblicke ihrer Dauer anders erscheinen, und in anderer Verbindung stehen. Jede dieser augenblicklichen Erscheinungen und Verbindungen ist die Wirkung einer vorhergehenden, und kann die Ursache einer folgenden, und sonach gleichsam das Zentrum einer Handlung sein»¹⁷.

[Objects that exist side by side, or whose parts are next to each other, are called bodies. Therefore, bodies are, with their visible qualities, real objects of painting. Objects that follow one after the other, or whose parts succeed one another are called in general actions. Thus, the actions are objects of poetry. However, all bodies do not exist only in space, but in time as well. They persist and can appear in every moment of their life in different combinations. Each one of these passing appearances and combinations is the result of an earlier moment, and may be the cause of a subsequent one, and therefore is the center of an action].

After having made this fundamental separation between the arts of time and the ones of space, Lessing focuses on the possibility of representing in a frozen movement something that still calls into itself its earlier and subsequent moments. And by saying that *jede dieser augenblicklichen Erscheinungen und Verbindungen ist die Wirkung einer vorhergehenden, und kann die Ursache einer folgenden, und sonach gleichsam das Zentrum einer Handlung sein*, Lessing seems to prefigure with an advance of more than a century what will be greatly shown in the well-known Edward Muybridge's chronophotographic series.

Outstanding attempts to capture the essence of the *movement*, the experimental images of the photographer of Kingston upon Thames bring into view the relationship that every picture inevitably keeps with the previous and the following one with which it composes the entire sequence.

Once captured and isolated in the disequilibrium of the middle of the action, the single pose of a man hitting a baseball with a bat has effectively to be

¹⁷ Lessing, G. E., *Laokoon. Oder: Über die Grenzen der Malerei und Poesie*. Reclam, Stuttgart 199, cap. XVI.

linked to those existing others; those immediately preceding and following moments, together with which the captured instant is immersed in a single flow of *motion*.



Edward Muybridge. *Man hitting baseball with bat*, 1887.

In looking at Muybridge's sequence, it appears a movement that lies *between* the images, namely in the gap *between* each image and the ones on which it borders. This same perspective has been clearly underscored by the American Art historian George Kubler in his most famous book released in 1962, *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things*. In it, he described what we commonly perceive as *motion* in our daily life, as a sequence of still frames or pictures that come alive as a *movement* only once rebuilt in motion by the eye. According to him, *motion* is to be described as

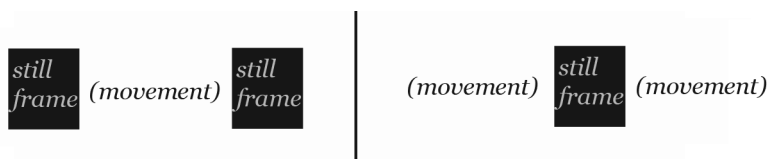
«nothing more than the mind's ability to build the missing link between different frames captured by the retina. It is the inter-chronicle interval when nothing happens. It is the gap that separates the events»¹⁸.

¹⁸ Kubler, G., *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things*, Yale University Press, 1962. p.25.

Every isolated image captured from the series of Muybridge looks like being immersed in a flow of a movement that has been temporarily frozen, and that in a few years will resume its life in the film movement.

For this reason, in *Note sul gesto*, a short essay on human gesture, Giorgio Agamben was underlining that maybe only the art of cinema – which is rightly called motion pictures – brings back the images in the homeland of gesture («riconduce le immagini nella patria del gesto»¹⁹) by showing them frame by frame as depending one each other, namely depending from the movement. Similarly, every fixed gesture, as the ones described by Lessing, is immersed in a flux of movement, and it appears to our eyes as the surviving element of a entire movement to which it must inevitably still refer to regain its whole sense.

However, if Muybridge and Kubler suggest the idea of a movement lying in the space between two still images, Lessing had rightly insisted on a reversal of the perception. Indeed, according to the German philosopher, the movement does not emerge just inside the gap between still frames through *perception*, but from any single image through *imagination*: it would not lie in the empty space between two poses, rather each pose would open forward and backward toward the line of a complete movement in which it is drowned.

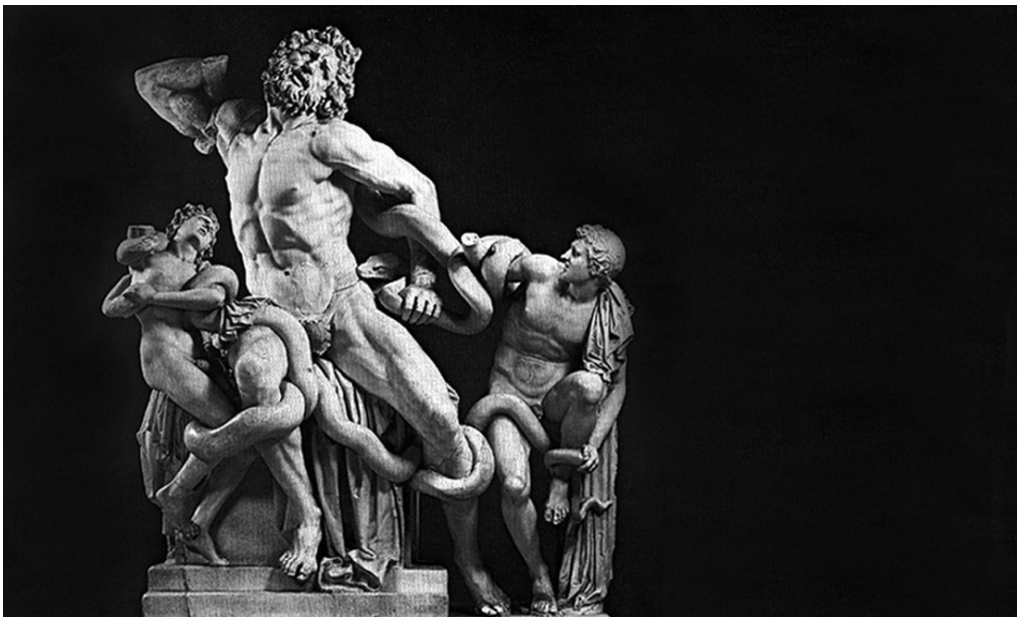


That is why Lessing emphasizes the choice of a unique *prägnante Augenblick*, the *meaningful instant* among others, able in its frozen position to tell about everything that precedes and can follow the same still image.

¹⁹ Agamben, *Note sul gesto*, in *Mezzi senza fine, note sulla politica*, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino 1996. . Cit, p, 5.

«Die Malerei kann in ihren koexistierenden Kompositionen nur einen einzigen Augenblick der Handlung nutzen, und muß daher den prägnantesten wählen, aus welchem das Vorhergehende und Folgende am begreiflichsten wird»²⁰. [Painting, in its co-existing compositions, it can use only a single moment of the action and must therefore choose the most significant; on the basis of which the one that precedes and what follows it becomes more understandable].

The static image of the muscular contraction of *Laocoön and his sons* suggests us a movement that preceded the instant captured in the marble's crystallization, and admits at the same time the dissolution of its position in its own furtherance. If the body is stretched to free itself or escape the snakes' grasp, through this tension it keeps and shows the power of an enduring movement: and in attempting to free himself from snakes, he appears to our eyes as if he was getting rid of the same hardness of the stone, to finally regain that *movement* that has been petrified.



Laocoön and His Sons, 160 - 20 B.C., Vatican Museum, Rome.

²⁰ Lessing, G. E., *Laokoon*. op.cit., Cap XIV. (Eng. tr. Bernard Bosanquet, <http://books.google.co.il/books?id=nhGvDn2biUwC&printsec=frontcover&hl=it#v=onepage&q&f=false>).

But even if both *The man hitting baseball with the bat* and the *Laocoön* are frozen in captured poses, in which it is given the will of representing a *movement*, we should not consider static images drowned *in motion* only when they actually try to represent it.

This is the reason why, in introducing the previously quoted *Note sul gesto*, Giorgio Agamben faces this relation between movement and image of the body, in giving examples of images in which the represented movement does not play as strong role at all, as it seemed to be in the previous ones.

«Anche *La Gioconda* o *Las Meninas* possono essere viste non come forme immobili ed eterne, ma come frammenti di un gesto o fotogrammi di un film perduto, nel quale solo riconquisterebbero il loro vero senso. Poiché in ogni immagine è sempre all'opera una sorta di *legatio*, un potere paralizzante che occorre disincantare, ed è come se da tutta la storia dell'arte si levasse una muta invocazione verso una liberazione dell'immagine nel gesto»²¹. [Even *Mona Lisa* or *Las Meninas* can be seen, not as motionless and eternal shapes, but as fragments of a gesture, or frames of a lost film, into which they would regain their true meaning. Since in every image there is always a sort of *legatio*, a paralyzing power that shall be disenchanted, and it is as if from the whole history of art, a silent invocation lifts up for a liberation of the image into gesture].

Hence, any fixed gesture is to be seen in a frozen movement that shall be disenchanted by the observer's eye; and every painting is waiting to be rescued by our gaze, while delivering itself in front of us to find again its possible destinies into *motion*.

To give a last example, the static bodies of *Le Radeau de la Méduse*, painted by Théodor Géricault in 1819, protrude forward, almost in an effort to shorten an untenable but always still undefined waiting. And together with the castaways we are asked to watch toward the horizon to see if the raft will be saved or not; or again we are asked to put in motion their exhausted arms to call the attention of an extremely far ship. And by doing this, we save the image every

²¹ Agamben, G., *Note sul gesto*, in *Mezzi senza fine*, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino 1996. p.50.

time, writing hundreds of time a different destiny departing from the single fragment we found in front of us.

Even following a real fact happened some months before, Géricault seems to give in the title he put to his canvas the metaphor of life of images of the body: they are myriads of immortalized poses petrified by Medusa's gaze, telling us of a time that has been contracted within the space of a still image, and constantly waiting to be freed in *motion* again by the human sight.

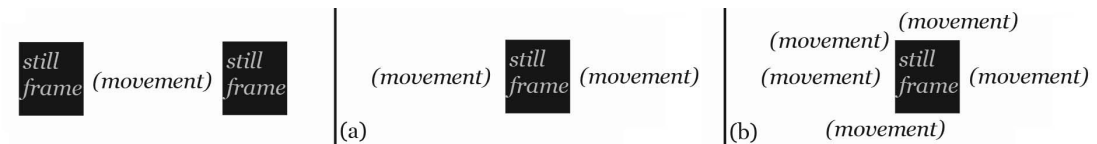
Nevertheless, if the still images are fragments of a motion picture, they never belong to something already written, because from a fixed position there is not a unique destiny of movement, but numberless possibilities. We can lift the arms of the castaways or drop them exhausted on the raft; we can put a smile upon the face of Mona Lisa or leave her unmoved, as we can let Laocoön be strangled by the snakes or make him scream in pain, since every image has in itself endless destinies of movement.

To understand this opening toward different possibilities of movement departing from a single pose, we can read the lines in which Domenico da Piacenza, in *De la arte di ballare et danzare*,²² a Renaissance treatise on the art of dance, calls *fantasmata* a sudden interruption between a movement and the following one. According to Domenichino, this still movement reveals the specific power of the movement itself: is a dialectical unmoving image that can recall the previous moments and opens at the same time toward the power to become any following step between numberless possibilities. The *fantasmata* is for Domenico what allows disclosing the contingency of motion, having into itself all possible destinies, and freeing the movement from a single privileged one.

Hence, Domenichino da Piacenza obliges us to revise the structure of the relationship between movement and still image of gesture. The latter is not

²² Domenico da Piacenza. *De arte saltandi et choreas ducendi/De la arte di ballare et danzare*, (1425) Bibliothèque Nationale di Parigi, f. Ital 972. on line edition: <http://www.pbm.com/~lindahl/pnd/>

simply immersed in motion along the two direction of a hypothetical timeline (a) as Lessing suggested, rather it is surrounded by countless possibilities of movement (b), which belong to the same pose. Every step the dancer will do, in moving from this suddenly arrested position, was already written in the same position, in the form of its possibilities.



To conclude, through Lessing, Kubler and Domenichino we can say that the image of gesture does not simply refer to the movement, but it has the movement in itself in a state of power.

For this reason in the lines through which we opened this analysis, Franco Donatoni was writing that gesture (both in the real movement of the human body as in its static representation) always preserves a substratum of movement inside itself. The movement is contained by the containing gesture: («Si potrebbe dire – con una certa tendenza a semplificare, non esente da alcune scorrettezze – che il movimento è contenuto nel gesto contenente»²³). And yet, in the lines that follow this quote, Donatoni opened to a further problem:

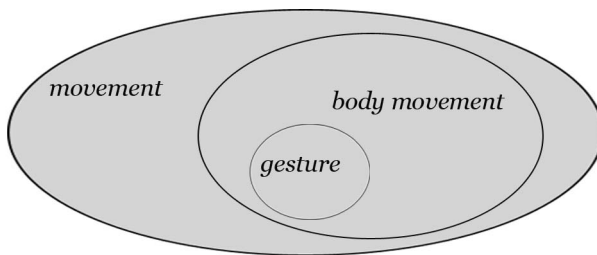
«In altre parole, il gesto non può sussistere senza movimento – per quanto impercettibile esso possa apparire – mentre il movimento può essere autonomamente indipendente e pienamente concluso in sé stesso, senza tuttavia assumere la movenza ausiliaria dalla quale viene connotato come gesto. In che cosa, dunque, consiste questa zona o intervallo o di più che qualifica il gesto nei confronti del movimento?»²⁴. [In other words, gesture cannot exist without movement - however subtle it may appear - while movement itself can be fully independent and concluded in itself, without taking on it that auxiliary movement

²³ Donatoni, F., *Antecedente X*, Adelphi, Milano, p.119.

²⁴ Ibid. p.119-120.

which transforms it in gesture. What is then, that area or range or *plus*, able to transform the movement in gesture?].

Indeed, in our common perception, the man could be defined in motion while being in any bodily activity - like in walking or breathing - without having to resort to the notion of *gesture*. Through Donatoni, the structure of the schema we presented at the beginning would need to be specified.



Hence, there is the category of *movement*, which embraces all possibilities described by Varro, in going from the trajectories of the solar system's planets until a paper bag moved by the wind. Among these numberless possibilities, lies the human body, as something that moves in many ways and that has among its possibilities something that we use to call *gestures*.

But – to quote Donatoni – what is that *plus*, able to transform the simple movement in gesture?

2 • THE SECOND MOVEMENT

2.1 • MOVING TOWARD THE OBJECT • In his remarks on gestural expressiveness, collected in form of letters in 1785 in *Ideen zu einer Mimik*, Johann Jakob Engel - Enlightenment philosopher and admirer of Lessing - gives a first definition of gesture as a result of attraction or repulsion toward an external object.

He describes that, when the desire nears the object either to possess it or to attack it, the chest and the upper parts of the body are leaning forward; and this not only because this it allows the legs to shoot faster, but also because these parts of the body are put in motion more easily. In the opposite direction, when disgust or fear moves him away from the object, the upper part would moves back even before the legs have started moving.

So, according to Engel, the man would tend to satisfy his desire mainly through the upper part of his body, which is identified by him as seat of gestural expressiveness.

«Eine zweite Bemerkung, die Sie bei jeder lebhaften Begierde werden bestätigt finden, ist die: dass sie immer die gerade Linie auf den Gegenstand zu oder von ihm zurücknimmt».²⁵ [A second comment, which will always be confirmed when there is a desire, is as follow: the body tends towards the object or it portrays the object always in a straight line].

²⁵ ENGEL, J.J., *Ideen zu einer Mimik*, (1785), p.64.

<http://books.google.com/books?id=I2oTAAAAQAAJ&ots=fodjIHOi7C&dq=ideen%20zu%20einer%20Mimik&hl=it&pg=PP1#v=onepage&q&f=false>

Ideen zu einer Mimik was conceived as an acting manual, and in these lines Engel refers primarily to objects placed on stage in relation to which the actor would produce a concrete movement. However this same structure of movement as source of gesture could be easily transposed toward daily object arranged in the surrounding world.



Caravaggio, *The Calling of Saint Matthew*, 1599 Church of San Luigi dei Francesi, Rome.

In we give a look to *La vocazione di San Matteo* (*The Calling of St. Matthew*), painted by Caravaggio in 1599 for the Contarelli Chapel in the Church of San Luigi dei Francesi in Rome, the well-known gestures of the Christ and Peter should be interpreted in this way.

Indeed, both gestures point to the body of Matthew, which, in the materiality of its presence in the middle of the same room, is itself *object* of gesture.

Similarly, while having far from me on the table a glass that I cannot grasp, I can point to it or make a gesture toward it, since it draws my gesture with its simple *objective* presence.

However, we cannot reduce the possibility of gestural expressiveness to an attraction and repulsion toward real object arranged in the world, otherwise we would not produce more gestures than the one of indicating.

Hence, if our common idea of gestural expressiveness does not seem to be limited to this concrete form of attraction and repulsion, how can we define this *object* toward which the gesture tends?

2.2 • THE OBJECT • In *L'Être et le Néant*, published in 1943 in response to the reading of Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit*, Jean-Paul Sartre lays the foundation of an epistemological analysis on the problem of the *object* on its relationship to the subject. Trying to define the presence of the *objects* in front of which the man stands, Sartre writes:

«Bien que nous soyant entourés de *presences* (ce verre, cet encrier, cette table, ect.), ces presences étaient insaisissable comme telles car elles ne livraient quoi que ce soit d'elles qu'au bout d'un geste ou d'un acte pro-jeté par nous, c'est-à-dire au future». ²⁶ [Although we are surrounded by appearances (this glass, this ink, this table, etc.), these presences could not be understood as such, because they did not give anything of themselves, if not for a gesture, an action designed by us, from the future].

Any *object* before my eyes does not simply appear in its physical presence as *object*, rather already as a possible action enrolled into it, or that I can achieve through it in the future. To give the previous example of having a glass in front of me, I can bring it to my lips as leave it on the table, as I can casually hit it and break it on the ground. It is the glass itself that tells me, through its own form (its ability to contain a liquid, for example) and material (the fragility of

²⁶ Sartre, L.P., *L'Être et le Néant*, Gallimard, Paris 1943, p. 554.

glass), any action that I will or will not do.

According to Sartre all possible actions that I can do in a while are already enrolled in the sum of *objects* that I have in front of my eyes; the world stands in front of me as a landscape of *objects-tools*, which have in themselves the entirety of my possibilities.

Hence, actions do not belong to me, rather they belong to the *objects* of the world; and one cannot imagine oneself in doing something that is not already written in the *objects* he has in the room in front of his eyes.

To be under the illusion of doing something unexpected - to take the world off guard and feel again myself as the owner of my own actions - I could think of destroying the objects. But if this comes about, it would only be because the action was already enrolled in them as possibility to be destroyed. Hence by doing this, I will find again myself as the one who can only behave in a very predictable way, namely among a basin of possibilities already enrolled in the world of *objects*.

Or again, with the purpose of escaping these surrounding objects that know everything about my future and myself, to finally do something that would allow me to conceive again the actions as mine, I can decide to leave the room. But once again, this action was already previously there in the form of the *object-door* ready to be crossed; and furthermore, once outside, I will just find myself in front of new *object*, keepers of all my new possibilities.

Hence, anything that I will do in a moment was already present in the objects in front of me, as action in a state of power. And through this analysis, Sartre shows how tending toward Matthew or toward the glass that I cannot reach, I do not only tend to their presence but to the range of my possible actions contained therein.

But Sartre goes further in suggesting that, even if not all human actions are linked to the use of physical *objects* arranged in the world, they shall not be excluded from being conceived as *object* for the body. Every action, according to *L'Être et le Néant*, shall be considered as an *object* simply in its being

separated from the present condition of the body, namely because constantly detached from the *subject*.

Opening to the contemporary philosophy and to the process of subjectivity, Sartre describes the subject as a constantly changing entity, perennially separated from his own future: a *nothingness* – in the well-known term chosen by Sartre alongside the *Being* – would separate the *subject* from his own future, as from all other *objects* of the world. This is the reason why Sartre emphasizes that, if we can commonly say that we know the aim of our actions, it is just because those all stand far from us as *objects* in front of our eyes.

«De seul fait, en effet que j'ai conscience de motifs qui sollicitent mon action, ces motifs son déjà des objets transcendants pour ma conscience, ils sont dehors»²⁷.
[Just because I am aware of the reasons that push my actions, these reasons are already objects for my consciousness; they are outside of my body].

Hence, if in being in front of the present condition of my body all conceivable actions placed in the future are to be conceived *objects* for me, through gesture I can tend to them as to all other *objects* that physically surround me. To give an example, gestures of challenge or seduction gesture should be seen as such only because they refer to an action, an *object* yet far but toward which they can tend. And that is how in gestures I announce the presence of an action that I can achieve in the future.

But how should be then explained in this perspective all those gestures that usually come with conversation?

By giving a look at two men speaking – and more than ever in the Mediterranean area – it would be easy to notice those restlessly movements of hands that have been always rightly categorized as gestures, and that are far from being classified as signs. But if we fallow the definition of Engel from which me moved at the beginning, where shall we define the *object* toward which those gestures would tend?

²⁷ Sartre, J.P., op.cit., p.484.

To go back to the example we were giving before, that *object* far from me toward which I can stretch myself is not only *that* glass in its physical presence or in my future actions contained therein, rather it is also *a* glass: I can recognize it because it is a specific case of glass; of an *idea-of-glass* that I have in my mind, born as sum of glasses I have met in the world.

I own an essence *idea-of-glass* grown through the perception of all previous existences of glasses, and changing while meeting in experience any new one. This *idea-of-glass* is to be thought as the missing title of a collection of *objects* (as clearly described by Walter Benjamin in his lines on collection in *Passagenwerk*), an unstably empty space, which grows and constantly changes through the incoming of new existences.

Hence it is this empty *idea-of-glass*, namely the essence of glass grown through all previous existences, that should be now conceived as *object* toward which my gesture can tend in conversation. While commonly pronouncing the sentence «I would like *a glass*», I am likely not referring to a real specific *object* surrounding me; while asking for *a glass* I am speaking about a sum of glasses organized into unity into my mind.

But even though I am referring in gesture to something that I have into my mind, the word *glass* through which I refer to it does not belong to me. And in his book on gestures, while addressing what he calls the «Gesture of speaking», Vilém Flusser moves from a consideration of Rainer Maria Rilke to underscore this same notion of foreignness of the language:

«Rilke dit du prophète qu'il crache les paroles comme le volcan crache les pierres, car les paroles du prophète ne sont pas les siennes, mais ne peut-on pas dire que les paroles qu'on prononce lorsqu'on parle, ne sont jamais (ou presque jamais) la propriété du parleur ? Ce sont presque toujours des paroles reçues d'autrui, et comme cet autrui les a reçues, lui aussi, les paroles prononcées pendant les gestes de parler ne sont, presque jamais, possédées par le parleur».²⁸ [Rilke said about the prophet, that he spits his words as the volcano spews rocks, because the words of the prophet do not belong to him; but can we not say that the words we

²⁸ Flusser, V., *Les Gestes*, D'Arts éditeur, Cergy 1999., p.29.

pronounce when speaking, are never (or hardly ever) ownership of the speaker? They are almost always words received by someone, and since this someone has received them as well, the speaker almost never owns the words spoken in gesture of speaking].

When I close my hand in a circle and do the gesture of bringing it to my mouth to ask for a glass, perhaps because I have forgotten the word or I do not know it in a foreign language, I am not attracted by *this* or that *glass*, but by *a* glass in its being an *object*-word.

Hence, following the analysis of Flusser, if the common idea of gestural expressiveness is strongly linked to the activity of speaking, it is precisely because also the language is an external *object* that the body does not possess.

If in biblical Hebrew *words* and *objects* were defined by the same word *davar*, the two words join again the unity in being *objects* toward which gestures tend. The language is like a surrounding landscape, on the backdrop of which stand out individual *objects*, to which my gesture tend in conversation. And we should just specify that with gesture I do not tend to the language in the aspect of the voice, but in the sense of a codified and external language toward which – simultaneously - even my voice tends.

Those seemingly inexplicable movements of hands that accompany the human speech, tell us about an attempt of going toward the language, as an external *object* detached from the body, that does not belong to the speaker.

2.3 • A DOUBLE MOVEMENT • Thus, from the point of view of gestural expressiveness we should think the term *object* under the light of an epistemological tradition that moves its step from Descartes: the term used by Engel goes well beyond the physicality of the objects-in-the world to embrace any entity separate and logically opposed to the *subject*.

Perhaps nothing more than the German term *Gegenstände* (*objects*, but literally, those which stand against), it correctly returns the detached position of this landscape, consisting of everything that lives in opposition to the presence and present position of the body.

As the language, my future actions or the arrangement of real objects in the world, these *objects* become in a phenomenological perspective the eccentric term toward which my body looks after, giving birth to gestural expressiveness.

Engel was suggesting a movement toward these *objects*, rather than a coincidence with them. And so did Franco Donatoni by emphasizing in the sentence we quoted at the beginning, how gesture could absolutely not be identified with its own meaning, rather being a movement in motion with the purpose of seeking its meaning.

«È possibile ammettere che il gesto non sia indifferente al significato. In altre parole: è possibile che il gesto voglia dire qualcosa. Se *qualcosa* è altro dal gesto, allora la difficoltà è manifesta perché la contraddizione è palese»²⁹. [One can say that the gesture is not indifferent to the meaning. It is possible for gesture to mean *something*. But if this *something* is other than gesture, our problem clearly emerges].

If by daily saying that one of our gestures should mean something we highly stress its foreignness in relation to that same *something*, in French or Italian the relation is even more clear: one can currently use about gesture expressions like *il veut dire quelque chose* – as the Italian *quel gesto vuol dire questo* –, which have into them a *will of meaning*, something that implicates a clear distance and tension toward the meaning. Hence, these common expressions about gestural expressiveness precisely sketch this relationship between terms in the form of tension and desire.

Through this tension, the pure movement overcomes itself, in becoming

²⁹ Donatoni, F., *Antecedente X*, Adelphi, Milano 1980. P. 121.

movement in motion towards an external *object*. If we have seen how – by having a part of irreducible movement within it – gesture is always movement, now it rises up from this former condition to be already in a *second movement* toward the external *object*. It is this second component that should be considered as the *plus* or *auxiliary movement* investigated by Donatoni: the element that should be added to the first substrate of movement to free it from its being a simple movement.

Therefore, the dynamics of this second movement allows us to draw a first definition of gesture: it is the bodily movement that exceeds itself in a tension towards an external *object*.

2.4 • THE WORLD AS PROSTHESIS OF THE SUBJECT • Precisely set in this perspective of tension toward an external element, gesture strongly required for its definition the birth of an external *object*, as what, being separated from the body, allows it to overcome its being substrate of simple movement: if the simple *movement* was not lacking of something, in gesture we bring to light the presence of an *object* exiled from the body, which becomes the missing cornerstone of the gesture itself.

Then, to keep this definition of gestural expressiveness, we should clarify the certitude of an otherness necessary to outline this relation: how does it happen the perception of this distance? How does the body discover and apperceive the presence of the *object* as *objects*, as something detached from itself, toward which the gesture can tend?

Sartre placed the *objects* as independent and unchangeable attendances, fundamental for a dialectic relationship with a solid and perpetually changing subjectivity: the *objects* are, according to him, substantially separated from the *subject*.

Although, these *objects* that Sartre could easily find in the surrounding world as opposed to the present condition of the body, shall not be thought as attributes of our being subject?

Sartre identified the actions as resting in the landscape of *objects* of the surrounding world: the described glass in front of me was already full of all my possible actions, so well announced by the physical qualities of its simple presence. Nevertheless, all those possible actions that I apperceive in that glass, are not just possible actions that belong to me?

I was stretching my arm toward that glass that I perceived as what has a chance of being taken or being used to drink. But shall I not see these possibilities as belonging to me? Will I not be the only one that at the end of my gesture will take it to drink?

Hence, that possibility of being taken that Sartre identified as owned by the *object*, shall be most correctly thought as its possibility of being-taken-by-me; which ultimately coincides with *my* possibility of taking it. Thus, under this new light, that glass on the table I had in front of my eyes is filled with nothing but *my possibilities* of using it.

Therefore, those actions that I had discovered as *objects* detached from my own body, are now revealed as *subject's* possibilities dislocated outside of its body; a remote ownership of the *subject*, as numberless overseas colonies of its very being. The glass is no longer an *object* – intended as opposed to the *subject* –, rather it is a prosthesis of my being *subject*, in the form of a future behavior of the *subject* itself.

Following this line, all those that I had supposed as *objects* of the world are nothing more than ways of being *subject* dislocated in the world, extracorporeal portions of myself, or attributes of a *subject* able to go beyond its extension. And once reduced to a way of being of the *subject*, the *object* would no longer be opposed to the *subject*, being instead part of the same *subject*.

That is why Sartre lights a glaring contradiction in his own thought: in *L'Être et le Néant*, with the purpose of building the *subject* as the one opposed to the surrounding *objects*, he moves from an already given situation of indubitable opposition among terms, without clearly facing this deep-seated problem of the perception of the *object* as *ob-jectum*. If everything I perceive around me can be considered as attribute of my being-*subject*, the result of this crossing the frontier of the physicality of the body till the whole reality causes the death of the *subject* itself: can we still talk about the *subject* when everything is absorbed in it? Is there a *subject* in the absence of any *object*?

By renouncing to demonstrate the otherness of a system of *objects* through which the *subject* builds itself, this last can easily disappear. There is no more a *subject* opposed to several *objects*, but just a unique *subject*, within which I can freely move; a single entity in which I can never meet foreign *objects*, and from which I can never go out: everything I do, though far from my own body, is nothing more than attribute or *prosthesis* of my being *subject*.

And if this endless being is something from which I cannot escape, it is at the same time something I cannot even define. Because if the act of defining clearly needs a distance from the defined item, trying to draw away from the *subject* to perceive it, I find myself again into it.

To solve this aporia, Sartre tried to locate in the *doubt* an early form of possibility of raising up from a full presence of the body: by asking a question that does not have an immediate answer, the *subject* exceeds his reality of full-being; he lifts up from his actual condition and in this suspension he is able to catch a glimpse on possibilities of *non-being* (negative answers), which constitute for Sartre an earliest cores of otherness.

«Dans la question on interroge un être sur son être ou sur sa manière d'être. Et cette manière d'être ou cet être est voilé : une possibilité reste toujours ouverte pour qu'il se dévoile comme un néant. Mais du fait même qu'on envisage qu'un existant peut toujours se dévoiler comme *rien*, toute question suppose qu'on réalise un recul néantissant pas rapport au donné, qui devient une simple *présentation*, oscillant entre l'être et le néant. [...] L'homme se présente donc, au

moins dans ce cas, comme un être qui fait écloré le néant dans le monde, en tant qu'il s'affecte lui-même de non-être à cette fin». ³⁰ [In the question, a being is questioned about the same being or his way of being. This way of being or this being are veiled: but it remains open the possibility that they are revealed as nothing. But for the very fact that an existing plans can always be revealed as *nothing*, any question becomes a simple presentation, hovering between being and nothingness. [...] The man is thus, at least in this case, the one who brings the nothingness in world, insofar as it takes into itself the non-being for this purpose].

But also in setting the doubt as what opens the doubting-*subject* to the *non-being* through the possibility of a negative answer, Sartre falls again into the same problem, since the doubt through which the non-being is generated, is produced by the same *subject*, and once again as its possible prosthesis.

Hence, to understand and solve the intricacy of Sartre's *subject*, we shall recall the Lithuanian-born French philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas, who precisely in the same years of Sartre called attention precisely on the fact that everything that comes from the *subject* can just be seen as extension of the *subject* itself. As Sartre with the doubt, Lévinas takes into account the theme of transcendence as the very essence of philosophy. However, according to Lévinas, a veritable transcendence cannot come from the interior of a *being*, of which it would only be a further extension, rather it must undoubtedly come out from a clash with an irreducible exteriority.

That is why, according to Lévinas, it will be necessary to have a second term to clash and contain this endless expansion of the *subject* in the world; and in the gap of this different chance to circumscribe the *subject* lies the most significant difference between the thought of Jean Paul Sartre and the one of Emmanuel Lévinas.

³⁰ Sartre, op. cit. p.58.

2.5 • THE FACE OF THE OTHER • The risk of the *subject* proposed by Sartre was to behave not differently from a wave that propagates in the ocean encompassing within itself everything it encounters along its path. However, in growing exponentially, this wave would end by picking up the entire water of the sea; and in this same moment, it would lose the possibility to be defined as a *wave of the sea*, being a unique entity that one would simply call *sea*. Likewise, the subject of Sartre tried to transcend its same being by rising over itself from the inside, but what it made in this attempt was nothing more than enlarge its own being, precisely because – as the described wave – it did not encounter anything that could not be encompassed within its qualities.

In opposition to Sartre, Lévinas describes that the *subject* needs to define himself as such the encounter with of at least one *object* that could not be reduced to a quality of the same being, and that in its irreducibility to it, may be perceived as clear and necessary otherness and not as its prosthesis.

But where can one find the presence of a particular *object* not attributable to the *subject*, and able to clash the *wave* of the *subject*, to finally circumscribe it and to allow it to not be a *subject-world* but to become *subject in a world of objects*?

If in opposition to Sartre, the philosophy of Lévinas underlines expressly the need to insert a stone that breaks the wave of the *subject*, and identifies the role of this stone – as a cornerstone of subjectivity – in the presence of the face of the *other*. If the presence of any inanimate *object*, as clearly shown by Sartre as well, could be reduced to attribute of my being, the *other* appears through his face in its irreducibility, since it appears endowed with an autonomy that I recognize similar to mine:

«Avoir à répondre de son droit d'être, non pas par référence à l'abstraction de quelque loi anonyme, de quelque entité juridique, mais dans la crainte pour autrui. Mon être-au-monde ou ma *place au soleil*, mon chez-moi, n'ont-ils pas été usurpation des lieux qui sont à d'autres déjà par moi opprimés su affamés, expulsés dans un tiers-monde: un repousser, un exclure, un exilier, un dépouiller, un tuer. "Ma place au soleil" disait Pascal "le commencement et l'image de

l'usurpation de toute la terre". Crainte pour tout ce que mon être – malgré son innocence intentionnelle et consciente – peut accomplir de violence et de meurtre. Crainte de derrière ma "conscience de soi" et quels que soient vers la bonne conscience les retours de la pure persévérance dans l'être. La crainte d'occuper dans le *Da* de mon *Dasein* la place de quelqu'un; une incapacité d'avoir un lieu, une profonde utopie. Crainte qui me vient du visage s'autrui»³¹. [Having to answer for his right to be, not by reference to the abstraction of some anonymous law, of any legal entity, but in fear for others. My being in the world or my place in the sun, my home, they have not been places usurped to others more oppressed by me. (...) The fear of occupying the *Da* of my *Dasein* instead of someone; an inability to have a place, a deep utopia. Fear that comes with the face of the others].

Quoting Heidegger, Lévinas puts the face of the *other* as the needed element that allows to find the being *être-au-monde* of the *subject*, to discover the *being-in-the-world* instead of a *being-the-worlds*. If before the presence of the *other* I could not define myself as a *subject* simply because in wanting to transcend myself and go beyond my own body to perceive me as a *subject*, what I could meet beyond me was nothing but the *subject* itself, when I encounter the face of the *other*, I discover it as something I can neither contain nor take into myself. And this crisis of subjectivity is what raises the subjectivity itself.

On the one side the *other* appears, according to Lévinas, as *l'Autre-comme-tel*, *the other as such*, in its presence that can in no way be assimilated to abilities or attributes of my subject. But on the other side - and maybe even more important - through the encounter with the gaze of the other, I perceive someone with which I am in challenge for the possession of the world.

The *subject* is no more placed in a privileged position compared to a reality made only by *objects*, and in which all *objects* should tend to a single *subject* constantly standing in the middle of them.

³¹ Lévinas, E., *Alterité et Transcendance*, Fata Morgana, Paris 1995. p.44-

When I perceive the *other*, I cannot take into account the possibility of the glass to be taken as quality of *my* being: the glass, from its position in the space, could be taken by me or by the *other*, and in this uncertainty it marks itself as an *object*, or neutral ground between more *subjects* who have no more unconditionally power on it.

Hence, sharing the world with the *other*, a perception of the world as a neutral field and not as prosthesis comes out. It is then that the *object* is clearly created as independent of me, subtracting itself from being my extension to finally being given back to me as possibilities of being taken by someone, among which my possibility to take it as well.

In opposition with this conception, Sartre had placed exactly this moment of perception of the *other* as death of the *subject*. Indeed, in a world in which there is a defined and close opposition between *subject* and *object*, through the appearance of the *other* as *subject*, I am forcedly reduced to *object* for him.

Thus in order to protect myself as *subject*, I must always consider the *other* as an *object*. The *other*, according to Sartre, in the radical negation of *subject's* experience, because it is the one for which the *subject* is no more such, but *object*.

«Autrui se pourrait se présenter, en un certain sens, comme la négation radicale de mon expérience, puisqu'il est celui pour qui je suis non sujet mais objet. Je m'efforce don, comme sujet de connaissance, de déterminer comme objet le sujet qui nie mon caractère de sujet et me détermine lui-même comme objet»³² [Other may arise, in a sense, as the radical denial of my experience, since it is the one for which I am not *subject* but *object*. As a subject of knowledge, I strive to determine as *object* the *subject* who denies my being *subject* to determine me as *object*]

To keep my status of *subject* I can perceive nothing else then *objects*, and the only possibility of existence of the *others* in my world is under the light of their being considered as *objects* for me, in reducing the presence of the *other* to simple *object*.

³² Sartre, op.cit. 267.

«Autrui est objet pour moi, simplement parce qu'il est autrui, et non pas parce qu'il se présente avec un corps-objet. Autrui n'est pas cette existence particulière que je rencontre dans le monde, mais le terme excentrique qui contribue à la construction de mon être»³³. [The *other* is an object for me, simply because it is other, and not because it comes with a body-object. The *other* is not this particular existence that I encounter in the world, but the term eccentric that contributes to the construction of my being]

Nevertheless, afterward Sartre explains more deeply how the problem of the presence of the *other* is not simply his perception of my body as an *object*; rather it is that through him I am forced to personally perceive myself as *object* as well. Again in *L'Être et le Néant* Sartre in two different parts writes:

«Or, voici que j'ai entendu des pas dans le corridor : on me regarde. Qu'est-ce que cela veut dire ? [...] Je suis, par delà toute connaissance que je puis avoir, ce moi qu'un autre connaît»³⁴. «Et par l'apparition même d'autrui, je suis mis en mesure de porter un jugement sur moi-même comme sur un objet, car c'est comme objet que j'apparais à autrui»³⁵ [Now, I heard some footsteps in the corridor: someone is looking at me. What does this mean? (...) Beyond all knowledge I might have, I am something that someone else knows. (...) And by the appearance of the other, I am able to give a judgment on myself as an object, because it is like object that I appear to the other].

Hence the real problem in Sartre is the impossibility for the *subject* of cohabiting with its being an *object* as well, the impossibility of thinking the human being as *subject* and *object* at the same time. And that is why Sartre tells us that by crossing the eyes of the *others* I lose my status as *subject* and become hopelessly *object*.

Precisely in this radical negation of the presence of the *others*, Sartre closed his thought toward solipsism, from which the *subject* could hardly get out or

³³ Sartre, op.cit. p. 280.

³⁴ *ibid.* p.299.

³⁵ *ibid.* p.260.

transcend toward *objects*: how could I rise beyond the *subject* if I had never encountered anything that limited my *subject*? And that is why certainly the being of Sartre remained undamaged, but perhaps no more a *subject*, rather it is a whole entity merged in a inanimate world he interacts with.

To conclude, the stone of the face of the *other* of Lévinas damages this same integrity, from which this limited *subject* can finally discover itself and transcend itself to question the reality and *objects*. And going this specific phenomenological discourse, Lévinas gives us the teaching that prior to any act of creation it is necessary a withdrawal of the creator itself, in order to leave free space to the creation of an otherness.

2.6 • THE GESTURE OF CREATION • Into this phenomenological dynamics of stepping backward into a limited body to have the possibility of perceiving the otherness, it seems to be present an echo of the words through which the first day of God's Creation is described and commented in the Jewish tradition. If the God that precedes the Creation is called in the Kabala *Ein Sof*, the *Endless*, how could it have been space to create something more than God himself?

The preeminent modern researcher of Jewish mysticism, Gershom Scholem, faced this problem in *The Secret of God's name*. Inside this book, dedicated to the holy mysticism of Hebrew alphabet, Scholem suggests the possibility of reading the Hebrew name of God as different stages of the first instants of the Genesis. Indeed, the Hebrew alphabet is composed by 26 consonants, and words are compiled in a succession of them, and pronounced vocalized only through an oral tradition. The only missing knowledge of pronunciation is the unpronounceable name of God, composed by four letters (what is usually called the Tetragrammaton), whose pronunciation, according to the Jewish tradition, will be revealed to the men only at the end of times.

Giving up in speaking about the possible sound of the Name, Scholem focuses on the shape of those four letters to explain the first moments of the Genesis. Yet, the first letter – the *yod* – is a sign hung in the air and it is the smallest letter of the alphabet, while the second letter – *hey* – recalls a house, with three walls and an opening toward the following letter, and being according to Scholem a metaphor for the world itself.

The shapes of those two letters would answer the visible intricacy to think about the first moments of the creation of the world. Following Scholem's thought, the *yod* shows how the creation of the world had to start with a withdrawal of God from a portion of space: the *yod* represents this first engraving of the space, a fragment from which God would have withdrawn in order to be able to build the world as something other than himself.

Afterwards, the *hey* would have been in the name of God the analogous of the created world as a result of the first necessary withdrawal:

«When *En-Sof* entwined itself within itself this texture of the original Torah folded up and remained as the original force of all linguistic movement in *En-Sof*. However a Yod of one of the names mentioned was lodged in the original space which had been liberated in the process of the *tsim tsum*; and this Yod, in its force which is gathered together in the almost dot-shaped Yod, transferred that linguistic movement to all emanations and worlds in the process of formation. In the highest world, according to this conception, the Torah-as in that original texture-simply forms a series of that combination of the Hebrew alphabet from two consonants respectively. The nuclei of all the further possibilities entailed in this linguistic movement reside in its original arrangement»³⁶.

God created a portion of vacuum to build the world; a moment of withdrawing that in the Kabala is called *tsim tsum*, sort of silence so that the first word could be pronounced.

³⁶ Scholem, G., *The name of God and the linguistic theory of the Kabbala*. Diogenes, vol. 79 (1972), pp. 59- 80, vol. 80 (1973) pp-164-194. p.182.

This particular structure of the idea of Creation seems not to be limited to the Jewish tradition: what else does indeed the Creator Christ of the Byzantine images with its famous gesture of junction of the fingers of his right hand?

Do not we have to review the gesture of *Christ Pantocrator* a request of silence around, so that the first World, which in Christian tradition builds the World, can come to life?



Christ Pantocrator, 1261 ca., Hagia Sophia, Istanbul.

Indeed, in *Scoperta della Chironomia ossia dell'arte di gestire con le mani* – a treatise about gesture in the Roman Era published in 1797 with the purpose of bringing to light the gesture's law that had characterized the development of classical oratory - the abbot Vincenzo Requeno describes this same position of the hand as the one used by the orator in the Roman forum to ask the silence of the onlookers.

If this gesture of Pantocrator is commonly known as the one with which the Christ creates the world, the coming across of this same position of the hands in Requeno, opens to a new consideration of this gesture as the one that preceded the creation of the world: it is a request of silence, so that the first

Word can be pronounced; parallel to the withdrawing of the *Ein-Sof* to open the necessary space for the Creation itself.

Hence, thinker not stranger at all to the study of Jewish Kabala, Lévinas recalls back the movements of Creation and draws a picture of the *subject* in which the man must first withdraw in his own body to create the world, to be then able to build, from a limited position, the world as otherness and not as prosthesis. And this conception of this limited position of the body from which to perceive or to create the *objects* of the world, is the core of a third French thinker, that in a sharp contrast with Sartre will light the body as a special entity in which both categories of *subject* and *object* should be forcibly restructured. In *Phénoménologie de la perception* Maurice de Merleau-Ponty, which will be fundamental thinker for gesture studies as well, writes:

«Le mot *ici* appliqué à mon corps ne désigne pas une position déterminée par rapport à d'autres positions ou par rapport à des coordonnées extérieures, mais l'installation des premières coordonnées, l'ancrage du corps actif dans un objet, la situation du corps en face à ses tâches. L'espace corporel peut se distinguer de l'espace extérieur et envelopper ses parties au lieu de le déployer parce qu'il est l'obscurité de la salle nécessaire à la clarté du spectacle, le fond de sommeil ou la réserve de puissance vague sur lesquels se détachent le geste et son but». ³⁷ [The word *here* applied to my body does not designate a specific position relative to other positions, or relative to external coordinates, but the installation of the first coordinates, the anchoring of the active body in an object, the position of the body facing its tasks. The bodily space can be distinguished from the outer space and enveloping its parts, instead of deploying. Because he is the darkness of the room needed to illuminate the show, the background of sleep or the powerful reserve on which emerge gesture and its purpose]

From a clear position in the space in which it withdraws, the body can finally perceive itself as *subject* and create the world as *objects*.

³⁷ Merleau-Ponty. M., *Phénoménologie de la perception*. Gallimard, Paris 1945, p.130.

2.7 • CREATING THE WORLD OF OBJECTS • Nevertheless, beside the one of the Creation, we maybe have to consider every gesture as an act of creation. Indeed, to conclude this part or this research, we have to recall how at the beginning the body did not open to an otherness, rather he was turned toward himself, and having found in himself the aim of the same movement, and producing what we usually consider a *pure movement*. It had no *object*, and the body had in itself its own *object* of the movement.

By imagining the external *object* as a cause of the attraction that gives rise to the second movement that defines the gesture, Engel seemed to presuppose the pre-existing of the objects: but – even after the face of the *other* – how does it emerge the perception of the *objects* as such: is the gesture just a subsequent and posterior attraction toward *objects* that are already there, or should we consider them responsible for the same perception of *objects* as such?

Sartre rightly underlined this problem, by drawing the attention on how in the perception of *objects* we already see projected in them possible actions, in a identicalness of the thing and the utensil that did not clarify the problem: if on the one hand gesture is a tension toward an *object*, and on the other the *object* is nothing but filled with all possible gestures:

«Et la chose, en tant qu'elle repose à la fois dans la béatitude quiète de l'indifférence et que pourtant elle indique au-delà d'elle des taches à remplir qui lui annoncent ce qu'elle a à être, c'est l'instrument ou l'ustensile. [...] La chose n'est point d'abord chose pour être ensuite ustensile; elle n'est point d'abord ustensile pour se dévoiler ensuite comme chose: elle est chose-ustensile [...] et le monde surgit comme fond indifférencié de complexes indicatifs d'ustensilité»³⁸.
[And the thing, while resting in the quiet bliss of indifference and that yet shows beyond it some spots ready to be filled by something that announces to it what it has to be, is the instrument or utensil. [...] The thing is not before thing to then be utensil, it is not before utensil to then unveil itself as utensil: it is thing-utensil

³⁸ Sartre, J.P., op.cit. pp.236-237.

and the world emerges [...] as undifferentiated background of a complex of instrumentality].

How to solve this dilemma of primogeniture between gesture and *object*?

Stretching out my arm toward an *object*, even before reaching it, I experience in my movement the distance between *me-as subject* and the *object*. I am starting my movement because the *object* I desire is far from me; it is something that does not belong to my own body, that is distant from me. And it is through my movement that I perceive the space between us. At the same time, when I mime a word I do not remember, I discover in this gesture the language as an *object*, something beyond me that does not always belong to me. If *ob-iectum* means thrown forward or in front, in gesture I am the creator of this fracture between the body and the world.

In this conception of gestures, the theory of the *transitional object*³⁹ developed by the psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott (1987) shall be reconsidered. With *transitional*, he refers to a moment of child development, between psychic and external reality, when the child discovers things as existing independently from his will. The transitional object—that Winnicott identifies as a teddy bear or a blanket— would be the first element that, through its possession and its irreducibility to the body, allows the child to discover the world as different from him.

Hence, in this analysis of gesture, it is not the *object* itself that puts the child in a relation with the world but, even before that, it is the first attempt to grasp it that allows him to perceive a distance from the World. That is why we have to consider that the first gesture detaches the body from the world, creating this last one as World.

This is moment of separation is an original division (what is call *Ur-teil*) existing at the beginning of gestural expressiveness, the one that opens up a chasm between myself and the world, revealing an empty space where my movements can flourish in the form of tension towards what is separated from

³⁹ Winnicott, D. W., *Playing and Reality*, Tavistock, London 1971.

me. Hence, gesture is not an indifferent and posthumously bond between me and the *object*, but it participates to my perception of the world as other than me. It is not simply attraction toward a distant *object*, but it creates in the same gestures the experience of this distance, raising the *objects* as opposed to the *subject*.

When the Byzantine Emperor, Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, writes in the preface of his *De Cerimonis* that his ceremonial of gestures would reproduce the harmonious movement that the Creator has given to the universe, we should now consider all gestures as gestures of creation: after being withdrawing by Lévinas into a *body-in-the-world*, the gestures create a landscape of *objects* in front of us. And through every new gesture, while going toward the *object*, I mark the distance between my body and the *objects*.

Within a book about the history of mechanical reproductions of the human body, the Italian philosopher Carlo Sini underlines precisely this double perception of distance and tension of the movement of gesture toward the *object*, while writing:

«Agendo il corpo *distanzia* da sé il mondo e insieme lo approssima. È mondo che si staglia *nel* mondo, che vi prende posto. Sebbene provenga dal mondo e non sia altro che mondo, agendo, *discrimina* dal mondo lo *strumento*, il *mezzo* (e anche il *contesto*), rispetto al *fine* dell'azione»⁴⁰. [By acting, the body dissociates itself from the world, and it approaches itself to it at the same time. It is the world that stands *in* the world, and that took its place. Although it comes from the world, and it is nothing more than world, by acting, (the body) divides world and tool, the medium (and context) and the aim of the action].

So gesture expresses, in its vector structure of tension toward the world, my way of being in the world, as the one who is placed distant from the world. It creates this separation only to interact with it through gestures. It appears as if it sets the distance between my body and the *object*, just because I cannot be in a relationship if not with something that is detached from me.

⁴⁰ Sini, C., *L'uomo, la macchina, l'automa*, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino 2009. p.43-44.

A double movement of gesture that Merleau-Ponty has well underlined: before the *Ur-teil* the movement referred just to the same body, creating a *concrete movement*. In opening to an otherness, gesture creates a movement in motion, what has been identified by Merleau-Ponty as *mouvement abstrait*, able to make space beyond the body to create the possible.

«Le mouvement concret est donc centripète, tandis que le mouvement abstrait est centrifuge, le premier a lieu dans l'être, le second dans le possible ou dans le non-être, le premier adhère à un fond donné, le second déploie lui-même son fond. La fonction normale qui rend possible le mouvement abstrait est une fonction de projection par laquelle le sujet du mouvement ménage devant lui un espace libre où ce qui n'existe pas naturellement puisse prendre un semblant d'existence»⁴¹. [The actual movement is inward, while the abstract movement is centrifugal, the first takes place in the being, while the second in the possible or non-being, the first adheres to a given background, the second deploys itself its bottom. The normal function that makes possible the abstract movement is a function of projection by which the subject's movement free before him a space, in which what is not natural is able to take some semblance of existence].

To conclude, if we started this paragraph by analyzing Sartre's possibility of considering the *objects* as prosthesis of the body, Carlo Sini, in the lines that followed the quoted ones, seems to solve the problem by bringing back the double etymology of the Greek lemma *prosthesis*.

«*Protithemi*, che significa: metto innanzi, presento, espongo, assegno. *Prosthithemi* che significa: pongo appresso, accosto, aggiungo, convengo, aderisco. [...] Possiamo concludere che il corpo in azione fa di sé stesso una protesi»⁴². [*Protitemi*, which means I put forward, I present, I expose, I give. *Prosthitemi*, which means I put below, alongside, I add, I come to. [...]. We might conclude, the body in action is prosthesis of itself].

⁴¹ Merleau-Ponty, M., op.cit. p. 142.

⁴² Sini, C., op. cit., p. 42.

On the one side, the prosthesis is something I could expose as detached from my body; but on the other side it is something that – while being used – still belongs to my own body. Indeed it is in the same word *prosthesis* that one can find the perpetual movement of gesture toward the *object* that opens a distance that detaches me from the world while trying to reach it.

Nonetheless, if we assume the gesture just as tension toward the external *object* and in the space of this distance, should we consider its ability to achieve the object?

3 • THE END OF GESTURE

3.1 • REACHING THE *OBJECT* • In 1180 the Welsh abbot Giraldus Cambrensis publishes a letter condemning the lively gestural conversation that seems to allow monks to communicate with each other overstepping the monastic rule of silence. Two centuries later, the French bishop Jacques de Vitry writes about monks who even talk with movements of feet to get around the silence imposed by the rule.

As deeply analyzed by Jean-Claude Schmitt in his masterwork about gesture in the Middle Ages⁴³, gesture in medieval monastic context is never explicitly prohibited, even without having a clear definition of it. Indeed, what is interdicted in them is the language, which would distract the monks from a needed isolation and silence prescribed as necessary instruments to concentrate on the prayer.

It is worthy of note that both the position of Giraldus and Jacques de Vitry do not speak about an interdiction of gestural expressiveness, rather they challenge its transformation into something that is no longer gesture; something that - in the words of Giraldus - would have violated the rule of silence by reintroducing the word in the body.

What Giraldus highlighted without mentioning it, was the transformation of gesture in a language of signs. Indeed, when in the second half of 1700,

⁴³ Schmitt, J.-C., *La raison des gestes dans l'Occident médiéval*, Edition Gallimard, Paris 1990.

Charles-Michel de L'Épée lays the foundations for a first coded language of sign, he expressed the intention to artificially reconstruct through the movements of the hands all parts of French syntax, from nouns to prepositions. Hence, starting creating a real *Dictionnaire général des Signes*, which will be completed by his apprentice, Charles-Michel de L'Épée codified a sign language that shall not be thought as made of gestures.

If we set gesture as what tends toward the language (as any other *object*), we should consider the sign as what has already the language *into* it. If the movements of gesture tended toward something that was other than the body, in the sign language, movements tend no more toward a language, but are built around a language. Hence we can say that the sign is no longer *movement toward the language*, but *language in motion*.

Far from being prerogative of Medieval and Modern debate, the possibility to consider the gesture as a language has been at the core of much of the classic debate, where the argues focused more on the origin of internal or external meaning of gesture than on its possibility of being detached from the language. Clear examples are Quintilian and Augustine, who - while associating the gesture to the language - see in a different perspective the details of its adherence to the language.

If Quintilian (ca. 35- ca. 100) conceived the gesture as a universal language that is in common to all men, and that does not need further explication since it has to have the meaning into itself, Augustine of Hippo – while writing three centuries later about the actors in *De Doctrina Christiana libri quatuor* – detached himself from Quintilian in strongly emphasizing on a foreignness of the law that associated precise meaning to gestural expressiveness.

«Illa enim signa quae saltando faciunt histriones, si natura, non instituto et consensione hominum valerent, non primis temporibus saltante pantomimo praeco praenuntiaret populo Carthaginis quid saltator vellet intellegi. Quod adhuc multi meminerunt senes, quorum relatu haec solemus audire. Quod ideo credendum est, quia nunc quoque si quis theatrum talium nugarum imperitus intraverit, nisi ei dicatur ab altero quid illi motus significant, frustra totus

intentus est»⁴⁴. [Originally a town crier announced to the people of Carthage what the dancers wanted to express; many older people still remember this detail, and we heard them telling about this. And we must believe in it, since even today, when someone goes to the theatre without being initiated to similar childishness, pays all his attention in vain, unless someone else does not explain him the meaning of the gestures of the actors].

Both Quintilian and Augustine refer to an idea of *gesture* as something that – through different ways – has reach its meaning. But according to the use of the term *gesture* we gave here, both description should not be taken into account as such, in being instead something that has already reach its *object* of tension. Yet, the issue of the gesture in theatre, raised by Augustine, is even more particularly remarkable once set in a debate that goes till contemporary thinkers: more than fifteen centuries later, Antonin Artaud will deeply go through it, by precisely analyzing the question of the canonized gesture of Western pantomime, in a direct contradiction to the one of the Balinese theatre. In a text entitled *La mise en scène et la métaphysique* – lately merged in the most famous *Le Théâtre et son Double* – Artaud emphasized this same difference that would place gestures of Balinese theatre away from the ones of the Western convention, heirs of the Augustinian tradition:

«Pour *pantomime non pervertie* j’entends la pantomime directe où le gestes au lieu de représenter des mots, des corps de phrases, comme dans notre pantomime européenne vieille de cinquante ans seulement, et qui n’est qu’une déformtion des partie muettes de la comédie italienne, représentent des idées, des attitudes de l’esprit, des aspects de la nature, et cela d’une manière effective, concrete, c’est-à-dire en évoquant toujours des objets ou details naturels»⁴⁵ [Instead of representing words and phrases such as in our fifty years old European pantomime, born by the deformation of the mute parties of the *commedia dell'arte*, Balinese gestures represent ideas, attitudes of mind, aspects

⁴⁴ Augustinus Hipponensis, *De Doctrina Christiana libri quatuor*, (397-427). II-XXV, 38, on line edition, http://www.augustinus.it/latino/dottrina_cristiana/index.htm

⁴⁵ Artaud, A., *La mise en scène et la métaphysique* dans *Le theater et son double*, 1935, in *Oeuvre*, Gallimard, Paris 2004. p. 526.

of nature, and this it happens in an effective, practical and always evoking particular or natural *objects*].

In the perspective of a movement that should *evoke the object*, Artaud's conception of gesture clearly calls attention to a distance from the language, which has been set as fundamental condition of gestural expressiveness. However, Artaud's sentences about gesture still show their roots in the Classical age: by setting this discriminant, the French writer and actor seems to recover a tradition of the rhetorical art set before Augustine and Quintilian, and clearly exposed at the origin of treatises on oratory in Cicero's *Brutus*, while describing the capacities of gestures of Antonio:

«Sed haec magna cum exacerbata in tum singularis Antonio, is relevant here in east gestum atque voice, non verba exprimens gestus erat, sed cum sentiis congruens»⁴⁶. [An especially remarkable action goes alongside these great qualities in Antonio. If it were to be divided into voice and gesture, the gesture did not give form to words, but answered to the thoughts].

According to Cicero, gesture does not take the form of words, as it will have to do in the following centuries, but it is connected with the structure of thought itself. The thought of the discourse is hence the *object*, toward which both the voice and the bodily movement tend to, simply without reaching it. The rhetorical gestural expressiveness to which Cicero refers, seems to reveal a quality of the gesture before its canonization in the direction of the language: he sets gesture before the *law* that – either conceived as coming from inside, as in Quintilian, or from beyond the body, as in Augustine - will shape and stretch gestural expressiveness into the rules of a pure language.

No coincidence, one of the greatest scholar of Classical gesture in the 18th Century, the abbot Vincenzo Requeno, will call his book *Scoperta della Chironomia*, using the term *Chironomia* firstly used by Quintilian, and that in its meaning of *law of movements* explicitly refers to an ensemble of rules. And

⁴⁶ Cicero, *Brutos*, 141.

to stress on the aspect of the gesture as adherence to a rule of language, in the preface Requeno writes:

«Il voler esprimere ogni idea, ogni affetto, ogni cosa co' gesti, senza che si accordino gli uomini sul significato delle loro figure, sarebbe lo stesso che il tentare di far un eloquente ragionamento con voci, e con parole, di cui il genere umano non si fosse prima concertato in dar loro qualche significazione. Gli antichi Greci s'accordarono certamente fra loro nel significare ogni idea co' gesti delle mani. Inventarono a questo fine determinate figure da farsi con le dita, e chiamarono la loro significante arte di gestire *chironomia*, o sia legge del gesto delle mani»⁴⁷. [The desire to express every idea, every affection, and every thing through gestures, without agreeing about the meaning of their figures, would be the same of groping in making an eloquent speech with voices and words, about which the human race had not first agreed in giving them precise meaning. The ancient Greeks certainly accord with each other to give a meaning to every idea through gestures of the hands. They invented for this purpose some figures to be done with fingers, and they called their art of managing the meaning *Chironomia*, namely the law of the gesture of the hands].

The Classical Latin gesture identified by Requeno is already an external meaning-*object* that has to be reproduced with its law on the body, in which each movement of the fingers and limbs has to mean something clearly identifiable from the outside, much more codified than the previous Ciceronian attitude in gestural expressiveness.

Under the light of this change of perspective, the letter of Giraldus worked precisely in the wake of a transition similar to the one that had divided in a hundred years Cicero and Quintilian, transforming the gestures of the rhetoric in a language of signs. And if the language of signs does not tend to an outer *object*, rather it incorporated it, or it builds itself around the *object*, we can understand in which sense Giraldus writes about the inclusion of the word

⁴⁷ Requeno, V., *Scoperta della Chironomia. ossia dell'arte di gestire con le mani. Dell'abate Vincenzo Requeno. Per li fratelli Gozzi. Parma. MDCCXCVII (1797). p.6-7*

inside the movement, as the element that corrupts the gesture itself.

The relation between the gesture and its *object* is then not only necessary condition for the birth of gesture, but also it becomes the element of discriminant, able to separate the idea of gesture from other categories of movements so often related to it.

3.2 • THE LOSS OF THE DISTANCE • To clearly understand the value of this distance in *gesture*, it is useful to read the pages written by the Italian abbot Andrea De Jorio, who just thirty years after the release of Requenó's essay, tackled the subject of gesture of the ancients, within a text that has become pivotal to any following study on gestural expressiveness.

In a way of working between anthropology and art history that seems to anticipate of almost one century the studies of Aby Warburg, De Jorio tracks in *La mimica degli antichi investigata nel gestire napoletano* (1832) the source of the gestures of Neapolitans of the beginning of 1800 and the return of the same formulas in classical images.

The book is divided into chapters, named either after the physical description of the gesture (when it carries different meanings) or after the sense it means (when it is made with different types of poses or movements).

Even if again there is no definition of gesture as such, De Jorio sets a cornerstone of gestural studies, by writing how gesture shall not be confused with the action it refers to, rather it must reproduce (*contraffarre*) it:

«I gesti però in quei titoli descritti possono esprimere tanto l'azione che si è già fatta, o che si sta facendo, o che si farà, quanto quella che si vuole che faccia»⁴⁸

[However, the gestures here described, can express both the action that has

⁴⁸ De Jorio, A., *La Mimica degli antichi investigata nel gestire napoletano*. Fibreno, Napoli 1832.P.221.

already been made and the one that is being doing, the one will be done or the one that is to do].

By defining the gesture as something that may refer to actions already passed as to something desired, but never to something that is happening in the same moment of gesture, De Jorio raises the need for a *spatialization* of *object* and gesture, since this last shall always refer to actions placed in the future or in the past. In this perspective of distance, a significant gesture described by De Jorio, is the one of greeting by waving the hand, which would be derived from the action of shaking the hand and replaced by the gesture in a situation where the distance between the bodies would not allow it.

Into what becomes a handbook of gestural expressiveness – even if living in the balance on the possibility of becoming another *Dictionnaire général des Signes* – De Jorio traces the source of more than a hundred of gestures, which are always described as what keep themselves far from the aim they tend to. From the thumb along the neck to evoke the action of killing the other (action still far away but that should threaten through gesture) till the well-know Italian stereotypical gesture of grouping the fingers and shake the hand to ask clarity (which goes toward the request of grouping all ideas into a single thought), all chapters of De Jorio precise the space between the gesture and its *aim*.

In some cases, De Jorio underlines how movements of the action and the gesture that refers to it could be very similar: to give an example, De Jorio writes about the gesture of holding the nose, which – while being exactly similar to the action it refers to – it sets its distance from it, by having the *aim* into the same movements or just facing it as distant *object*. Thus, De Jorio defines that what distances gesture and action is precisely the presence of an *aim* into or outside the same movement.

Hence, when in the first moment (*Ur-teil*) the gesture had tended towards the *actions* kept in the *object* of the world in front of us, it had discovered an *aim* into them, outside the movement itself. Now, achieving the action or the

language means to make a movement that does not differ itself from the same *aim*: the sum of the movements of the action *holding the nose* coincides with the purpose they wanted to achieve; in passing a glass to someone, the *aim* of my motion is the same sum of my movements, which can no longer distinguish themselves from the *object* they are achieving.

De Jorio follows the Aristotelian idea of the *action* as what contains the *aim* in itself, as it can be found in *Nicomachean Ethics*. In it the Philosopher distinguished action and production by saying that the *praxis* [action] is different from *poiesis* [production], because the aim of the production is other from the doing itself while the aim of the action cannot be different from itself.

In this distinction, Aristotle indicates that the action is that, by which its *aim* cannot be distinguished.

While writing about the *aims* of the actions, Sartre unmistakably described this distance between terms before the action is completed: and now, the gesture seems to freeze for a while this being projected in this distance toward the achieving of the action.

«Est comprehensible toute action comme projet de sois-même ver un possible. Elle est comprehensible d'abord en tant qu'elle offre un contenu rationnel immédiatement saisissable – je pose mon sac sur le sol *pour* me reposer un instant – c'est-à-dir en tant que nous saisissons immédiatement le possible qu'elle projette et la fin qu'elle vise»⁴⁹. [Any action is understandable as a project of oneself toward a possible. First, it is understandable as it provides a rational content immediately comprehensible - I put my bag on the floor *to* rest for a while - namely because we can immediately grasp the possible it has into it as plan, and the purpose it is looking for].

Hence if the gesture and the action to which the same gesture refers can never be co present, it is exactly because this would represent for the movement to have to maintain at the same time two different spatial relationships with the same *object*.

The explanation of this spatial relationship between the movement and the

⁴⁹ Sartre, op.cit. p.504.

object helps in specify the definition of gesture itself: precisely because defined in the form of tension toward an *object*, the gesture would be exhausted in the attainment of the same *object*, and to keep itself as a gesture it has to emphasize this space of distance with the *object* as an area of tension, and guarantee of the gesture.

In this perspective we should reconsider the *gesture of painting* of Jackson Pollock, whose painting seems to recall the need to set this distance from the *object*. In several cases Pollock reiterated that his signs were absolutely not completely random: far from being abstract he painted mainly landscapes. In keeping himself distant away from the canvas, he would translate a figurative effort into non-figurative marks on it.



Jackson Pollock, *Action painting*

Thus, even if the signs appear as seemingly linked just to Pollock's movement, they actually have a strong connection with a clear *object* of representation.

For this reason, what has been called *action painting* should in reality be ascribed to a veritable *painting of gestures* that allows the maintenance of this distance between the hand and the canvas. For this reason, in his well-known essay, *The legacy of Jackson Pollock*, the art critic Allan Kaprow wrote:

«With Pollock, however, the so-called ‘dance’ of dripping, slashing, squeezing, daubing and whatever else went into a work placed an almost absolute value upon a kind of diaristic gesture»⁵⁰.

Pollock's painting should be seen as simply not exhausted in the *object* toward which it tended, and in doing so it shows that, if the pure movement had no *object* other than itself, and the action is exhausted in reaching the object, gesture is in an intermediate position and stands remote from its own fulfilment.

3.3 • BEING INSTRUMENT OF THE WORLD • Nevertheless, if in the *Ur-teil*, the first instant of gesture had placed the *object* outside the movement, at the achieving of the *object*, in the multiple meanings we have attributed to this term, the movement does not return to be the simple movement we had seen existing before gesture: it is no longer a movement that has the *object* in itself, but a movement that becomes the *object*.

When my action already raised an *object* beyond my body, this last can no more be reabsorbed into the body, and the movement can just sacrifice itself to the same *object*. By achieving the *object* the gesture become *object* itself: by reaching the action it was referring to, the gesture becomes the action; by absorbing the language, it becomes a language of signs. And this achievement

⁵⁰ Kaprow, Allan, ‘The legacy of Jackson Pollock’, in *Art News*, Volume 57, n 6, December 1958, pp. 24-26, p. 26.

marks precisely a detachment that transforms the gesture in *object*.

To understand the consequence of reaching the *object* we shall refer again to Emmanuel Lévinas, who in his whole philosophy has marked a weighty difference between two concepts, which – even though they largely overcome the act of speaking – are defined as *le dire (the saying)* and *le dit (the said)*: if *the saying* could be easily defined as the very act of speaking, *the said* should be identified in something already achieved, as for example an already spoken word. What Lévinas clearly underlines, is that, even though I personally contributed to achieve this *said*, once it appears to the light, it settles its independence from me. The *said* detached itself from the body where it was generated. So for example, when the word is pronounced, it is already - even physically - detached from my own body. It crosses the space in the form of sound waves that gradually abandon my position, losing moment after moment the original link they have had with it.

In this fracture between gesture and *object*, there is a strong analogy with the object of artistic creation: once separated from the work he created, the artist has no longer possibilities to *say* something, because the object reached its autonomy. Any umbilical cord between the artist and his work is now cut, and the object shows itself in its independency. In *Fenomenologia della tecnica artistica*, Dino Formaggio called the *instant* this dramatic moment of the artistic creation, which not only reveals the object of creation as an independent object, but also reveals the artist as instrument of it.

«L'istante è anche la liquefazione del materiale in tecnica (delle sue leggi nell'atto tecnico formativo e trasformante) e il consolidamento dell'infinito probabilismo della tecnica interna in un'opzione che si fa gesto od atto, che si fa opera, durata, scavalcando l'istante stesso»⁵¹. [The instant is yet the liquefaction of the material into technique (of its laws in its technically shaping and transforming act) and the consolidation of an endless probability of the internal technique, in an option that makes itself as a gesture or act, which transform itself into work, time, in

⁵¹ Formaggio, D. *Fenomenologia della tecnica artistica*. Nuvoletti, Milano 1953. p. 314.

overstepping the same instant.]

If the artist would like to *say* more about it, it could no longer: the artistic object is autonomous and the artist has no longer power over that, in which he gave birth: if he tries to enter the museum where his work is exposed to update his work according to his actual taste (as for example the impressionist French artist Pierre Bonnard tried several times to do in his life), he would be certainly stopped by the guards, because he is no longer the owner of the work, but just the one that allowed this work to be created.

And yet, it is not an independence that leave the two terms without relation: actually, in reaching the *object* - which is essentially the passage from *saying* to *said* - the *object* turns to me and reveals how all my efforts to *saying* were done for nothing but to let the *said* appear.

All the movements on my mouth were done just for the word to be pronounced. My movements are revealed as existing only in function of the *object*, as a constant attempt to highlight it, or highlight qualities that belonged to it, and me, the one who did the action, I am just the one who allowed the *object* to appear as *achieved*.

I strongly desired to take that glass, and yet, when I finally take it, it makes clear that it had into it the opportunity to be taken by anyone, and the fact that this action has been completed by me becomes totally accidental.

In this way, by achieving the *object*, I mark my being extremely replaceable in front of its achievement: it had in it the possibility to be taken by someone and it had expected someone to do it, someone that could become instrument of the achievement of one of its possible destinies.

Hence reaching the *objects* he was tending to, the body yields to the *objects* of the world, being submitted to them as an instrument of their possibilities of being achieved. And going back to the similarity to the artistic creation, we should call back the way through which, in his essay on Russian icons, Pavel Florenskij had insisted on this same dimension of the artist as replaceable

instrument, into the path of an Icons tradition that proceeds in spite of him. And so, in marking his space of gesture, Pollock wants to give up from this condition, to maybe mark himself as the one who *says* and not as an instrument of *said*.

3.4 • THE CEREMONY OF THE SAID • The fact that I am the one who does actions and signs, does not save me from being revealed as their instrument, since in achieving them I still commit my body to them.

In the early 90's rose in Paris a political collective called *Tiqqun*, who published for almost ten years a homonymous magazine named as the «spreading organ for an imaginary party». One of the first investigations of *Tiqqun* took form in *Premiers matériaux pour une théorie de la Jeune-Fille*, an treatise turning around a theorization of a modern category named *Jeune Fille*. Through this term, *Tiqqun* does not intend to simply analyze a young female body, rather it means to put under the light an idea of extreme exposition that have invaded all bodies of our time, and that simply finds in youth and femininity some models of its paradigm: therefore, the image of the *Jeune Fille* depicts a body delivered over its exposure, and involves everybody in their being instruments of something *said*.

«En tant que son apparence épuise entièrement son essence et sa représentation sa réalité, la Jeune-Fille est l'entièrement dicible»⁵². «L'affectivité de la Jeune-Fille n'est faite que de signes, et parfois même de simple signaux»⁵³. "[Since her appearance runs out entirely the essence of reality and its representation, the Jeune-Fille is completely *speakable* (...). The affectivity of the Jeune Fille is made of nothing but signs, and sometimes even simple signals].

⁵² *Tiqqun, Premiers Matériaux pour une Théorie de la Jeune-Fille* . Edition Mille et une Nuit, Paris 2010. p.30.

⁵³ *Tiqqun, op.cit.* p.36.

Every gesture of the Jeune-Fille is a sign, every voice a word. Even in the originality and clarity of the depiction made by Tiqqun, her image represents the pick of the heritage of a long philosophical tradition, which already underlined the exposure of a body, as something in which every movement seems to be instrument of something to be *said*. If we go back to *L'Être et le Néant*, we can perceive Sartre in sketching this being a body of signs:

«Mais que *sommes-nous* donc si nous avons l'obligation constante de nous faire être ce que nous sommes, si nous sommes sur le mode d'être du devoir être ce que nous sommes? Considérons ce garçon de café. Il a le geste vif et appuyé, un peut trop précis, un peu trop rapide, il vient vers les consommateurs d'un pas un peu trop vif, il s'incline avec un peu trop d'emressement, sa voix, ses yeux expriment un intérêt un peu trop plain de sollicitude pour la commande du client, enfin le voilà qu revient, en essayant d'imiter dans sa demarche la rigueur inflexible d'on ne sait quel automate, tout en portant son plateau avec une sorte de témérité de funambule, en le mettant dans un équilibre perpétuellement instable et perpétuellement rompu, qu'il retabli perpétuellement d'un mouvement léger du bras et de la main. Toute sa conduite nous semble un jeu. Il s'applique à enchaîner ses mouvements comme s'ils étaient des mécanismes se commandent les uns les autres, sa mimique et sa voix, meme semblent des mécanismes ; il se donne la prestesse et la rapidité impitoyable des choses. Il joue, il s'amuse. Mais à quoi donc joue-t-il? Il ne faut pas l'observer longtemps pour s'en rendre compte : il joue à *être* garçon de café. Il n'y a rien là qui puisse nous surprendre : le jeu est une sorte de repérage et d'investigation. L'enfant joue avec son corps pour l'explorer, pour en dresser l'inventaire; le garçon du café joue avec sa condition pour la *réaliser*. Cette obligation ne diffère pas de celle qui s'impose à tous les commerçants : leur condition est toute de cérémonie, le public reclame d'eux qu'ils la réalisent comme une cérémonie, il y a la danse de l'épicier, du tailleur, du commissaire-priseur, par quoi ils s'efforcent de persuader à leur clientele qu'ils ne sont rien d'autre qu'un épiciier, qu'un commissaire-priseur, qu'un tailleur»⁵⁴.

[Let's consider this waiter. It has a lively and clear gesture a little too precise, a little too fast; he comes towards the patrons with a step a little too lively; he

⁵⁴ Sartre, op.cit. p.93-94.

stoops down with too much kindness; his voice, his eyes express an interest a bit too full of concern for the order of the customer; he goes back, trying to imitate in his walk the inflexible rigor of a kind of automaton, taking the tray with a kind of recklessness as a tightrope walker in a perpetually unstable and broken equilibrium, which always is re-established with a slight movement of the arm and hand. All his behaviours seem a game. It strives to concatenate his movements as if they were gears that control each other; even his mimic and his voice look like mechanisms. He assumes the quickness and pitiless rapidity of things. He plays games, he is having fun.

But what kind of game does he play? No need to look long to understand it; he plays at being a waiter. There is nothing that can surprise us, the game is a kind of monitoring and investigation. The boy plays with his body to explore it, to make the inventory; and the waiter plays with his condition to achieve it. This requirement does not differ from what is imposed to all merchants, and their condition is the *ceremony*; the audience claims from them that they achieve it as a *ceremony*, there is the dance of the grocer, of the tailor, of the auctioneer. With which they strive to persuade their customers that are nothing but a grocer, an auctioneer, a tailor].

No coincidence, Sartre uses the term *ceremony* that seems to connote gesture as a series of movements in which the *said* pre-exists the *saying*. And just like a good master of ceremonies is the one that carries the message to be *said* without *saying* nothing about himself, by achieving the *object* the body discovers itself as invisible instrument, a body replaceable but necessary to achieve something that existed and still exists in spite of it.

If Sartre writes *L'Être et le Néant* in response to the reading of *Sein und Zeit*, this conception of the body as instrument should certainly be seen as debtor to the way through which Martin Heidegger defined how the *Dasein* is reduced to be instrument of himself.

Even more important Heidegger describes the essence of the instrument in its being devoted to produce something else than itself. The instrument is that which is dedicated solely to achieve its purpose, which has no reason to exist than to accomplish the purpose for which it was built; as all tools in common daily use, the instruments are designed precisely starting from an *aim* to be

achieved. And this is the reason why in achieving the *object*, the body reveals itself in its being instrument of an external aim: both for Sartre and for Heidegger, in the moment when gesture disappears reaching the *said*, the body finds itself being instrument of that external *said*.

In this sense, we shall read the notion of gestures within the monastic rule of St. Benedict and the oath reserved for novices. At the entrance to the monastery the novice makes a final gesture before gifting his body and his gestures to the community of God: from that moment on, he has to renounce to any individual gesture, to merge in the rule and in the movements set by the group. Benedict describes how the novice - as a last free gesture - should put the hand on the altar, and then adds:

«Res, si quas habet, aut eroget prius pauperibus aut facta sollemniter donatione conferat monasterio, nihil sibi reservans ex omnibus, Quippe qui ex illo die nec proprii corporis protestatem se habiturum scit»⁵⁵. [And from that day, he is aware of not having even more power over his own body].

What actually happens in the words of this promise is a renunciation of the gestural expressiveness itself: from now on, each movement of the monk will be tool of a *said* imposed from the outside. The body of Benedictine monk loses any independent role of *saying*, and gesture fades to let emerge every movement as an instrument of a will already given and *said* from the outside.

3.5 • FROM *GESTUS* TO *GESTA* • In writing around 1104-1108 *Gesta Dei per Francos*, namely the gestures of God through the Franks, the Monk Gilbert of Nogent focuses on God as the main actor and on the bodies of the Franks as

⁵⁵ Benedict, *The rule*, LVIII, 24- 25. on line edition:
<http://www.zammerumaskil.com/regolabenedetto.html#LXVIII>

instruments of an external will, opening to a perspective that minimizes the determination of the individual, by placing the Franks as inert bodies managed by a higher external power.

Beside the Monastic rules, the image of gesture in medieval production seems to be always expressed in a form of an external invasion, and subsequent loss of possession of the man over his own body.

The most widespread and interesting case is the development of the *Chansons des gestes*. While apparently recounting the heroic deeds of mighty men, they argue in their same name the passive aspect of human gestures: the Latin term *gestus* is replaced by *gesta* - which does not identify the hero as the driving force of the legend but as *Res gesta*, namely – in the passive form of the Latin verb – the one on which the story is acted by God.

As third and last case, gestures in Middle Ages are described among the tales of *daemoniacus*, which are called, through a military terminology, obsessus (*besieged*). Like the Knights and their being God's instruments, the possessed are instruments of a narrative that sees the Evil as the main actor and that expropriates the man of any mastery or own volition.

To give an example, Giraldus Cambrensis puts in the words the story of the possessed of Poitiers, as quoted by Schmitt: the Gospel and the relics of several saints are applied on the body of the women. But the Devil seeks refuge under the skin and, hunted by sacred objects, he constantly moves in another part of the body, giving birth to all convulsive movements and gestures

Hence, the analysis of medieval literature highlights the external causality of gesture as a passion that invades the body. For this same reason Ambrose, at the dawn of Middle Ages, described the Virgin as a body without gesture (*non gestus fractior*). Unlike all other Saints of Christian tradition, and unlike the same image of the Christ, the image of the Virgin would rise avoid of any passion. In *De Verginibus*, the bishop of Milan sees in her image a mirror of all virtues and the expression of an isolated stillness in her simple presence, as if she were living suspended from the earthly events, a motionless beauty that expresses the impermeability to any external *object*.

«Nihil torvum in oculis, nihil in verbis procax, nihil in actu inverecondum: non gestus fractior, non incessus solutior, non vox petulantior; ut ipsa corporis species simulacrum fuerit mentis, figura probitatis»⁵⁶

Overstepping the late Classical idea of gestures as mirror of the soul, the medieval gesture – from the monastic rules to the *chanson de gestes*, from the *possessed* to the description of a Virgin avoiding gestures – is both in its presence and absence always the result of an outer will that invades the body.

No coincidence that if we seek the origin of the term from an etymological perspective, this outer perspective seems to clearly spring out. On the one side the possibility of its origin from *geta*, *to obtain*, *reach to beget* or from the idea of *hold something* (from which the same word *guess* would come from); on the other, even lacking of a definition of gesture, *De Lingua Latina* takes into account the analysis of the verb *gerere*, from which the term *gestus* is derived.

«Tertium gradum agendi esse dicunt, ubi quid faciant; in eo propter similitudinem agendi et faciendi et gerendi quidam error his qui putant esse unum. Potest enim aliquid facere et non agere, ut poeta facit fabulam et non agit, contra actor agit et non facit, et sic a poeta fabula fit, non agitur, ab actore agitur, non fit. Contra imperator quod dicitur res gerere, in eo neque facit neque agit, sed gerit, id est sustinet, tralatum ab his qui onera gerunt, quod hi sustinent»⁵⁷. [One can in fact do something and not acting it, like the poet, who does a tragedy but does not act it [*agere* in the sense of playing a part]: on the contrary, the actor acts the drama but it does not create it. Similarly, the drama is done [*fit*] from the poet, but is not acted [*agitur*], by the actor is acted, but not done. Instead, the emperor, for which the expression *res gesta* is used [do something, meaning to take it upon themselves, assume the entire responsibility], he does not act, but *gerit*, namely assumes [*sustinet*].

⁵⁶ Ambrose, *De Virginibus*, II, 2, 7

⁵⁷ Varro, *De Lingua Latina*., VI, VIII 77, on line edition:
<http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/varro.ll6.html>

The literal meaning of *assuming* would thus underscore a strong connection with an external source of gesture. Through Varro we shall consider gesture as an act of assuming - as if it were a medicine that invades the body by changing its nature - or a condition in which the body has to deliver itself to a continuous and external modelling, of which it can not be said to be responsible.

3.6 • A CHANGE OF DIRECTION • The analysis of the medieval conception of gesture allows thus to precise a general definition of gesture in itself: in a process of secularization, the presence of God and the Devil has been replaced by the presence of a highlighted *object*, which calls toward itself the gestures of the body. Hence, the gesture is not simply a movement toward the outside, but the answer to an irresistible external attraction.

One clear description of this change of direction has been greatly exposed by Flusser, who, while analyzing the relationship between language and activities of speaking to emphasize the foreignness of language, rightly pointed out that not only the man is not the one who owns the language, but - on the contrary - is the one who is possessed by it.

«C'est, au contraire, le parleur qui est possédé par les paroles pendant le geste de parler. Lorsqu'on donne la parole à la parole, la première chose qu'elle dit est qu'elle n'est pas parlée par l'homme, mais que c'est elle qui parle par l'homme ; que ce n'est pas l'homme qui articule la langue, mais que c'est la langue qui articule l'homme».⁵⁸ [It is, instead, the speaker who is possessed by the words during the act of speaking. When we give the word to the word, the first thing it says is that it is not spoken by the man, rather it is the one who speaks the man. It is not the man that articulates the language, but the language that articulates the man].

⁵⁸ Flusser, V., *op.cit.* p.29.

Hence, in a modern theory of gesture, the divine and demonic power are replaced by the mere presence of the *object*, a *said*, which strongly asks for its achievement and calls the body in a movement that could accomplish it and that transform gesture more as the result of an outer impression than the one of an inner expression.

Maurice de Merleau-Ponty calls it *attraction à distance* while writing in *Phenomenology of the perception*:

«Le corps n'est qu'un élément dans un système du sujet et de son monde et la tâche obtient de lui les mouvements nécessaires à une sorte d'attraction à distance, comme les forces phénoménales à l'oeuvre dans mon champ visuel obtiennent de moi, sans calcul, les réactions motrices qui établiront entre elles le meilleur équilibre»⁵⁹. [The body is nothing but an element of a system of the subject and his world, and the *aim* gets from him the necessary movements for a long distant attraction, as the phenomenological forces working in front of my eyes get from me the movements of reaction that will set among those the best balance].

In this perspective of attraction, this change of direction allows us to redefine the role of the intention in gestural expressiveness. Indeed, if in *Antecedente X*, Donatoni posed as dual fundamental conditions of gesture both a tension toward the meaning and an intention into it, through the analysis of medieval gestural expressiveness, we must be able to put again into question these two categories.

In this transition from *gestus* to *gesta* the Middle Ages resets the relationship of gesture with the *object*, and if the presence of a meaning underlined by Donatoni effectively corresponds to the tension toward the *object* that we have identified as necessary in gesture, how can the intention be considered as an essential condition of gestural expressiveness, once we recognized this tension as the answer to an attraction coming from the outside and calling the movements towards the achievement of the same *object*?

⁵⁹ Merleau-Ponty, op.cit. p.136.

In 2006, the directors Oleg Tcherny and Erwin Michelberger shot *Doch* (*But still*), a documentary on the topic of the syndrome of Tourettisme, which affects the body with what we use to call ticks. The syndrome is named after Gilles de la Tourette, a doctor of the Parisian hospital of the Salpêtrière, who first studied them and published in 1885, *Étude sur une affection nerveuse caractérisée par de l'incoordination motrice accompagnée d'écholalie et de coprolalie*.



Erwin Michelberger, Oleg Tcherny, *Doch*, Documentary, Germany 2006, 79', Beta SP

In *Doch*, three men and three women suffering from different degrees of Tourette's syndrome, face the movie camera over an entire day spent together in a wood, while trying to tell each other - and so to the audience - the perception about their own condition.

Through the dialogue, it emerges an astonishing portrait of Tourettisme: the six men speak about their movement as gestures, and they claim at the same time to be subjected to something that assails them from the outside,

producing both gestures and coprolalia.

If we consider – as the men of *Doch* do – their movements as gesture, the Tourette's syndrome confirms the turning direction of the medieval analysis: what we called the *second movement*, namely that tension toward the *object*, is not a spontaneous movement of the body at all, rather it is a reaction to *objects*, which call the movements of the body to be their instrument, as a perpetual song of the Odysseus's sirens by whom the body is attracted toward the world. We should therefore think the second movement as a sweet surrender or a drift towards the world: in front of that sirens' song of the *object*, the body is unable to resist and overcomes its solipsism going out of itself to *say* something.

We can now clarify the definition of gesture, by describing it is a movement of the body, which, being attracted by an external *object*, goes beyond itself.

Nevertheless, the sliding without interruption of the movement towards the *object*, showed how gesture and action do not belong to independent categories, because the two terms, as shown by Andrea de Jorio, are nothing but different forms of relationship between a same movement and the same *object*; and since the movement is in motion towards the *object* from which is attracted, the spatial relationship between terms may change at any time. In its tension toward the *object*, nothing seems to prevent gesture from reaching it and blend with it, becoming *object* (action, sign) as well.

And if this relationship between gesture and *object* would live only as an attraction, the movement should necessarily be absorbed by what it tended to, destroying the space that separated the body from the world, that distance that had been created through the split (*Ur-teil*) between movement and *object* at the beginning of gesture.

How is then possible to conceive gestures in their independence and life, and not as temporary movements ready to sacrifice themselves - as caterpillars for butterflies - to give life to something else?

4 • THE THIRD MOVEMENT

4.1 • INTERRUPTION • In the book of Genesis is told the story of the sacrifice of Isaac, in which the action of Abraham - charged by God to sacrifice his son - is interrupted by the Angel when he already raised the knife to achieve the commandment.

«When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!” “Here I am,” he replied. “Do not lay a hand on the boy,” he said. “Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.” Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son»⁶⁰.

The sacrifice is interrupted just before the action is completed and thanks to this, this movement crystallized by the hand of the Angel is considered in the biblical tradition as a *gesture*, or as the gesture of Abraham that does not sacrifice Isaac. The interruption seems to be the way to prevent gesture from becoming *object*: Abraham's hand is grasped by the Angel, remaining

⁶⁰ Genesis, 22-9

suspended in air (interruption of the movement), and the movement appears as gesture when Abraham, trying to sacrifice Isaac, does not sacrifice it (interruption of the action).



Caravaggio, *Il Sacrificio di Isacco*, 1598. Firenze, Gallerie degli Uffizi

How do we have to look at this form of interruption, which actually seems to save our gestures?

Domenico da Piacenza, in the Renaissance treatise on the art of dance formerly quoted, calls *fantasmata* a sudden interruption between a dancing pose and the following one. As we have seen, this frozen movement reveals the specific power of the movement: it is a dialectical still-image able to recall the previous moments and to open itself at the same time toward the power to become any following step between numberless possibilities.

The *fantasmata* is for Domenico what lets emerge the contingency of motion, having itself all possible destinies and freeing the movement from a single

privileged destiny.

But this plain contingency is exactly the reason why the *fantasmata* cannot be the form of interruption that saves the gesture: a relationship of perfect indifference with the *object* (that is the destiny of gesture), would be for the gesture a fatal lack of direction and disorientation: potentially attracted by all *objects* – hence by no one – it would lose its constitutive tension toward a specific *object*, returning immediately to a state of pure movement.

The denial of the *object* – in its absence as in the contingency - kills the gesture as, in the opposite direction, it does its achievement: on the one hand it returns pure movement, on the other it becomes a mere *object*. The deletion of any of two terms yields the same result, cutting off in both cases a specific relationship between *two* terms that defines the gesture.

Hence, the gesture seems to lie in an aporia engraved in the middle of these two terms, which seem to unabated flow one into the other: gesture cannot be the *object* but can not live without it, living instead in a dependency from the *object*, that is dependency from the distance from the *object* at the same time.

4.2 • THE DYNAMICS OF ESCAPE • In the attempt of trying to save the *object* of gesture, and so the gesture itself, it is necessary to propose to substitute the impracticable idea of interruption with the one of escape from the *object*.

Indeed, in the image of a fugue, while escaping I run away forward looking backward at the same time: I cannot ignore the *object* from which I am running away as I cannot deny its existence, precisely because he is both the origin and the reason of my fugue. On the contrary, by running away from my enemy I certify his existence and I keep myself in relation to him. And by fleeing the *object*, gesture goes toward it, and avoids its achievement at the same time.

No coincidence that, still dealing with the gestures of Balinese theatre, Antonin Artaud describes the impression of a pure language as something that *escapes* the language: in the choice of this word, Artaud seems to draw, on the sidelines of a movement toward the language, a second one of withdrawing from it. Hence, the gesture can be described as such only when escapeing that *said*, toward which it apparently seemed to tend.

In the same opposition found between the *true gesture* of Balinese theatre and the one already achieved in language of the Western pantomime, stand two different types of gesture at the birth of cinema. On the one hand, a gesture that goes in the direction of that spoken language still missing: how to imagine otherwise those emphatic gestures so well sculpted on the bodies of actors and actresses of Méliès. Not so distant from the *Chironomia* set by Requeno a century and a half before, these gestures of silent cinema live beyond the limit of gestural expressiveness, constantly captured as defined *objects* of a non-verbal language. The body became the medium of a language, the blank page of something that can be *said* through it and *on* it: what it appears is no longer a gesture, being instead a dialogue of signs written on the body, and transforming the body of the actor in an instrument, in the medium of a language that has not yet other medium of writing.

However, it is necessary to focus on a second attitude of gestures that – always at the origin of cinema - seems to absolutely refuse the construction of a canon of verbal signs. Within the so-called burlesque cinema, the inconclusive gestures of Buster Keaton, the Marx Brothers or Charlie Chaplin reject to reduce themselves to a perspective of language. In a book about gesture in silent cinema, Emmanuel Dreux focused precisely on the ability of those gestures in not only detaching themselves from the language, but also in subverting it somehow. In *Le cinéma burlesque ou la subversion par le geste*, she writes:

«Il est essentiel de préciser que les gestes nombreux et remarquable du cinéma

burlesque ne forment pas un langage significatif, comme dans le dialogue mimé ou le mimodrame»⁶¹. [It is essential to clarify that numerous and remarkable gestures of burlesque cinema do not form a meaningful language, as in the dialogue or in mime].

These gestures destabilize the language itself; they are in their gratuitousness a rebellion or an anarchistic hymn against the using of the body for the usefulness of the language. And in this expressing a being-elsewhere they reveal a being inappropriate of the body in every situation, a detachment in respect to the world they refer to at the same time.

While being evidently not so common in the arts of expression through the body, this possibility of escaping the *object* and its rule is not prerogative of cinema, but can be similarly perceived in some experiences of the European dance of the last fifty years.

At the festival Montpellier Danse 2004, the French choreographer Mathilde Monnier, presented a performance called *Publique*, in which the bodies of dancers on stage face the rhythm of different songs, source of the dance itself. Monnier exposed small movements that seemed to answer the simple instinct of motion of a body subjected to a rhythm, and the scene reproduces different degrees of adherence to an idea of *object*-choreography. The scenes are drawn from different contexts, from images that seemed actually recovered from the ballet, to others retrieved the image of bodies in a disco, where dancers usually do not test themselves already as professionals even if shaping already their bodies in knowing to be under the gaze of others, until the movements that one could create while being alone in his room accompanied by the music. Hence – as suggested by the title – Monnier create a collection of movement in relation with the *object*-choreography, moving from the most adherent to the codified dance to a private dimension. In the presentation Monnier writes:

«Il s'agit de convoquer un monde à soi, de dégager un *laisser-aller du*

⁶¹ Dreux, E., *Le cinéma burlesque ou la subversion par le geste* . Editions L'Harmattan, 2007. p.13

mouvement, un lâcher prise du geste déplaçant la notion d'écriture chorégraphique. Parler de la danse comme d'une expérience avant toute autre chose, une expérience qui convoque des mémoires différentes et superposent sans hiérarchie un ensemble de mouvements contradictoires»⁶². [It is about calling a world in itself, to reach a *letting go of the movement*, a *letting go of gesture* by pushing forward the concept of choreography. Speaking of dance as an experience above all else, an experience that convenes different memory and that overlaps without hierarchy a set of contradictory movements].



Mathile Monnier, *Publique*, 2004.

On the one hand Monnier speaks about a *laisser-aller du mouvement*: the movement is not a *pure movement*, but is already beyond the body and toward the *object-music*. On the other hand it is never exhausted in adhering to it, because the whole thing happens by *déplaçant la notion d'écriture chorégraphique*. Yet, the choreographic language to which usually the dancer adheres is not destroyed but remains existing as *object* toward which the movement shall still tend: and little by little Monnier focuses on a work of

⁶² Monnier, M., *Publique*. www.mouvement.net/html/fiche.php?doc_to_load=9183

subtraction with respect to choreography; to avoid a written *said* until returning to a dimension exactly definable as private.

If already some years before, in the experiences of Pina Bausch's *Tanztheater*, it was interceptable the attempt to escape dance as such, now it is in the specificity of a dichotomy between *public* and *private* that Monnier retrieves a dimension of dance as gestures that precede its exposure as codified language.

If the choreographic language does not disappear, it becomes a kind of lighthouse toward which the dancer tends, that sirens' song that would attract the dancing body toward it; and it is in the dimension of resistance to this same song that the dancing body let emerge the gestures on it.

From Abraham's sacrifice till the dancer of Mathilde Monnier, the gesture is so to be defined as a tension toward a *said* that crystallizes itself before its achieving, hangs in a balance of forces. Gesture resists against the passion of something *said* from the outside, as if the image of the muscle tension of *Laocoön* would be standing for escaping from the grip of snakes ready to catch him in an irreparable *said*.

What is even more interesting is that at the end of the quoted presentation of *Publique*, Monnier writes about the presence of *contradictory movements* into the movement. Similarly we shall now think *gesture* as a substrate of original movement, on which live – without canceling each other out – two opposing tensions: a third movement (escape from the *object*) that does not suppress the second one (movement towards the *object*), as if the attraction and repulsion toward the *object* described by Engels as sources of gestural expressiveness, had not to be conceived as alternatives, but as structurally present together in gestures, and both of them necessary for its existence.

The movement of attraction towards the *object* presented me the *objects* as different from me, and set them detached from my own body; and the gesture flourished into the space of this same distance, to live into it in a state of tension. For this reason it was necessary to lay down a second force of repulsion to counterbalance the attractive one, to not inescapably reabsorb the tension in an adherence to the *object*.

If gesture manifests a desire, it is only in escaping from what I desire, that I keep it alive in the form of non-satisfied desire. Similarly to the Captain Ahab, who does not seem to want to reach the whale, because the desire to achieve it has blazed his life, and he now fears that by achieving it he will have nothing more: he curses it and want to reach it, but this space between him and the whale has become so precious that - while tending to it - he seems to escape from an achievement in order to leave intact a distance between them.

This is the meaning of the escape that tries to keep the gesture alive: as Daphne that flees through the woods, in seeming to foresee that the touch of Apollo will crystallize her in inanimate tree, the gesture flees from the accomplishment of the *object*, to not transform itself in *object*. And this is the dynamics of *two movements* into the movement of gesture, going in opposite directions to keep alive a distance that is vital space of gesture.

We have thus defined the presence of this *third movement* in gesture to counterbalance the one that goes in the direction of the *object*: but where does it bring this movement of escaping from the world?

Mathilde Monnier saw in this resistance to the *object*-choreography, a going back to a dimension that she defines *private*, in writing in the presentation of *Public*:

«Aborder les croisements du privé dans la sphère publique pas comme une question générale mais bien dans notre pratique de la danse et du geste. Comment les strates du privé croisent-elles celles de nos professions? Quelles sont les interférences, les confusions, les points de rencontres entre ce que nous pratiquons dans nos métiers de super spécialistes et le rapport d'une part avec le public, et d'autres part avec nos sphères personnelles?»⁶³. [Addressing the crossings of the private in a public sphere not as a general issue but in our practice of dance and gesture. How do layers of private intersect those of our profession? What interferences or blending of meeting points between what we practice in our professions of super specialists and the relationship, on the one

⁶³ Monnier, M., Ibid.

side with the audience and on the other with our personal sphere?].

Thus, the *private dimension* mentioned by Monnier is nothing but the body itself. Having to flee in the opposite direction of the *object* - which is structurally different from me - the third movement seems to cannot bring us elsewhere than in the body itself; and besieged by the *objects*, the gesture will have no option but to seek refuge in sinking again in the body.

4.3 • INCORPORATION OF THE INCOMPLETE • Caught in this structural dynamics of a necessary giving up from its own fulfillment, the gesture seems apparently to be included in the sphere of incompleteness. However, it reveals itself as a complete gesture only in the form of this incompleteness; exactly as a sketch is completed as sketch just if - while deferring to a future work of art - it is not that work of art.

Hence, this incompleteness it is not optional, because if it were complete in a form of completeness, this would eliminate that lack of fullness that defines it as gesture, and it would become complete *object*.

Hence, to keep itself complete in the form of its incompleteness, gesture must always have present to itself - as its spectrum - that totality it did not yet achieve. It cannot isolate itself or shut in itself, but shall always refer to that fullness it is escaping from.

And this full *object* that I did not accomplish in gesture should not be a harmless spectrum, but it must continue to threaten me with its attraction, because by perceiving it as what I can no longer reach, I would no more be its unfinished, but something independent of it (and once again full and complete in my new independence).

Thus, to give some examples, in the Roman oath named *lapis silix*, constituted

by the act of hurling a stone, the body movement discloses the punishment of Jupiter's thunderbolt that – departing from this gesture – can always happen. And so again, even gestures of seduction are revealed as such, precisely because they refer to a fullness that can still be accomplished.

The *object* I chase and I abstain from - the sexual act or punishment of Jupiter - is still waiting for me: is over there as an *object* that I can achieve and from which I can always be reached: I can keep myself unfinished by referring to something that I can still accomplish in any moment, and gesture is always a promise written on my body, something that will be maybe kept.

But under a closer look, it is not the unfinished that refers to the fullness, but the opposite. It is only the final picture that, once born, can look back to all the previous preparatory sketches to reveal them as sketches that tended just to it. Alone, they could not refer to what they are not yet, and without the final work of art they would be simply considered as different completed works of art.

Similarly, gesture cannot certify its lack of fullness by referring to the *object* that it is not, but it should instead be revealed by the *object* as what is missing from being that precise *object*. In other words, we can say that is exactly that *said* that I do not completely *say* that illuminates my *saying*. From its fullness of meaning or action down below, the *object* turns toward the movement, to certify gestures as tensions toward it, as those which are not missing in a generic way, but lacking of a precise fullness embodied in its being *object*.

In his essay on Franz Kafka, Walter Benjamin defines the literary production of his friend as *a code of gestures*⁶⁴, and through this definition of the *object* of gesture as something unreachable but necessary we can now understand why. Indeed Kafka's characters structurally wait for an *object* yet to come: the day of the trial, the admission to the Castle or to the Law. They live waiting for something inaccessible but fundamental at the same time, because they can be defined just in relation to an *object* toward which they tend and that could

⁶⁴ Benjamin, W. , *Brief an Gershom Scholem* , 12. Juni, 1938 (*Über Franz Kafka*), Briefe, II, hrsg. v. Gershom Scholem u. Theodor W. Adorno, Frankfurt a.M., Suhrkamp Verlag, 1978, S. 756 - 764.

explain everything, something impossible to reach or that the characters do not reach, remaining in tension in a state of gestures.

For this same reason, both in the Jewish and Christian tradition, God or the angels are described as devoid of gestures. Indeed, if the gesture is always lack of something, the life in Heaven is to be thought without any unsatisfied desires. In *Nudità*, Giorgio Agamben underlines how Angels would move in the heavens just to show their agility: at the opposite image of Kafka's characters, who are toiling to try to catch the image of an unspecified fullness from which are attracted.

In everyday life, while indicating that previously quoted glass away from me, it, in itself, is the one that indicates me at the same time, to enlighten my gesture: it is itself, as *object* fraught of possible actions, that explains my gesture as a not generic tension, but a tension that has into the qualities of this glass - as my future possibility to grasp it or desire to drink - its very reason of gesture. Indeed, if while my arm is still stretched out, the glass shatters all of a sudden, my gesture is amended, because I am dependent and revealed, in my tension toward the *object*, from its nature of *object*.

In this perspective, Sartre wrote in *L'Être et le Néant* that he perceived Peter's *gestures* in how they were revealed from the future, from the terms they tended to. The *object* as future of the world, announces my body in the form of a *not-yet*.

But if the *object* is actually an external item opposed to the *subject*, this lack of *object* cannot be place outside the body, but must belong to the same body, since the body is - with his gestures - this same lack of something. The gestures of Peter about which Sartre speaks, are not only perceived from the outside as missing the *object*, but are themselves - as Kafka's characters - this same lack of fullness.

This is how, by fleeing the *object*, the gesture incorporates it in the form of its lack of *object*; and it keeps this lack inside itself, as a core of absence that cannot be filled, because once done it would destroy it, becoming fullness.

This is the meaning of the movement of withdrawal during the flee, which after tending toward the *object*, it brings it back in the body in the form of its absence, marking it as incompleteness.

For this reason, we can say that in gestures, we are the *objects* of the world in the form of their lack of presence, and this incorporation of the *object* in the form of structural failure, leads us to draw two fundamental consequences for gesture.

4.4 • THE SYMBOLIC • First, by embedding in the body the *object* in the form of its absence, the gesture shows how it has absolutely not just a conventional relationship with the meaning: it is not – like in the sign is – a symbolic link retrospectively decided that we might dissolve or nullify in any moment, keeping the gesture alive. If gesture is built around an unreachable attempt, this lack of the *object* is foundation and pillar that once eliminated, would let collapse the whole gesture.

If at the beginning Franco Donatoni revealed that gesture is not its meaning, we can now say that it is precisely the lack of the same meaning: not only the gesture is not indifferent to the meaning, but also it carefully keeps in itself this lack of meaning as its *raison d'être*.

Thus, if for example in the medieval jurisdiction the *gestus iniuriosius* (spitting on the ground in the direction of someone) and the *actus iniuriae* (spitting in the face) were both punished, it was not simply a conventional decision, but it was because the former contains within it the latter, establishing itself as a act of spitting in the face to another, in the form of a lack of action not yet filled.

According to the liturgy, the gesture is placed on the same level of events: it previously states them, by already starting their achieving in the moment of gesture. The future event starts to happen: and if it is not something that will

certainly happen, starting from the gesture it can always happen. That is why, according to Sergio Bertelli and Monica Centanni, gestures are in different cultures considered as irreversible, since once made, they cannot be revoked. Bertelli and Centanni report of the Sassanid king of Cabada, Procopius⁶⁵, who, having taken possession of Amida, came on a visit to Edessa and asked his magicians to foresee the conquest of the city, by pointing to it with the outstretched arm: he was hence told that now he could not win because he had done in the direction of the city, the gesture of salvation.

Hence, and even more important, by incorporating in the body the *object* in the form of its lack, by assuming it as something that is not innocuous but that I can always achieve, I am in gestures – and in my body – the *possibilities* of achieve my actions.

4.5 • POWER OF GESTURE AND GESTURES OF POWER • When I stretched my arm in the moment of the *Ur-teil* of gestures that had divided me from the world - the world rose in the form of *objects* independent of me, keepers of all my actions in a state of power. I watched this diaspora of all my possible action, a landscape of which I could no longer regain possession: indeed, in making my actions I would always have been revealed as a tool for qualities of the *objects*, since grasping the glass would mean revealing its possibility to be taken by anyone; in the opposite direction, in not grasping them, I would have simply left them intact and inscribed in a state of power, as possible qualities in the *objects* of the world.

The gesture is thus the attempt through which, after having split myself from the world, I regained my actions and *object*, not to achieve and serve them revealing their qualities, but to manifest them as *my* possibilities in *my* body.

⁶⁵ Bertelli, S., Centanni, M., *Il gesto nel rito e nel cerimoniale, dal mondo antico a oggi.* Ponte delle Grazie, Firenze 1995

So through gestures I express plans of actions that I am the only one able to conceive as such: in gestural expressiveness I am the one – and the only one – that manifests his possibility of making actions, and it is no longer the glass that reveals itself in its possibility to be seized by anyone. In this way, I subtract myself from being tool of the world to more simply relate to it, as my possibility of its realization. The second consequence of the incorporation of the incompleteness is thus that gestures reveal themselves as *programs of action*, breaking the false choice between power and action, being actions in power.

That is why, to keep this achievement as a possibility, I should have the possibility of its failure as well, since any *power to be* shall coexist with a *power to not-be*, without which - as revealed by Aristotle – would fall always in the act, merging with it; and for this reason we shall think at Engel's force of attraction and repulsion as two forces present together and not as alternative in gestures.

Any gesture should be the power to achieve the object and the power of a failure: I must be – stretching out myself toward the glass as any other purpose - the possibility of its achievement (for example, someone hands it to me) and its failure (that I will be completely ignored), because in gesture, solution and dissolution must live together.

According to the confession of a Nazi official in the Nuremberg Trial, gestures of Hitler were pure language: how can we interpret this sentence, when we had denied to gesture the possibility to be an *object*?

Being the gesture constitute by *power to achieve* and *power to fail the object*, gestures disappear on a body that does not accept this component of failure. The gesture of Hitler has not both possibilities, (success and failure of its goal), because we have seen that this failure – unlike the achievement itself – will not appear as belonging to the *object* but to the body.

And even less the others can accept this failure, and - like they ignore the nudity of the king in the short tale *The Emperor's New Clothes* - they see the

gesture of power (as the French word *pouvoir*) constituted just by the power (*pouissance*) of its realization.

This is the meaning of expressions like the *gesture of the pope is law* that we find - reported by Schmitt in his study about gestures in the Middle Ages - in the texts of papal ceremonies of the 700; as the use of words in the description made by Pasolini of a *ragazzo di vita* «che fa con la mano un gesto che nessun borghese avrebbe mai saputo fare; e a cui non si poteva non ubbidire»⁶⁶. (that makes with his hand a gesture that any middle class man would have been able to make, and to which one could not not obey).

In alienating from the gesture of power the power of failure, we nullify the power itself, because they become unavoidably action, law or language and thus no more gesture. If the so called gesture of the sovereign is always achieved by the others, it is because, not being recognized in it a possibility of failure, gesture is no longer in power rather it is already achieving the *object*. Deleuze and Guattari in *Milleplateaux* defined *the power (pouvoir)* as what has been separated from its *power (pouissance)*, and this seems to be confirmed in gestures as well, by letting emerge this incompatibility between power of gestures and gestures of power.

From the thumb down of Roman emperors, till the gestures of a policeman or a conductor, what is called into question when one hesitates in recognizing these movements as *objects* (and so in front of their definition as *gestures*), it is not the clarity of the movements, but the status of the body on which they are inscribed, which must remain averse to any failure.

It is now clear that what is the central point in human gestural expressiveness, it is not at all just the single meanings of gestures, but a definition of the body.

⁶⁶ Pasolini, P.P., *Petrolio*, Einaudi, Torino 1992, p.205.

5 • THE GESTURE AND THE FLESH •

5.1 • SNAPSHOT OF A BALANCE • Between 1987 and 1989, while he was a student at Yale, the American artist Matthew Barney made a series of performance events entitled *Drawing Restraint 1-6*.

The primary intention of Barney addressed the implementation of some pencil drawings, in a condition of impairment of the drawing itself: what Barney does is to place a white sheet on the wall of a space, in a quiet impossible position to reach, so that he can leave some marks on it only through an extreme high effort of the body.

Matthew Barney seems to recover an artistic approach that focuses more on the process than on the object, line pioneered among the first by Yves Klein and his conception of his *Anthropometries* as ashes of his art.

However, in the case of *Drawing Restraint*, the signs that appear on the sheet at the end of the performance are not to be conceived just ashes of an effort, but the snapshot of an expression that should not be achieved and exhausted. The *Drawing Restraint* series fixes a movement that cannot be overstepped in art object, but in which the tension must be maintained as such.

For this reason, the work of Barney fits into a conception of art as a conflictual relationship between creativity and resistance: only by giving up the achievement of that *said* from which is attracted, the artist can avoid to be suddenly lit as a mere instrument of the *object* he created, and keep himself in a creative tension toward the same object.



Matthew Barney, *Drawing Restraint 1-6* (1986-1989)

In a text focused on *Drawing Restraint*⁶⁷, the English art critic Neville Wakefield used for the body of Barney the words "Desiring machines". In fact Barney in this performance presents himself as the one - or the *machine* - able to maintain this physical distance, in which the desire keeps itself as still desiring and never satisfied desire.

To prevent himself from what it seems to be an unavoidable reabsorption, Barney hardly works to maintain this unfolded distance: he seems to have learned the lesson from Jackson Pollock, but to see more clearly the danger of the calling the *object*. For this reason, against the tension toward the sheet, he materializes a physical strength that allows him not to yield to the attraction.

In one of the last *Drawing Restraint* he placed the sheet to the head of a boat and tied himself to the opposite side with some partially elastic ropes so that he can arrive with the pencil to the paper only through an extreme attempt of

⁶⁷ Wakefield, N., Scott, K., ed. *Matthew Barney: drawing restraint* : vol V, 1987-2007. Serpentine Gallery-Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, London-Köln 2007.

the body. And it is difficult not to think that through the ropes - which will slowly become the most significant tool of these performances – and the set of this *Drawing Restrain* Barney suggests a very strong relation to the quoted episode of the mermaids in *Odysseus*, and he ties himself to keep from falling into something that loudly calls him.



Jackson Pollock, *Action Painting*



Matthew Barney, *Drawing Restraint*

Hence, Barney's gesture is anything but idle: it is already headed for the *object*, but crystallized in this half-way between the creative act and the waiver of the creation, in an interstitial space where the creative forces are not exhausted; where the desire is not reabsorbed in satiety.

How could we imagine this same balance, as what crystallizes gestures on the body? Where should we locate in gesture Barney's ropes, this resistance to the *object*, able to keep the gesture alive?

5.2 • BEYOND THE FLESH • At the beginning, in the *Ur-teil* and birth of the *second movement* toward the *object*, the gesture projected the *objects* in the world to tend towards them.

The starting moment of gesture had been a creation of the world itself; it made appear the *objects* through gestures, since those last could not be defined if not by the presence of the *objects* to which they referred. Perhaps only in the German verb *zuwenden*, it is clearly set the dual perspective of the *second movement*, in both forms of directing the body to the world and presenting it: by making a gesture, I always refer to that *object* beyond the body, presenting it to the eyes of the others.

This necessary reference to the *object* is clearly visible in the gesture of pointing we have seen as first image. The analysis of Caravaggio's *The Calling of St. Matthew* often insisted on the light direction as the item that - setting a strong line from right to left - would dictate a reading key of the work itself. The observer's eyes are transported to St. Matthew through this light that becomes allegory of the divine grace.



Caravaggio, *The Calling of Saint Matthew*, 1599 Church of San Luigi dei Francesi, Rome.

However, the light does nothing but masterfully emphasizes the direction set by the gestures of the two bodies placed in the right edge of the painting: the eyes of the observer cannot rest on the body of the Christ and St. Peter, because – through their gestures – they categorically reject any attention from their own body. Both show elsewhere and, by doing this gesture, they push our gaze to abandon their bodies, to look elsewhere for the *object* that created their own gesture. When Sartre wrote: «I perceive Peter's gesture in what is now revealed to me from the future, from the terms it tents to», he was probably not thinking at this painting by Caravaggio, but this same sentence would perfectly resonate as pictorial analysis of the image.

However, beyond the gesture of pointing to something, the observer's look seeks always this *elsewhere* to which the gesture refers. Alluding to this, in his *Théorie du geste dans l'art de la peinture* of 1813, the French artist Jacques Nicolas Paillot de Montabert (1771-1849) theorized gesture as made of empty (*blanks*), points of the painting that force the viewer to abandon the simple picture to look elsewhere in order to complete the meaning.

However, is this drawing attention away from the body that carries out the gesture, really a side effect of it? Is it not rather the attempt to hide a bodily dimension of the being, which is perceived as intolerable?

5.3 • BEING FLESH • In *L'Être et le Néant*, Sartre analyzed the dialectic between the two components that make up the human being.

On the one hand a *being-in-itself*, the material presence or the *facticity* of the body, which is common to all beings and objects: it is - in the words of Sartre - a *massive body*, spatially delimited to its current location. The *being-in-itself* finds its best definition as the one who is simply what it is; on the other hand, the *being-for-itself*, which Sartre identifies as an ability to get out of this

fullness of being, to be projected elsewhere.

We have seen how according to Sartre, under the gaze of the *other* and of his being *subject*, I am always hopelessly perceived as an *object*, and namely – we can now say – a *being-in-itself*.

And that through this same gaze, I am not only caught by the *other* in my dimension of *object* for him, but through his simple presence, I'm forced to look at myself in this same perspective. Indeed, the Sartrean problem about the birth of the gaze of the *other* was precisely the perception of my own body as a *being-in-itself*.

«Et par l'apparition même d'autrui, je suis mis en mesure de porter un jugement sur moi-même comme sur un objet, car c'est comme objet que j'apparais à autrui»⁶⁸ [And by the appearance of the *other*, I can give a judgment on myself as an object, because it is like object that I appear to the *other*]

At the same time, Lévinas defined the necessity of perceiving specifically through the *other* the limits of the subject. But once I have shared with him my presence in the world and I have offered my body to be *object* of his perception, how to save myself from the Sartrean fear of being just *massive body*, and *object* of the *other's* perception?

Hence, gestural expressiveness inscribes itself in the cracks of this issue: it is to escape the possibility of being perceived just as body *hic et nunc* of pure materiality that the body announces through gestures its ability to project itself elsewhere. Through gestures, the body seems to want to say to the *other*: *I am more than just this flesh that you see in front of your eyes; I do have some projects that will take place in the world; I do have now and here the possibility to create things in the future, over there, outside of me: this glass, to which from my fixed position in space and time I am pointing, it will be taken by me in a moment, by achieving one of the numberless actions I was foreseeing as my possible action through my gesture.*

⁶⁸ Sartre, op.cit. p.260.

Thus, if at the beginning of gestural expressiveness I gave birth to the perception of the *objects* of the world as such, in everyday gestures I constantly underline their presence outside of me, not only to highlight their *presences* separated from my body, but even more to emphasize them as *my* possibilities, and make them stand out as my ability to be more than a material body.

That is the reason why, in *La redenzione degli oggetti*, Italo Calvino strongly emphasizes how, in the relationship with the *objects* of the world, the man would just look for the refusal of any reduction to the naked human nature of biological entity:

«Con tono pacato di chi vuole esaminare la questione da tutti i lati, ma pur sempre con una vena di sarcasmo sotto cui traspare la tenacia della passione, Praz afferma quello che egli chiama il suo *materialismo*, cioè il rifiuto d’ogni spirituale ascetismo [...], ma anche rifiuto d’ogni riduzione dell’umano alla nuda natura d’ente biologico»⁶⁹. [With calm tone of someone who wants to examine the issue from all sides, but always with a hint of sarcasm in that reveals the tenacity of passion, Praz explains what he calls his materialism, ie the rejection of all spiritual asceticism [...], but also the rejection of any reduction of the human body to the naked nature of a biological entity].

So gestures are first attempts to overstep my facticity; to exit the simple situation of being-in-body, to throw myself out in the *objects* of the world to circumvent my own flesh. I project myself down there - in the language as in the presence of the world - and the embarrassing presence of the body as object for the *others* becomes just the background of my activity. Through gestures I built a much larger periphery, within which I can disperse the attention of the *others*, that would otherwise be on my body as a mere presence. And conveying the gaze of others toward the *object* necessary to its interpretation, I dim the presence of the body itself: through my gestures I distract the onlookers from my own body, like a magician who draws attention with the gesture of one hand while hide the handkerchief with the other.

⁶⁹ Calvino, I., *La redenzione degli oggetti*, in *Collezione di Sabbia*, Mondadori, Milano 2010. p.121.

Furthermore, in quoting the *naked nature of a biological entity* of Italo Calvino, we approached the problem of this mere presence of the body as perception of nudity. In *Nus sommes*, an alphabetical collection of writings created in response to a dozen images of nudes, Federico Ferrari and Jean-Luc Nancy clarify the two-way of this analogy:

«Le nu est avant tout *presence*. Une presence exposée au regard d'autrui. Le nu, n'importe quel nu, se trouve toujours dans un regard, même quand il ne s'agit que de mon regard. Le regard, quand il rencontre la nudité du corps, atteste sa presence. Le corps est nu est en presence dans le regard. Et sa presence est de l'ordre de l'indubitable : elle est là»⁷⁰. [First of all the nude is *presence*. A presence exposed to the gaze of others. [...] The eye, meeting the nakedness of the body, attests its presence. The naked body is present in the eye. And its presence is unquestionable: it is simply there].

What Sartre was calling a *being-object of the body* is risignified by Ferrari and Nancy in the term of a nudity, namely the simple presence of the body attested by the *other*, something that – through gestures as well – I try to hide from the *other's* perception.

No coincidence that gestural expressiveness can be easily found in bodies that seem to need to cover this same embarrassment of their bodily presence. Looking at a group of teenagers, it is straightforwardly remarkable how the gestural component is strongly marked in large and codified movements that mislead the attention away from the body. But is it not the adolescence, the stage where a changing body is still perceived as the object of a shame not yet faced up?

Teenagers protect their own bodies from the gaze of the others with a layer of vector movements able to distract from what they still perceive as a full nudity. In his essay on gesture within the *Traité d'Anthropologie Historique*, Christoph Wulf describes it as a choreography, in emphasizing how coded these gestures can be:

⁷⁰ Nancy, J.-L., Ferrari, F., *Nus Sommes*, Ives Gevaert Editeur, Bruxelles 2002, p. 97.

«Les individus, les groupes et les institutions mettent en scène la vie sociale. Ils développent des choreographies de la communauté humaine. Les mises en scène du corps, des gestes et de formes rituelles d'expression peuvent être lues, ou plutôt décodées comme un texte»⁷¹ [Individuals, groups and institutions depict social life. They develop choreographies of the human community. The staging of the body, gestures and ritual forms of expression can be read, or rather decoded as a text].

Gesture lies on the edge of becoming a sign to cover the body underneath, it behaves not so far from the description that Sartre was giving of a waiter of a Parisian café, intent in playing through motions and gestures the *ceremony* of his same condition of waiter. The flesh is the hidden and ultimate layer that remains underneath ceremonies and gestures, under all those movements and situation that do not allow us to question the flesh beneath in its simple and naked presence.

For this reason Ferrari and Nancy built their whole book around the missing perception in our daily experience of the body in *itself*, which far from being just a question about nudity, it is a question about the human condition; taking as example the image of the naked body of Betsabée painted by Rembrandt:⁷²

«Loin d'être un modèle, une essence définie et définitive, sa nudité – comme toutes les nudité postérieures (mais aussi, dans de nombreux cas, précédents) – est l'ouverture d'une interrogation sans fin. Au fond, le nu demande encore: qu'est ce que l'homme *dans sa généralité*? – mais seul un nom singulier réussit, au cas par cas, à configurer une réponse possible face à la question réitérée. [...] La question se perd dans la singularité de la chair. C'est l'essence même du nu qui se perd. En-deçà et au-delà de chaque essence, il reste l'immanence d'un corps, son être là sans réponses, totalement exposé, sans protection»⁷³. [Far from being a model, a defined and definitive essence, her nudity - like all later nudities (but

⁷¹ Wulf, C., *Geste*. In *Tarité d'Anthropologie Historique*, L'Harmattan, Paris 2002. p.525.

⁷² Rembrandt, *Betsabée with the letter of David*, 1654, Paris, Musée du Louvre.

⁷³ Ferrari, F., Nancy, J.L., *Nu sommes*, op.cit. p.21-22

precedents too in many cases) - is an opening of an endless interrogation. Basically, the nude still wonders: what is the man in general terms? - But only a term, case by case, can give a possible answer to the repeated question. [...] The question is lost in the singularity of the flesh. This is the essence of the nude. Below and beyond all existences, there is the immanence of a body, his being there without answers, fully exposed and unprotected].

This presence that we called *nudity* is completely concealed by the activity of gesture, protected by an army of movements that will hardly allow the gaze of the *other* to step over it to finally ask the body *qu'est ce que tu es dans ta généralité?*

Anything but obvious, it is the intimacy of this question that gestural expressiveness tries to deny. From the naked body of Betsabée to the condition of the Sartrean waiter, from the monks until the group of teenagers, gestures cover the materiality of the body, that is related to the idea and fear of the human condition of being just flesh. This is the sense that Tiquun gave to this exposure, while clearly showing this same pattern of protection of the body in the model of the *Jeune-Fille*:

«Pourquoi la Jeune-Fille doit-elle toujours feindre quelque activité? Pour demeurer imprenable dans sa passivité»⁷⁴. [Why the *JeuneFille* must always pretend some activity? To remain imprenable in its liabilities],

the liabilities of a flesh that risks to be revealed as mere presence. And if every human activity and every gesture become a cover of the *being-in-itself*, a dress over the *being-always-a-naked-body*, every gesture - whatever it is - does nothing but it reproduces the first gesture described in the Bible, the dress of leaves manufactured from Adam and Eve, upon a nudity become untenable.

Their bodies were thus unexpectedly perceivable as naked just in the space of time between the opening of their eyes and this first gesture that, while covering them, will announce the covering of all further nudities of the bodies through gestures even before the dresses.

⁷⁴ Tiquun, op.cit. p. 25.

For this reason we should read the lines in which Ferrari and Nancy consider as particularly interesting the sudden nudity of Adam and Eve, as the only moment in which the nudity accesses its own revelation.



Rembrandt, *Adam and Eve*, etching 1683
Art Institute of Chicago.

In describing Rembrandt's etching of *Adam and Eve* of 1683, they write:

«La scène se passe dans lieu et dans le moment où la nudité accède à sa propre révélation. C'est la scène du dénudement, de la nudité, ou de sa mise à nu. Le geste que Rembrandt saisit au milieu de son accomplissement, ce mouvement vif et tendu qu'il immobilise de son trait, c'est celui qui va dévoiler l'humanité à elle-même en tant que nudité. À peine sorti de l'humus d'où l'a tiré et façonné son créateur, l'homme (celui qui es fait de la terre *homo/humus*) va se voir et se savoir nu, c'est à-dire exposé à une indétermination

qui le soustrait à la nature ou à l'essence. Et plus précisément, ils vont se voir l'un l'autre nus, l'homme et la femme qui sont une seule chair et cette chair qui fait deux en s'exposant nue»⁷⁵. [The scene takes place in the moment in which the nudity accesses its own revelation. This is the scene of reaching the nudity. Rembrandt took the gesture in the middle of its completion: this vivid and tense movement that immobilizes its trait is one that will reveal to the humanity the nudity. Right out of the humus, the ground from where the Creator shaped him, the man (who is made of earth *homo / humus*) will see his own body and will know himself as naked, exposed to an indeterminacy, which withdraws him from the nature or from the essence. More precisely, man and women will see each other as naked, made only by flesh].

⁷⁵ Ferrari, F., Nancy, J.L., op.cit. p. 57.

Adam and Eve perceive for a while each other the flesh, and they make immediately a gesture to dress this nudity of the presence, first gesture of an endless collection of numberless gestures with which the humanity, from this moment on, will be forever dressed *in situation* even when naked.

«Le corps d'autrui est originellement corps en situation ; la chair au contraire apparaît comme *contingence pure de la présence*. Elle est ordinairement masquée par les fards, les vêtements etc.; surtout, elle est masquée par les *mouvements*; rien n'est moins *en chair* qu'une danseuse, fût-elle nue. Le désir est une tentative pour déshabiller le corps de ses mouvements comme de ses vêtements et de le faire exister comme pour chair»⁷⁶. [It is usually hidden by makeup, clothes etc.. but above all it is disguised by his movements, nothing is less flesh of a dancer, even if naked. The desire is the attempt to undress the body of his movements as clothes, to do it exist as pure flesh].

Hence, after the first gesture of Adam and Eve, it seems to be quiet impossible to perceive the flesh and nakedness of the *other*, namely to perceive the *other* in the simple dimension of his presence, since, as clearly highlighted by Sartre, the body will be always giving itself to the *others* as already *elsewhere* and not in the flesh. And the erotic gaze, according to Sartre, corresponds exactly to this impossible desire to grasp the *other* in its dimension of simple presence, as *contingence pure de la presence* and object: but the body slips always out, even when naked in front of me he distracts my attention from its nakedness referring always away through movements and gestures.

For this reason, by looking for a way of possession of the body of the *other* as *object*, Sartre had focused on sadomasochism. With its image of a body tied in awkward positions, the sadomasochism appears as the sadistic successful attempt to strip the *other's* body from those gestures that usually cover him, to finally reach the flesh; and, at the same time, it is the masochistic desire to hand over the unstable role of *subject* to finally perceive himself as simple but indisputable flesh through the perception of the *others*.

⁷⁶ Sartre, J.P., op.cit. p 384.

The masochist is no more *in situation*, he allows the sadist to reach that flesh usually concealed: in a body tight by laces, gestures are forcibly reabsorbed into the flesh, which is now shown exposed in its simple presence without shelter, as a soil suddenly without shrubs.

«Une désadaptation particulière qui détruit la situation dans le temps même où je la saisi et qui me livre l'épanouissement inerte de la chair comme une brusque apparition sous le mince vêtement del geste qui l'habillent»⁷⁷. [A particular disharmony that destroys the situation in the same moment I perceive it, and that gives me back the inert flourishing of the flesh as a sudden appearance under the thin veil of gestures that dress it].

On the body of the masochist resurfaces the flesh usually buried by gestures: at the evaporating of any possibility for the body to be already more than flesh, this last lies expose to the light as pure presence.

That is why Ferrari and Nancy defined the *flesh* as a «retreating of the subject». And not by chance, sadomasochism, with the resurgence of this flesh of body, is considered fundamental reference in the work of Francis Bacon, so committed in a withdrawing of the subject and in bringing out the *Figure* as the simple presence of the body detached from any incidental activity.

Indeed, Gille Deleuze, who deeply worked on Francis Bacon in the well-known *Logic of Sensation*⁷⁸, identified in the cages that cover and twist the bodies of Bacon, this attempt to hold the body; and what does it means to hold the body, if not to prevent his fleeing *in situation* toward something that is already in action, to finally expose itself to the eye as *flesh*?

For this reason, even without the presence of a real nude body, Ferrari and Nancy consecrate one of the chapters of their book to Francis Bacon, whose painting is an endless research, so that a Figure is given as *nude*.

Hence, according to Sartre, only in sadomasochism - as perhaps in death - the body is forced to re-emerge as flesh, in the form of that pure presence that we

⁷⁷ Sartre, J.P., op.cit. p.442

⁷⁸ Deleuze, G., *Francis Bacon: Logique de la Sensation*, Editions du Seuil, Paris 2002.

constantly cover. And beside this, the gesture always emerges again from the flesh, in its perpetual denial of it. The flesh never disappears but it is constantly covered even before clothes by that layer of gesture that Sartre calls *grace*:

«La facticité est donc habillée et masquée par la grâce : la nudité de la chair est toute entière présente mais elle ne peut pas être vue»⁷⁹. [The facticity is always dressed and masked by grace: the nudity of the body is present, but cannot be seen]

To describe the layer of gesture, Sartre chooses the Christian term *grace* recovered from the early medieval tradition. In *De Civitate Dei*, Augustine calls it *indumentum gratiae*, to bring attention to an idea of otherness in respect to the nudity of the body. In Augustine as well, by surrounding the man as a cloth, the *grace* covers the being naked of the body, which can disappear even in the apparent absence of clothes.

At the same time we cannot think of gesture as something that covers completely the flesh of the body and that allows it to fully disappear. Indeed, this would not coincide with an effect of the definition of body as instrument, which we had identified in the moment of becoming *object* of gesture?

Martin Heidegger in *Sein und Zeit* wrote that: «the particularity of what is immediately utilizable, is to disappear behind its usability, with the purpose to be – in the true sense of the word – used»⁸⁰.

The instrument is the item that disappears in the realization of its end: as long as it is good for its use, the tool disappears in front of the work it produces. While writing, I do not perceive the pen with which I write, because I am already projected into the dimension of the written and I focus on the pen only when it suddenly refuses to continue to write.

Likewise, the bodies of the monks or the ones of the actors of silent movies were instrument of something *said* through them: the grain of their bodies

⁷⁹ Sartre, J.P., op.cit., p. 441.

⁸⁰ Heidegger, M., *Sein und Zeit*, Max Niemeyer Verlag Tübingen 1967, p.69.

disappeared under signs and actions, since the body becomes invisible instrument of its ceremony, in all cases when gesture is already transformed into sign, fully *said* and thus no more *gesture*.

Hence, if while referring to the *object* the gesture tries to cover the flesh, but at the same time it cannot cover it completely as the sign or the action do, what kind of relation or balance of relations does the gesture have to intertwine with the flesh?

5.4 • THE RESISTANCE OF THE FLESH • I had stretched myself toward that glass beyond myself that I could not reach, underlining in this gesture myself as more than flesh; as one who has his possibilities in that glass.

But under a closer look, in this same movement, the body reveals the flesh that seemed to elude and discloses it precisely as a finite material: while indicating something, in stretching myself toward the *object*, I suggest my inability to stretch beyond the extension of my own flesh and I emphasize my presence to the world as nothing but flesh. Indeed I point to the *object* just because - imprisoned in my not extendable body - I am too far from it; I mime this word I do not remember, because I am made of flesh and separated from a language that does not actually belong to me.

Hence, in the form of tension toward the *object*, the gesture gets caught and reveals in the physicality of the flesh that it seemed to elude. While defining in *Le Théâtre et son Double* the real gesture (*geste absolu*) of Balinese theatre far from the signs of Western pantomime, Antonin Artaud describes this being caught in this physicality of the matter of the body.

«Il est certain que ce côté de theater pur, cette physique du geste absolu qui est idée lui-même et qui réduit les conceptions de l'esprit à passer, pour être perçues,

par les dédales et l'entrelacs fibreux de la matière»⁸¹ [It forces the spiritual concepts to pass through the maze and the tangled web of fibrous material to be perceived].

Furthermore, gestures have not just to pass through the interweaving of the flesh, but – to keep itself as gesture – it seems to be caught in its matter and limited extension. Gesture struggles to emerge from the body, like a word that remains stammered in the mouth, caught in the materiality of its own *saying*, that prevents it from being completely *said*, achieved, clear sign fully exposed.

To fully grasp an image similar to the relation that gesture seems to interlace with the flesh we can look to the pictures of the experiments that the French neurologist Duchenne de Boulogne conceived at the middle of Nineteenth Century.



Duchenne de Boulogne, *De L'Electrisation Localisée*, 1855

⁸¹ Artaud, A., *Le Théâtre et son Double*, in *Oeuvre*, op.cit., p 541.

Around 1835, he devised a technique of muscle stimulation, which was called *electrisation localisée*, that exploited a faradic shock on the surface of the skin to induce the face from the outside into different facial expressions. However, In his work *De l'Electrisation Localisée et de son Application à la Physiologie à la Pathologie et a la Therapeutique*, first published in 1855, Duchenne complains the impossibility to grasp in its clarity the desired expression, which remains too sensitive to the materiality of the face on which it is impressed.

For this reason we should consider the expressions of the bodies of Duchenne de Boulogne as perfect images of gestures: they are attempts to assume something from the outside, but they are embodied in the specific qualities of the matter of the flesh and in body of individual patients. The images published by Duchenne seem a clear image of the gestural expressiveness: the doctor and the nurses surround the patient from different sides and shape the flesh with instruments and electric shock, in order to achieve the *object* of expression; that *said* of facial expressions that, to remain gesture, clashes against the resistance and specificity of the flesh.

Hence, if Matthew Barney placed the needs of those bungee cords to not exhaust the power of the creative act in itself, the gesture finds the same rescue in the extension and restriction of the matter of the flesh: they are its limits that keep me from sliding inevitably in the object, that save me from reaching the *object*, becoming invisible instrument of its *said*.

Probably, without this finite body I could not have gestures, because I would not encounter the resistance of my body, and in any going toward the *object*, I would inevitably merge into it, and each external call would end in a *said*. We saw that in the Christian tradition Angels are devoid of gestures, because excluded from having any missing desire. But even when we suppose for a moment that they might have unfulfilled desires, they still could not express themselves through gestures, because in the moment of tension towards the *object* of their desire, they join him immediately without meeting any body limit: gestures would not have time to flourish as such, because every desire, without limitation, would be satisfied immediately.

Thus, trying to evade the body, the gesture reveals itself as spatially defined and made of flesh: not only the materiality and its being spatially limited allow the gesture, but also through gesture the man discovers the matter of the body, he finds the limit that allows him to give an physical extension to his own body. Helmuth Plessner, *Stages of the organic and man*, a founding essay of Anthropological philosophy, emphasized this by writing:

«Being spatial means to have identifiable space limitations. Everything, as spatial configuration, has its precise dimensions in a specific location. To put it in a more intuitively way: it has an outline, an identifiable periphery and a clear center»⁸².

If the *face* of the *other* helped me in withdrawing in the *subject* and intellectually conceiving my extension, the gestures – as shown in the debate about the *transitional object* – are necessary to physically perceive it. From my position in the middle of the world I stretch toward the *object* and my possible action, toward the language and the *other*, and without having the immediate possibility of achieving them, I discover the limits of my gesture, which are basically the limit of my body.

5.5 • POWER OF THE MATTER • We had initially thought that nothing prevented the *second movement* to achieve the *object*; we supposed the appearance of the *third movement* of resistance or escape from the *object*, as what is create by myself to save gesture from its mingling with *objects*.

Now, however, the *facticity* underlines how the *third movement* is not rising from my conscious perception or willing of protection of my gestures, rather it is the consequence of the encounter with the limit of my body.

⁸² Plessner, H., *Die Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch* , (1928). Tr. It., *I gradi dell'organico e l'Uomo*, Bollati Boringhieri,. Torino 2006, p. 110.

In the moment of tension towards *objects*, I come across the impassable limit of my own flesh. It is then that, without the possibility of going beyond it, I act like the fox pursuing the grapes of Aesop's fable, and I retreat. But as the fox retreats without forgetting the grapes and keeping them in the body in the form of a hunger that has not been satisfied, I embed the unreachable *object* in the form of my failure: I guard this defeat, and I leave it to the body to counterbalance my power to achieve, creating my gesture as power.

It is therefore in this way - through failure inherent in the gesture - that the finitude is no longer simple flesh, but factor of freedom: it is what allows me to be the one who can – and not that must – achieve its possibilities; the one who does not have always and inevitably to slip into the *objects* of the world to become their instrument.

If in *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle defined the *praxis* as what has in itself its own aim, and the *poiesis* as what has an aim outside itself, the gesture seems now to be more production than action. And what I produce in gesture is a continuous re-signification of my own body: if in gestural expressiveness my body does not evaporate, or is not completely exceeded, it is put under a new light. Through my gestures I am no longer only flesh, but - thanks to it - not even just tool for actions contained in the *objects* of the world that I always have to achieve. Instead I am the free possibility of do these actions, because I can fail them.

So, when I stretch my arm toward the glass I cannot reach and I return back in the body, I am no longer the one who at the beginning of gestures simply discovered that had his possibilities dispersed in the world, but the one who brings back these possibilities (made of possibilities of failure and possibilities of achievement) in his own body. By allowing me to escape from to the certainty of achieving the *objects* of the world, the presence of the flesh is the condition of the presence of possibilities. In an attempt to step over my body, the gesture uncovers its limit as what – as revealed by Sartre – set my body as free.

«Le sens commun conviendra avec nous, en effet, que l'être dit *libre* est celui qui peut *réaliser* ses projets. Mais pour que l'acte puisse comporter une *réalisation*, il convient que la simple projection d'une fin puisse se distinguer *a priori* de la réalisation de cette fin. S'il suffit de concevoir pour réaliser, me voilà plongé dans un monde semblable à celui de rêve, où le possible ne se distingue plus aucunement du réel»⁸³ [The common sense will agree with us that the being considered free, is the one that can achieve its plans. But because the act could lead to its achieving, it is better that the simple projection of an aim can be distinguished from the achieving of the same. If it is enough conceiving for achieving, I would be immersed in a world similar to that of the dream, in which the possible is no different from reality].

Through these words Sartre underscores how any limit means inserting a degree of freedom, by replacing the certainty of the achievement of specific aims with its possibility. So the gesture brings to light my finitude as the element that, making me fail, sets me free and frees myself from being always instrument of the world.

Maybe in not so many cases such as in the elderly bodies of *Kontakthof mit Damen und Herren ab '65* of Pina Bausch, dance succeeds in showing the materiality of the body in this perspective of limits and possibility. In 1978 the German choreographer developed *Kontakthof*, which focuses on the impossibility of a true love. Twenty years later Bausch decided to represent again the performance, by reconstructing it with dancers over 65 years: the bodies on scene engage themselves in a choreography previously written that, as a result of their age, they can no more achieve. But precisely for this reason, the body can no longer be seen as a transparent instrument of the choreographical *said*, but it becomes a matter filled with efforts and failures. It is the one that strives to *say* the choreography and that - in this unachieved tension to it - has the opportunity and not the certainty of *saying* it.

The gesture shows up the matter of my own body as what sets me in *power*. And it is not about an abstract power, rather all possibilities are embodied in

⁸³ Sartre, J.P., op.cit. p.528.

my own body and its matter: my chances of success and those of failure do not belong to anyone else, but to my own body and the limit of its matter.

As revealed by the analogy with Duchenne de Boulogne, the matter of the body becomes raw material of gesture: all gestures I can do, are already inscribed into the possibilities of the matter of my body, of which my gesture are made and in which my gesture are impressed.

«C'est ainsi que le geste d'un bloc de pierre sculpté différera du geste d'un tige métallique finement ciselée et émaillée; chaque matériau doit avoir et conserver son geste propre»⁸⁴. [Thus, a gesture of a block of carved stone will differ from a metal gesture or from the one finely crafted in ceramic; and each material must have and maintain its own gesture],

can be found written in a Belgian drawing handbook of the beginning of the century, in emphasizing the gesture as belonging to the same material of which it is composed.

In drawing attention to how the power of the gesture is power of the matter of the body, gesture remembers us how – generally speaking and beyond this research – there is no power except the power of matter.

And it is thus among the specific limits and possibilities of the matter of the body, that the *object* attracts gestures; it is in the matter of the body that the calling of the *object* tries to impress its imprint on the human body.

Hence, not only gesture does not cover completely the flesh as the sign does, but also this visible materiality of the body is hypothesis of gesture itself, the starting element that once denied would let fall the entire reasoning.

⁸⁴ *La figure humaine dans l'Art et l'Enseignement par FFGsPD de L'école Saint Luc*. Vromant, Bruxelles, 1918.

5.6 THE IMPRINT OF THE *OBJECT* • Hugh of St. Victor has been the first one in the Middle Ages to compare the body to a material, and the discipline of gesture to an action of carving them from the outside. Among the pages of *De institutione novitiorum*, published in Paris shortly before the end of 1140 with the purpose of teaching to the novices the way to the eternal bliss, the chapters from ten to twelve deal with the use of discipline. The twenty-first chapter is specifically devoted to the discipline of gesture and it opens with a first definition of it:

«Gestus est motus et figuratio membrorum corporis, ad amnem agendi et habendi modum»⁸⁵. [Gesture is the movement and the figuration of the body's limbs, according to whatever modality of action and attitude].

Hugh opens this definition of gesture to a plastic and figurative perspective, as something that shall be seen from the outside. And analogous and opposed to the perception, Hugh describes the construction of gesture as well, as something that appears from the outside. In sketching an image that foresees of many Centuries the attempts of Duchenne, Hugh describes the discipline of gesture as the work of a blacksmith, who heat up and beat the iron to give it a new form.

«Scio enim quam difficile sit, cor malitia induratum ad formam disciplinae et speciem honestis incurvare, sed necesse est ut dura materia cum facile ad formam non flectitur, ei et acrioris flammae incendium et mallei gravioris tunsio adhibeatur»⁸⁶.

Hugh of Saint Victor chooses the image of a durable material, partially difficult to shape but unchangeable once completely impressed on the body. Indeed, in line with a giving up to the gestural expressiveness that depicts all the portrayals of gesture in monastic rules, Hugh intends a form of perfect adhesion of the body to a rule given from the outside, a sign that the body

⁸⁵ Hugo of St. Victor, *De institutione novitiorum*, cap. 12, PL 176, 938.

⁸⁶ Ibid, on line edition. <http://books.google.com/books?id=mDtAAAAAcAAJ>

must simply carry on. Through the image of the blacksmith, Hugh surrounds the body of the novice with an armor of strong signs, and the body underneath become invisible support of this armor of exposure of *said*, inside which it would be kept as prisoner.

The image of being jailed in the *said* is far from being prerogative of the Middle Ages. Far from the monastic context, this same crystallization of gesture in hard sign is the one we have seen identified by Tiqqun as primary element of the image of the *Jeune-Fille*, whose attempts work in the direction of becoming pure sign to the *other's* eye. And furthermore, Tiqqun recovers the idea of being imprisoned in an armor of signs that hides the body, while saying:

«La Jeune-Fille est le geôlier d'elle-même, prisonnière d'un corps fait signe dans un langage fait de corps»⁸⁷. Et « ce qu'elle aime, c'est *son image*, c'est à dire quelque chose qui ne lui est pas seulement étranger et extérieur, mais qui au plein sens du terme, la *possède*. La Jeune-Fille vit sous la tyrannie de ce maître ingrat»⁸⁸. [The Jeune-Fille is the jailer of herself, prisoner of a body become sign in a language of bodies]. And [What she loves is her image, that is something that not only is foreign and external to her, but that in the full sense of the word possesses her].

The novice and the *Jeune-Filles* are jailed inside an armor made of signs; their skin is replaced with a completely *said*; with their image – *something foreign and external* – that protects or detains the body underneath, keeping it as invisible. But all these precautions to cover the body push inescapably to ask: what does this layer of sign have to protect?

To answer this question we have to read again the relationship built between the signs and the body underneath in the actions of the waiter during his ceremonial, where Sartre concluded by writing:

⁸⁷ Ibid. p.53.

⁸⁸ Ibid. p.60.

«Voilà bien des précautions pour emprisonner l'homme dans ce qu'il est. Comme si nous vivons dans la crainte perpétuelle qu'il n'y échappe, qu'il ne déborde et n'élude toute à coup sa condition»⁸⁹. [Yet, many precautions to imprison a man in what he is. As if we were living in the perpetual fear that he could escape or overflow, or suddenly circumvent his condition].

To prevent the matter of the body to escape in the countless possibilities of the same *saying* of the matter, the ceremony jails it in a shaped code of signs.

These are the meaning of the words used by Baron Felix Hezerquez, the court page of Louis XVI, in his *Souvenirs d'un page de la cour de Louis XVI*, while saying that «the ceremonies are one of the most important supports of the king Luis. Undress the prince of the authority that surrounds him and he will be, in the eyes of many, no more than an uncertain man»⁹⁰. And this is the perpetual fear that Sartre gives us back in the condition of the ceremony: the uncertainty of the *saying*, revealed by the breaking out of the simple matter with its still-living numberless possibilities.

Hence, this is the meaning of the iron armor carved by Hugh's blacksmith: it is not useful just to express the *said*, but to hide the body underneath as well. The signs that refer only to an otherness, fully deny in their rigidity the presence of the body underneath; because this presence of the body, if it suddenly comes out, it would render indeterminate the *said*, by making spring out a rush of uncertain *saying*.

5.7 • THE WIND OF THE OBJECT • We should then imagine - as opposed to the armor of signs - a different consistency for the image of the impression on the materiality of the body, about a gesture able to keep itself as gesture.

⁸⁹ Sartre, J.P., op.cit. p.94.

⁹⁰ Hezerquez, F., *Souvenirs d'un page de la cour de Louis XVI*, Montfort Gerard, 2002, 122.

First of all it must be imagined as something able to waive that shaped *said*; stopping a moment before the creation of a unique shape.

To grasp the image of this unshaped matter, it would be useful to read the line in which Giordano Bruno in *The Art of Memory* describes the matter before the creation, as that which precedes and constantly waits on the birth of forms without exhausting itself in the act of their reception. The matter is not saturated once it receives artistic shape, and this is attested by matter's eternal inclination to put on new ones; rather the matter is distinguished by a perpetual state of availability, or as the power to receive forms of creation.

Even more supporting in understanding the behavior of the impression of gestures on the body, is the way through which, to explain the behaviour of this power of the matter, Bruno depicts the image of a cloud driven by the winds:

«Il primo soggetto, secondo i principi della *Clavis magna*, è un caos fantastico, [...] e pare che questo caos non si comporti diversamente da una nube sospinta dall'esterno dai venti, la quale, a causa delle differenze e delle proprietà degli impulsi, è in grado di assumere tutte le infinite figure della specie»⁹¹ [The first subject, according to the principles of *Clavis magna*, is an extraordinary chaos [...], and it does not seem to behave differently from a cloud; shaped by the wind, assuming myriad shapes].

Rather than the impression on the body suggested by Hugh, this image sets the correct perception of the relationship between *objects* and impression of gestures in the matter of the body.

The calling of the *object* is an external wind that shakes the body pushing and pulling gestures, but still unable to crystallize them in a fixed forms. Driven by the winds of the *object* and magnetized by a perpetual and unreachable necessity to mean, gesture modifies the body allowing it to assume endless shapes.

⁹¹ Bruno, G. *L'arte della memoria* [parte seconda, I – II]. op. cit., p. 89-90

No coincidence that the image of the Nymph - which perhaps embodies the most in Western tradition a body made of gestures - lives under a constant breeze. In the words used by André Jolles in a letter to Aby Warburg, she moves «like an agile ship with the swollen sail, that ploughs rhythmically the relentless waters»⁹².

The whole canvas of Botticelli's *La primavera* is crossed by a wind that touches the light dresses; the same wind that elsewhere in Botticelli ruffles the hair of the *Venus rising*. It is a passion said from outside, the *Pathos* of Warburg seeking for its imprint among centuries.



Botticelli, *La Primavera*, 1482, Galleria degli Uffizi, Firenze.

And yet, in a radical change of perspective in respect to the Middle Ages, it is a conception of gesture that does not cover the body, rather it fights against the resistance of the same matter in which is imprinted.

If in her flimsiness, the Nymph seems to always embody the idea of gesture in itself, the one painted by Botticelli on the right of *La Primavera*, clearly

⁹² André Jolles. *Lettera ad Aby Warburg*, in *Opere di Warburg*, p. 245.

describes this fight of the different forces of a gesture, which are able to keep the gesture as such. She is attracted and escapes at the same time the wind of *said*: Aeolus blows on her, shaping the matter of her clothes and trying to get her jailed in a complete form, while the Nymph - so similar to Daphne escaping from Apollo to not be transformed in *object* - escapes the possibility of being full *said* from the outside.

This Renaissance wind is the closest image to the calling of the *object* that we described as the origin of gesture. And it is in writing about the hair and draping of the nymphs moved by this wind, which in Renaissance canvases invests the bodies from the outside stroking clothes and modeling shapes, that Didi-Huberman, in his study of Aby Warburg, described it as a passion looking for its imprint on the body:

«Comme si une énergie inconsciente – Warburg parle d'*éléments dépourvus de volonté* – cherchait le subjectile de son empreinte dans le matériel si indifférent mais plastique, des draperies ou des chevelures»⁹³ [As if an unconscious energy - Warburg speaks of elements without will - would be looking for the subjectile of its imprint in the material, indifferent but statuesque, of drapery and hair].

The description given by Didi-Huberman of this *unconscious energy* surrounding the body and creating gestures on it, lies exactly in between the idea of supernatural forces of the medieval conception of gesture as acted by God and the Evil and its more prosaic transformation in the calling of the *object* in modernity.

Indeed, beside drapery and hair, the unconscious energy of Warburg looks for its imprint in the matter of the body, creating gesture. On the one side the matter of the body responds to the wind of the calling of the *object* in undertaking gestures, in a form of assumption that was already suggested by the etymology of the word; but on the other hand the wind does not have the coercive forces of the blacksmith of Hugh, and is no more able to transform the matter in a fully *said*.

⁹³ Didi-Huberman, G., *L'Image survivante*, Les Editions del Minuit, Paris 2002, p.242.

It is under this light that we should consider the abundance of gestures in Renaissance paintings, all those twisted little fingers that, as in Verrocchio's *Tobiolo e l'Angelo*, while *saying* something, seem to resist any meaning. These *insignificant* gestures as the one of Tobiolo weave a layer of *saying* above the body, able of veiling the body without reaching the armor of *said*. The wind of the *object* carves the body and meet the resistance of the flesh, which prevent it from reaching a completely *said*.

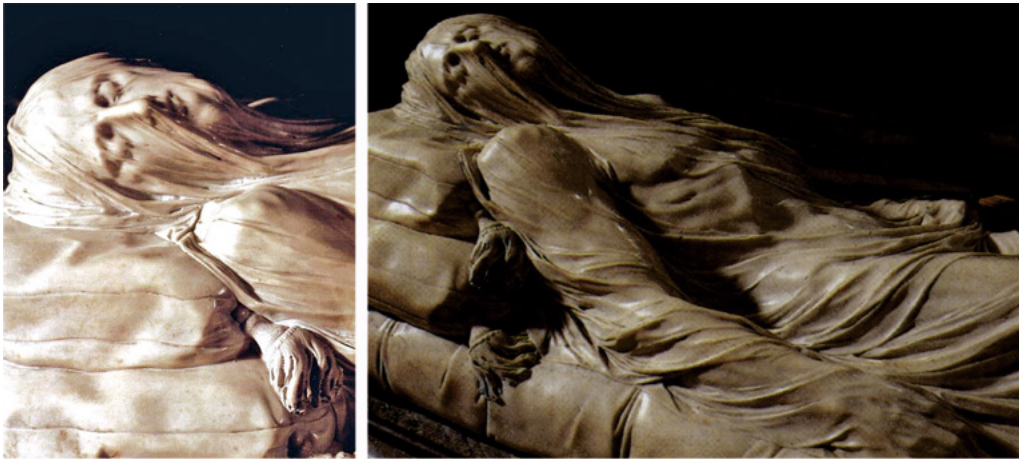


Andrea Verrocchio, *Tobiolo e l'Angelo*, 1470-1475, London National Gallery

Insubstantial as the dresses of the Nymphs, those gestures cover, but strongly manifest at the same time, the matter of the body in which they are caught. The gesture in the Renaissance recovers completely the idea of a light dress, metaphor that from the Latin *habitus* and throughout the Christian tradition of Augustinian *Indumenta gratiae*, it has not been alien to gesture at all.

No longer seen as supernatural, the *grace* of the dress of gesture becomes the simple possibility of the body of exposing itself as more than flesh: the movements of gestures stitch around the body a vectorial dress that covers the body and diverts the attention of the gaze of the *others* beyond. And, if we have seen the extraneousness of a cover of signs becoming a shell of the body, the consistency of the veil of gesture shall be light enough to still reveal the presence of the body underneath. This lightness of the dress allows a new relationship of visibility with the flesh: the body is no longer canceled and denied by the thickness of the armor, but revealed in the transparency of the dress. Because the veil of *graces* - as any veil - is something that veils and reveals the flesh at the same time.

If we give a look to the famous *Veiled Christ* (1753) conserved in the Sansevero Chapel in Naples, the folds and pleats of the thin vail sculpted by Giuseppe Sanmartino allude in the dramatic drapery to the passion and to more than the simple presence of a dead body. But this cover does not hide the flesh of the Christ, which instead must be completely revealed in all its presence of dead flesh exposed to the eyes of the faithful.



Sanmartino, *Cristo Velato*, 1753, Cappella Sansevero Napoli.

Similarly, the veil of gestures must remain light enough to let the flesh always visible underneath. This is the difficulty of the consistency of gesture: to keep itself intermediate in between the veiling and unveiling; between being the

image of something beyond the flesh (that covers the same flesh), and having at the same time a strong will to manifest the flesh.

In his philosophy, Jacques Rancière distinguishes the images in two different categories, the *Image-hieroglyphic* and the *Image-presence*. On the one side, the *image-hieroglyphic* is a form referring just to its meaning, by eluding its matter. Into a path about the definition of gesture, to the *image-hieroglyphic* would so belong the movements of the adolescents, the ones of the Monks and Jeune-Filles, and all those signs already outside of gestural expressiveness and exposed on the body as pure *said*. (Vincenzo Requeno two centuries before in *Scoperta della Chironomia*, highest expression of an idea of gesture as rule, had used the same word in saying: «Gli oratori usarono le figure de' gesti, come gli Egizj le figure de' geroglifici, delle quali ognuna corrispondeva almeno ad una parola»⁹⁴ [The orators used figures of gestures, like Egyptians the hieroglyphics]).

On the other side, the *image-presence* celebrates only a presence that does not refer to anything else, as it could for example be a monument of granite in the purpose of celebrating the granite itself. And even this image is absolutely not the one that could describe gestural expressiveness, which shall instead always refer to something beyond the body, and in particular to that *object* toward which is attracted, rising from being just a simple movement.

Gesture should hence remain in an intermediate between the two categories of images set by Rancière, a dialectic image between the presence and the *elsewhere*, between the body and the *object*: a vectorial dress that suggests an otherness while announcing a body of matter that lies underneath it.

Hence, if the armor of signs of Hugh was rigid and opaque enough to not necessarily require the presence of a body beneath, since in the eyes of the onlookers it behaves as if there might be a body there, the dress would not be conceivable without the body, and it necessarily requests the presence of the body below. About this relation of the dress with the body, in *Nudità*,

⁹⁴ Requeno, V., *Scoperta della Chironomia*, op.cit. p.9.

Agamben writes:

«In questa esteriorità della mera veste, si esprime qualcosa di molto importante, e cioè che la grazie presuppone la natura creata, la sua assenza di vesti come la sua possibilità di essere denudata»⁹⁵. [In this mere externals of clothes, something very important is expressed, namely that grace presupposes the created nature, its lack of clothes as his chances of being undressed].

And in these words he emphasizes how it cannot exist dress without a body to be covered, as there cannot be gestures without a flesh to be overstepped.

This necessary presence of the body beneath gestures opens to the last question of this research. Conceived as what lie under the veil of gesture, the body is then not simply hypothesis of gesture, namely necessary element of a discourse on gestural expressiveness, but a literal *hypothesis* as well.

But in this perspective where should we imagine the position of our gestures in relation with the human body: if we described them as organized in a veil of gesture, should we really think of them as located above the body?

⁹⁵ Agamben, G., *Nudità*, Nottetempo, Roma 2009, p.94.

6. LIFE ON THE THRESHOLD OF THE BODY

6.1 • THE INTERSTITIAL SPACE • In *L'image survivante* George Didi-Huberman deepens the analysis about the clothes of the Nymph in saying:

«On danse avec son vêtement autant qu'avec son corps; ou, plutôt, le vêtement devient quelque chose comme l'espace intersticiel – lui-même dansant – entre le corps et l'atmosphère qu'il habite»⁹⁶ [One can dance with the clothes as with the body, or rather, the dress becomes a kind of interstitial space - which dances as well - between the body and the atmosphere it lives.]

Didi-Huberman describes a dress dancing *between* the body and the atmosphere it lives in: but should we think at this same gap as the space in which gestures live in?

First, the *interstitial space* described by Didi-Huberman is to be identified as the space that the gesture created at the beginning of gestural expressiveness, in the moment of the *Ur-teil*: in accomplishing the first movement of gestural expressiveness, I rolled out that distance between myself as a body and the world as *objects* and the gesture keeps itself in an intermediate in between. For this reason, as we have shown that the gesture does not belong to the world of *objects* and it strongly refuses to achieve them, we cannot say that it belongs to the body, because it is already out from the body, beyond it.

⁹⁶ "Didi-Huberman, G., *L'image survivante*, op.cit. p. 262.

Placed on a precarious balance between the body and the *object*, gesture takes both as limits, refusing to be reduced to one of them, and refusing to reduce the distance between them. And the daily repetition of gestures, going out of the body and preventing at the same time the body from being always already in the action of the world, keeps alive this distance between body and world.

At the same time, as gesture is not completely indifferent to the *object*, being in itself absence of that precise *object*, it is not completely indifferent to the body, because it is from the body - as a fertile field and a basin of possibilities of any gesture - that gesture was born.

Hence, even if similar to the position of the Nymph's dress described by Didi-Huberman, the gesture cannot be completely considered as a such, since even placed above the body, it is necessarily made of it.

When, while describing the accessories of Renaissance canvases, Didi-Huberman was outlining the action of the outer passion looking for its imprint in the matter of hair and draperies as on the one of the body, he used the specific term *subjectile* to describe this same matter:

«Comme si une energy inconsciente – Warburg parle d'*éléments dépourvus de volonté* – cherchait le subjectile de son empreinte dans le matériau si indifferent mais plastique, des draperies ou des chevelires»⁹⁷. [an unconscious energy - Warburg speaks of elements without will - would be looking for the subjectile of its imprint in the material, indifferent but statuesque, of drapery and hair].

Although this word is not so common in French, it has a very strong tradition in French contemporary philosophy, being the term used in several cases by Antonin Artaud to define that substratum of matter that lies beneath his drawing, and deepened by Jacques Derrida, in *Forcener le subjectile*, his work about the paper drawings of the play-writer and poet of Marseille.

Firstly defined simply as the «support, surface or material, [...] that is

⁹⁷ Didi-Huberman, G., *L'Image survivante*, op.cit. p.242.

distinguished both from the shape and from the sense of representation»⁹⁸, the concept of *subjectile* is slowly excavated by Derrida in a more complex way. Indeed, Derrida points out how the term *subjectile* contains within it the roots *sub* and *jecter*, prompter of a *movement* (*jecter*, *projecter*) that from below (sub) projects images on the surface. Therefore the term implies not just being the physical basis of creation, but fertile soil that has the responsibility for the creation itself. And to focus on this dual aspect of the support, Derrida likens the *subjectile* to a woman in labor:

«The *subjectile* can become everything; settled in one form or another. But the dramaturgy of its becoming increasingly oscillates between the transitivity of *iacére* and the intransitivity of *iacere*. [...]. In the first case, *iaceo* I'm lying down [...]. In the second case, *iacio*, I cast something, a bullet, some stones, a fire, an arrow»⁹⁹.

The matter of gesture is thus a *subjectile* that lies beneath, co participating at the creation of gesture at the same time.

In an analysis of the matter that precedes the biblical Creation, Gerschom Scholem had drawn attention on this specific double aspect of a matter able to participate to the Creation. According to his comment to the *Book of Zohar*, the matter before the Creation had not only shapes in power, rather it had a share in the birth of shapes. To refer to the Hebrew terms used in the Jewish tradition, the *tohu* of formless matter is always united to the *vohu* or power of forming forces. Like a fertile womb, that broods all possible images and that takes part to the creation, giving birth to images on the surface and beyond the surface. Scholem describes them this way:

«They are stones immersed in the abyss [forms bathed in primordial matter] and they emerge out [as forming forces] from their being imprinted in the *tohu*»¹⁰⁰.

⁹⁸ Derrida, J., *Forcener le subjectil. Antonin Artaud: Dessins et portraits*, Ed. Paule Thevenin. Paris: Gallimard 1986, p. 15.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p.29.

¹⁰⁰ Scholem, G. *Die Geheimnisse der Schopfung*, Surhkamp, Frankfurt, 1971. (tr. it *I segreti della creazione*. Adelphi, Milano, 2003, p.78).

Hence, from their being imprinted in the matter of the body, gestures are stones of body thrown over the body, whose matter co participate at their same creation. And defining the matter of the body as a *subjectile*, Didi-Huberman clarifies this constitution of gestures as the elements that bloom from the body and already above it. They are embodied in it, but earn a living space above it, being a kind of ornament that is part of the structure from which is supported.

And exactly as a flower or a shrub once cut from the soil, loses its ties with the earth and stops living to become an *object*, gesture becomes *object* in the moment of the loss of its link with the original body, once completely shaped in an action or in a fully *said*.

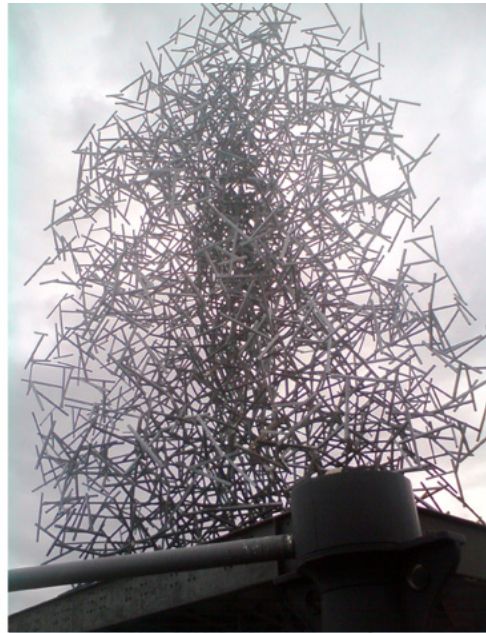
Again Gershom Scholem clarifies how the connection with the matter is to be seen as a warranty of still living possibilities: Scholem explains that the face of Adam would have received as a gift the ability to contain within itself all the faces of the men yet to come, precisely thanks to a relationship he maintained with the earth (*Adama*), source from which it was created and that he never rejected, keeping into himself in his same name (*Adam*). The relationship with the earth would have kept powerful the face of Adam, which never runs out in a simple *said* face. Similarly, only by maintaining this connection with the body, with its matter of possible and failure, gesture may be kept as gesture. In order to be *saying* and not *said*, to be *possible* and not *object*, gesture cannot be completely detached from the original matter, but it must go out from the body without denying its matter.

The gestures are made of the material of the body: while referring to an otherness, they are constantly in motion on the background of the body, a bas-relief of possibilities on the homogeneous matter of the body that celebrates the possibilities of the same matter. Gestures flourish as matter of the body over the matter of the body, without covering it completely, rather revolving around it as an insubstantial cloud of matter that still allows a glimpse on the body below.

Hence, even more than the light Renaissance dress of the Nymph, perhaps no image more than the sculptures of the contemporary British artist Anthony Gormley (born 1959), gives a crystal-clear model of gestural expressiveness in its relation with the body.



Gormley, *Quantum Cloud XX (tornado)*, 2000 Stainless steel, Raymond and Patsy Nasher Collection, Dallas, Texas



Gormley, *Quantum Cloud*, 1999, London, Millenium Dome.

Since the late nineties, Gormley started a series of works entitled *Quantum Clouds*, in which he worked in addition, by veiling his anthropomorphic sculptures of the same material they are made: the image of the body is surrounded by a cloud of fragile material, caught in the uncertainty of the shape. A residual outline of a body at the centre of the sculpture is veiled by the same matter it is made: its possibilities of changing shape and relation towards the world placed over it to create a cloud of matter able to significantly describes the *interstitial space* of gestural expressiveness.

6.2 • SURVIVAL • Hence, driven by the winds of the *object* and being inconsistent as the dress of the Nymph, the cloud of gestures is blown in different directions without crystallizing in one form, and without leaving the body. It surrounds the body, as a dust of possibilities orbiting around the matter of the body, and sculpting and preserving a space between the body and the world. If from Giordano Bruno to Antony Gormley the image of possibility passes through the unstable shape of the cloud, to it it refers Italo Calvino as well, while in the quoted passage of *La redenzione degli Oggetti*, he writes:

«Se questa sfera di segni che ci circonda del suo fitto pulviscolo viene negata l'uomo non sopravvive»¹⁰¹. [If this sphere of signs, which surrounds us with its thick dust, is denied, the man does not survive].

But in which sense we should interpret the word *survive* used by Calvino?

In tracing a new discipline that became known as iconography (and that Giorgio Agamben in *Note sul Gesto* proposes to reconsider as an history of gestures), Aby Warburg coined the term *Nachleben* to define a sort of afterlife of the image that is often translated as a *survival*. Warburg set the *Nachleben* in the possibility of returning of the same *Pathosformeln* (formulas of pathos) in different cultures and centuries away from each other.

Noting a fresco by Ghirlandaio, in which a young nymph was portrayed with a basket on her head, Warburg was able to find the same figure not only in antiquity, but also in medieval illustrations and even in the Native American community: they are emerged in the art history in most cases without a mutual knowledge of the same figure. According to Warburg, a pathetic energy crosses art history leaving its imprint in gestures created in centuries distant from each other. The *Pathosformeln* live submerged in the history of art and then re-emerges on the surface in the form of this posthumous life. Crystallized in statuesque gestures, those images exhibit this *Nachleben*, the possibility of the survival of the same image.

¹⁰¹ Calvino, I., *La redenzione degli Oggetti*, in *Collezione di Sabbia*, op.cit.

Warburg underlines how the *Pathosformeln* have in themselves a double task: they manifest their presence while referring to their otherness. And perhaps the same parcel *Nach-* should bring our attention to that going toward, inherent in these images.

To quote Warburg is here useful, since we defined gesture as well as an affirmation of a present body that overcomes itself in going already toward something beyond, a living of the body projected toward the worlds. Should we use Warburg to consider the term *Nachleben* of gesture in its most literal sense, as what lies beyond the life itself, going in the direction of something?

Survival, *survivance*, *sopravvivenza* which means *over the life*, being more than a biological life, more than that massive body underlined by Sartre as the *being-in-itself*: hence, there is a first sphere of life, which marks the extension of our body into a simple bodily presence: it is what we called *being-in-itself*, *object* or *nudity* and that now we call *life*; but then there is also a *first periphery*, a second sphere of possibilities, which is still part of the body and that covers the flesh, and could be called *survival*.

The sphere of gestures that covers the body is then more than mere decoration, it reflects the confidence of man in his own possibilities and projects: through gestures the man expresses the tension towards a desired and not yet realized future. That is why, we could say that in the abasement of this sphere of human gestures and dust of signs that surrounds the body and that we now can call *survival*, the man – as clearly pointed out by Italo Calvino – does not survive but simply live.

Moving forward from this considerations, it is then fundamental to re-read the figure of the *Muslim* living in the concentration camp, as described by several survivors and witnesses of the Holocaust, and as so carefully analyzed by Giorgio Agamben in *Quel che resta di Auschwitz: L'archivio e il testimone (Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive. Homo Sacer III)*.

In it, opening the reasoning on biopolitic of the body, the *Muslim* is described as being purely organic, biological residue of the human being. His name

would come from the squatting position he used to assume, similar to the one of a praying Muslim or, according to a second version, from the idea of total submission as translation of the word *Islam*. Those who survived the Holocaust described the Muslim as a figure on the margins of life: motionless, with no reactions or impulses, it is confined in his own body from which he seems he cannot get out.

What we have to underline is that the specific nature of the condition of the *Muslim* is absolutely not limited to a physical destruction, which indeed gripped in the same way all the inhabitants of the concentration camp. The condition of the Muslim is something different from the physical fatigue, something that could be called, with Gilles Deleuze, the *exhaustion*.

«L'épuisé c'est beaucoup plus que le fatigué. [...] Le fatigue a seulement épuisé la réalisation, tandis que l'épuisé épuise tout le possible. Le fatigué ne peut plus réaliser, mais l'épuisé ne peut plus possibiliser»¹⁰². [The exhausted is much more than the tired. The tired cannot achieve, but the exhausted has no more possibilities].

Indeed, in analyzing the theatrical production of Beckett, and in focusing on *Quad*, Delouse writes a short essay entitled *L'Épée*, in analyzing the moment in which the bodies that walk in a manic way along all sides of the square of Beckett's *Quad* suddenly stop. Delouse writes that this does not happen because of tiredness, rather it happens because they have exhausted all possible combinations of interacting with that space.

Thus, Delouse reveals how *exhaustion* has nothing to do with action, but with possibilities: it is not a physical destruction, but the loss of a relationship with a world yet to achieve, it has to do with the end of trust in an external *object* and possibilities that I have in the future.

If the *Muslim* can no more be projected outside of himself, it is because he lost any faith in possibilities, and he lost his cloud of gestures, which were symptoms of this trust in the world. Even Bethlehem describes the *Muslim* of

¹⁰² Deleuze, G., *L'Épuisé*, in Beckett, S., *Quad*, Les Editions de Minuit, Paris 1992, p.57.

the concentration camp as the one, who gave up any reaction, reduced to biological life: he presents himself to the eyes of the others deprived of any cloud of survival and reduced to *life, object or being-in-itself*. And maybe, in modernity, only the figure of *Muslim* saw the realization in a context of complete horror of that tenacious sartorial sadistic attempt to appropriate the *other's* body in the form of flesh.

So, the condition of the *Muslim* has to do with the will to destroy this fundamental periphery of the body. The cloud of gesture, that space of possibilities and relations with the world so well represented by Antonym Gormley, evaporates in front of the absence of any project or any horizon that exceeds the body, and the interstitial space is reabsorbed, reduced to the massive presence of the body, to this remnant of it.

The *Muslim* is the one who is forced to live inside the threshold of the body, when having already given up to survive; the one who has already lost the survival space of his periphery without having yet met his death.

Yet, if the other internees of the Lager considered already the *Muslim* as an image of death, and tried to banish him as foretelling image of their same death, it is because the perception of a living body is given to the other more in the sphere of survival than in the one of life.

Likewise, at the beginning of this research, in dealing with the category of movement, Didi-Huberman has been quoted, while writing:

«Je pourrai dire qu' *il y a UN reste de vie* seulement quand je pourrai dire que *cela peut encore bouger*, de quelque façon que se soit. Toute problématique de la survivance passe, phénoménologiquement parlant, par UN problème de mouvement organique»¹⁰³. [I can say that there is a remnant of life only when I can say that one can still move in one way or another. Each issue of survival passes, Phenomenologically speaking, through an issue of organic movement].

And we should now emphasize that if there is no *life* without *movement*, there

¹⁰³ Didi-Huberman, G., *L'image survivante. Histoire de l'art et temps de fantômes selon Aby Warburg*, Les Edition de Minuit, Paris 2002. p. 191

is no *survival* without the *second movement* or a *movement toward*, already beyond the organic body.

We could not otherwise explain all the attention given - in a completely different context - in re-creating absolutely insignificant gestures and movements of the human body in the inanimate figure of cartoon characters or puppets. This, well beyond the aim of a communication, it is from the sphere of gestures that we recognize in them a human *life* in the form of its *survival*. If Hugh of St. Victor in the Middle Ages was referring to the gesture in the form of *indicium*, we should consider it now as evidence of a *survival* of the body. Hence, marginal and peripheral elements, gestures are much more than mere decoration, but they testify to the *being-more-than-body* of the body itself.

Furthermore, that an unnecessary and changeable peripheral element might be fundamental in establishing a central condition, it has been abundantly shown by Warburg himself. It is not known whether the sentence «God is on the details» has ultimately really to be attributed to the historian of Hamburg, who certainly has a strong obsession with image details.

According to Warburg, details are far from being insignificant, rather they are the essence of the body, becoming constitutive of the figure. In Botticelli's *La Nascita della Venere*, the central composure is magnificently surrounded by the impetuous shape of the blonde hair, which reveals the passion of the same image. Hair, clothes and gestures are external attributes that define the image much more than the body in the middle of them. If we call them accessories, they should be conceived through Didi-Huberman *constituent accessories*: what would indeed be the image of the Nymph without her moving clothes or the Venus without the hair stirred by the wind?

To catch the importance of this being structure of details, George Didi-Huberman identifies in Warburg's obsession for details the heritage of an aspect of the evolutionary thought brought to light by Darwin just some years before. Didi-Huberman focuses on what is identified as a *principle of movement*, namely the persistence of secondary traits in the evolutionary

theory: if the evolution proceeds through transformation of primary traits, Darwin focused on the re-emergence of insignificant and apparently disappeared secondary details.

«Le principe du *déplacement* énoncé dans *L'Expression de emotions* correspond aux intuitions premières de Warburg lorsqu'il cherchait à définir, en 1893, le mode de survivance des formules antiques de pathos dans les *accessoires animés* – vêtements, chevelures – des personnages si étrangement impassible et *désaffectés* de Botticelli. Le déplacement nomme bien la loi figurale si efficace des tableaux du maître florentin : toute le *mouvement passionnel de l'âme* (leidenschaftliche Seelenbewegung), ou *cause intérieure*, passe par un *accessoire extérieure animé* (äusserlich bewegtes Beiwerk)»¹⁰⁴. [The principle of displacement exposed in *Expression of Emotions* corresponds to first intuitions of Warburg when in 1893 he tried to define the mode of survival of ancient formulas of pathos, on moving *accessories* - clothes, hair - of the characters so strangely impassible and *deseccrated* of Botticelli. Displacement is a term that well defines the effective figurative law of the paintings of the Florentine master: the whole *passionate movement of soul* (leidenschaftliche Seelenbewegung) or *inner cause* passes through an *animated external accessory* (äusserlich bewegtes Beiwerk)]

In the same way, gesture is not body but is constitutive of the body; and similar to the objects of Benjamin's collection described in the *Passagenwerk*, which illuminate the inconsistency of a center in perpetual redefinition, man collects gestures of his survival around his living space.

But if we have seen the evaporation of the cloud of gesture in the withdrawing - or in being confined - of the subject within the threshold of the body, what would happen in the opposite direction, in sinking into the world, and in what has been partially incorrectly defined from contemporary philosophy as alienation of the *subject*?

¹⁰⁴ Didi-Huberman, G., op.cit. p.242

6.3 • THE MAN WITHOUT *OBJECT* • We described the moment of becoming instrument of the world that the body experiences in achieving the *object*: by reaching it, the body is denied as invisible instrument or support of signs, it seems to have to live completely ignored and voted just to accomplish that *object* he was tending toward.

What is commonly called *alienation* has been seen by modern philosophy as part of this process: a phenomenon in which a fragmented subject can recognize himself just in the *objects* he created, reaching them through work. In this definition of *alienation*, the *subject* seems to disappear to reappear just as a correlative of a landscape of *objects*, in relation to which he finds himself as displaced instrument. According to this hypothesis, the subject would live *in the objects*, and it would find himself in the world as stranger to itself.

However, how can one imagine a dispersal of the *subject* in the world? A clear contradiction is placed in this statement about *alienation*: indeed, or one remains *subject* in the body, or we should consider that he has become something else than what it formerly was. But then, we could no longer speak of *alienation of the subject*, since there is no longer *subject* to talk about.

Martin Heidegger's *Dasein* perfectly reveals the impossibility of this substantial transformation, by saying that the *subject* cannot be found elsewhere than in the *subject* itself. And by analyzing this substantial aspect of Heideggerian subject in *Sans Objet*, Franck Fischbach writes:

«Concevoir l'aliénation comme une perte ou un oubli de soi au profit d'un être ou d'une réalité dont le mode d'être est autre au sien, étranger au sien, c'est implicitement attribuer à l'être ainsi aliéné une nature substantielle qu'il perdrait dans l'aliénation, une nature substantielle par rapport à laquelle l'aliénation constituerait un écart dont la conséquence serait de se trouver étranger à soi, désapproprié de soi»¹⁰⁵. [To conceive alienation as a loss or an extinction of oneself for the benefit of reality, whose mode of being is other than its own and

¹⁰⁵ Fischbach, F., *Sans Objet, Capitalisme, Subjectivité, Aliénation* . Librairie Philosophique Vrin, Paris 2009, p.49,

foreign to itself, it implicitly means to attribute to a so alienated being, a substantial nature that would be lost in alienation. A substantial nature, in relation to which the alienation would constitute a gap whose consequence would be to find the subject as stranger to himself, dis-appropriated from himself].

Furthermore, Fischbach underlines that if the issues of the *alienation* were related for the man to its being instrument of production of *objects*, the inactivity should be considered as the only way for the man to prevent it. Hence, Marx reveals how the *alienation* is not a loss of the *subject* in the *objects* of the world, rather it consists in a form of detachment that the man undergoes in respect of its own production: if in *Das Kapital*, Marx specifies the problem within the class struggle and workers production, by stressing that it is basically just the fact that the worker can no longer be identifies as the master of his *object* that makes him alienated, even more interesting is the *Manuscripts of 1844*, in which, years before *Das Kapital*, he portrays the image of the *alienation* in a body who is not lost into the world, rather that has simply broken a tie with it.

The image of this detachment is what we have seen in the *instant* of disjoining of the artistic production revealed by Dino Formaggio as a dramatic fracture that the artist experiences in its relationship with the art *object*.

In this disconnection, body and *object* did not keep anything of each other: on the one side the artist, as the worker's body, becomes the instrument of a production of *objects (said)*, and it does not preserve anything of the working or artistic activity (*saying*); on the other side, the *object* becomes hopelessly immutable *object*, and the worker can no longer have any possibility of *saying* more on him. So, in its detachment, it is no longer *object of the subject*, related to the *subject*, and the *object* simply disappears.

Hence, every time I achieve an *object* I lose it, since it is no more in connection with my work; and every time I *said* something I lose it because it is no more connected with my *saying*.

The *Alienation* is then not at all a falling of the *subject* in the *objects* of the world, rather should be defined as a split between *subject* and *object*. The

Alienation it is thus not the loss of the *subject*, but the loss of the *objects*. And in this loss the *Alienation* coincides with the loss of the same sphere of possibilities and gestures that were created in going toward the same *objects*. However, this same cloud was not what protected me from being always in the world, efficient instrument of the actions of the worlds once going toward it? It is then a double relation: the efficiency detached the *object* from the *subject*, which causes the evaporation of the cloud of gesture, which prevented the *subject* from being always efficient.

If we give a look at the body of Bartleby, in him Melville sketches out the perfect description of a body made only of actions, a body-instrument of a creation of *objects*. *Bartleby the Scrivener* is completely efficient. Melville does not choose randomly his profession: the role of copyist shows us scrupulously how in human activity the *said* precedes the *saying*, being this last almost subordinated and denied.

Bartleby pronounces his well-known sentence: «I would prefer not to». But if he has rightly been often taken as an image of power and possibilities, we should now specify the dynamics of his being in power. Indeed, he cannot look at the idea of *possibilities* in a positive direction: he cannot just say «I would prefer», but he must request to step back, to oppose himself against his being always in the world and into accomplished action, to finally perceive a sphere of power not yet exhausted in action.

Hence, Bartleby tries to rationally put up a resistance to his condition: he *prefers not to*, he prefers not to start the action, since – once the cloud is evaporated – every attempt in *saying*, would transform him into instrument of something already *said* and independent from his efforts. The narrator tells:

« I looked at him steadfastly. His face was leanly composed; his gray eye dimly calm. Not a wrinkle of agitation rippled him. Had there been the least uneasiness, anger, impatience or impertinence in his manner; in other words, had there been any thing ordinarily human about him, doubtless I should have

violently dismissed him from the premises»¹⁰⁶.

But once become invisible instrument of a *said* imposed from the outside and to which he can no more resist, Bartleby can no longer expose his bodily or human dimensions. If the *Muslim* lost any contact with the *objects* to be confined into the body, Bartleby lost all contacts with his own body; with the original matter that once gave life to his gestures now exhausted. It is thus not strange that the office director says,

«If in any other way I could assist him, I would be happy to do so, especially if he desired to return to his native place, wherever that might be, I would willingly help to defray the expenses»¹⁰⁷.

But Bartleby would simply love to take a step backward toward the body, backward into the cloud of possibilities and resistances that, once evaporated, has made him irreversibly instrument of the world.

We should then see in *Bartleby the Scrivener* the story of a man who has lost his gestures and that – not differently from the way we described the Angels - has to achieve the *object* in any tension toward it.

Through this loss of gesture, it emerges how Bartleby and the *Muslim* are not completely far, although apparently on the opposite sides of the *space of gestures*: the Muslim had lost all possibilities and, exhausted, he lived enclosed in its own body without going over the threshold of it; while on the contrary Bartleby seems to have achieved the efficiency and obstinately asks to return in the space of possible and failure.

That is why alienation and solipsism are two sides of the same consequence of evaporation of the cloud of power that connects the *subject* with the landscape of *objects*. In fact, both Bartleby and the *Muslim* continue to live despite having already ceased to survive: the *Muslim* has no access to the gesture because locked up in the body, while Bartleby has gone beyond the flesh and

¹⁰⁶ Melville, H., *Bartleby the Scrivener*, 1853, on line edition
<http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/11231/pg11231.txt>

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

lost in the other direction the space of gesture. Exhausted of his efficiency, he seems to silently protest for the re-emerging of gestures against the productive life: and by doing in a system of strict productivity, this Bartleby reveals the humanity of uselessness, among which gestures live.

In 2006 the artists Douglas Gordon and Philippe Parreno presented at the Cannes Film Festival *Zidane: A 21st century portrait*, a movie focused on the worldwide celebrated French football player. Zinedine Zidane is shot by dozens of cameras during ninety minutes of the match Real Madrid - Villareal, played on April 23th 2005. The movie opens to a new dimension of vision of the game: it is not seen in its totality or following the game, rather the cameras mark Zidane's body regardless of where the ball is.



Gordon, Parreno: *Zidane, A 21st Century Portrait*, 2006

The body of Zidane is given back to the spectators in all these moments when - even on the soccer field - he does not strictly play; in all the instants when he is not necessarily in *action*. The body is full of small movements, failed attempts

to the goal that bring to nothing: a collection of intimacy captured from far and given back isolated from the game. Hence, to quote an expression used by Gordon when the film output, the presence of Zidane becomes an «exercise of solitude».

And it is precisely this dimension that leaves a strong impression to the spectators: while doing nothing he looks irrevocably human. Hence, when we see him in *action* during the movie, we perceive him already as instrument of something he is doing or that he has to do. But the humanity comes out of a body removed from its task, and the intimacy of Zidane is in this sphere, which is not resolved in the action but already out of the body.

6.4 • LIFE ON THE THRESHOLD OF THE BODY • Thus, in the interstitial space of gestures, I keep myself balanced between the body and the *object*, keeping myself equidistant from them; from the reducing of my body as a mere flesh-*object* on the one side, and from that reaching the *object* that would separate it from me on the other.

This threshold created by gesture is not just sign of an external perception of the humanity, but the space that allows me to perceive myself as such. It is from this interstitial space that I can go out of my body and – from there – perceive my same body.

In *Laughing and crying: a study of the limits of human behaviors* Helmuth Plessner had focus on this threshold in describing the human specificity:

«This directivity, this requesting, the being in search for satisfaction and fulfillment, this living only in a kind of anticipating of life behaviors, expresses its indefinite infinity of have-always-going-over, intertwined with the present and actual infinity of the open world, i.e. its finitude. But this is not the sheer animal finitude, which may exhaust its needs in its own world, a world that is itself finite. It is a finitude intertwined with infinity, so that it manifests and expresses himself

as such, to claim to be naturally compensated in an artificial way»¹⁰⁸

In the words of Plessner is clearly underlined the coexistence of *possibility* and *finitude* we have seen to be the two ingredients of gesture. However, Plessner raises then the issue of these two elements as something that belongs specifically human condition compared to the one of animals. More expressly Plessner writes that the animal might have the sphere of gestures but could not *perceive* itself in this sphere as well as man does; namely can not be aware of being living outside the body. According to Plessner this is mainly because the animal would certainly be its body (*Korper sein*), but – unlike the man – it would not have its body (*Korper haben*). It does not perceive it from the outside, in the form of a corporeity with which entering in a dialectical relationship.

Hence, it is precisely for this reason that the animal cannot feel the shame, because it cannot see itself and its body from the outside as the man does.

When Adam and Eve ashamed of their body, this occurred because for the first time a body had emerged. Likewise, while making errors or mistakes, I perceive the emergence of the flesh through a dysfunction of my enduring attempt to be an instrument; because, while failing, the instrument may no longer refers to something else and bring the attention back to the flesh that composes it. Thus in any dysfunction that is a loss of control of the body (as for example vomiting or premature ejaculation are as well), what touches me is the exposure for an instant of my being a body. This is the reason why Sartre rightly pointed, as quoted at the beginning of this research, how any shame is shame of being an *object*-body for the gaze of the other.

«Or, voici que j'ai entendu des pas dans le corridor : on me regarde. Qu'est-ce que cela veut dire ? [...] Je suis, par delà toute connaissance que je puis avoir, ce moi qu'un autre connaît. Et ce moi que je suis, je le suis dans un monde qu'autrui m'a aliéné, car le regard d'autrui embrasse mon être et corrélativement les murs, la

¹⁰⁸ Plessner, H., *L. laughing and crying: a study of the limits of human behaviors* (tr. From. Plessner H., *Il riso e il pianto*. Bompiani, Milano 2007. p. 108).

porte, la serrure»¹⁰⁹. [Now, I heard some footsteps in the corridor: someone is looking at me. What does this mean? [...] I am, beyond all knowledge I might have, something that someone else knows. And I am this *something* in a world that the other stole me, because the eyes of others embrace my being and the walls, the door lock, etc].

However, in opposition to Sartre, the subject of Levinas shows how after being reduced to the physical extension of the body, the *other's* gaze is not necessary in the experience of the shame: once inside the body, I have the opportunity to exceed myself as *subject*, to overcome my flesh and see me from the outside. Thus I feel ashamed because I perceive myself from outside and not just because the *other* sees me from the outside.

We should thus say that, in order to cover themselves, Adam and Eve had before to exit from their bodies and see themselves as naked: well before God speaks to them, they knew they were naked, and perhaps it is this gap with the condition of animality that the tree of knowledge opened: in this moment of separation from his own body, the man is no more – using again the terminology of Plessner - the one who is his own body (*Körper sein*) but who has its own body (*Körper haben*) as well.

For this reason, although it is not possible to think the *alienation* as a pure overstepping of the *subject*, in the *Manuscripts of 1844* Marx describes how the man need a minimum degree of detachment that allows him to perceive himself from the outside, writing that this first movement is so well suggested by the particle *ent-* of the German word *Entfremdung*.

This movement is not a falling in the world, but the minimum rising over the body, on the threshold of the body, that allows me to perceive myself as body. Hence, the man is not only the one who has this interstitial space, but also the one who lives in it, living in the threshold of the body, which is the space of the gesture

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.* p.299.

To grasp a clear manifestation of this space, we can conclude returning to the image with which this research opened, even if in putting attention to another gesture.

In the painting of Caravaggio, while being indicated by the Christ and Peter, Matthew point to himself. But if this gesture of Matthew is considered by art critics as a question and each question requires a *being* who asks and *object* that is to be questioned, the peculiarity of this image lies in the coincidence of two terms: the gesture of Matthew has his own body as *object* of gesture: should we thus think of a disappearing or reabsorbing of this distance of gesture through a gesture?



Caravaggio, *The calling of St. Matthew*, 1599, San Luigi dei Francesi, Roma

Matthew's arm goes out from the body, and from the outside he indicates his body, become *object* of gesture. Facing the gesture of the Christ, Matthew responds by stretching his arm because he has something to say as well; but the direction is immediately rebounded to the same body of Matthew, whose hand turns back toward himself.

Far from destroying the sphere of gesture, through the gesture Matthew shows himself as the one who *is* making the gesture and the one who *has* in his own body the object *of* gesture. And this it is just because he can go outside, over the threshold of his body, and perceive himself from the outside, leaving his body and then re-entering in it.

And this gesture shows how this threshold is the place where the man can go out to perceive the body, but it shows as the same time the same threshold of the body that the man created through gestures.

Although the body has in itself the *object* of gesture, the gesture of Matthew is substantially different from the movement that existed before the *Ur-teil*, at the birth of the gesture. Arm and hand clearly manifest the two forces in opposite direction that do not reabsorb themselves, rather opening an interstitial *space* over the body. So similar to the two movements of the camera in Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958), that tracking shot backward combined at the same time with a dizzying zoom forward, that - even in the apparent immobility of the image - opened up an abyss of vertigo that could marvelously describe the feeling of the protagonist.

And it is in this vertigo on the threshold of the body that we catch the gaze of Matthew: he lives between the body and the possible, between the present condition and his own actions. He is caught in the threshold of the body, which is revealed now as uncertain space: he rises over himself by questioning himself, and he takes shelter for a while in this threshold of possible.

He suspends any action, and shows himself through this cloud that surrounds the body, which is revealed as what divides the body from the future as from any other *object*.

So through gestures I put myself on the border of the body and I contract my being in the world. If Sartre had placed the subject surrounded by a *Nothing* that separated him from *objects* of the world, the gesture shows that what surrounds us is a cloud of possible, as clearly expressed in the words of Giorgio Agamben about *Bartleby* as well:

«Ciò che si mostra nella soglia tra essere e non essere, tra sensibile e intellegibile, tra parola e cosa, non è l'abisso incolore del nulla, ma lo spiraglio luminoso del possibile»¹¹⁰. [What shows itself in the threshold between being and not being, between sensible and intelligible, between word and thing, is not the colorless abyss of nothingness, but the luminous glimmer of possible].

We do not live, as Sartre pretended, in a perspective of separation in relation to the *objects*, but rather we live *on* this same threshold of separation; maybe the world is not made of *objects* and *subjects*, rather of uncertain projects that intertwine. By unrolling a distance between me as the *subject* and the *object* of the world, gesture does not elevate a barrier between us; rather it forces me to dangerously live this boundary. And the gesture reveals as *subject* and *object* do not dwell in separate worlds, but they live in dealing in this osmosis on the threshold of the body.

6.5 • CONCLUSION • Marked at the beginning of this thesis there is a quote from Bernard-Marie Koltès, who writes:

«Si vous marchez dehors, à cette heure et en ce lieu, c'est que vous désirez quelque chose que vous n'avez pas»¹¹¹.

This sentence opens *In the solitude of cotton fields*, stage play in which two men, named as the Dealer and the Client, meet at night in the «hour of gently growling men and animals»¹¹², to begin a long negotiation about something that will remain undisclosed until the end.

¹¹⁰ Agamben, G., *Bartleby, la formula della creazione*, Quodlibet, Macerata 1993, p.65.

¹¹¹ Koltès, B. M., *Dans la solitude des champs de coton*, Les Éditions de Minuit, Paris 1987.

¹¹² Ibid.

The Dealer insists in knowing what exactly the Client desires, while this last refuses to enumerate it; although the text may allude to a sexual exchange or an illegal trading, what the Dealer insists on selling to the Client shall be seen – and has been seen – as the same ability of desired. Facing the Client, who refuses everything, declaring himself satisfied and closed in this fullness, the Dealer insists in asking at least one unfulfilled desire.

It does not matter at the end that it may or may not be satisfied by the goods that the Dealer owns: the satisfaction is indeed less important for the Dealer than the emergence of a desire, as that, which opens the body beyond the threshold. The Dealer asks to do a *gesture of life*, to communicate and bargain one's *being-in-the-world* beyond the fullness of his *being-in-itself*. Because this empty communication is, in fact – as also noted Plessner – a symptom of the human condition.

«Enclosed but exposed, [man] is the being lacking of something, the one that waits, desires, strongly tries, wants, asks»¹¹³

In the hour of gently growling men and animals, the Dealer asks the Client to stay openly human, to make a *gesture* and expose his being suspended over his own body. And likewise the gesture is an uncertain exposure of one's condition: the man is shown suspended and helpless between the *flesh* and the *object*, and he contracts for his being in the world. He shows his projects, exposing the uncertainty of their realization.

In gestural expressiveness the body agrees to suspend its fixity and impassivity and exhibits itself in its continuous bargaining his staying in the world.

Similarly, the gesture of Matthew in Caravaggio does not simply create the *interstitial space* but it makes itself object of a communication. Through his gesture, Matthew does not only show us his body, but it shows his being suspended in this question on the threshold of the body. It is precisely in this vertigo of possible that we catch Matthew's uncertain gaze that - while

¹¹³ Plessner, H., *The stage of Organic and the Man*, op. cit., p.108.

questioning himself - he exposes us his uncertain opening and his bargaining the existence over the threshold.

Hence, the man in gesture does not simply live on the threshold of the body, but tries to grasp his life on it. Agamben calls *Volto (Face)* this opening toward the *other* to perceive one's own transcendence by making it object of communication. Hence the true purpose of every gesture may be defined as nothing but this living and perceiving oneself *as body over the body*.

For this reason Agamben says that after all the *Face*, exactly like the gesture, has nothing to say, precisely because what it shows is the being-in-transcendence of the man as mediality and possibility.

«Ciò che il volto espone e rivela non è *qualcosa* che possa essere formulato in questa o quella proposizione significativa e non è neppure un segreto destinato a restare per sempre incomunicabile. La rivelazione del volto è rivelazione del linguaggio stesso. Essa non ha, perciò, alcun contenuto reale, non dice il vero su questo o quello stato d'animo o di fatto, su questo o quell'aspetto dell'uomo o del mondo: è soltanto apertura, soltanto comunicabilità. Camminare nella luce del volto significa *essere* questa apertura, patirla»¹¹⁴ [What the *face* exposes and reveals is not something that can be given in this or that significant proposition; and even not a secret that has to remain forever incommunicable. The revelation of the face is the revelation of the language itself. Therefore, it has no real content; it does not tell the truth about this or that state of mind or fact, about this or that human aspect or about the world. It is just an *opening*, only communication. Walking in the light of the *face* means to be this opening, to assume it»

And if – to answer the question we asked at the very beginning with Franco Donatoni - the gesture has to mean *something* beyond its meaning, this *something* can be nothing but a manifestation of liability, a transcended transcendence made of an exposure of my risks and free possibilities. The gesture is a breath, in which one opens itself to the other, and means nothing but its own breathing as being in a form of pure communicability.

¹¹⁴ Agamben, G., *Il volto*, op.cit., p.74

I stretched out my arm to touch the world in the form of my possibilities, and I bring back this possibilities into my body, which now seems finally to be revealed and communicated to the *other* as what goes beyond itself to be finite support of my endless possibilities.

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SECONDA PARTE

***LA PRIMA PERIFERIA: ESPERIENZE DI PRATICA PERFORMATIVA
SULLA SOGLIA DEL CORPO***

La struttura di questa tesi sulla gestualità si è consolidata attraverso una metodologia che affiancasse costantemente alla ricerca teorica una sperimentazione in ambito performativo. Esso si situa all'interno di un percorso artistico che in questi anni ho portato costantemente avanti a margine della mia ricerca in ambito accademico. Questa ricerca teatrale non ha costituito un'appendice alla teoria ma è stata uno strumento attraverso il quale la stessa ricerca della gestualità illustrata nella parte precedente della tesi, *Life on the threshold of the body*, si è potuta consolidare e realizzare.

La specificità di questo lavoro risiede così nell'essere stata concepita come tesi performativa, ovvero come metodologia che approcciasse e sviluppasse in parallelo la stessa problematica della gestualità da due differenti punti di vista.

La parte di ricerca prettamente teorica e l'esito performativo si presentano come due oggetti compiuti dal valore autonomo. Da un lato una tesi costituita come impianto teorico, che è stata esposta nelle pagine precedenti; dall'altra l'esito di un lavoro performativo intitolato *La prima periferia*. Essi sono due oggetti autonomi eppure fortemente legati dal filo progettuale da cui sono emersi.

Al tempo stesso è necessario specificare il tipo di rapporto che intercorre tra i due oggetti e che ha caratterizzato questo doppio percorso: la precedente teoria non è infatti stata concepita a posteriori a supporto di una data pratica performativa; così come lo spettacolo non nasce postumo come rappresentazione teatrale di una costruzione teorica già terminata. Essi costituiscono al contrario due tasselli complementari e assolutamente paritari di un percorso parallelo, fili di una ricerca che si è più volte intrecciata permettendo, nei due sensi, lo scarto necessario all'avanzamento della ricerca stessa.

Questa seconda parte della tesi, intitolata *La prima periferia: esperienze performative sulla soglia del corpo* mette così in luce lo specifico approccio di ricerca che hanno avuto questi anni di lavoro di tesi, illustrando in maniera cronologica la genesi del lavoro di ricerca e la sua metodologia proprio nel suo cristallizzarsi attraverso una serrata ed inedita relazione con la pratica performativa. Per questa ragione il lavoro è organizzato secondo un ordine indice cronologico che ripercorra l'aspetto metodologico della ricerca che ha portato alla nascita tanto del lavoro performativo quanto alla tesi redatta in inglese nella prima parte di questo volume.

INDICE CRONOGRAFICO

- 1 • ORIGINE DEL PROBLEMA >> ottobre 2008
- 2 • UNA COLLEZIONE DI GESTI >> maggio 2009
- 3 • UN SOSTRATO DI MOVIMENTO >> luglio 2009
- 4 • L'OGGETTO >> agosto 2009
-
- 5 • PER UN'ESTETICA DEL *DIRE*
- 6 • L'ASSEDIO DEL *DETTO* >> ottobre 2009
- 7 • MODELLARE LA MATERIA
-
- 8 • LA FORMA SCENICA >> marzo 2010
- 9 • IL PRINCIPIO DI SPOSTAMENTO
- 10 • IL CENTRO VUOTO >> febbraio 2011
- 11 • LA SOGLIA DEL CORPO >> aprile 2011

1 • ORIGINE DEL PROBLEMA • L'origine della riflessione sulla gestualità che ha occupato questi tre anni di ricerca performativa risiede nello stesso testo di Franco Donatoni che ha dato contemporaneamente avvio alla questione in ambito teorico.

In uno scritto incentrato sulle difficoltà del comporre pubblicato a metà degli anni 70, il compositore italiano affermava:

«È possibile ammettere che il gesto non sia indifferente al significato. In altre parole: è possibile che il gesto voglia dire qualcosa. Se *qualcosa* è altro dal gesto, allora la difficoltà è manifesta perché la contraddizione è palese».¹¹⁵

Nel momento in cui ammettiamo che il gesto possa significare qualcosa, viene sottolineata immediatamente la possibilità che esso sia altro rispetto a quello stesso significato che siamo soliti attribuirgli. Tuttavia potremmo pensare di liberare ogni singolo gesto dall'essere solo portatore del proprio significato, per cogliere la gestualità nel suo insieme sotto forma di un'unica definizione? E se in quest'ottica ogni gesto potesse liberarsi dall'esprimere unicamente il significato del gesto stesso, cosa esporrebbe l'uomo sul proprio corpo nel momento in cui compie dei gesti?

La riflessione sul gesto trova al tempo stesso nel teatro un terreno d'indagine particolarmente fertile: a partire dalla concezione del gesto nella teatralità greca fino alle esperienze novecentesche di fortissima matrice gestuale di Antonin Artaud o Tadeusz Kantor, il gesto è sempre stato visto come strumento privilegiato dell'espressività stessa del corpo in scena.

Nell'ottica di ripercorrere la centralità del gesto in ambito teatrale, una delle testimonianze più vivide della sua importanza nella classicità ci viene da Vincenzo Requeno, che nel XVIII° Secolo rintraccia in *Scoperta della Chironomia* la nascita della gestualità nel teatro e nell'arte oratoria degli

¹¹⁵ Donatoni, F., *Antecedente X*, Adelphi, Milano 1980. p.121.

antichi. Egli descrive così un panorama scenico della classicità all'interno del quale il gesto sembra dover prevalere su qualsiasi altro mezzo espressivo:

«Seneca, Marziale, Apulejo e Luciano hanno lasciato autorevoli testimonii onde argomentare che la pantomima greca e latina gareggiasse colla drammatica poesia a muovere i sentimenti più forti nell'animo degli spettatori: ella era dunque un'arte più ingegnosa e più efficace della nostra, se, come dice ancora Aurelio Cassiodoro, rendevansi per essa *loquacissimae manus, linguosi digiti, silentium clamosum*. È però forza arguire, che gli antichi avessero certi segni che si sono perduti, e certi moti di convenzione nella danza, che ora ignoriamo, i quali parlavano agli occhi con una imitativa, e tacita prodigiosa eloquenza. Lo asserisce S. Agostino nel Libro III della *Dottrina Cristiana*, il quale ne accenna che i pantomimi de' suoi tempi prima di esporre qualche azione sul teatro facevano spiegare i loro gesti ed i cenni per mezzo del pubblico banditore»¹¹⁶.

Le parole dell'abate Vincenzo Requeno introducono in maniera cristallina la principale problematica del gesto in scena che ha occupato questa ricerca: il gesto – secondo le parole di *Scoperta della Chironomia* – viene sempre considerato come *tacita prodigiosa eloquenza*, ovvero unicamente alla luce del suo stesso essere strumento di un detto di cui si deve fare portatore.

Anche le sopracitate esperienze novecentesche che hanno posto in alcuni casi la gestualità come pietra stessa della ricerca teatrale, non hanno potuto considerare il gesto se non confrontandosi obbligatoriamente con i singoli significati di cui esso, di volta in volta, si rende messaggero.

Colui che in epoca moderna meglio ha colto l'essenza di questa problematica scenica del gesto è probabilmente Antonin Artaud, che, come vedremo successivamente, nei celebri scritti sul teatro pubblicati all'interno de *Il Teatro e il suo doppio*, contrappone in maniera inedita i gesti *significativi* della pantomima occidentale alla tensione verso un gesto *puro* che – tuttavia – egli stesso non riesce a cogliere nella sua piena possibilità di espressione.

¹¹⁶ Requeno, V., *Scoperta della Chironomia. ossia dell'arte di gestire con le mani*. Parma. MDCCXCVII (1797), p.3.

Le esperienze performative e le teorie ad esse connesse sembrano così destinate a presentare principalmente una gestualità carica di un portato di singole e specifiche espressioni.

In che modo potremmo al contrario pensare, in un'ottica teatrale, alla gestualità indipendentemente dal significato di cui essa stesso è portatrice, fino a fare emergere quel gesto *puro* indicato come limite ultimo da Artaud?

È nell'ottica di queste specifica domanda attorno alla possibilità di materializzazione in scena di una struttura che permettesse il raggiungimento di quel gesto definito *puro*, o scisso dall'essere solo carico del proprio significato, che la ricerca performativa parte nell'ottobre 2008 all'interno delle attività di *Pathosformel*, progetto performativo da me co-fondato nel 2007.

2 • UNA COLLEZIONE DI GESTI • Di fronte alla complessità del tema scenico, a inizio 2009 ho impostato il percorso di ricerca teatrale in maniera differente rispetto a precedenti produzioni affrontate. Prendendo un intero anno di ricerca performativa ho proposto, all'interno delle attività di ricerca teatrale di *Pathosformel*, l'organizzazione di una serie di laboratori di movimento incentrati sul tema della gestualità.

Questi workshop sono stati parte integrante e fondante della ricerca stessa: non si è trattato di una fase di didattica, ma di una investigazione sperimentale condotta assieme ai partecipanti dei laboratori, da noi guidati ogni volta per la durata di tre giorni di incontri. I dieci laboratori di ricerca sul gesto si sono svolti nell'intero arco del 2009 (da maggio a dicembre) in diversi contesti e città europee, tra cui: Milano (*Uovo Performing art festival*), Pavia (*Università di Lettere*), Bruxelles (*Les Brigittines*), Dro (*Festival Drodeseira – Centrale Fies*), Sarajevo (*Kino Bosna*), Roma (*Facoltà di Architettura Roma3*), Venezia (*Teatro di Fondamenta Nuove*).

Ogni laboratorio prevedeva la partecipazione di un numero massimo di dodici partecipanti, i quali non dovevano aver vuto per forza precedenti esperienze performative. La gratuità dei laboratori (per partecipare al quale gli aspiranti dovevano inviare il proprio curriculum) ha permesso di avere un numero tale di richieste che lasciasse la possibilità di creare in ogni occasione dei gruppi di lavoro fortemente eterogenei dal punto di vista delle esperienze sulla gestualità che le stesse avrebbero potuto portare all'interno del gruppo. All'interno dei singoli gruppi di lavoro, abbiamo avuto così la possibilità di mettere assieme la gestualità di una danzatrice e quella di uno scultore, di un attore e una modella dell'Accademia di Belle Arti, fino a persone che non avevano mai avuto esperienze legate in maniera particolare a riflessioni sulla gestualità stessa.

Nonostante l'intento iniziale della ricerca, e così quello dei laboratori, ruotasse attorno alla possibilità già individuata di una gestualità scissa dal proprio significato, l'approccio ai laboratori è avvenuto senza una concezione a priori del risultato da ottenere. Essi sono stati degli spazi di ricerca condivisa, in seno ai quali la ricerca stessa è cresciuta.

Ovviamente non lasciati al caso, i laboratori erano condotti secondo uno schema preciso che – di volta in volta – è stato affinato e proposto ai partecipanti della tappa successiva.

Una dei primi punti fermi da cui la presentazione stessa del laboratorio è partita, è stata la convinzione di affinare a questi momenti di ricerca sul movimento proposti ai partecipanti, una riflessione teorica condivisa con loro sul tema del collezionismo.

Nella difficoltà iniziale di pensare infatti il gesto slegato dal significato, era emersa una fortissima analogia – come probabile supporto teorico – in alcune concezioni sul collezionismo che hanno attraversato il '900, in una linea filosofica che fa principalmente capo a Walter Benjamin. Sembrava infatti emergere nell'idea di collezionismo benjaminiano quello stesso distacco tra oggetto e significato che sembrava essere problema centrale della gestualità. Scrive infatti Benjamin all'interno dei *Passagenwerk*:

«Ciò che nel collezionismo è decisivo, è che l'oggetto sia sciolto da tutte le sue funzioni originarie per entrare nel rapporto più stretto possibile con gli altri a lui simili. Questo rapporto è l'esatto opposto dell'utilità, e sta sotto la singolare categoria della completezza». ¹¹⁷

Questa riflessione sul collezionismo benjaminiano è stata così il punto di partenza proprio nell'interrogare l'idea di *perdita di senso unico* di un oggetto, questione fortemente adiacente alla problematica iniziale del gesto.

Il collezionismo diviene per Benjamin una struttura in grado di oltrepassare il carattere di *utilità*. Ed in questi termini è stato proposto all'interno del laboratorio: nella sua possibilità di pensare il gesto slegato dalle sue funzioni, per creare una collezione di *gesti* in grado di cogliere l'essenza della categoria al di là della comunicazione stessa.

Analogamente a un sistema di oggetti collezionati (dai piatti francobolli) che perdono il proprio valore d'uso per entrare in quello che Benjamin definisce il *cerchio magico del collezionismo*, una collezione di gesti compiuti tutti assieme – o l'accostamento di gesti anche differenti tra loro – è in grado di abbandonare il legame solido con il proprio senso per far accedere ad un'idea di gesto che, nuovamente con Benjamin, potremmo definire di matrice iper-Uranica?

In questo parallelismo iniziale tra il tema del collezionismo e quello della gestualità, il seguente testo è andato ad affiancare, a partire dall'aprile 2009, i singoli *call for participants* che da lì a poco avremmo pubblicato nei siti delle varie strutture che avrebbero accolto il laboratorio.

«Il titolo di una collezione potrebbe non nascere mai da una scelta fatta in precedenza. Affianco due oggetti: ecco la mia collezione, quella a cui ora posso finalmente attribuire un titolo.

Ne accosto un terzo e d'improvviso il lavoro fatto fino ad ora è distrutto: dovrò per forza riformulare da capo quello che permette ai tre oggetti di stare all'interno di

¹¹⁷ Benjamin, W., *I passages di Parigi*, Einaudi, Torino 2000, p.213.

questa nuova collezione.

E se elimino il primo, sostituendolo con qualcosa di completamente differente? La mia collezione senza nome chiederà a gran voce un nuovo nome. Andando avanti così nessuna collezione potrà mai dormire tranquilla, nel timore che all'ultimo arrivi un oggetto tardivo, pronto a cambiare il senso di tutti gli oggetti precedenti.

Tutti gli oggetti della collezione – dai piatti ai francobolli – hanno dovuto rinunciare alla propria funzione. Non possono più essere utilizzati, e quasi si annullano individualmente nel costruire la collezione tutti assieme. Eppure è come se ognuno svelasse nelle proprie caratteristiche o mantenesse custodito, la storia che ha vissuto prima di entrare nella collezione: l'epoca a cui apparteneva e il luogo dove è stato trovato, o la vita stessa del suo primo proprietario.

Proviamo a collezionare dei gesti, in una collezione in cui inevitabilmente ogni gesto riflette minimamente parte dell'intimità di colui a cui apparteneva: è come chiedere ad ognuno di distaccarsi da un gesto, sacrificarlo all'anonimato ma destinarlo al tempo stesso ad una relazione intima con i suoi simili inclusi nella stessa collezione. Solo allora, infatti, i gesti affiancati cominceranno a dialogare tra loro, svelando all'esterno il titolo in continuo cambiamento di questa nuova collezione.

È un'arca di Noè delle azioni perdute e dei gesti che non facciamo più, all'interno della quale i gesti stessi si sommano facendo nascere un intimo dialogo, fino a creare quasi una narrazione. Una collezione il cui senso nasca ogni istante in maniera differente, poiché gli oggetti instabili di questa collezione non potranno far altro che far slittare continuamente – nel movimento del corpo – un senso attribuibile unicamente dall'esterno»¹¹⁸.

Ricevute le application dei primi partecipanti e formato il primo gruppo, nel maggio 2009 prende avvio a Milano il laboratorio sul gesto «La collezione» all'interno di *Uovo performing art festival*. Descriverò di seguito la struttura di lavoro che sarebbe poi rimasta per i laboratori successivi.

¹¹⁸ Pathosformel, *La collezione*, testo pubblicato per la prima volta il 2 aprile 2009 su www.pathosformel.org

Dal principio il lavoro di riflessione teorica che conducevamo con loro è stato alternato da un intenso lavoro di movimento, centro stesso del laboratorio. Nello specifico lo spazio di lavoro era marcato da una linea a terra che separava lo «spazio della collezione» da quello «dello sguardo».

I primi esercizi proposti andavano per noi nella direzione di creare una vera e propria collezione di gesti comuni: i partecipanti, seduti in quello che avevamo definito spazio dello sguardo, potevano entrare nella collezione a loro piacimento, secondo i tempi che preferivano e sovrapponendosi senza alcun tipo di preoccupazione di natura estetica o compositiva a quello che già stava avvenendo al suo interno.

Una volta dentro, essi dovevano compiere un gesto qualsiasi, nella posizione e alla velocità che preferivano, per rimanere poi nello spazio per il tempo che avrebbero ritenuto necessario.

L'interesse primo del lavoro era senza dubbio concentrato maggiormente nello spazio dello sguardo rispetto a quello dell'azione, ovvero nel vedere in che modo la somma di diversi gesti, di quello che sembrava un quadro in movimento che si componeva e scompondeva davanti ai nostri occhi, potesse dare accesso a qualcosa che oltrepassasse il senso stesso di comunicazione del singolo gesto.

Per analizzare questa perdita di centralità del significato, il secondo giorno di laboratorio partivamo da una lettura di un'opera dell'artista visiva francese contemporanea Sophie Calle, che, nel proprio lavoro *Disparition* pubblicato nel 2000 da Actes Sud, mette al centro di questa stessa riflessione la storia di una collezione d'arte della casa museo Isabella Stewart Gardner di Boston, derubata di sei opere la notte del 18 marzo 1990.

Sophie Calle prende spunto dal testamento di Isabella Stewart Gardner, nel quale era stato espressamente scritto che nulla avrebbe dovuto essere toccato o spostato dopo la sua morte, per riflettere su come rendere questi vuoti di collezione degli *oggetti* ancora presenti.

Il lavoro che sceglie di fare Sophie Calle possa innanzitutto attraverso il fotografare gli spazi vuoti del museo, chiedendo poi ai custodi del luogo – alcuni dei quali avevano lavorato interi anni, mentre altri da pochi mesi – di descrivere ognuna delle sei opere sottratte, così come la ricordavano.

Sophie Calle ci riporta così nella pubblicazione le singole descrizioni, spesso divergenti tra loro, senza darci modo di vedere l'immagine dell'opera: ogni capitolo si apre con la fotografie dello spazio dove l'opera era collocata, affiancata dalle descrizioni della stessa, mescolate e ricomposte in un collage di ricordi intimi e descrittivi.

Il lavoro che fa Sophie Calle va al di là della semplice indagine, per divenire riflessione profonda sul collezionismo: se ognuno dei singoli quadri era stato oggetto di una collezione più ampia, ora essi – nella loro assenza – divengono titoli mancanti di una collezione di descrizioni che si sta costruendo attorno a loro. Le singole frasi divengono gli *oggetti* di una collezione il cui titolo ora visivo muta ad ogni istante.

Così come nel leggere le frasi – e in assenza dell'immagine originale – nella nostra mente si crea un'immagine che muta costantemente ad ogni nuova descrizione, i gesti che venivano compiuti nello spazio del laboratorio perdevano il loro unico significato e divenivano improvvisamente oggetti alla ricerca di un titolo che mutava ad ogni istante.

Questo aspetto del collezionismo come privazione di titolo stesso della collezione è stato l'elemento che ha spinto la riflessione verso un passo ulteriore: potremmo infatti considerare non unicamente la somma di gesti, ma ogni singolo gesto come ciò che è in attesa di trovare il proprio significato?

Per cercare di cogliere questo possibile aspetto del gesto abbiamo così provato a sollevare i gesti fatti a quel momento da qualsiasi intenzionalità. Essi divenivano così materia di movimento puro in una dimensione apparentemente non più espressiva bensì scientifica.

I partecipanti entravano in scena e – come prima – compivano un gesto. Tuttavia, a differenza degli esercizi precedenti, essi dovevano ora concentrarsi unicamente sulla somma di micro-movimenti che – partendo da una posizione neutra – scolpiva quello che dall'esterno appariva come un gesto. Il movimento veniva ripetuto diverse volte e a differenti velocità, calando lo stesso gesto in una dimensione che aveva perduto completamente nella ripetizione il possibile senso dell'intenzione iniziale, e sollevandolo così da ogni forma immediata di espressione.

La ripetizione dei gesti sembravano ridurre gli stessi a dei puri movimenti, eppure balenava l'impressione che essi rimandassero ad altro, che aprissero verso un altrove che eccedesse il movimento stesso.

3 • UN SOSTRATO DI MOVIMENTO • È stata esattamente questa dinamica che, a inizio dell'estate del 2009 mi ha spinto a ripercorrere in maniera sistematica la dialettica fondamentale tra *movimento* e *gesto*, e l'idea di analizzare in una prospettiva storica il rapporto tra i due termini. Come potremmo definire in termini filosofici e performativi la differenza tra *gesto* e *movimento*?

Sono partito così dall'analisi dei termini classici, per analizzare come, nonostante movimento e gesto abbiano avuto come unico equivalente greco la parola *kinesis*, nella lingua latina essi vengano comunemente distinti nei termini di *motus* e *gestus*.

Una delle prime fonti all'interno della quale sembra emergere una definizione, è la descrizione dell'orazione di Sulpicio nella *Retorica*, all'interno della quale Cicerone accosta il *gestus* ai termini *motus corporis*¹¹⁹: il gesto verrebbe così ad essere accostato per la prima volta come movimento che riguarda strettamente il corpo, specifico della condizione umana.

Se la categoria di *motus* potrebbe riguardare tanto il corpo quanto gli astri o le foglie di un albero, il gesto sarebbe al contrario prerogativa unica del corpo umano.

Quello che tuttavia al tempo stesso emerge in Cicerone è l'idea che – in quanto

¹¹⁹ «Fuit enim Sulpicius omnium vel maxime, quo quidem ego audiverim, grandis et, ut ita dicam, tragicus orator. Vocem cum magna tum suavis et splendida; gestus et motus corporis ita venustus, ut tamen ad forum, non ad scaenam institutus videretur». [Infatti, tra quelli che io ho ascoltato, Sulpicio fu l'oratore più grandioso e, per così dire, tragico. La voce, potente, era anche armoniosa e limpida; gesti e movenze erano eleganti, ma di un'eleganza che appariva intonata al foro non al teatro. Cicerone, *Rhetorica*, *Brutus* § 203].

definito *motus corporis* – il gesto si marchi come sottotermine del movimento, ovvero qualcosa che suggerisce la presenza irriducibile del movimento al suo interno.

Cicerone suggerisce così come non sia possibile pensare ad una gestualità privata della condizione di movimento: da un lato infatti l'uomo, in quanto corpo, è sempre in movimento, anche negli sforzi utopici nella direzione di un immobilismo; dall'altro lato – se prendiamo ad esempio quella che sembra essere la gestualità statica di un dipinto o di una scultura – quelli che cogliamo come gesti immobili, giungono a noi attraverso l'analisi di Gotthold Ephraim Lessing come *istanti pregnanti (prägnante Moment)*¹²⁰ di un intero movimento corporeo.

Così, nello stesso esercizio sopra descritto, il compimento del gesto non veniva mai considerato come semplicemente la riproduzione di una posa plastica, ma come l'insieme di movimenti che davano vita al raggiungimento di un istante pregnante.

Ogni posa fissa del corpo dovrebbe essere vista non come semplice immagine ma piuttosto come un movimento pietrificato dallo sguardo della Medusa. Estratto dal flusso in cui era immerso, ogni gesto statico è pari ad un singolo elemento di una serie di Edward Muybridge, che pur esposto in solitudine rimanda inevitabilmente al precedente e successivo con i quali compie l'intera sequenza cronofotografica. Così l'immagine statica della contrazione muscolare del *Laocoonte* ci racconta di un movimento che ha preceduto la cristallizzazione marmorea, e ammette uno scioglimento della posa nella sua stessa continuazione; se il corpo è teso nello sforzo di una liberazione rivela in questa stessa tensione la potenza di un movimento in esso contenuto. E il *Laocoonte*, mentre tenta di liberarsi dai serpenti, appare ai nostri occhi come se volesse liberarsi dalla durezza di questa stessa pietra, per poter infine riacquistare lo scorrere del movimento in cui era immerso.

¹²⁰ Lessing, G.E., *Laokoon*. Oder: Über die Grenzen der Malerei und Poesie. Reclam, Stuttgart 1994,

Tramite questo esercizio ci ponevamo l'obbiettivo di mettere in luce l'aspetto mediale di *movimento* all'interno del *gesto*. Già a partire dal secondo laboratorio, il secondo giorno era dedicato a questo far emergere la categoria di movimento all'interno del gesto, per coglierne le differenze.

I partecipanti compivano il proprio gesto quotidiano nell'ottica di scomporlo, per avere accesso all'infinita somma di micromovimenti e precise inclinazioni che riproducono ogni singolo gesto.

Il gesto compiuto, poco a poco perdeva quel senso iniziale che l'aveva originato, per diventare materia di studio: a quell punto chiedevamo così ad ogni partecipante di lavorarlo come fosse una materia in grado di essere modellata in diverse direzioni.

Ogni sequenza precisissima di movimenti che dà vita ai singoli gesti, poteva essere rallentata e frammentataa in un fraseggio senza fine; divenire la materia base di un'operazione di auto-scultura che avviene istante dopo istante sullo stesso corpo, nelle infinite possibilità di velocità e di riproduzione in ripetizione.

L'idea di questa parte di lavoro non risiedeva nel semplice studio del singolo gesto, ma nell'aprire alla capacità di ragionare sul lavoro meticoloso che accompagna ogni nostra manifestazione gestuale: sulla posa e precisione che ci attraversa in un momento di esposizione come sull'insieme di regole che modellano un qualsiasi gesto adolescenziale.

Ogni nostro gesto è infatti scomponibile in una serie di informazioni, complesse quanto solitamente ci sembrano immediate. E se solitamente pensiamo ai gesti in termini espressivi, la domanda che emergeva in questo caso era: i gesti quotidiani potrebbero trasformarsi in istruzioni dettagliate sull'inclinazione degli arti per convogliare in un manuale tecnico delle intenzioni?

Eppure, una volta isolata la categoria di movimento all'interno del gesto, essi emergevano in un singolo momento come già altro rispetto al movimento che faceva loro da sostrato. Come definire questo *plus* che trasformava il semplice movimento in gesto?

4 • L'OGGETTO • I mesi estivi del 2009, periodo di pausa dalla ricerca condotta attraverso i laboratori sul gesto, sono stati dedicati a mettere a frutto i risultati ottenuti nei mesi precedenti per elaborare una prima parte della teoria della gestualità alla luce del percorso effettuato. La questione della trasformazione del movimento in gesto, ampiamente vista in termini di movimento, ha necessitato così un'analisi teorica che prendesse avvio dai risultati del laboratorio.

Non è forse un caso che la riflessione che maggiormente avrebbe determinato la parte successiva della ricerca, emerga in questa fase proprio dalla lettura di un manuale di recitazione del XVIII° secolo.

Nelle proprie riflessioni sulla gestualità, raccolte nel 1785 in *Ideen zu einer Mimik*, il filosofo illuminista Johann Jakob Engel sembra dare una primissima definizione della gestualità, marcandola come attrazione e repulsione verso un *oggetto* esterno¹²¹.

Ideen zu einer Mimik nasce come manuale di recitazione, e l'*oggetto* in esso indicato è ineso da Engel innanzitutto sotto forma degli oggetti disposti in scena – e così nel mondo – rispetto ai quali produrrei un moto concreto.

Per restituire un esempio che poi sarebbe stato ampiamente utilizzato nei mesi successivi all'interno della seconda fase dei laboratori, se osserviamo un celebre dialogo gesturale come quello dipinto nel 1599 da Caravaggio ne *La vocazione di San Matteo* per la Cappella Contarelli di San Luigi dei Francesi, l'idea di attrazione verso l'*oggetto* impostata da Engel appare evidente: Cristo e Pietro tendono il braccio per indicare Matteo, che nella materialità della sua presenza al centro della stanza è *oggetto* del loro stesso gesto. In maniera analoga, avendo un bicchiere posto a distanza da me sul tavolo, posso indicarlo con il mio gesto, perché esso è là che mi attira con la sua semplice presenza.

Se tuttavia l'idea comune della gestualità sembra non limitarsi a questa forma

¹²¹ Eine zweite Bemerkung, die Sie bei jeder lebhaften Begierde werden bestätigt finden, ist die: dass sie immer die gerade Linie auf den Gegenstand zu oder von ihm zurücknimmt. [una seconda osservazione, che verrà sempre confermata quando vi sia un desiderio è la seguente: il corpo tende verso l'oggetto o si ritrae dall'oggetto sempre in linea retta]. Engel, J. J. *Ideen zu einer Mimik* (1785-86), Lettera XIV.

concreta di attrazione e repulsione verso oggetti disposti di fronte a noi, come potremmo definire questo *oggetto* engeliano, elemento centrale della definizione verso cui il gesto stesso tende?

A partire da queste riflessioni di Engel la teoria della gestualità ha potuto così svilupparsi e ampliarsi nella direzione di una definizione generale.

È merito di Jean-Paul Sartre l'aver evidenziato ne *L'Être et le Néant* come la disposizione degli *oggetti* nel mondo non sia altro che il correlativo delle mie azioni possibili.¹²²

Così questo stesso bicchiere che ho davanti a me posso portarlo alle labbra o lasciarlo sul tavolo, ma posso anche urtarlo distrattamente e farlo cadere a terra, ma ogni azione possibile è già iscritta in esso. È l'*oggetto* così a raccontarmi, attraverso la sua stessa forma (possibilità di contenere un liquido) e la sua materia (fragilità del vetro), tutte le azioni che farò o non farò ed io non posso immaginarmi, in questo istante a venire, in nulla che non sia già iscritto negli *oggetti* che ho davanti agli occhi in questa stanza.

In questo modo Sartre dimostra come le azioni – al pari della materialità degli *oggetti* – siano distanti dalla situazione presente del mio corpo. E se io nel gesto tendo all'*oggetto*, inteso come qualcosa che eccede il mio corpo, tendo in egual modo al raggiungimento di un'azione futura; se posso così dire di conoscere i fini delle mie azioni, è proprio perché essi si stagliano lontano da me – come *oggetti* – davanti al mio sguardo. Per fare un esempio, i gesti di sfida o della seduzione sono da considerare tali unicamente perché rinviano a un atto, a un'azione che intravedo ancora distante ma a cui posso tendere con i miei stessi gesti.

Il gesto è così sempre tensione verso qualcosa al di là del corpo, o che eccede la

¹²² «Et la chose, en tant qu'elle repose à la fois dans la béatitude quiète de l'indifférence et que pourtant elle indique au-delà d'elle des tâches à remplir qui lui annoncent ce qu'elle a à être, c'est l'instrument ou l'ustensile. [...] La chose n'est point d'abord chose pour être ensuite ustensile ; elle n'est point d'abord ustensile pour se dévoiler ensuite comme chose : elle est *chose-ustensile* [...] et le monde surgit comme fond indifférencié de complexes indicatifs d'ustensilité». Sartre, J.P. (2005): *L'Être et le Néant*, Édition Gallimard, Paris.

condizione presente del corpo, e se nell'immaginario comune la gestualità è fortemente legata all'attività di parlare, è proprio perché anche il linguaggio è per il corpo *oggetto* esterno che esso non possiede.

Nell'affrontare ciò che egli chiama il *gesto di parlare* all'interno del proprio scritto sulla gestualità, Vilém Flusser sottolinea questa estraneità del linguaggio, muovendo da una riflessione di Rilke:

«Rilke dit du prophète qu'il crache les paroles comme le volcan crache les pierres, car les paroles du prophète ne sont pas les siennes, mais ne peut-on pas dire que les paroles qu'on prononce lorsqu'on parle, ne sont jamais (ou presque jamais) la propriété du parleur ? Ce sont presque toujours des paroles reçues d'autrui, et comme cet autrui les a reçues, lui aussi, les paroles prononcées pendant les gestes de parler ne sont, presque jamais, possédées par le parleur»¹²³.

Così quando ad esempio chiudo la mano a cerchio per chiedere un bicchiere (forse proprio perché ho dimenticato la parola o non la conosco in un lingua straniera, proprio perché il linguaggio non mi appartiene) l'*oggetto* a cui tendo non è *questo* o *quel* bicchiere, ma *un* bicchiere, nella sua dimensione linguistica.

Le parole sono così *oggetti* verso cui tende il gesto; esse costruiscono un unico paesaggio di linguaggio esterno al corpo all'interno del quale metto a fuoco volta per volta singole parole a cui tendere: e nel gesto io non tendo al linguaggio nella dimensione della voce, ma in quello di un linguaggio costituito ed esterno a cui – contemporaneamente – anche la mia voce tende.

Così, a partire dalle riflessioni di Engel derivate dalla struttura della prima parte dei laboratori è emersa una prima definizione del gesto: esso è il movimento che eccede sé stesso in una tensione verso un *oggetto* esterno a sé.

¹²³ Flusser, V., *Les Gestes*, D'Arts éditeur, Paris 1999. p. 29

Eppure quello che stava emergendo nella pratica del lavoro sulla *collezione* mostrava come i movimenti che venivano messi in campo vivevano di una forte differenza rispetto a quelli che siamo soliti considerare dei *segni*. Una delle problematiche che era emersa nella scelta stessa dei gesti che i partecipanti avrebbero potuto effettuare nello *spazio della collezione* era proprio sulla distanza che intercorre tra gesto e segno.

Per risolvere questa problematica, una delle fonti più interessanti che ho potuto ritrovare risale ad una lettera scritta nel 1180 dall'abate gallese Giraldo di Cambria, all'interno della quale egli condanna l'animata conversazione gestuale che sembra permettere ai monaci di comunicare tra loro mantenendo la regola monastica del silenzio; due secoli dopo Giacolo di Vitry racconta addirittura di monaci che parlano con i movimenti dei piedi per aggirare il silenzio imposto dalla regola.

L'analisi delle regole monastiche rivela come, pur mancando una definizione di gestualità, essa non sia mai esplicitamente proibita: Giraldo e Giacolo non parlano infatti di un'interdizione del gesto, ma della sua trasformazione in qualcosa che non lo è più, qualcosa che – secondo le parole di Giraldo – avrebbe violato la regola del silenzio reintroducendo il verbo nel corpo.

Lo studio delle regole monastiche ha permesso di impostare il limite di definizione della gestualità: se il gesto deve essere caratterizzato da una tensione verso un *oggetto* esterno, il suo raggiungimento – in questo caso iscrizione del verbo in seno al movimento stesso – estinguerebbe evidentemente la gestualità.

Quello che Giraldo mette in luce senza nominare è la trasformazione della gestualità in un linguaggio dei segni radicalmente differente al gesto, in quanto in esso i movimenti non tendono più ad un *oggetto* esterno ma sono costruiti attorno all'*oggetto*.

Quando nella seconda metà del '700, Charles-Michel de L'Épée pone le basi di un primo linguaggio codificato per sordomuti, esplicita l'intenzione di ricostruire artificialmente nel movimento del corpo tutte le parti della sintassi francese, dai sostantivi alle congiunzioni o preposizioni. Così il segno non è

assolutamente gesto perché non è più movimento verso il linguaggio ma bensì un linguaggio in movimento.

La relazione spaziale tra movimento ed *oggetto* sembra essere così il limite che permette la definizione stessa della gestualità: proprio perché definito nella forma di tensione verso un *oggetto*, il gesto si esaurirebbe al raggiungimento dello stesso e per mantenersi come tale deve rimarcare questo spazio di distanza dall'*oggetto*.

5 • PER UN'ESTETICA DEL DIRE • Tutt'altro che unicamente teoriche, queste considerazioni sulla distanza dall'*oggetto* sono state l'elemento che hanno condotto nell'arco dell'estate del 2009 a pensare di concretizzare in termini scenici questa stessa teoria della gestualità all'interno del lavoro che avevo fino ad ora svolto nel progetto Pathosformel.

Nella sua distanza dialettica dall'*oggetto* il gesto si inseriva infatti a pieno in un percorso di estetica che avevamo ricercato fino a quel momento nella pratica artistica.

Per chiarire i termini della questione di distanza del gesto dall'*oggetto* a cui rimanda ho fatto ricorso in quel periodo alla maniera in cui Emmanuel Levinas ha marcato nella propria filosofia la fondamentale dialettica tra *le dire* e *le dit*: se *le dire* consiste nell'atto stesso del dire, *le dit* rappresenterebbe qualcosa di già realizzato e che – proprio nella sua realizzazione – marca innanzitutto una scissione dal corpo che l'ha originato. Così quando in *Fenomenologia della tecnica artistica*, il filosofo italiano Dino Formaggio mette a fuoco la problematica del rapporto tra l'artista e il proprio oggetto della creazione, sembra inserirsi in questa stessa dialettica levinasiana.

Formaggio chiama *istante* l'attimo preciso in cui viene completata l'opera, il momento a partire dal quale l'artista non avrà più alcun potere sull'opera stessa che ha contribuito a creare: se anche ora l'artista volesse dire altro su

essa, non potrebbe più; se anche cercasse di entrare nel museo in cui la sua opera è esposta per aggiornarla in base al suo gusto attuale – come tentò più volte di fare il pittore impressionista Pierre Bonnard negli ultimi anni della sua vita – verrebbe certamente fermato dai guardiani, perché una volta *detto*, il *detto* marca la sua indipendenza ormai intoccabile rispetto a qualsiasi *dire*.

Il gesto si iscriveva così proprio in questa dialettica levinasiana in un tipo di indagine che aveva caratterizzato la nostra ricerca precedente. Tutte le esperienze che avevamo condotto fino a quel momento avevano visto questa problematica della soglia del *dire* come elemento centrale di tutta la ricerca performativa, declinata ogni volta secondo diverse tipologie di immagine.

La ricerca sul gesto, concepito a partire da questi canoni sviluppati all'interno del laboratorio, prometteva così di inserirsi come tassello differente ma coerente con un percorso di sottrazione al *detto* che si era tracciato negli anni precedenti.

Per cogliere l'aspetto di continuità e frattura del nascente progetto sul gesto, all'interno del percorso artistico, tratteggio di seguito una breve cronologia della ricerca artistica, concentrandomi su due lavori nello specifico che hanno contribuito alla nascita della stessa riflessione sulla gestualità.

Pathosformel nasce come progetto artistico a Venezia nel 2007, con l'interno iniziale di costruire un'immagine che metta lo spettatore nella condizione di dover completare una forma riconoscibile e al tempo stesso incerta, rendendolo in qualche modo complice nella sua stessa formazione.

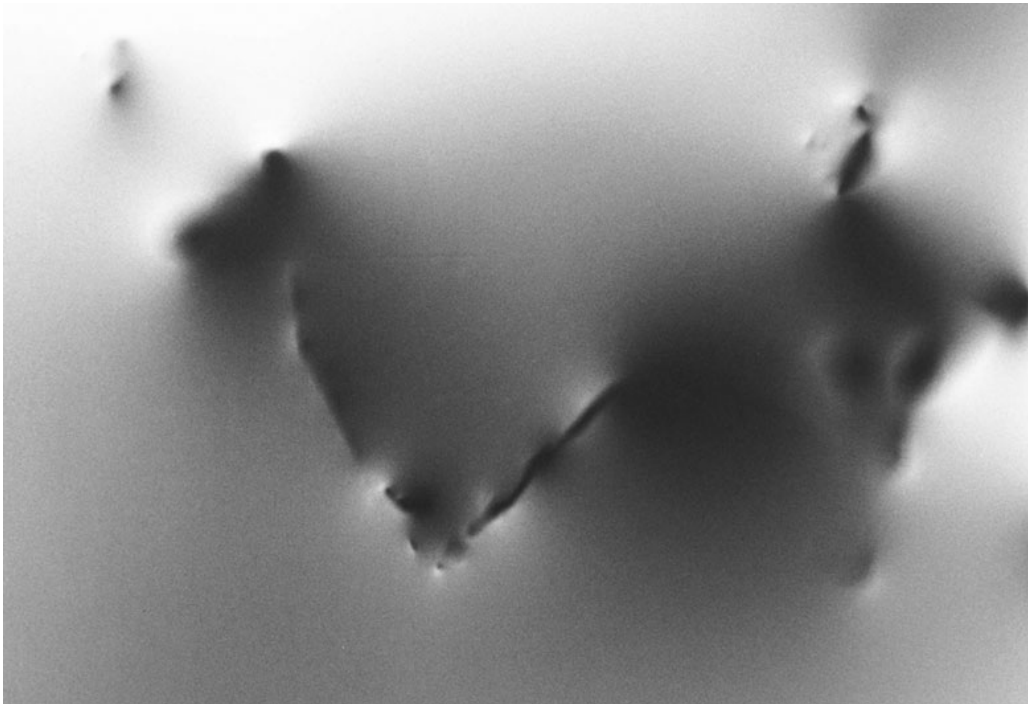
L'inizio di questo percorso ha ragionato principalmente sull'idea di *immediatezza* che si attribuisce solitamente all'atto performativo. Quella specifica assenza di un *medium* materiale – come la tela per la pittura o la pellicola per il cinema – tra lo sguardo e il corpo in scena, e che è divenuta forse l'essenza stessa del teatro: una sorta di comunione e condivisione di un momento irregistrabile e di uno spazio unico: tutto avviene solitamente nel momento in cui il corpo e lo sguardo si trovano uno di fronte all'altro; cosa succederebbe se questa immediatezza venisse messa in discussione?

I primi due progetti sono partiti così dalla necessità di negare il corpo, non nella sua presenza ma nella scontatezza della sua visibilità in scena: la sua presenza davanti al pubblico non è più l'elemento base a partire dal quale costruire il resto, ma il nucleo stesso che può essere messo in discussione. Il lavoro nato si propone così di fare un passo indietro per condividere tutto quello che c'è prima della visibilità del corpo, il quale non è più semplicemente presente in scena, ma va al contrario indagato, scoperto e nuovamente abbandonato.



La timidezza della ossa è stato il primo spettacolo che realizzava quasi fisicamente la presenza di un *medium* tra il corpo e lo sguardo. Un telo bianco e teso che dividesse completamente lo spazio, pronto ad accogliere le immagini di corpi che, imprimendosi dal retro, si concedono in rilievo. Il telo separa in via definitiva il corpo scenico da colui che è venuto a vederlo: un diaframma che sigilla la visione senza concedere immagini in trasparenza, ed oltre il quale non è concesso immergere lo sguardo.

Lo spettatore è davanti a questa membrana opaca che – nell’assenza iniziale di immagini - assume quasi la tensione di una tela limpida prima che sia scalfita dalla prima pennellata. Appaiono i punti sporgenti di quella che sembra essere una costellazione in rilievo – o i semi a partire dai quali qualsiasi immagine potrebbe nascere – e a poco a poco riaffiorano sulla superficie bianca gli arti e le immagini di una civiltà sepolta: sono frammenti di corpo che si distaccano dal piano per conquistare il rilievo, che sbocciano attraverso questa materia lattea per esporre alla luce i propri contorni.



Le parti del corpo riemergono progressivamente, si espongono nell’arco di una gestazione che procede arto per arto; si mostrano attraverso una visione quasi ecografica, simili per noi a feti che sperimentano la capienza dell’utero, che premono ciecamente contro le pareti del ventre materno. Un corpo non ancora formato, che sembra quasi galleggiare in un luogo privo di gravità, i cui arti attraversano la totalità della superficie e sembrano esplodere e ricomporsi: la mano vicino al suolo e il piede contemporaneamente a due metri d’altezza per

creare l'immagine di un corpo umano che può essere ricostruito solo dall'esterno.

Il corpo si mostra frammentato e, al tempo stesso, modificato soprattutto nella sua stessa visibilità: la carne, così come le parti morbide, sono quasi sparite, appiattite dalla tensione del telo, mentre riemergono le giunture e le ossa. Il corpo si consegna allo sguardo unicamente attraverso queste linee in rilievo e trasforma lo spettatore in una sorta di archeologo alle prese con una visione dal sottosuolo: l'occhio non vede semplicemente il corpo ma deve quasi scavare sotto il telo per ricostruirlo, per legare la struttura ossea che appare all'immagine di un'anatomia quotidiana. Deve immaginare le parti mancanti che non si sono potute imprimere, abbandonarsi al gioco delle linee di questa *danza radiografica*, o tentare di ricostruire l'immagine prima che sparisca.

Il corpo cerca sì di imprimersi dal retro per concedersi alla vista, ma sparisce inevitabilmente al suo distacco, quasi inghiottito dalla tensione dal telo. Gli arti non possono solidificarsi in un'immagine, ma compongono un bassorilievo in movimento, sottoposto ad una continua erosione.

La timidezza delle ossa è infatti legato nella sua gestuazione alle famose immagini dei corpi delle modelle di Yves Klein, che – appoggiati alla tela – lasciavano la propria impronta antropometrica in vernice blu o oro, testimonianza che qualcosa era avvenuto. E tuttavia *La timidezza delle ossa* marca come lo statuto del teatro è racchiuso proprio nella fragilità dell'immagine, in un corpo che ritirandosi dal telo trascina con se la propria impronta, cancellandola per sempre.

Se per Klein i propri quadri unicamente come la *cenere* della propria arte, nel caso del teatro l'assenza di *cenere* nell'impressione del corpo diviene quasi una peculiarità. È un gesto che si brucia nel suo accadere e che non lascia cenere, se non proprio nello sguardo dello spettatore.

Questa idea di costruire un'immagine che andasse catturata nell'istante precedente la sparizione è proseguita nel lavoro successivo: se ne *La timidezza delle ossa* la ricerca si costituiva attorno a due corpi che quasi lottavano nel tentativo di apparire, in *Volta* ci sono tre corpi che lottano nel tentativo di non

scompare: lo spazio è completamente buio e i corpi, coperti di nero, sarebbero assolutamente invisibili se gli arti non fossero parzialmente ricoperti da una strato sottile di cera bianca. Questo nuovo materiale diviene così il supporto che rende visibile il corpo altrimenti invisibile.

Sono anatomie ancora frammentate, forzatamente provvisorie e fragili; si uniscono e si separano creando figure umane non per forza riconoscibili, ma eventualmente ricostruibili da parte di chi guarda. La metamorfosi e la conseguente necessità di catturare istantaneamente l'immagine appaiono forse con maggiore evidenza proprio in questo lavoro.



Ad una componente volontaria se ne somma una che è propria del materiale: la cera è un materiale organico e per forza di cose – dal principio – comincia a sciogliersi e frantumarsi, annullando progressivamente la percentuale di visibilità del corpo. Spariscono gli arti e abbiamo la possibilità di ricostruirli mentalmente unicamente in base a quello che c'era prima o grazie alle nostre conoscenze anatomiche. È uno sparire graduale, uno spezzarsi che può

terminare solo nella testimonianza delle scaglie che ritroviamo in terra alla fine, come una costellazione postuma nata all'evaporazione del corpo.

In entrambi questi i lavori, proprio il materiale è ciò che – con i propri vincoli – ci ha in parte guidato nella creazione dell'immagine, eliminando una serie di possibilità e facendone scoprire di nuove. Il materiale è così una guida oltre ad essere il filtro che abbiamo costantemente ricercato per allontanare il corpo da una rappresentazione mimetica, per allontanamento forse dall'idea stessa di *rappresentazione* e cercare una più semplice *presentazione* di qualcosa di sconosciuto e al tempo stesso familiare.

Il telo o la cera non lavorano così unicamente nella direzione di coprire il corpo, quanto in quella di mostrarlo in maniera differente; l'azione slittava dal *cosa* vedo del corpo al *come* lo vedo: non c'è desiderio di allontanarsi dal corpo – che rimane centrale nella pratica performativa – ma solo da una sua presentazione univoca che impedirebbe quell'ambiguità fertile a una sua potenziale ricostruzione da parte di ognuno in infinite maniere differenti.

Astratti dal corpo intero e riproposti come frammenti di corpo scomposto, quelli che apparivano sul telo o nella materia di cera erano primissimi nuclei di gesti *puri*: essi, pur costruendo una drammaturgia serrata di movimento, erano svincolati da qualsiasi contesto apparentemente noto. Essa ecedeva i riferimenti al quotidiano per formalizzarsi come narrazione dello stesso formarsi della visione.

Se ne *La timidezza delle ossa* i gesti che apparivano sul telo andavano a formare il tentativo stesso di autoscrivere come corpo, in *Volta* il materiale della cera trasformava qualsiasi gesto in un involontario movimento in direzione della scomparsa del corpo stesso.

Entrambi i lavori erano accompagnati da un tessuto sonoro composto originalmente, e nato assieme ai lavori stessi. Essi infatti non fungevano unicamente da accompagnamento al lavoro, ma erano creatori del senso stesso di questa scrittura gestuale scissa dal corpo.

Il suono è stato composto a partire dal campionamento di suoni che avessero un'assonanza con il materiale visivo. Così ne *La timidezza delle ossa* i movimenti avvengono in corrispondenza di suoni di scrittura, quasi il gesto della creazione del corpo incidesse il segno su una pagina bianca; o numerosi suoni di sgretolamenti, come ad evocare la possibilità di un effimero bassorilievo marmoreo sottoposto a continua erosione e nuovo lavoro di scultura.

Parallelamente *Volta* era guidato da un panorama di suoni che alludeva maggiormente al contatto elettrico, matrice dell'immagine luminescente che appariva in scena, così come a suoni più dolci che seguissero lo scioglimento di quei stessi gesti privati di corpo.

Nella loro frammentarietà i gesti ruotavano attorno all'assenza stessa della visibilità del corpo. E nell'annullamento dell'immagine del corpo essi divenivano gli indizi visibili di qualcosa di non *detto*, emissari umani di un nucleo di corpo lasciato inesplorato, e non a caso così simile in questo al *titolo* mancante di una collezione periferica che avremmo esplorato nel progetto sulla gestualità, intenzione alla ricerca che sarebbe nata proprio da queste prime esperienze performative.

6 • L'ASSEDIO DEL DETTO • A partire dall'ottobre 2009, alla ripresa dei laboratori sul gesto, nell'immaginare questa idea di sottrazione al *detto* che era stata presente in tutti i nostri lavori precedenti, abbiamo cominciato a proporre un ultimo esercizio che mettesse in luce questa specifica dialettica.

Durante l'ultimo giorno di laboratorio, a fronte del percorso sulla scomposizione del gesto, chiedevamo ai partecipanti di modellare il proprio gesto sul corpo di un altro partecipante.

Questa ultima fase del lavoro sembrava infatti poter creare la più forte scissione tra materia e significato stesso del gesto: quest'ultimo veniva infatti

riprodotto su un'altra materia, impresso dall'esterno su un corpo inerme che – di volta in volta – si concedeva ad assumere i gesti prodotti ed impressi dall'altro.

Ma la concezione stessa di questo esercizio ha permesso di mettere in luce un'analogia che fino a quel momento era rimasta in secondo piano. Nel cercare di descrivere l'esercizio ai partecipanti, ho avuto modo di imbattermi in una riflessione riguardo all'etimologia stessa della parola *gesto*, che fino a questo momento era sembrata marginale all'interno della ricerca.



Nel *De Lingua Latina*, Varrona pone l'attenzione sulla derivazione del termine *gestus* dal verbo *gerere*, il cui significato letterale di *assumere* sottolineerebbe una marcata origine *esterna* del gesto rispetto al corpo.

«Si può infatti fare qualcosa e non agirlo, come il poeta fa un dramma ma non lo agisce [agere nel senso di *recitare una parte*]: al contrario, l'attore agisce il dramma ma non lo fa. Analogamente il dramma è fatto [*fit*] dal poeta, ma non è agito [*agitur*]; dall'attore è agito, ma non fatto. Invece l'*imperator* [il magistrato investito del potere

supremo], rispetto al quale si usa l'espressione *res gesta* [compiere qualcosa, nel senso di prenderlo su di sé, assumerne l'intera responsabilità], in questo né fa, né agisce, ma *gerit*, cioè sopporta [*sustinet*]» .

Il corpo assume i gesti, li accoglie sul corpo rendendo la propria materia disponibile ad imprimersi con differenti forme.

Questo esercizio metteva così in luce in maniera corporea l'idea di estraneità del gesto che sembrava essere emersa alla genesi del rapporto con l'*oggetto*.

Una delle domande che ponevamo al termine dell'esercizio ruotava proprio attorno alla paternità di quella serie di movimenti che avevano originato questa nuova forma di gestualità, in cui sembrano rincorrersi senza sosta le categorie di appartenenza ed estraneità.



A seguito dell'emergere di questo esercizio all'interno dei laboratori sul gesto, ho provato ad approfondire maggiormente se in letteratura esistesse effettivamente una linea teorica che aveva marcato questo aspetto di appartenenza ed estraneità del gesto rispetto al corpo.

Uno degli aspetti più interessanti che sono emersi da questa parte specifica della ricerca in relazione a questi esercizi di assunzione della gestualità, sono state le parole con cui viene tracciato l'ultimo *gesto libero* descritto da Benedetto all'interno della propria regola monastica.

All'ingresso in monastero il novizio compie un ultimo gesto, prima di rinunciare a qualsiasi gesto individuale, per fondersi nella regola e nei movimenti regolati dal gruppo. Benedetto descrive come egli – come ultimo gesto libero – debba poggiare la mano sull'altare, ed aggiunge: «Quippe qui ex illo die nec proprii corporis protestatem se habiturum scit». [E a partire da quel giorno, egli è consapevole di non avere nemmeno più potere sul proprio corpo].

Tuttavia, quello che avviene in realtà nelle parole di questa promessa va al di là di un'iscrizione di gesti per divenire rinuncia alla totalità della gestualità: svanisce qualsiasi appartenenza per abbracciare una completa estraneità. Nell'ottica di una contrapposizione di termini tra il *dire* e il *detto* levinasiano che aveva caratterizzato fortemente l'impianto della ricerca teorica e pratica, il movimento del monaco viene descritto come strumento di un *detto* impartito dall'esterno che deve essere sempre raggiunto.

Il corpo del monaco benedettino perde qualsiasi autonomia del *dire*: il gesto affievolisce per lasciare emergere ogni movimento come strumento di un *oggetto/segno* da realizzare. Così nel Medioevo, l'etimo della parola *gesto* ritrova il senso proprio, messo in luce ancora in epoca tardo romana nel citato *De Lingua Latina* di Varrone.

Ma questa idea di assunzione esterna presente nella concezione medievale del gesto è tutt'altro che estranea a una teoria della gestualità: quando nell'analizzare l'attività del parlare aveva marcato l'estraneità del linguaggio, Flusser aveva al tempo stesso sottolineato come non solo l'uomo non sia semplicemente colui che non possiede il linguaggio, ma come anche – al contrario – sia colui che ne è posseduto: «C'est, au contraire, le parleur qui est possédé par les paroles pendant le geste de parler. Lorsqu'on donne la parole à la parole, la première chose qu'elle dit est qu'elle n'est pas parlée par l'homme,

mais que c'est elle qui parle par l'homme ; que ce n'est pas l'homme qui articule la langue, mai que c'est la langue qui articule l'homme».¹²⁴ Alla potenza divina e demoniaca del Medioevo, si sostituisce ora la semplice presenza dell'*oggetto*, quel *detto* che chiede a gran voce il proprio compimento e chiama il corpo in un movimento che possa realizzarlo.

Nel gesto il corpo risponde così alla chiamata dell'*oggetto*: esso è un canto delle sirene di Ulisse al quale il corpo non è in grado di resistere, e che lo spinge a uscire fuori da sé fino a potersi rendere *detto*.

L'analisi della gestualità medievale ha permesso un cambio di direzione che va a precisare la definizione di gesto stesso: questo non è un movimento che dal corpo va verso l'*oggetto* senza raggiungerlo, ma piuttosto un dolce abbandonarsi alla deriva verso il mondo da cui è attratto, ma nel quale – per mantenersi gesto – deve cercare di non precipitare.

7 • MODELLARE LA MATERIA • Di fronte a questi interrogativi, l'esperienza del laboratorio ha permesso così di cogliere la specificità del problema. La gestulità non si può risolvere in una pura assunzione esterna (che rischierebbe di confondere le categorie di gesto e di segno); ma quest'ultima deve convivere con l'appartenenza del gesto nella materia in cui è impresso. Solo l'emergere di quest'ultima, che si abbandona ad essere modellata, permette al gesto di rimanere tale.

Questa idea di gesto come resistenza della materia a una forza esterna, nata dall'immagine dell'ultimo esercizio dei laboratori, ha permesso di impostare tutta l'ultima fase della ricerca, divenendo pietra miliare della ricerca stessa.

Una volta impostata questa definizione, ho provato a verificare il riscontro che essa poteva ritrovare in esempi di pratiche artistiche precenti che si fossero confrontate in maniera serrata con la gestulità, o per le quali la categoria di

¹²⁴ Flusser, V., op. cit., p.29.

gesto aveva assunto un significato centrale.

Esiste un'ampia letteratura che descrive specificatamente la gestualità sotto forma di modellazione della materia. Degli esempi trovati in questo periodo di ricerca ne ho trovati due particolarmente fondamentali per gli sviluppi successivi.

Da un lato nel proprio *De institutione novitiorum* composto a Parigi poco prima del 1140, Ugo di San Vittore è stato il primo a paragonare il corpo a una materia e la disciplina del gesto all'attività di imprimere una forma dall'esterno sul corpo del novizio. Per descrivere questo lavoro di disciplina egli fa riferimento all'immagine del fabbro che scalda e batte il ferro per imprimergli una nuova forma¹²⁵.

Ugo di San Vittore sceglie l'immagine di un materiale durevole e che, una volta impresso sotto forma di gesto, è difficile da modificare. Così ciò che egli intende qua con il termine *gesto* ha già abbandonato la sfera della gestualità, essendo piuttosto una forma d'adesione perfetta ad una regola impressa sul corpo dall'esterno, segni oggettuali che il corpo deve portare. Quella scolpita dal fabbro di Ugo attorno al corpo del novizio, sostituisce alla gestualità una vera e propria corazza di segni, e il corpo è unicamente supporto di questa stessa armatura di cui si farebbe prigioniero.

Il corpo del novizio sparisce sotto un'armatura di gesti il più codificato possibile: essa si costituisce di segni che rinviano unicamente ad altro; manifestano la certezza di un *detto* che nega l'incertezza del *dire* e che – in questa immagine di rigidità della corazza di segni – copre completamente e nega la presenza della materia del corpo al di sotto.

Dall'altro lato, Duchenne de Boulogne, che nel 1835 mise a punto una tecnica di stimolazione muscolare per far assumere al volto dall'esterno diverse espressioni facciali. Nella sua opera *De l'Électrisation Localisée et de son*

¹²⁵ «Scio enim quam difficile sit, cor malitia induratum ad formam disciplinae et speciem honestis incurvare, sed necesse est ut dura materia cum facile ad formam non flectitur, ei et acrioris flammae incendium et mallei gravioris tunsio adhibeatur». Ugo di San Vittore, *De Institutione Novitiorum*, Liber XII.

Application à la Physiologie, à la Pathologie et à la Thérapeutique, pubblicata per la prima volta nel 1855, Duchenne lamenta tuttavia l'impossibilità di cogliere nella sua purezza l'espressione desiderata ed impressa dall'esterno, poiché essa rimane sempre troppo sensibile alla fisionomia e alla materialità del volto stesso su cui è iscritta.

Proprio per questa ragione dovremmo considerare le espressioni dei corpi di Duchenne de Boulogne al pari dei gesti: essi sono tentativi di far *assumere* dall'esterno qualcosa che tuttavia rimane incarnato nella stessa materia del corpo e specifica fisionomia dei singoli pazienti. E le immagini pubblicate da Duchenne sembrano una visualizzazione stessa della gestualità: il medico ed un infermiere attorniano il paziente da diversi lati e modellano la carne del suo volto con strumenti e scosse elettriche al fine di raggiungere l'*oggetto* espressivo, quel *detto* della mimica facciale che si scontra con la resistenza della specificità e della carne dello stesso volto.

È questa idea di resistenza che sembra prevalere nel gesto: il gesto si cristallizza come tale nel momento in cui si *sottrae* dal raggiungere il pieno significato. L'analisi del gesto nel cinema e nelle arti performative ha permesso di mettere a fuoco questo ribaltamento.

Emmanuel Dreux, in un saggio intitolato *Le cinéma burlesque ou la subversion par le geste* distingue due differenti tipologie di gesto alla nascita del cinema.

Da un lato emerge un gesto che va nella direzione di quel linguaggio sonoro ancora mancante: come immaginare altrimenti i gesti enfatici, e scolpiti in maniera così plastica sul corpo degli attori e delle attrici di Méliès. Dreux nota tuttavia come, in questo caso, il corpo divenga supporto di un linguaggio puro, pagina bianca di qualcosa che viene detto attraverso esso e su esso: essi non sono più gesti perché sono già segni compiuti, *detti* dall'esterno.

Questo stesso discrimine viene posto da Antonin Artaud ne *Le Théâtre et son Double*, nel momento in cui parla dei gesti della pantomima occidentale come di qualcosa che ha evaso la sfera del gesto per rientrare in quella del segno, ovvero di qualcosa che non ha più distanza dal suo stesso significato verso cui

tendeva. I movimenti affettati del cinema muto vivono sempre oltre il limite stesso della gestualità, catturati ad ogni istante in oggetti definiti di una comunicazione non verbale. Il corpo dell'attore è così lo strumento, il medium di un linguaggio che non trova altro supporto di scrittura.

D'altro lato tuttavia Dreux pone l'attenzione su un atteggiamento del corpo che – alla nascita del cinema – sembra affiancare la costruzione di un canone realmente gestuale.

All'interno di quello che viene chiamato *cinéma burlesque*, i gesti sconclusionati di Buster Keaton, dei fratelli Marx o di Charlie Chaplin sembrano non volersi assolutamente ridurre ad un'ottica di scrittura di un linguaggio. Nel proprio saggio *Le cinéma burlesque ou la subversion par le geste* Emmanuel Dreux scrive infatti:

«Il est essentiel de préciser que les gestes nombreux et remarquable du cinéma burlesque ne forment pas un langage significatif, comme dans le dialogue mimé ou le mimodrame»¹²⁶.

Questi gesti sovvertono il linguaggio stesso, sono nella loro gratuità una forma di ribellione alla parola, in grado di manifestare il fuori luogo del corpo in qualsiasi situazione.

Al tempo stesso è necessario mettere in luce come questi gesti non siano sostanzialmente differenti dai segni di Méliès. Essi non sono del tutto indipendenti rispetto al linguaggio. Come posto in maniera magistrale da Antonin Artaud a proposito dei gesti del teatro balinese essi sono «linguaggio puro che sfugge alla parola»: nella scelta di queste parole egli sembra tracciare a margine di un movimento di tensione o di caduta verso il linguaggio una sottrazione ad esso che – nella dinamica tra movimento ed *oggetto* – non si presenta come interruzione ma come sottrazione all'interno della quale semplicemente sembra si fermino un attimo prima di raggiungere il *detto* a cui tendevano.

¹²⁶ Dreux, Emmanuel, *Le cinéma burlesque ou la subversion par le geste*, op.cit. p13.

L'analisi del gesto in danza è stata fondamentale per lavorare su questa prima ipotesi. Al festival Montpellier Danse 2004, la coreografa francese Mathilde Monnier presentò lo spettacolo *Public*.

In scena diversi corpi di danzatori si confrontavano – sulle note di alcune canzoni – con una dimensione che sembrava essere quella di origine della danza stessa: quello che veniva esposto erano piccoli movimenti che sembravano rispondere al semplice istinto verso il movimento di un corpo sottoposto a un ritmo. Le immagini in scena riproducevano diversi gradi di adesione alla musica e avrebbero potuto essere estrapolate da diversi contesti, da una dimensione privata verso una più aderente alla danza codificata. Alcune movenze erano simili ai movimenti che ciascuno di noi potrebbe produrre da solo in casa accompagnato dalla musica, altre recuperavano la dimensione di parziale esibizione del movimento all'interno di un contesto da discoteca dove solitamente danzatori non professionisti si cimentano già nell'adesione a un ritmo e alla modellazione di qualcosa che possa essere visto da altri, fino a lambire immagini che sembravano recuperate dalla danza classica. Nella presentazione del lavoro Monnier scrive:

«Il s'agit de convoquer un monde à soi, de dégager un "laisser-aller du mouvement", un "lâcher prise du geste" déplaçant la notion d'écriture chorégraphique. Parler de la danse comme d'une expérience avant toute autre chose, une expérience qui convoque des mémoires différentes et superposent sans hiérarchie un ensemble de mouvements contradictoires»¹²⁷.

Da un lato Monnier parla di un *laisser-aller du mouvement*: il movimento non è *fine a sé stesso*, ma è già in uscita verso la musica, verso l'*oggetto*. Eppure non si esaurisce mai nell'adesione ad essa, in quanto il tutto avviene *déplaçant la notion d'écriture chorégraphique*.

Così Monnier rivela come la scrittura coreografica a cui aderisce solitamente la danza non è annullata, ma rimane *oggetto* di tensione da cui il movimento stesso deve fuggire: se inizialmente i movimenti messi in scena sembrano

¹²⁷ Monnier, M., *Publique*. www.mouvement.net/html/fiche.php?doc_to_load=9183

raccontare una genesi della danza, risulta poco a poco chiaro come Monnier ponga l'accento piuttosto su un lavoro di sottrazione rispetto alla coreografia. Sottrarsi a questa scrittura *detta* e pubblica per tornare in una dimensione che essa definisce appunto privata.



Mathile Monnier, *Publique*, 2004.

Se già nel *Tanztheater* di Pina Bausch è possibile intercettare il tentativo di sottrarsi alla danza in quanto tale, è nella specificità di questa dicotomia di termini tra pubblico e privato, che Monnier recupera una dimensione di gesto della danza come ciò che precede la sua stessa esposizione e codificazione come linguaggio.

Questo linguaggio coreografico infatti non sparisce ma diviene una sorta di faro a cui il danzatore tende, simile al canto delle sirene di Ulisse che attirerebbe il corpo che danza ad aderire a sé. Ma è nella resistenza a questo stesso canto che il corpo crea la dimensione del gesto.

Il gesto è così emerso da questa analisi come quella resistenza al *detto* che si cristallizza prima della sua stessa significazione. Esso si blocca in un equilibrio di forze prima di divenire significativo, simile forse a quella profusione di

mignoli ritorti dei corpi del Rinascimento che forse altro non sono che la necessità di questa gratuita cristallizzazione di rinuncia a un *detto* che non si vuole assumere.

Così ne *Il teatro e il suo doppio*, Antonin Artaud definisce il gesto del teatro balinese – ben distante dal segno *detto* della pantomima occidentale – come ciò che costringe i concetti spirituali a passare, per essere percepiti, attraverso i dedali e gli intrecci fibrosi della materia: non solo essi devono passare dagli intrecci fibrosi della carne, ma sembra rimanere impigliati nelle sue limitazioni d'estensione; il gesto descritto da Artaud stenta ad uscire dal corpo, come una parola balbettata che rimane in bocca, bloccata nella materialità del suo stesso *dire*.

È la stessa presenza della materialità del corpo che mi trattiene dal raggiungere l'*oggetto* e scivolare inevitabilmente in esso divenendo strumento invisibile del *detto*.

L'analisi di queste *resistenze* – da Duchenne de Boulogne a Mathile Monnier – ha permesso così specificare la definizione della gestualità, per impostarla come un cedere all'attrazione dell'*oggetto* che rimane impigliato nella fisicità della stessa carne.

È così proprio nella materia e nelle possibilità di questa stessa carne che l'*oggetto* attira i gesti, cercando di imprimere – al pari della modellazione di Duchenne – il proprio *detto* sul corpo dell'uomo.

8 • LA FORMA SCENICA • Una volta impostata questa dialettica ho deciso, a inizio del 2010 di seguire questa strada della modellazione dall'esterno, attraverso una struttura che mettesse in luce in maniera più evidente l'idea di materia inerme al centro della gestualità, un corpo vuoto in balia delle forze del *detto*.

Questo aspetto emerso nel laboratorio (la concezione del gesto come assunzione dall'esterno e sua collocazione rispetto al corpo) è quello che ha maggiormente impostato il mio percorso di analisi teorica successivo e ultimo.

La forma scenica di questo progetto di ricerca comincia a prendere forma nel gennaio 2010 attraverso la costruzione dello spettacolo *La prima periferia*. La concretizzazione dell'indagine condotta nel laboratorio si concentra in questi mesi attorno alla natura espressiva di un corpo svincolato dalle proprie intenzioni e che si abbandona ad essere *gestito* dall'esterno. La base del lavoro parte dall'idea di avere tre performer che muovano altrettanti modelli anatomici.



(*La prima periferia*, foto1)

Il progetto parte così nei primi mesi del 2010 dalla progettazione e costruzione artigianale dei tre modelli anatomici che – muovendo i passi dai tentativi scientifici di fine settecento – riproducano nel dettaglio le possibilità di movimento di tutte le membra e giunture umane. Essi non vivono di un

tentativo di corrispondenza fisiognomica con il corpo umano, ma puntando a riprodurre le esatte possibilità di inclinazione e movimento dei singoli arti.

Tre corpi monocromi, privati di ogni fisionomia o espressione facciale, in cui le infinite inclinazioni divengono indizi di un'indagine espressiva; tre corpi artigianali, mossi a contatto dall'esterno, bisognosi in ogni istante di maggiore o minore attenzione tecnica a seconda della scala di precisione imposta da ogni singolo gesto.

Nei loro spostamenti, i tre performer divengono una sorta di visualizzazione di scala di difficoltà dei gesti stessi, mettendo in luce - quasi incarnassero una muscolatura esplosa e fuoriuscita, che ha abbandonato l'interno del corpo per rendersi visibile agli occhi dello spettatore - quell'infinito lavoro che solitamente non percepiamo dietro i gesti più quotidiani.

Se talvolta ogni singolo performer si occupa della gestualità di un singolo modello in un rapporto quasi paritario, altre volte due o addirittura tre performer ricostruiscono gesti più complessi lavorando attorno a un singolo modello.



(La prima periferia, foto2)

La scelta dei performer che potessero affiancarmi nella modellazione é stata fondamentale in questa fase, proprio nella certezza - nata nel laboratorio - che un portato diverso di gestualità avrebbe condizionato la modellazione stessa del gesto. La scelta finale è stata fatta selezionando un tecnico artigiano (intervenuto inizialmente per la costruzione dei modelli anatomici e successivamente integrato in scena) e un danzatore conosciuto in seno ai laboratori stessi.

Essi avevo tra loro e in rapporto a me un tipo di gestualità molto differente che ha fortemente condizionato ed arricchito la modellazione collettiva che andavamo ad affrontare.



(La prima periferia, foto3)

Esiste così ne *La prima periferia* una doppia ragione del gesto: da un lato esiste un gesto puramente *tecnico* che i tre performer relizzano: essi sono là *per* modellare il gesto dei modelli anatomici, la loro presenza - come nel *bunraku* giapponese - é puramente tecnica. Per questa ragione la maggior parte del tempo questo gesto è oltrepassato dall'occhio dello spettatore: i

performer spariscono in una modalità di percezione molto simile, appunto, a quella del teatro di figura giapponese.

Dall'altro esiste il *gesto espressivo* impresso sul corpo del modello anatomico, che è centro stesso dell'attività narrativa dell'atto teatrale.

Paradossalmente è proprio quel gesto a venir percepito come maggiormente umano, in grado di entrare in maniera empatica nell'immaginario dello spettatore e di muovere ad emozione.



(La prima periferia, foto4)

Lo spettacolo segue un tipo di narrazione che riflette fortemente l'esperienza di ricerca che ha contribuito alla sua stessa genesi. Esso comincia con i tre modelli anatomici già disposti in scena in pose espressive. Sono pose di attesa ed essi sono credibili nella loro staticità; ed al tempo stesso, nel momento in cui il primo performer – disposto inizialmente fuoriscena ma visibile – comincia ad alzarsi per dare vita al primo movimento del primo di loro, questa stessa attesa è retrospettivamente letta come attesa di un richiamo esterno che potesse finalmente spingere il corpo ad assumere un primo gesto.

Il primo modello anatomico prende così vita, (foto1) ed emerge in un gesto di protensione verso un secondo corpo disposto poco lontano da lui. L'inizio de

La prima periferia sembra così suggerire la possibilità effettiva di un rapporto narrativo *tra* i tre modelli anatomici.

Eppure all'ingresso degli altri due performer questa stessa forma di narratività è immediatamente negata e scartata per essere sostituita da una forma differente. I restanti performer che entrano sollevano il secondo corpo e lo depongono poco lontano, ridimensionando il modello anatomico alla sua entità oggettuale e spezzando qualsiasi illusione di autonomia che nei primi istanti si era creata.

Allo spezzarsi della narratività *tra* modelli anatomici (ovvero di quel tipo di narratività che caratterizza solitamente il teatro di figura) si instaura così un tipo di narrazione ambigua, giocata principalmente tra i performer e i modelli. Ed è attraverso questa narratività che il gesto non emerge più nel suo significato, ma piuttosto nel continuo rapporto di dialettica *tra* la materia del corpo e quel *detto* esterno, fatto di costrizione e rapporto (foto 2 e 3)

Ogni volta che i modelli anatomici prendono vita nella gestualità, prima che il gesto si possa trasformare in una reale forma di comunicazione *tra* i tre modelli, regolarmente emerge l'aspetto coercitivo della presenza esterna che fa slittare il rapporto su un tipo differente di narrazione. Essi, per tutta la durata del lavoro, non riescono in fondo a comunicare *tra* loro, ma sono relegati a una sfera del gesto che non diviene mai segno.

Solo nell'ultimo istante dello spettacolo (foto4) i tre modelli sollevano, contemporaneamente, il braccio e l'indice in un gesto tanto comune quanto ambiguo. Essi d'improvviso sembrano richiedere attenzione allo spettatore o forse la tregua da una forma di solitudine divenuta insostenibile; o a tratti indicano se stessi, come in un'interrogazione ultima e definitiva sulla loro natura di corpi privati di ogni intenzione, oltre la soglia dei quali un'ininterrotta gestualità fiorisce senza posa non raccontando forse nella se non il racconto della stessa condizione del corpo.

9 • IL PRINCIPIO DI SLITTAMENTO • La creazione di questo doppio modello di gestualità tecnica e espressiva mi ha permesso di accedere alla teorizzazione di tutta l'ultima parte della teoria della gestualità. In particolare essa inizia mettendo in luce un principio che nella ricerca ho chiamato principio di *slittamento*.

A partire da ciò che emergeva nel lavoro come sovrapposizione di una gestualità tecnica ed espressiva, ho potuto fare riferimento nell'analisi teorica sul gesto al *principio di slittamento* citato da Didi-Huberman a proposito degli accessori dei quadri del Rinascimento (drappeggi e capigliature) così lungamente studiati da Aby Warburg.

George Didi-Huberman individua in questo aspetto di Warburg l'eredità di un pensiero evoluzionistico portato alla luce da Darwin alcuni anni prima. In particolare Didi-Huberman concentra l'attenzione sulla persistenza evoluzionistica di caratteri animali secondari nella teoria darwiniana: l'andamento evoluzionistico procederebbe per trasformazione di caratteri primari e contemporaneamente per riapparizione di dettagli secondari apparentemente spariti e non significativi, che vivono in quella stessa marginalità rintracciata da Didi-Huberman negli accessori warburghiani:

«Il principio dello spostamento enunciato nell'*Expression of the Emotions* corrisponde alle intuizioni prime di Warburg quando cercava di definire, nel 1893, il modo di sopravvivenza delle formule antiche di pathos, negli «accessori» in movimento – abiti, chiome – dei personaggi così stranamente impassibili e «sconsacrati» di Botticelli. Spostamento è un termine che definisce bene la legge figurale tanto efficace dei quadri del mastro fiorentino: tutto il «movimento passionale dell'anima» (*leidenschaftliche Seelenbewegung*) o «causa interna», passa attraverso un «accessorio esterno animato» (*äusserlich bewegtes Beiwerk*)»¹²⁸.

Ugualmente i modelli anatomici vivono di «accessori esterni animati»: essi sono i movimenti stessi dei tre performer che imprimono il «movimento

¹²⁸ Didi-Huberman, G., *L'immagine insepolta*, op. cit.

passionale dell'anima» nella materia anatomica inanimata dei modelli. Ed è la materia che sembra resistere, nelle sue stesse possibilità di movimento, a non darsi come completamente *detta*.

Sottomesso a un *pathos* che invade il corpo dall'esterno, il gesto cerca di sottrarsi al darsi irrimediabilmente come *segno*, e il gesto si crea in questa tensione di forze. Se l'immagine delle Ninfa è strutturalmente, nella sua inconsistenza, incarnazione del gesto, ne esiste una in particolare, dipinta da Botticelli, che sembra poter divenire didascalica della gestualità.

Nell'angolo destro de *La Primavera*, Eolo cerca di afferrare la Ninfa, che – pur mossa da lui nei capelli e nelle vesti – tenta la fuga.



Ugualmente ne *La prima periferia* una passione (il *pathos* varburghiano) invade il corpo dall'esterno cristalizzandosi non più nelle vesti e nella capigliatura della ninfa ma nelle giunture e possibilità di movimento del modello anatomico.

Ma da questo confronto fondamentale con la teoria degli accessori costitutivi di Warburg, è potuta emergere la domanda: dovremmo davvero considerare anche il gesto come un *accessorio costitutivo*? Ovvero come qualcosa che emerge al di là del corpo, già oltre la soglia del corpo?

10 • IL CENTRO VUOTO • Pur confrontandosi fortemente con la tradizione del teatro di figura occidentale e con il bunraku orientale, *La prima periferia* ha come proprio nucleo una differenza sostanziale a livello di narratività.

I corpi dei tre modelli anatomici sembrano in fondo non dire nulla, o non poter dire nulla. Infatti – come abbiamo detto – se lo facessero starebbero esponendo de segni, ricadrebbero il quel *detto* de cui il gesto sembra allontanarsi.

Eppure proprio in questo sottrarsi dalla comunicazioni essi sembrano riuscire a raggiungere il punto maggiore di umanità. L'immagine muta dei modelli anatomici interroga fortemente sul senso che ha l'esposizione della gestualità sul nostro corpo.

Se prendiamo i gesti non comunicativi, quelli che facciamo involontariamente, o anche quelli che capita di fare durante una conversazione, e li analizzassimo, emergerebbe la loro assoluta gratuità; la loro non necessità di questi movimenti ai fini della comprensione.

Eppure proprio questi gesti sono quelli che permettono forse di percepire l'uomo come vivo. In essi, sottratto al linguaggio, al segno così come all'azione, l'uomo non è più strumento di un *oggetto* esterno, ma appare al centro vuoto della propria indifesa umanità. Forse allora, di fronte allo sguardo dell'altro, l'umanità del corpo riemerge proprio quando esso è sottratto al proprio compito o azione.

Per comprendere questo aspetto, e cogliere l'esatto tipo di movimento che ci interessava catturare nello spettacolo, è stato di fondamentale supporto

l'analisi di un film che, nel 2006, gli artisti Douglas Gordon e Philippe Parreno hanno realizzato attorno alla figura di Zinedine Zidane.

Ziane: a 21th century potrait, film incentrato sulla figura del giocatore simbolo e stella del calcio francese, ripreso da decine di telecamere nell'intervallo temporale di novanta minuti della partita Real Madrid - Villareal, del 23 aprile 2005.



Gordon, Parreno: *Zidane, A 21th Century Portrait*, 2006

Il film apre una dimensione inedita di visione della partita: essa non è vista nella sua totalità: le macchine da presa marcano il corpo di Zidane indipendentemente da dove la palla si trovi e Zidane è restituito agli spettatori in tutti questi momenti in cui – pur in campo – non gioca strettamente, ovvero non è *in azione*. Ed è esattamente questa dimensione che lascia turbati nel film. Egli appare irrimediabilmente umano come un giocatore non ci era mai apparso. Se solitamente nel momento in cui lo vediamo *in azione*, lo percepiamo già strumento di qualcosa che sta realizzando, quando al contrario egli *non fa nulla*, emerge l'umanità del corpo che realizza tutte quelle azioni.

Sono piccoli movimenti, tentativi falliti di azioni, scatti che non si risolvono in nulla, una collezione di intimità catturata a distanza e restituita ingrandita ed isolata rispetto al gioco stesso. La presenza di Zidane diviene un *esercizio di solitudine* per utilizzare un'espressione usata dallo stesso Gordon all'uscita del film: e l'intimità di questa sfera che non è risolta nell'azione ma che è già fuori dal corpo, appare come specificamente umana.

Analogamente, i corpi vuoti dei modelli anatomici mettono in luce come esista una prima sfera di vita, che marca la nostra estensione di corpo in una semplice presenza: essa è quello che potremmo chiamare vita. Al di sotto della gestualità giace una pura corporeità, o un corpo vuoto come nel caso dei modelli anatomici.

Ma ciò che permette di percepire l'umanità del corpo è una sorta di *prima periferia*, che precede l'essere già in azione del corpo. Essa è una sfera che copre la presumibile *vita biologica* e che potremmo chiamare *sopravvivenza*.

Così sottraendosi al *detto* e all'*utile* il gesto in quanto tale diviene semplice manifestazione di questa sfera. Ben al di là dei segni comunicativi, è dalla sfera dei gesti che cogliamo la vita stessa sotto forma della sua *sopravvivenza*. E se Ugo di San Vittore in epoca medievale si riferiva al gesto sotto forma di *indicium*, dovremmo considerarlo ora come indizio di una sopravvivenza del corpo stesso.

Elemento periferico e marginale, il gesto è così ben più di un semplice ornamento, ma testimonia la *sopravvivenza* stessa del corpo.

Così i corpi svuotati dei modelli anatomici prendono vita in maniera subitanea. Ed esso avviene maggiormente nel momento in cui un movimento non significativo attraversa il loro corpo. Ogni loro movimento sembra non necessario, e in questo essere non finalizzato ad altro, diviene manifestazione di niente altro che un fremito di vita. Così il gesto si cristallizza sulla soglia del corpo, ma a differenza del segno, che rinvia ad altro, esso rimane ancorato al corpo per rivelarne l'intimità più esposta.

11 • **LA SOGLIA DEL CORPO** • Questa immagine della cristallizzazione del gesto sui corpi dei modelli anatomici, come copertura stessa della sfera biologica e materia del corpo ha dato avvio dell'arco del 2011 a tutta l'ultima parte della teoria stessa della gestualità aprendo alla stessa possibilità di costruire una teoria di *vita sulla soglia del corpo*.

La somma di queste forze che appare ai margini del corpo lascia trasparire uno spazio interstiziale che emerge al di sopra di esso, come spazio del gesto e *prima periferia* del corpo. Ed è attraverso questa immagine di una gestualità posata al di là dell'estensione stessa del corpo che si concentra il parallelismo con l'idea di *spazio interstiziale* impostato da Didi-Huberman.

All'interno del *L'Immagine insepolta*, Didi-Huberman scrive a proposito della veste della Ninfa:

«Si danza con gli abiti come con il corpo, o piuttosto, l'abito diviene una sorta di spazio interstiziale – anch'esso danzante – tra il corpo e l'atmosfera che esso abita».¹²⁹

Da un lato questo *spazio interstiziale*, è ciò che potremmo identificare come lo spazio dove hanno vita i nostri gesti: nella tensione del gesto esco dal corpo, ma questo stesso corpo mi trattiene dal precipitare negli *oggetti* del mondo, mantenendomi in uno spazio intermedio tra il corpo e il mondo.

Nel tentativo di tratteggiare un'immagine della definizione della gestualità, potremmo allora dire che il gesto si comporta sul corpo al pari di una veste leggera che rifiuta di cristallizzarsi in forma unica. Non a caso, dall'*habitus* romano all'*indumentum gratiae* di Agostino, la gestualità ha spesso vissuto in una descrizione che avesse nella veste la sua stessa metafora.

Così i gesti abbigliano le spoglie strutture inanimate de *La prima periferia* di un'umanità improvvisa e mutevole. Esse giacciono al di sotto dei gesti

¹²⁹ Didi-Huberman, *L'immagine insepolta*, op. cit., p. 243

rivelando la loro fragilità: non sono mai in azione, ma sempre portare in vita da una copertura leggera di gesti.

Così i gesti fioriscono come materia del corpo al di là del corpo e, senza coprirlo completamente, gravitano attorno ad esso come una veste inconsistente o una nube di materia che lascia intravedere il corpo stesso al di sotto. Lo spazio dove gravitano i tre performer diviene lo spazio di possibilità che attornia il corpo stesso.

Forse allora più ancora della veste – e in fortissima analogia con le strutture da noi costruite – una referencia fondamentale sono divenute le sculture di Anthony Gormley, in grado di resituire appieno questa immagine della gestualità.

In *Quantum Clouds*, Gormley lavora per addizione, velando le proprie sculture antropomorfe col medesimo materiale di cui sono composte: l'immagine del corpo è attorniata da una fragile nube di materia, colta nell'incertezza della forma. Allo stesso modo, sospinto ed attirato dai venti dell'*oggetto*, il gesto circonda il corpo, come un pulviscolo di possibilità che gravita attorno alla materia del corpo, scolpendo e custodendo uno spazio tra il corpo e il mondo. Ogni gesto diviene così la manifestazione di questo spazio del corpo al di là del corpo, la manifestazione di questa possibilità dell'uomo di vivere in questo *spazio interstiziale*, sulla soglia del proprio stesso corpo.

A partire dall'interesse per questo *spazio interstiziale* o *prima periferia* che si era concretizzata davanti ai nostri occhi nella forma della performance, ho dedicato l'inizio del 2011 a mettere in discussione e trattare questo spazio di possibilità al di là del corpo.

Ne *I gradi dell'organico e l'uomo* Helmut Plessner aveva individuato la peculiarità dell'uomo rispetto all'animale, nella capacità di eccedersi per non *essere* solo il proprio corpo, ma per *avere* il proprio corpo. Secondo Plessner, l'animale sarebbe certamente il proprio corpo, ma tuttavia non avrebbe il suo corpo, ovvero non lo percepirebbe dall'esterno sotto forma di corporeità con cui entrare in relazione. Per questa ragione l'animale non si vergognerebbe,

perché egli non si vedrebbe a causa della mancanza di questo spazio di possibilità di uscita da sé.

Se l'uomo al contrario può vergognarsi, è proprio perché può uscire sulla soglia del proprio corpo e percepisce il proprio corpo dall'esterno.

Se Sartre sottolineava come ogni vergogna dovrebbe essere pensata come vergogna d'essere corpo di fronte allo sguardo dell'altro,¹³⁰ Levinas mostra come – dopo aver incontrato il Volto dell'altro ed essere rientrato nell'estensione del mio stesso corpo sotto forma di soggetto responsabile – lo sguardo dell'altro non sia fondamentale nella vergogna: io ho infatti la capacità di eccedermi, di superarmi come carne e vedermi da fuori e provo vergogna perché mi vedo da fuori e non unicamente perché l'altro mi vede.

Così dovremmo dire che per potersi vergognare, Adamo ed Eva erano dovuti prima uscire dal proprio corpo, superare la soglia della pella per percepirsi nudi dal loro stesso *spazio interstiziale*. Ben prima che Dio parli loro essi seppero che erano nudi, e forse è proprio questo scarto con la condizione di animalità che l'albero della conoscenza aveva aperto: in questo momento di scissione dal proprio stesso corpo, l'uomo non è più – utilizzando la terminologia di Plessner – solo colui che è il proprio corpo (*korper sein*) ma che ha il proprio corpo (*korper haben*). Collocato in questa stessa regione periferica del corpo, il gesto è così la manifestazione di questa possibilità umana di poter vivere sulla soglia del corpo, di *essere* ed *avere* al tempo stesso il proprio stesso corpo.

Per concludere esiste un'ultima immagine di questo spazio interstiziale che è divenuta per me immagine finale della ricerca stessa.

Recuperando una delle prime immagini che erano state usate al laboratorio – la tela di Caravaggio – ho notato come c'è un gesto che ancor più che quello di Cristo e Pietro diviene centrale per questa riflessione sulla gestualità.

Mentre è indicato da Cristo e da Pietro, Matteo indica sé stesso. Questo gesto

¹³⁰ «Or, voici que j'ai entendu des pas dans le corridor : on me regarde. Qu'est-ce que cela veut dire ? [...] Je suis, par delà toute connaissance que je puis avoir, ce moi qu'un autre connaît. Et ce moi que je suis, je le suis dans un monde qu'autrui m'a aliéné, car le regard d'autrui embrasse mon être et corrélativement les murs, la porte, la serrure». Sartre, op. cit. p. 318-319.

di Matteo è giustamente considerato comunemente e dalla critica d'arte come un gesto interrogativo. Tuttavia, se Sartre sottolinea come «ciascuna domanda presuppone dunque un essere che interroga e un essere che è interrogato»¹³¹, Matteo in questo gesto è colui che pone la domanda, ma al tempo stesso colui che *ha* nel proprio stesso corpo l'*oggetto* dell'interrogazione, e nella coincidenza dei termini ci mostra in questo gesto lo spazio interstiziale dell'uomo.

Il braccio di Matteo esce dal proprio corpo per allontanarsi e, dall'esterno indicare il proprio stesso corpo che diviene *oggetto* dell'interrogazione del gesto stesso: braccio e mano di Matteo – con le loro direzioni opposte – sono l'immagine perfetta delle due forze opposte insite nella gestualità, quella tensione e resistenza che pur di segno opposto non si riassorbono ma mantengono disteso quello spazio interstiziale al di là del corpo: nonostante il corpo abbia in sé stesso l'*oggetto* del gesto prodotto dal corpo stesso, il gesto di Matteo non è un puro movimento, perché in questo doppio movimento verso l'esterno e di ritorno verso il corpo, il gesto non riassorbe questa distanza, ma lascia spalancato questo spazio al di là del corpo.

Il doppio movimento del gesto non si riassorbono, al pari dei due movimenti della macchina da presa di Hitchcock in *La donna che visse due volte* (Vertigo, 1958), quella carrellata all'indietro con un vorticoso zoom in avanti combinati contemporaneamente che – pur nell'apparente immobilità dell'immagine – spalancano un abisso di vertigine che possa descrivere la sensazione del protagonista.

Ed è in fondo proprio in una vertigine sulla soglia del corpo che cogliamo lo sguardo di Matteo: egli vive tra il corpo e il possibile, tra la condizione presente e le sue stesse azioni. Egli è colto sulla soglia, che è rivelata ora come spazio incerto: egli si solleva da sé e si interroga, e si rifugia per un istante in questa soglia del possibile; sospende ogni azione, mostrando come ciò che divide il corpo dal futuro (come da ogni altro *oggetto*) sia proprio questa nube del possibile che attornia il corpo. Per questa ragione Agamben scrive in

¹³¹ Sartre, op. cit., 38-39

Bartleby come «ciò che si mostra nella soglia tra essere e non essere, tra sensibile e intellegibile, tra parola e cosa, non è l'abisso incolore del nulla, ma lo spiraglio luminoso del possibile».¹³²

Così nel gesto io mi metto in gioco sul confine possibile del corpo e da là contratto il mio stare al mondo. Se Sartre aveva rifugiato il soggetto in un essere attorniato da un nulla che lo separerebbe dagli oggetti del mondo, il gesto mostra invece come il soggetto non viva assolutamente protetto da una separazione con l'*oggetto*, ma piuttosto *in* questa stessa soglia di separazione. Srotolando una distanza tra me come corpo e il mondo degli oggetti, il gesto non innalza una barriera tra noi ma mi obbliga a vivere pericolosamente questo confine. Esso rivela ora come soggetto e oggetto non abitino in mondi distinti, ma vivano in un rapporto osmotico sulla soglia: il mondo non è fatto di oggetti e soggetti ma di progetti che si compenetrano.

Se Donatoni inizialmente si chiedeva cosa fosse il gesto, potremmo così rispondere che esso è una trascendenza trascesa, un esporsi per patire questa vertigine dell'esposizione. Il gesto comunica la presenza di questo stesso spazio del possibile tra me e il mondo, ed ogni gesto – stretto tra soluzione e dissoluzione – diviene un sospendersi su questo baratro sulla soglia del corpo. Ed è questo stesso spazio che i modelli anatomici indicano come propria prima periferia, come spazio del possibile e non del già attuato.

Esattamente come nell'ultima scena dello spettacolo, momento in cui i modelli anatomici indicano loro stessi, Matteo non ci indica semplicemente il suo corpo, ma ci indica il suo essere sospeso in dubbio sulla soglia del corpo. Ed è in questa vertigine del possibile che cogliamo lo sguardo incerto di Matteo che – mentre interroga se stesso – ci comunica la bellezza incerta di questo suo stesso interrogarsi.

¹³² Agamben, *Bartleby, la formula della creazione*, Quodlibet, Macerata 1993. p.65

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