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Mediating Gesture in Theory and Practice

Editorial Article

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Keywords

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"Criticism is the reduction of works
to the sphere of pure gesture".

Giorgio Agamben in *Kommerell, or On Gesture* (1999a: 80)

Gesture as a Figure of Speech. About this Issue

Gesture seems to be a rather convenient catch-all concept in a wide range of interdisciplinary discussions that probe the expressive acts of the body from the standpoints of iconography, semiotics, anthropology, kinesics,

neurophysiology, phenomenology, affect theory, ethics, anthropology, and political philosophy. Elements of these perspectives trickle into cinema and media studies, where the concept of gesture tends to be most frequently evoked for the sake of non-logocentric recuperation of the body, for exploring the limits of agency and rational meaning, and for the assessment of dramatic deeds with cultural and political repercussions. The key questions that gave rise to this collection of essays revolve around methodologies of gestural analysis and the avenues that this path of inquiry opens. How can the notion of gesture, although diffuse and elusive, be formulated as a source of theoretical reflection on cinema and an eligible tool of film and media analysis? What is cinematic gesture in both historical and theoretical perspectives? How does gesture relate to such concurrent concepts as movement, affect, and the body as a whole? How does it surpass this – however evident – relation to the body (above all, the hand, the face, the eye) and become subsumed under the categories of film apparatus (camera movement, perspective, framing, montage, colour, sound)? Where is gesture to be placed between the visible and the enunciable? How does the moving image mediate corporeal performance, both aesthetically and ethically? In what ways do cinematic gestures affect and move the audience? Finally, how does gesture negotiate corporeality, film techniques, and modes of thinking?

Owing to gesture's "muteness", any inquiry into the nature of the gestural faces a twofold challenge: the encumbrance of utterance leading to gesticulation on the one hand, and the methodological problem of adequately representing all nuances of the bodily act on the other. How should we capture, verbalise, and analyse the unspeakable beyond mere description and ekphrasis, when all language appears inadequate or overabundant? For good reason, Giorgio Agamben (who forefronts the theoretical premises of this issue) chose a pointed metaphor for gesture: a "gag" in the literal sense of the word – as "something that could be put in your mouth to hinder speech" (2000: 59). To overcome such an "incurable speech defect" (ibid.), intrinsic to every gesture, one needs to adopt an almost impossible posture: to transcend the logocentric system by means of language. To put it differently, one has to traverse the path not from words to deeds, but the other way round: from deeds, actions, and movements, from bodies and their actions and passions, to words.

Indeed, one tends to resort to more eloquent, albeit opaque, means – silence and gesture – when confronting the boundaries of language and thought. "Silence is the artist's ultimate other-worldly gesture: by silence, he frees himself from servile bondage to the world [...]", remarks Susan Sontag astutely in her 1967 essay "The Aesthetics of Silence" (2013: 4).¹ She continues: "One use for silence: certifying the absence or renunciation of thought [...]. Another, apparently opposed, use for silence: certifying the completion of thought" (ibid.: 17). Indeed, is gesture a surplus of communication or its loss? For effect, we pigeonhole most general phenomena and acts under the category of gesture and expect this terse expression to be grasped in a flash (and we usually do) – gesture is a perfect figure of speech in the generalising (and undifferentiated) rhetoric of politics, ethics, and art (artistic, social, political gesture, grand gesture, beau geste and alike). What is more, it appears to be a perfectly unspeakable figure of speech. The theory is equally affected by this holistic impulse to conceptualise gesture as an overarching "receptacle" which can artfully enclose both form and content and render them indistinguishable. This is manifest in numerous theoretical works, from Bertolt Brecht's renowned notions of "gest" (Gestus) and "basic gest" (Grundgestus), to Jan Mukařovský's "semantic gesture" (sémantické gesto) as a dynamic unity emerging in the process of unification of meaning (významová jednotnost) in a work of art (1942), to Vilém Flusser's attempts at a gestural phenomenology, in which gesture is elevated to a universal, interdisciplinary, and anti-ideological category capable of overcoming the disconnection between the natural sciences and the humanities (1991), etc.

With a nod to Sergei Eisenstein, we have chosen the term "mise en geste" for the collection's title – not only as a way of underscoring, as the Soviet avant-garde director once did, the performative and enactive dimension of cinema, but to point more broadly to a productive constellation of ideas which emerge when key disciplinary debates in film and media studies are recast in terms of gesture. In a narrow sense, Eisenstein's term "mise en geste" is defined in his 1948 notes on directing, completed a few months before his death, where he describes the actor's quest for a precise gesture to convey the subtext of a narrative situation and suggests that the actor gives a scene its dramatic charge by embodying – in the literal sense of the word – the conflicting motives driving the character (Eizenshtein 2004: 393). However, Eisenstein's interest in gesture went far beyond highlighting the narrative function of the actor's trajectory within the mise en scene. Time and again throughout his career, he would return to the notion of the moving body, placing it at the very center of the aesthetic process – both for the creator of an artwork and for the spectator. Eisenstein's gesturology was premised on the conception of the body as a site of intersecting forces – internal and external pressures which give shape to actions and reactions from a mechanical, biological, psychological, social, and political standpoint.

Extrapolating from this broader philosophical concern with gesture, the present issue of *Apparatus* aims to provide a platform for contemporary research that focuses on corporeal acts as a way of reframing some of the central concerns in film and media scholarship, as well as in cultural theory more broadly. One such concern is the relationship between the moving image and the viewer, both in terms of semiotic production of meaning and the phenomenological, as well as political potency of film. Gesture offers a valuable lens to address the processes that have been described under the categories of projection, mimesis, empathy, sensory engagement, and innervation. A second, related topic taken up by the articles in this volume is the problem of mediation: the question of how visual media capture, modify, transmit, and disseminate movement and thereby contribute to historical transformations.

Thus, Oksana Bulgakowa builds upon her earlier seminal project *The Factory of Gestures* to outline the role of cinema in reflecting and fashioning bodily comportment. Presenting cinema as a veritable document of somatic history, she investigates the materialisation of cultural and ideological imperatives in the bodily techniques in postwar European film. Eric Rauth proposes the term “cine-kinesis” to address the workings of the filmic medium in his refined and far-reaching interpretation of F. W. Murnau’s horror classic *Nosferatu*. Irina Sirotkina’s historical study shows the way in which Wassily Kandinsky’s effort to launch a universal science of movement, or “kinemology”, inspired researchers at the Russian Academy of Artistic Sciences in the 1920s to record and analyse movements of dancers, workers, and athletes in a variety of media. Drawing on studies of iconography (Aby Warburg, Erwin Panofsky, André Chastel), Ivan Pintor Iranzo traces the enigmatic “gesture of silence” in the oeuvre of Aleksandr Sokurov, arguing that this motif, intertwined with Sokurov’s poetic depiction of liminal spatialities, serves to redirect the spectator’s gaze inward and initiate a reflection on historical memory. In his analysis of Yorgos Lanthimos’s provocative films, Carlo Comanducci proposes the notion of “empty gestures” to describe the mechanical movements that characters are coerced to reproduce in a futile attempt to reinstate lost emotional connections; the performed subjection in Lanthimos inevitably leads to problematisation of subjectivity.

Altogether, these essays offer a portfolio of historical and theoretical approaches to the study of mediated gesture in cinema, dance, literature, theatre, and visual arts from Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe. In the next chapter, we set off for a parcours over some theories of gesture, relevant both in the trans-medial and trans-cultural approaches of the articles presented in this issue and essential in our own understanding of gesture as a mediating term (with the full awareness that any kind of such an overview cannot avoid certain limitations or reductions). The concluding chapter offers an extended commentary on Petr Pavlenskiï’s latest performance by considering it as a compelling manifestation of pan-European political and artistic gesturology.

1. From the collection *Styles of Radical Will* (1969). Relevant to our discussion of gesture, the German translation of Sontag’s book reads as *Gesten radikalen Willens* (2003).

Liberated Gestures: Theories of Bodily Statements Beyond the Sign

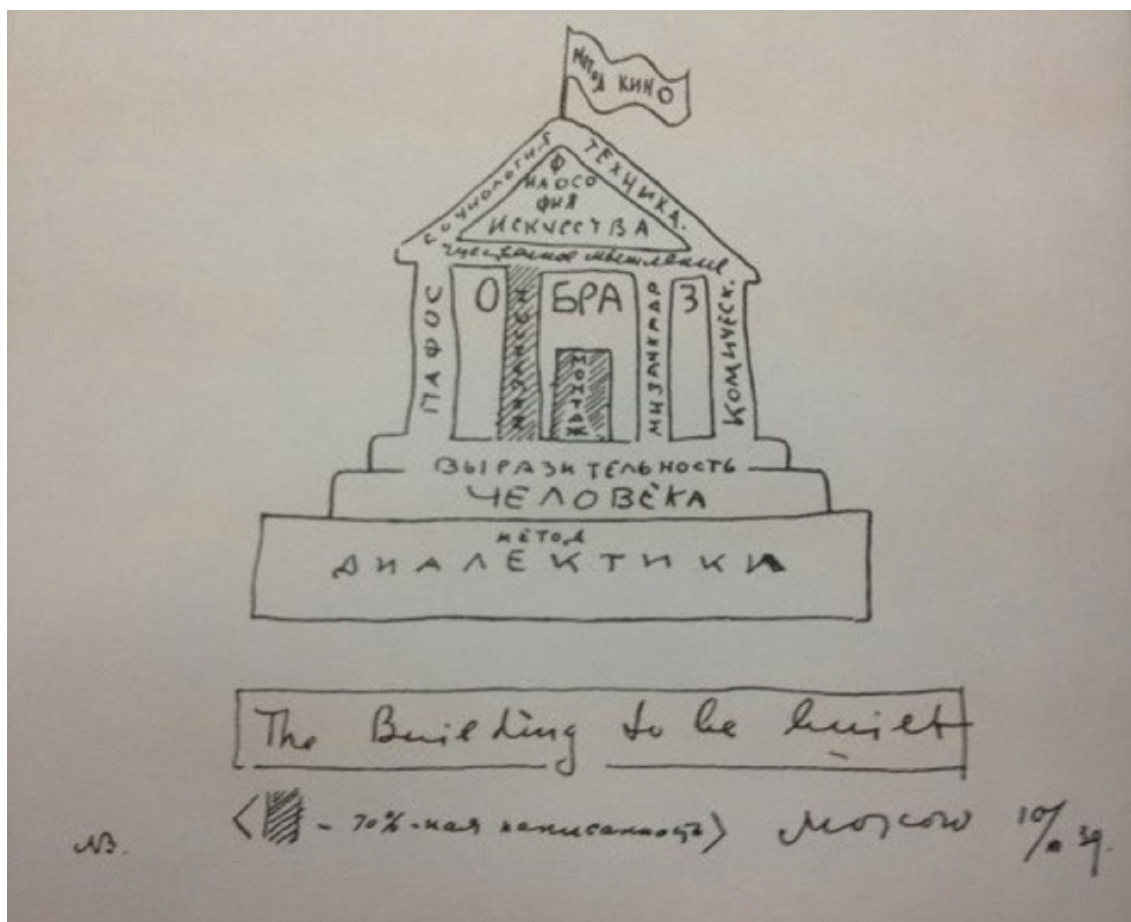


Fig. 1: Sergei Eisenstein’s hand drawing *Zdanie kinoteorii* [The Building of Film Theory], 10 March 1939. Reproduced from Naum Kleiman’s 2004 edition of *Neravnodushnaia priroda 1* (Eizenshtein 2004: 2).

Sergei Eisenstein: The Underlying Gesture

Within the context of film theory, Sergei Eisenstein stands out as a thinker who elevated gesture to the status of a fundamental aesthetic category. It is no accident that in his famous sketch *The Building to be Built: the Method of Cinema* (1939), the basis of the edifice rests on two core elements: “the method of dialectics” and “expressivity of man”. The first refers to a series of dramatic qualitative transformations, as well as the Marxist-Hegelian principle of logical inquiry that identifies conflicting stages of evolution, while the second encapsulates Eisenstein’s long-standing belief that gesture, or corporeal movement, is an elemental force that gives structure to the work of art and shapes the audience’s experience. “Dialectics” comes prior to the “expressivity of man”, because it offers a conceptual prism through which Eisenstein tends to analyse corporeal movement: the principle of segmentation and the foregrounding of violent contrast between separate stages permeate all of Eisenstein’s conceptions of bodily expressivity – from “bi-mechanics” in the early 1920s (his take on Meyerhold’s biomechanics) to “ex-stasis” later in his career. It is out of this foundation that the columns making up the notion of “image” emerge in the acropolis of Eisenstein’s film theory, rearing up towards the portico, which bears the inscription “philosophy of art” and is framed by “sensory thinking”, “sociology”, and “technique” (Fig. 1). “Image” for Eisenstein is thus grounded in gesture, a category that he places at the juncture of the psycho-physiological and the socio-cultural. While acknowledging the importance of the audience’s background for its ability to relate to the image, Eisenstein has always sought to explore the mechanisms of visceral response, emphasising, in particular, the role that motor sensations play for emotions, memory, and cognition (cognition, most evidently, on the “pre-logical level”, but also on a higher intellectual level of impulse control and problem-solving within the physical environment).² Hence Eisenstein’s interest in biomedical and psychological discourse, both historical and contemporary (Ernst Kretschmer, Sigmund Freud, Ivan Pavlov, Vladimir Bekhterev, Aleksandr Luria, Lev Vygotsky, Kurt Lewin, and Jean-Martin Charcot among others), as well as his quest for insights in areas distant from hard science: anthropology, performance theory (notably, biomechanics, Ausdruckstanz, and East Asian theatre), and even physiognomy and chiromancy (Bulgakowa 1988; Bulgakowa 2014; Law and Gordon 1996; Moore 2006; Tikka 2010; Vassilieva 2013).

The director’s persistent interest in gesture stemmed from his belief in kinesthetic empathy as a key element of spectatorial involvement. One of his earliest theoretical essays, *The Montage of Film Attractions* (1924), postulates: “emotional perception is achieved through the motor reproduction of the movements of the actor by the perceiver” (2010: 48). By the mid 1930s, he would expand his definition of movement and argue that not only the actors’ gestures delineate the audience’s experience, but also the “pathway” implied in the compositional structure of images, the running course of the unfolding mise-en-scene, the twists of the plotline, and the shot-to-shot jolts of montage (Eizenshtein 1996:126). Comparing these movement programs to drawing or dancing, he would argue that the film’s impact “to a large degree rests on the fact that the spectator recreates the gesticulatory process at the core of the design” (ibid.).³

Dictating the compositional core of the artwork, gesture for Eisenstein was an imprint of the author’s physical intention and also a trigger of the audience’s experience – an idea that the director sought to substantiate through analysis of multiple media. Vincent Van Gogh’s and Edgar Degas’ paintings, as well as Auguste Rodin’s and Michelangelo’s sculptures, he argued, make the structuring work of brushstrokes and chisel palpable. The stroke represents the “retention of the artist’s gestural path inside the work of art, that is, a dynamic self-portrait of the artist [...]. It is a means for the artist to trace oneself into the fabric of one’s own work of art” (Eizenshtein 2002: 338). Likewise, in literature, as Andrei Belyi apparently confessed to Eisenstein, “the only way to fully comprehend what he writes is to recreate by one’s own gait the kind of leaps he [the writer] takes across the room, while charting the novel’s movement on the pages of his manuscript with his own motions” (ibid.).

Establishing a connection between cinema and other arts, Eisenstein placed gesture at the center of synaesthetic unity, when he conceptualised it as “the cradle of all kinds of imagery” in his unfinished essay of 1939-40, titled *Opredel'aiushchii zhest* [The Underlying Gesture] (1942) (Eizenshtein 2004: 177).⁴ This yet untranslated essay presents the thesis that gesture, language, music, and colour co-exist in the form of “layers”, commensurate “voices” in our sensorium and our cognitive apparatus (ibid.: 165f.). One of the focal theoretical sources that provoked Eisenstein to formulate this claim was the monograph *L'art et le geste* [Art and Gesture] (1910) by Jean d’Udine⁵ (Fig. 2). This was, in the spirit of modernism, a monistic study of the origins of art (painting, music, architecture, and literature), which propounded an “extraordinary unity” and an “intimate correspondence” of all senses, i.e., synaesthesia (Udine 1910: xxi). D’Udine argued that at the core of synesthetic association stands the intermediation function of haptics, because all human senses may ultimately be traced back to a “plastic reflex” (ibid.: 82). Eisenstein (2004: 176) expands d’Udine’s line of thought by suggesting that “proto-gestures” underlie both our emotions and body movement and provide a structure to compositions of artworks (in music, poetry, painting, film montage, etc.) and even philosophical systems. Ultimately, for Eisenstein, gesture was, on the one hand, a syncretic impulse, “an initial act that determines the plastic formulation of images in any artistic sphere” (2004: 179), or a figure of potentiality, “an embryo” [embrion] that could be actualised in the “audio-visual image” [zvuko-zritel'nyi obraz] (ibid.: 175). On the other hand, gesture was the contour, or a graphic tendency of the image, a “geometric flourish” [geometricheskii roscherk] (ibid.: 183) that the recipient was bound to retrace and decipher in a piece of art.⁶

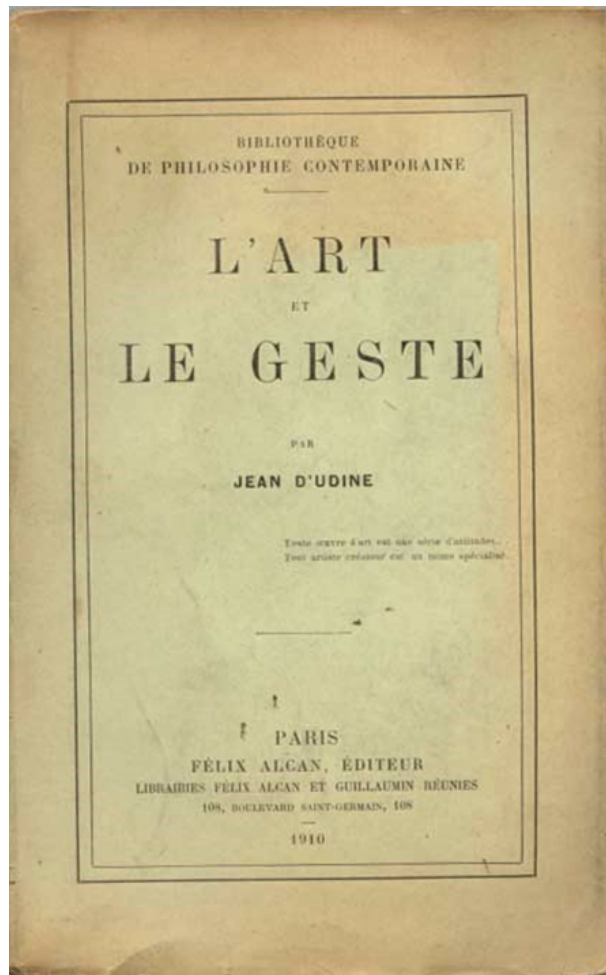


Fig. 2: The title page of *L'art et le geste* (1910) by Jean d'Udine (Albert Cozanet).

2. Eisenstein's term "pre-logical thinking" ("pra-logicheskoe myshlenie") is borrowed from Lucien Lévy-Bruhl's controversial anthropological studies of "primitive" societies, and denotes, for Eisenstein, an "archaic" layer of consciousness that is not subject to the censoring work of reason (Eisenstein 2002:167; Somaini 2016:31).
3. On Eisenstein's approaches to dance and drawing, see Michelson (2001) and Frank (2017).
4. This essay was intended to be part of a chapter called *Vertikal'nyi montazh* in Eisenstein's book *Neravnodushnaia priroda* [Non-Indifferent Nature], parts of which were published in English under the title *The Film Sense*. The essay first appeared in Russian in 2004 in the first volume of *Neravnodushnaia priroda* edited by Naum Kleiman. The same text was considered for publication in *The Film Sense* as part of the chapter "Synchronization of Senses", but was ultimately not included in the final version of the book, despite the fact that the notion of "opredel'aiushchii zhest" clarifies the central ideas of Eisenstein's method of vertical montage. For a commentary on the history of this text, see Naum Kleiman's notes (Eizenshtein 2004: 614, 633).
5. "Jean d'Udin" was the pseudonym of the music theorist Albert Cozanet (1870-1938).
6. Tsivian addresses Eisenstein's concept of gesture in the context of the filmmaker's drawings and film aesthetics, as well as d'Udine's study of gesture in his book on carpalistics (2010: 40-44). D'Udine's book on gesture was first translated into Russian in 1912 by Sergei Volkonskii, a populariser of Emile Jaques-Dalcroze's eurythmics and François Delsarte's system of expressive movement. Regarding the role of Volkonskii's teaching for acting in the early Soviet film see Iampolski (1991); Olenina (2012).

In Eisenstein's Footsteps: Yuri Tsivian's Carpalistics and Pia Tikka's Enactive Cinema

During his lifetime, Eisenstein's vision of gesture as a structuring undercurrent of artwork in different media and a conduit of kinesthetic empathy did not produce the resonance it deserved. He did not publish a large part of his writings, and indeed, most of his ideas could not appear in print in Stalinist Russia. His essays that came out abroad covered only the tip of the iceberg, resulting in misunderstandings and downright dismissal. Theodor Adorno and Hanns Eisler rejected Eisenstein's efforts to describe musical score on the basis of gesture as "vague" in their 1947 book *Komposition für den Film (Composing for the Films 2005: 68)*, a critique that the Russian director took close to heart.⁷ Some of Eisenstein's colleagues, such as Mikhail Romm (1981: 35), did try to make use of the term "mise en geste" in their own teaching; however, such references were cursory at best, and the riches of Eisenstein's gesturology did not find an adequate following for many decades.⁸

Today, one of the most interesting projects inspired by Eisenstein on a methodological level is Yuri Tsivian's "carpalistics" – an erudite historical study of gestural structures in multiple media. One of the world's foremost experts on Eisenstein's work and the Soviet avant-garde more broadly, Tsivian replicates his subject's fascinating ability to detect composition-defining gestures in literature, cinema, and other visual arts. However, in contrast to Eisenstein, Tsivian does not lay claim to the discovery of any kind of universal aesthetic mechanisms, nor is he concerned with kinesthetic empathy, a crucial component of the Soviet filmmaker's gestural research. Tsivian's term "carpalistics" is borrowed, not without irony, from Vladimir Nabokov's novel *Pnin* (1957), where the neologism, based on the Latin word for "hand" (carpus), denoted a fictional discipline of philosophical kinesics (Tsivian 2010: 14). Tsivian presents his own focus on gesture as a "device, a way of treating the material" (2013: time code 00:04:06), which permits him to bring together, in a montage-like exposition, a great variety of heterogeneous sources. "Carpalistics," he writes (2010: 80), "is a science of the contingent," which deals with "phonetic and kinetic coincidences, such as the similarity of a stick [palka] and a finger [palets], which not only resemble each other by sound, but also by the character of movement." To be distinguished from iconography, semiotics, and narratology, "carpalistics deals with gestures that do not express, signify, or characterise, but which draw attention to themselves as gestures" (Tsivian 2013: time code 00:05:21). If kinesics studies communication, carpalistics studies the interferences occasioning moments of self-reflexivity within the medium (Tsivian 2010: 77). While the author purports to "stake a claim" to a new branch of visual studies (Tsivian 2010: 7), he focuses on concrete case analyses, treating them with playful defamiliarisation reminiscent of Viktor Shklovskii's prose.⁹

Whereas Tsivian's carpalistics has little room for the psychophysiological dimension of Eisenstein's gesturology, other scholars of the Soviet filmmaker's writings have made it central to their own projects. For instance, the Finnish media theorist and artist Pia Tikka, who devoted her meticulously researched dissertation to historicising the "enactive" aspect of Eisenstein's films, is currently exploring the frontiers of "neurocinema", analysing film spectatorship from the point of view of cognitive neuroscience (Tikka 2010; Tikka et al. 2012).¹⁰

7. Adorno and Eisler in *Komposition für den Film* (1947) criticised Eisenstein for what they saw as a blunt comparison of the melodic line with a sketch. Commenting on these incidents, Lampolski describes Eisenstein's reaction to the critique: "Two months before his death, after reading the previous hit Adorno next hit-Eisler critique, Eisenstein made the following note: 'Eisler believes that there is no commensurability, like a pair of galoshes and a drum (although even here, in plastic terms, it is possible) [...] The image passes into a gesture that underlies both. Then we can construct any kind of counterpoint.' The linking of galoshes and a drum, a cliff edge and musical notation, is possible because what is being linked is not their external appearance but their images, the linear traces that organize them as gestures" (Lampolski 1998: 229f.; for further analysis of Adorno's and Eisler's critique see Kleiman 2004: 23).
8. That is not to say that Eisenstein's gesturology lacked scholarly attention. His ideas on corporeal expression and the definitive role of gesture in art are evoked in multiple historical and theoretical studies (to name but a few, Lampolski 1998: 226ff; Michelson 2001; Ivanov 2009:88; Kleiman 2004:9; Nesbet 2009; Law and Gordon 2012; Norshtein 2012; Somaini 2016; Didi-Huberman 2016; Geil, 2016; Frank 2017).
9. A collective tribute to Tsivian's approach to carpalistics appeared as a volume on gesture in the interdisciplinary context (Lavrov, Ospovat, Timenchik 2010).
10. In the 1970's, Viacheslav Ivanov pioneered an analysis on Eisenstein's theory from the point of view of brain science, semiotics, anthropology, and cybernetics (Ivanov 1978).

Béla Balázs: Physiognomy

Eisenstein's exploration of gesture as the source of art's potency recalls some of the theoretical propositions developed independently by his contemporary Béla Balázs. In *Visible Man* (1924), Balázs proclaimed that "in film the basic material, its poetic substance, is the visible gesture" (Balázs 2010: 18).

Today, mention of these two theorists' names side by side immediately brings to mind their heated polemics in the 1920s. However, it would be misleading to judge the relationship between the maître of the Soviet avant-garde and the renowned Hungarian-Jewish intellectual solely on the basis of their mutual attacks, such as Eisenstein's "Béla Forgets the Scissors" (1926), an invective against Balázs's alleged inability to recognise the powers of montage and the collectivist nature of filmmaking, and Balázs's retaliation ridiculing Eisenstein's experiments with film "ideograms" as rebuses in *The Spirit of Film* of 1930 (Balázs 2010: 128, 149-151). The clash between the two authors may seem at first sight like a confrontation of irreconcilable perspectives, one rooted in constructivism, reflexology, and Marxism, and another – in Georg Simmel's phenomenology of culture, Bergsonism, and Romantic idealism. For the historian of Weimar cinema Erica Carter, the incompatibility of the two authors' viewpoints is epitomised in their diverging emphases when conceptualising cinema's means of impact and its relationship with language (2010: xxxiii; xxxvi). Whereas Eisenstein prioritised a series of discrete, calculated shocks ("montage of attractions"), Balázs spoke of the "close-up" as cinema's most entrancing device, which bares the fluid, indivisible "polyphony" of facial expressions as it transports the viewer into the realm of emotion, imagination, and memory (ibid., xxxvi). Whereas Eisenstein attempted to describe the process of meaning-formation in cinema through

comparisons with language, Balázs proceeded from the premise that the differences between “the gestural language” of film and “analytical” verbal structures are insurmountable (ibid.).

It is worthwhile, however, to probe the two theorists’ standpoints beyond their mutual overt rejections. There is a level where their ultimate concerns converge, and their differences appear to be more in the placement of accents, rather than in conceptual fundamentals. Carter herself (ibid., xxxvi) repudiates the unfair characterisation of Balázs as a theorist who ignored montage (although the way in which he approached editing, in contrast to Eisenstein, laid emphasis on cinema’s ability to evoke intuitions of organic unity and simultaneity of distinct events). Both authors, however, seemed to believe that ¹¹ sequences of images direct the viewer’s gaze, with each new shot contributing to the affective pressure on our consciousness (it is just that Balázs was interested in the cumulative effect, and Eisenstein in a step-by-step transformation of mental states leading to some ecstatic epiphany). In thinking about editing, both authors foregrounded the function of rhythm in structuring and intensifying the viewers’ affective experience (Carter ibid., xxxvi; Vogman 2016). Generally speaking, rhythm may be regarded both as a flow, creating a sense of momentum and forward movement, and as an orderly pattern made up of discrete units. Balázs, under the influence of Bergson, embraced the first definition, while Eisenstein concentrated on the dialectic, dynamic relations between distinct elements. The Janus-faced nature of rhythm, however, makes it impossible to separate one aspect from the other. Regarding the second area of disagreement between Balázs and Eisenstein, identified by Carter – cinema’s relation to language – it is important to bear in mind that the Soviet filmmaker had an embodied perspective on verbal expression, which tends to be neglected whenever he is “credited” with inventing the syntax and grammar of the moving image. As Naum Kleiman reminds us (2004: 9), Eisenstein’s favoring of the “pre-logical” dimension of cognition placed gesture at the source of the mind’s metaphoric operations. The whole body is involved when our consciousness is working towards articulating its dispositions. This sensory-motor foundation of figurative “image” (obraz) is rendered palpable in cinema through the “movement (of montage, drama, plot line, construction, tone, and rhythm” (Eisenstein cited in Kleiman 2004: 9).

It is not coincidental that a plane of convergence is detectable between the two film theorists. Both were influenced by the German philosophical tradition of Lebensphilosophie, which was in vogue in Balázs’s intellectual milieu (Koch 1987: 174) and which Eisenstein imbibed from Ludwig Klages and Rudolf Bode (Bochow 2000; Bulgakowa 2014). Lebensphilosophie, as a reaction against the rationalism of the Enlightenment, privileged intuitive knowledge of the body over the positivist constructs of science, and immediacy of experience over abstract, theoretical afterthought. In Eisenstein’s case, this philosophical undercurrent, with which he became acquainted in the early 1920s, came to full fruition in his later writings on the “pre-logical” layer of consciousness, which resurrects the “animistic”, “associative”, and “magical” beliefs discredited by rational civilization (Kleiman 2004: 9). In the case of Balázs, as Gertrud Koch (1987: 170) has argued, Lebensphilosophie underpins his discussion of the “physiognomy” of the landscape and inanimate objects, which we tend to dismiss as rational adults and which film redeems for our gaze. In *Visible Man*, Balázs wrote:

Every child knows that things have a face, and he walks with a beating heart through the half-darkened room where tables, cupboards and sofas pull strange faces at him and try to say something to him with their curious expressions. [...] Children have no difficulty understanding these physiognomies. [...] For objects, like modest women, mostly hide their face behind a veil. The veil of our traditional, abstract way of seeing (2010: 46).

Implicit in this passage is the anti-logocentric impulse shared by many Modernist authors, who came to view corporeal expression as a Nietzschean liberation from the columbarium of cultural clichés and prejudices. The crux of Balázs’s proposition that cinema stages our encounter with the “faces of things” rests on highlighting the defamiliarising, revelatory potential of this medium. He suggests that cinema creates opportunities for an intimate connection with the depicted objects, places, and persons: they appear to look back at us from the screen (Koch 1987: 170). Because of his validation of the viewer’s subjective, contemplative relationship to the expressions on screen, Balázs’s concept of physiognomy is far removed from the 18th-century pseudoscience that this term usually refers to. Rather, the deciphering of physiognomies of filmed objects is, for Balázs, an exercise in phenomenological hermeneutics. As Erica Carter notes (2010: xxvi):

[W]hat becomes apparent as film technology interacts with objects, bodies, or spaces to produce filmic realities within the mise-en-scene, is what Balázs variously calls “mood,” the “atmosphere,” the “microphysiognomy” or the “instinctive sensibility” that reveals itself in the interaction between the spectator and film. Physiognomy is distinguished from realism and empiricism, then, through its status as a mode of aesthetic as opposed to crudely empirical knowing: a mode in which cognition occurs within the context of a perpetual flux of aesthetic value and affect.

For Balázs, contemplating the shapes of gestures and facial expression does not lead to categorical labels summing up the subject’s inner essence. Rather, what interests him is the beholder’s mental space in which the polyphony of visible expressions triggers intuitive emotional responses. The knowledge offered by cinema, as a modern medium, is fleeting and inconclusive, garnered from surface impressions – even though these impressions trigger powerful affects and aesthetic pleasure. In fact, cinema renders the dichotomies of surface and depth, inside and outside, irrelevant. Wrote Balázs:

[Film] no more has content than does a painting, a piece of music, or indeed – a facial expression. It is a surface art and in it whatever is inside is outside. [...] This psychology and this meaning, however, are not a “deeper meaning,” residing in some “idea” or other; they dwell entirely on the surface, as phenomena accessible to sensory perception. (Balázs 2010: 19).

According to the contemporary film philosopher Giuliana Bruno (2015: 4), Balázs’s discussion of “surface” (which she spells, evocatively, as “sur-face”) anticipated Gilles Deleuze’s understanding of immanence, which emphasises the materiality of affects produced by film within the spectator’s sensorium.

11. For Balázs, rhythm was essential to film’s nature as a temporal art, as an unfolding. His conception of rhythm comes close to Henri Bergson’s description of melody, which our consciousness synthesises out disparate notes, anticipating what is to come based on the resonant trace of the past.

Julia Kristeva: Anaphora

The Nietzschean rebellion against the oppressive dogmas of rationalism, which was crucial for Balázs, was further taken up in the 1960’s by the French post-structuralist philosophers. In her 1968 essay on gesture, Julia Kristeva took issue with the tenets of structural linguistics and anthropology, which analysed corporeal expressions by analogy with verbal signs. In her effort to disentangle gesture from its frequent equation with the sign, the French-Bulgarian theorist noted the negative connotations of this approach: gesture, as a rule, had been dismissed as a redundant or inferior communicative instrument compared to verbal language. Whereas the Western philosophical tradition since Plato privileged sound as the principal conveyer of ideas and reduced gesture to the status of pictorial embellishment, Kristeva shifted scholarly attention to the very condition of gestural semiosis, which she considered, in a post-structuralist vein, outside the teleological framework of meaning transmission from a concrete author to a concrete addressee. Drawing on Karl Marx’s insight into the functioning of impersonal socio-economic mechanisms involved in the production of meaning and value in the capitalist regime, Kristeva proposed to free gesture from its problematic association with signification and consider it, first and foremost, as a corporeal practice, a process:

Gesturality, more than phonetic discourse or the visual image, can be studied as an activity in the sense of a *spending*, of a productivity anterior to the product, and so anterior to the *representation* of a phenomenon of significance in the circuit of communication. (Kristeva 1978: 267).

In this model, gesture is the work that makes the constitution of a sign possible; and as such, it exceeds the sign. Gesture does not represent, or signify, but points out, demonstrates, or indicates, thereby englobing the subject, objects, and practice into one semantic field (ibid.: 269). Being primarily “indicative, relational, [and] empty,” gesture for Kristeva resembles the grammatical principle of anaphora (from ancient Greek ἀναφορά, “carrying back”), which serves as a placeholder pointing in the direction of a syntactic antecedent or postcedent. What is more, “the dichotomies of idea-word, signified-signifier” do not apply to corporeal acts (ibid.: 269). Gesture resists being broken down into discrete units, analogous to phonemes or morphemes in structural linguistics – a quality which underscores, for Kristeva, its fundamental difference from verbal language. Similarly to Michel Foucault’s and Jacques Derrida’s dismissal of the notion of authorship in favour of more abstract textuality, Kristeva de-individualises gesture and foregrounds the workings of the socio-cultural regime.

Mikhail Iampolski: Deformations

Post-structuralist philosophy gave impetus to productive elaborations of the concepts of gesture and body in Russian critical theory of the 1990s and early 2000s, particularly in the works of Mikhail Iampolski, Valerii Podoroga, Mikhail Ryklin, Mikhail Epstein, and Oleg Aronson. Iampolski’s essays devoted to cinema, appearing in monographs such as *Vidimyi mir: Ocherki rannei kinofenomenologii* [The Visible World: Sketches of Early Film Phenomenology] (1993), *Pamiat’ Tiresiia* (1993) / *The Memory of Tiresias* (1998), *Demon i labirint: diagrammy, deformatsii, mimesis* [Demon and Labyrinth: Diagrams, Deformations, Mimesis] (1996) and others, are especially noteworthy for articulating a compelling approach to corporeality (telesnost’), which bridges phenomenology, Deleuzian and Foucauldian influences, and native Russian traditions of formalism and semiotics (cf. Olenina 2005).

Iampolski’s concept of corporeality is developed most extensively in *Demon i labirint*, where he focuses on what he calls “deformations of the body” (1996: 4). A “deformation” is a “certain dynamic process or a trace of dynamics inscribed into the body”, that is, a change of shape, a movement, or, in fact, “any kind of violation of the primary stasis – from grimaces, to laughter, to dance, to groping for one’s way in the dark” (ibid.). Such deformations are understood in purely mechanistic terms – these are distortions that occur under the influence of forces acting upon the body. As Iampolski puts it, the body is deformed in response to “the demon”, that is, it starts mirroring another body that possesses or inhabits it. A spatial equivalent of a demon is a labyrinth, which imposes external limits on the body’s trajectory. Psychological motivations are deliberately excluded from Iampolski’s analysis:

From the very beginning, it was clear to me that deformations of this kind [antics and convulsions] could not be explained in terms of psychology, that the body functioned here like a machine, beyond conscious psychological motivations. An explanation within the framework of mimesis seemed much more adequate. The body appears to mime the behaviour of another body (ibid.: 5).

Refusing to search for psychological motivations behind characters' actions and focusing instead on the mechanistic, physiological, gesticulatory aspects of their corporeality, Mikhail Lampolski displays an approach to literary and cinema criticism that returns to the strategies of early twentieth century Russian formalism (such as, for example, Boris Eikhenbaum's discussion of bodily mannerisms in Nikolai Gogol's novella *The Overcoat*), as well as the Moscow-Tartu semiology of behavior developed by Iurii Lotman in the 1960s-70s. However, Lampolski revises the key principles of structuralism. If structuralist analysis presupposes a certain privileged point of view in relation to the particular cultural formation it scrutinises, the "continualist" method promoted by Lampolski implies a relation to the "body-text" not from above – the "omniscient" point of view – but from within, or, to be more precise, from within the same plane where one or another cultural phenomenon unfolds. They analyse what may be called areas of strain and tension, deformations and fissures, as well as threads of acupunctural resonance within the body-text itself.

Lampolski's expansion of the boundaries of semiology by rejecting its assumption of the rational outsider's viewpoint undeniably resembles Gilles Deleuze's major counterproposition to structuralism, namely his concept of immanence. Perhaps the most beautiful way to describe this ontological concept presupposing only one substance, an immanent plane which is "not defined by a Subject or an Object" (Deleuze 2002: 171), would be to compare it with a spider's web, as Deleuze did in his study of Proust. For Deleuze, such a web is "a body without organs, a pure sensory surface, perceiving nothing but degrees of intensities of vibrations corresponding to no particular sense organ and thus to no exterior quality," the web, which is the "search in the process of being made" (Khalfa, 2002: 77). Premising the plane of immanence entails operating with "machinistic assemblages that go beyond any systems of semiology, linguistics, or logics" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 148), with "diagrams" which have "neither substance nor form, neither content nor expression" but only "matter and functions",

a matter-content having only degrees of intensity, resistance, conductivity, heating, stretching, speed, or tardiness; and a function-expression having only "tensors", as in systems of mathematical, or musical, writing (ibid.: 141).

The tracing of such diagrams lies at the core of Lampolski's "continualist" approach to cultural phenomena. Rather than analysing the structure of discourses conditioning representations of the body in a given society or "the ways in which real human bodies adapt to the requirements of a particular culture", Lampolski concerns himself with "the proper life of the body – as it reveals itself in the construction (*stroenie*) of culture, in one or another form of corporeality (isolated or collective, resting or ecstatic, etc.) that dominates at a given moment" (Zenkin 2001b). Bearing the somatic continuity in mind, Lampolski's treatment of cultural phenomena resists a structuralist decomposition into bits, as well as a rigid division into historical periods, because the very act of dissection presupposes having a certain a priori plan according to which the body will be "cut". The imposition of a preconceived idea might run counter to the internal logics of the body, instead of helping to intuit it. Besides, any attempt to create an "elegant", "systematic" theory that would "explain everything" is doomed to produce only a "fragmentary reflection" (Lampolski 1996: 16). A strategy of approximating the totality of the text-body that Lampolski employs in *Demon i labirint* can be described as neo-hermeneutic (except that it has no exegetic agenda). This model envisages placing oneself within the heart of the text that is "infinitely rich with internal meanings and – something that, in the final count, is actually the same – external links and associations" (Zenkin 2001a). In a way, Lampolski's own description of his approach – "free movement of thought within the text" (quoted in Tokarev 2002) – resembles Jacques Derrida's account of a reader being "guided by the contours" of the text he is exploring (Wolfreys 1998: 53).

Oksana Bulgakowa: The Factory of Gestures

Theodor Adorno describes in *Minima Moralia* (1951) how technologies condition our gestures and how their functionality makes our movements "precise and brutal", by the same token limiting our freedom: "The new human type cannot be properly understood without awareness of what he is continuously exposed to from the world of things about him, even in his most secret innervations." (Adorno 2005: 40). Carrie Noland expands Adorno's argument by adding that adopting gestures from other cultures might produce new innervations and senses as well (Noland/Ness 2008: x). This "afterlife" of "migrating gestures", their circulation, their inevitable transformation and, to the fear of most theoreticians, their unpreventable loss, is registered and stored in moving images. Therefore, for thinkers such as Agamben, film is indeed an optimal medium, more effective than Aby Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas* could ever be, to fixate both the obsession with and the loss of gestures – a powerful archive of human presence in the world.

Oksana Bulgakowa's long-term project of a "factory of gestures", launched with her monograph *Fabrika zhestov* in 2005, develops a distinct outlook on the archival potential of cinema and its aptness in shaping new patterns of

body language both in real life and on-screen. Anchored in Marcel Mauss's anthropological concept of "techniques of the body" on the one hand, and in Foucault's critique of disciplined bodies on the other, Bulgakowa furnishes a wide-ranging study of culturally specific and universal somatic codes, documented in Russian and Soviet film from the beginning of cinema to the early 1950s (with a cursory overview reaching up to the 1990s).¹² Her goal is to trace social transformations and dystopian projects realised – plastically [plastichno] (Bulgakowa 2005: 7) – in the actor's body, as it incorporates an ideal model of the societal Imaginary. The concise title of her book alludes to the classical vision of cinema as a dream factory and ironically frames the idea of the cinematic apparatus as a system of production, distribution, re-production, and recycling. Bulgakowa thus offers a memorable metaphor and a model of cinema as such, which can reference the technological, sociological, and philosophical premises of the moving image.

What is particularly valuable about Bulgakowa's approach is that instead of symbolic or emblematic gestures, she focuses on "insignificant" bodily movements: the way people walk, sit, lie, stand, drink, move, communicate with each other (talking, flirting, kissing). Such habitual, banal gestures and semi-conscious body postures usually remain left out of studies of iconology, yet they build the basis of our everyday experience. It is through such "insignificant" gestures that we can perceive the process of signification in a palpable manner. By means of film, these pre-signs can realise their potentiality to unfold into signs, acquiring, during this process, particular aesthetic and ethical values within a society. Although there is always a gap between bodily comportments in real life and on screen, these two patterns constantly interact and interfere, forming new somatic canons and deforming the old. Bulgakowa calls the object of her examination "techniques of filmbodies" ("tekhniki kinotela"; *ibid.*: 8), which she conceptualises using a comprehensive corpus of visual materials (feature and documentary films, photography, theatre, sculpture, painting, propaganda posters, etc.).

Based on the assumption that cinema caters to spectators' imitative abilities and impacts their kinesic behaviour, Bulgakowa demonstrates the migration of gestures not only from screen to real life and vice versa, but also from one culture to another. The concept of "the body of the Other" (chuzhoe telo), treated through the prism of cross-cultural gestural transfer, is the focal point of Oksana Bulgakowa's article in the present issue. Now she develops her ideas using a broad material of American, Soviet, Italian, French, German – East and West – cinema of the late 1940-1960s. Increased international film distribution and circulation during the postwar period showed this mimetic potential of cinema and simultaneously facilitated a "liberation" of gestures.

The new young actors copied the relaxed bodily gestures of Hollywood and European stars: the loose hips of Elvis Presley, the bare feet of Brigitte Bardot, James Dean's slouch. In Soviet cinema of the sixties, tense back muscles are relaxed to show the body as liberated; slouched postures become a sign of antiauthority and nonconformity; there is a "liberation of legs and hips," "a new impetuosity" as protagonists fly up and down stairs, exhibiting the freedom of the youthful body (Kaganovsky 2012: 170)

Taking cinema as the site that reveals the malleability of body language in response to cultural and ideological moldings, Bulgakowa unpacks the cinema's dynamic embodiment of cultural scripts. The multiple "techniques of the film-body" are traced on a ramified map: from decadent and theatrical expressions of pre-revolutionary Russia, to proletarian, mechanised, urbanised and naturalised bodies of the 1920s, to the disciplined, civilised or progressive bodies of the the period 1931-1951 (just to name a few). Further, she turns her attention to the social stratification enacted in gesture (what is a gesture of a servant? of a political leader?), national and gender distinctions (what is a Russian or an American gesture? what is a suffragist gesture? what is female gesturality at all?). It is hardly possible to summarise all issues raised in this book and its accompanying DVD, yet what becomes abundantly clear is that Bulgakowa's mapping of gestural representations has paved the way for a Russo-Soviet counter-history and, to some extent, a counter-discourse to the traditional historiography of cinema.

12. The book is accompanied by a DVD representing Oksana Bulgakowa's audio-visual research project in collaboration with Dietmar Hochmuth and Gregor Hochmuth throughout 2003-2008 in Stanford (Bulgakowa 2008 in the Filmography).

Giorgio Agamben: Pure Gesture

The "gestural turn" in contemporary film theory is largely triggered by Giorgio Agamben's recurrent reflections in a series of works, specifically in his essay of 1992 *Note sul gesto / Notes on Gesture* (2000: 49-60). Agamben's prominent position (approaching Deleuze's impact on cinema studies) has been recognised in a number of publications on gesture in the last decade. In this section we do not intend to reiterate the tenets of Agamben's philosophy, which have been discussed in the fast-growing scholarship on a broad spectrum of subjects, including cinema.¹³ Instead, we would like to outline the key areas where Agamben's ideas intersect with the gestural theories we have touched upon in this introduction, as well as the theoretical platforms of the articles presented in this issue.

Gesture is one of the key notions in Agamben's writings, reaching beyond cinema to art, language, literature, and ethics. Working in these multiple contexts, he models and refines his perspective on gesture, without ever offering

a unified definition. A crucial influence for his conception of gesture as “pure praxis” is Walter Benjamin’s notion of “pure means” developed in *Zur Kritik der Gewalt* (1921) and his other works on technology and mediality.¹⁴ Agamben’s aspiration is to refute the representational character of the image, or, as he succinctly puts it, to initiate a “liberation of the image into gesture” (Agamben 2000: 55). Asbjørn Grønstad and Henrik Gustafsson note that his “post-representational” philosophy is a method, a praxis for releasing images from their “spectral destiny” directed towards “the unfolding of appearance” (2014: loc. 227). “Pure gesture” also bespeaks Agamben’s doing away with language as a system of communication and representation and underpins his liberation of gesture from the sphere of aesthetics in favour of ethics. He writes:

Gesture is the name of this intersection between life and art, act and power, general and particular, text and execution. It is a moment of life subtracted from the context of individual biography as well as a moment of art subtracted from the neutrality of aesthetics: it is pure praxis. (ibid.: 80)

Agamben theorises pure gesture as non-linguistic, yet intrinsically intertwined with the functioning of language in his 1991 essay on the German literary scholar and translator Max Kommerell (Agamben 1999a). The expression “pure gesture” is borrowed from Kommerell’s *Geist und Buchstabe der Dichtung. Goethe – Schiller – Kleist – Hölderlin* (1940), where it is articulated as a possibility (or potentiality) to speak:

Beyond the gestures of the soul and the gestures of nature there is a third sphere, which one may call pure gestures. Its temporality is the eternity [...] the pure possibility of speaking itself [...] These “pure gestures” have given up all claim to reality [...] Consumed in themselves, the soul paints itself with its own luminous shades (Kommerell 1964: 47; cit. in Agamben 1999a: 79-78).

It is hard to overlook the cinematic imagery of Kommerell’s poetic wording, which evokes Plato’s cave metaphor and, to a certain extent, anticipates Agamben’s inquiry into cinema. Drawing on the criticism of Kommerell, whom he highly esteemed, Agamben envisions a methodology that would resolve “the work’s intention into a gesture (or into a constellation of gestures)” (ibid.: 77) – the path he has been successfully pursuing himself. In the same text Agamben advances his catchy metaphor of gesture as a “gag” – which he simultaneously develops in *Notes on Gesture* and the essay *Marginal Notes on Commentaries on the Society of the Spectacle* of 1990 (Agamben 2000: 73-89) to stress muteness as the other side of speaking and gesture as our human condition – “speechless dwelling in language” (1999a: 78). Gesture permits the experience of “communication of communicability” (2000: 59) and facilitates entrance into the sphere of political action against the outright inflation of images and words in the contemporary era of the triumphant “spectacular-democratic regime” (ibid.: 85).

Apparently, the idea of disappearance of gestures at the end of the 19th century that Agamben mourns (2000: 40f.; 1999a: 83) is inspired by Kommerell as well: “At the end of his book on Jean Paul, Kommerell speaks of modern man as a man who has lost his gestures” (1999a: 83). This loss – however imagined a deprivation this may be – leads, as Agamben claims, to an unprecedented obsession with gestures at the turn of the last century. Gesture as a medium of cultural and historical memory was recapitulated in Serge Diaghilev’s *Ballets Russes*, Aby Warburg’s *Mnemosyne Atlas*, Isadora Duncan’s free movement dance, Friedrich Nietzsche’s concept of the eternal return, Marcel Proust’s prose, Rainer Maria Rilke’s poetry, and, above all, cinema, “the homeland of gesture” (2000: 55).

Ernst H. Gombrich, exploring visual representations of gestural expression, which, he argues, come into art in ritualised forms, favours painting as a comprehensive source of information and a means of preserving gestures, because, as he puts it, “art arrests movement” (1982: 71). Agamben, speaking of Western visual culture, argues that this is “not an immovable repertoire of images but rather a representation in virtual movement of Western humanity’s gestures” (2000: 53). For him, all art originates from sheer “antinomic polarity: on the one hand, images are the reification and obliteration of a gesture [...]; on the other hand, they preserve the *dynamis* intact” (ibid.: 54). Agamben extends Deleuze’s argument regarding the key element of cinema without making a strict opposition between image and gesture. He seeks instead to “substrate” the latter from the former (an operation reminiscent of Eisenstein’s search for the underlying gesture); in other words, he inscribes gesture into image as an innate potentiality of movement, as in legends about statues coming alive. In another essay, he maintains that “paintings are not immobile images, but stills charged with movement, stills from a film that is missing” (2004: 314). From Agamben’s point of view visual art has been, from the outset, cinematic and only through film the immobile images “would regain their true meaning. And that is so because a certain kind of *litigatio* [sic!], a paralyzing power whose spell we need to break, is continuously at work in every image” (2000: 56).¹⁵ Agamben uses, as a matter of fact, “ligatio” in his original essay in Italian (1996: 30), which is the past participle stem of “ligare” [to bind]. This root can be found in such words as “ligation”, “ligature”, and the musical term “legato”. This provides new prospects for how ligatio (a captured trace of movement) can be extracted from within images: for instance, in chronophotography, revealing gestural ligation with help of long exposure (Fig. 3), or in filmic special effects achieved through hyper-slow-motion (so-called “bullet time”).



Fig. 3: Étienne-Jules Marey. Chronophotography *Homme qui marche / Man walking* (1890–91). Public domain. Wikimedia Commons.

Agamben separates cinema from mass media by attacking the latter for its tyranny of facts devoid of possibilities of repetition (2014: loc. 606) and privileging (certain types of) cinema for its potential to salvage gestures in liberating them as pure praxis. In claiming this, he rehabilitates the Warburgian idea of “gesture as the crystal of historical memory and gesture in its petrification as destiny” (Agamben 1999a: 83) and assigns this veritably messianic mission to cinema. Both Guy Debord and Jean-Luc Godard have endeavoured, according to Agamben, to imagine (to put in images) a salvation of history, and, in so doing, opened up the absolute and complete gesturality of human beings – the sphere of pure means, or politics. Thus, Godard’s *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1998, France) yields a film apocalypse, a catastrophe of the optic regime, but also a revelation: “Godard’s work functions as an unveiling of the cinema by the cinema” (2014: loc. 599). Godard continues the process initiated in “Debord’s cinematic practice [which] dismantles the image to reveal the gesture” (ibid.: loc. 633).¹⁶ In the question of how the exhibition of mediality of images (and gestures) and their resurrection are achieved, Agamben arrives at the conclusion that it occurs in the process of montage. Both Debord and Godard exemplify what Agamben calls two transcendental conditions of film montage: repetition and stoppage. These show the image as such (he does not use the word “gesture”, although it would seem appropriate here). In a paradoxical manner, repetition, which is never a return of the identical, “restores” the possibility of what was, i.e., makes the past possible anew, and resembles, therefore, the working of memory: “Memory is [...] the organ of reality’s modalization: it is that which can transform the real into the possible and the possible into the real [...] that is also the definition of cinema” (Agamben 2004: 316). As for the stoppage, it is “the power to interrupt, the ‘revolutionary interruption’ of which Benjamin spoke” (ibid.: 317). Agamben resorts, for comparison, to the only possible (in his view) distinction between prose and poetry – the caesura and enjambment – devices which enable the interruption of the flow of words and make the word appear as such. Rephrasing Paul Valéry’s definition of poetry, Agamben suggests an elegant metaphor for cinema: “a prolonged hesitation between image and meaning” (2004: 317).¹⁷ Thus, Agamben, adopting Deleuze’s reformulation of cinematic image as a “mobile section” (Deleuze 1986: 22) and Warburg’s “iconology of the interval” (Agamben 1999b: 100), pleads for rethinking of the status of (any) image: it is by repetition and stoppage that the “mobile section” and the interval can be exposed as a gesture.

13. See, for example, Noys (2004); Noland, Ness (2008); Görling, Skrandies, Trinkaus (2009); Richtmeyer, Goppelsröder, Hildebrandt (2014); Gal, Friedlander, Wulf, Zuckerman (2014); Chare, Watkins (2015, 2017); and, especially, Gustafsson, Grønstad (2014). This list provides only a cursory overview of relevant literature and by no means claims to be exhaustive.
14. From Benjamin comes, besides, the embedding of “pure gesture” into the field of the political and the ethical, as well as the notions of “standstill” (Stillstand) and “stoppage” (Unterbrechung). See Schumacher-Chilla (2008: 126).
15. The English translation contains a mistake or a typo: the juridical term “litigatio” (from “litigare” [to dispute, go to court]) instead of “ligatio”.
16. This goes so far that Debord entirely refutes creating images and pleads for “imagelessness” (Agamben 2004: 319; Williams 2014), as he successively implemented in *Hurléments en faveur de Sade* (1952), the 80-minute “anti-film” consisting entirely of white frames with a soundtrack while black images with no sound (see Rasmussen 2003).
17. We can add to this Viktor Shklovskii’s shrewd remark from the short text *Poeziia i proza v kinematografii* [Poetry and Prose in Cinema] (1927), where he tacitly ridicules a blunt comparison of cinema and poetry and says that cinema can be both poetic and prosaic (1985: 38).

Vilém Flusser: The Gesture of Filming

The idea of transcendentals of film montage formulated by Agamben as “pure means”, reverberates in the monograph *Gesten. Versuch einer Phänomenologie / Gestures* (1991 and 2014 respectively) by the phenomenologist and media theorist Vilém Flusser. Published during approximately the same period, this clearcut collection of short essays conceptualises sixteen gestures (from making, to loving, to smoking a pipe, etc.), and among them, the gesture of filming. Like Agamben, Flusser regards montage as the actual gesture of filming – “the gesture that makes strips intended to represent historical time” (Flusser 2014: 87). Unlike Agamben, he interprets it as a pure mechanical process of “cutting and pasting” (ibid.) and the authorial power behind it, that constitutes the historical impetus of cinema. Through a purely manipulative, technical operation, “with scissors and glue” (ibid.: 88), this gesture releases radically new possibilities of treating time, telling and making the (hi)story [Geschichte]:

The filmmaker stands apart from the material strips and composes, from this transcendent position, things that will appear [...] he can reorder single phases of the process [...], speed up or slow down [...], let phases or the whole process run backward, even make the whole process dissolve in eternal return as a circular loop. (ibid.).

Film thus reveals its innate engagement with history, because if history is *res gestae* (things done), “in the filmic gesture, history is made from above and beyond itself. It is therefore [...] ‘things in progress.’” (ibid.: 89). More precisely, while “making” history, cinema “imagines events and makes them imaginable” (ibid.: 90). Flusser’s vision of film’s historicity once again resonates with Agamben, who defines cinema as “the memory of that which was not” (2004: loc. 605). Flusser seems to remain wary of this exceptional power of film, which is for him a sign of our reaching a post-historical era of overall apparatusisation (in the sense of technological totality). On the other hand, as he mentions, post-history requires a new theory, a meta-theory. Similar to Agamben, who has advocated the Warburgian “nameless science”,¹⁸ Flusser, too, at the end of his book, advances a general theory of gestures, which would be interdisciplinary, antiacademic, and anti-ideological (ibid.: 161). This field would bridge different disciplines (communication theory, anthropology, cultural studies, physiology, kinesics, economics, etc.), since gestures cannot be explained in a satisfying way using the methodology of any existing science. If gestures are movements necessitated by inwardness [Innerlichkeit], which is, for Flusser, synonymous with freedom (ibid.: 163), what would it take to explain such an expression of freedom as human active-being-in-the-world? Due to their epistemological overdetermination, Flusser argues, gestures need to become the subject of a meta-theory – not abstract, but rather instrumental, combining theory and practice – to adequately address their emancipatory potential and the issues of agency arising thereof.

We are probably in a revolutionary situation [...] [which] manifests itself as [...] a sense of having to reorient ourselves to be able to act at all, as a sense of needing to develop new kinds of theories. The suggestion of a general theory of gestures came from such feelings: of gestures, because they concern the concrete phenomenon of our active being-in-the-world, and of revolution, because a revolution is always, in the end, about freedom. (Flusser 2014: 176).

18. Such science, Agamben suggests, would overcome the opposition between history and anthropology and converge “philology, ethnology, and history would converge with an ‘iconology of the interval,’ a study of the *Zwischenraum* in which the incessant symbolic work of social memory is carried out. There is no need to underline the urgency of such a science for an epoch [...]. We will be truly faithful to Warburg’s teaching if we learn to see the contemplative gaze of the god in the nymph’s dancing gesture and if we succeed in understanding that the word that sings also remembers and the one that remembers also sings. The science that will then take hold of the liberating knowledge of the human will fully deserve to be called by the Greek name of *Mnemosyne*.” (Agamben 1999b: 100).

Gesturology of Revolution: Petr Pavlenskii's Mise en geste

Tsivian devotes three chapters of his book on carpalistics to “gestures of revolution” (2010: 147-221), which he illustrates with an insightful and humorous analysis of Viktor Shklovskii’s theoretical writings, a fragment from Dziga Vertov’s film *Kino-Glaz / Kino-Eye* (1924, USSR), and Aleksandr Rodchenko’s photography.¹⁹ Tsivian points out that all three examples share the same underlying “gesture of turning” (“zhest povorota”; *ibid.*: 158), accountable for the new vision achieved through either the techniques of “ostranenie” (defamiliarisation), the renowned montage artistry of the Russian avant-garde, and the revolutionary implications of constructivism. Following Eisenstein’s logic, Tsivian foregrounds the etymology of the word “revolution” – “revolutio” – which discloses the initial movement: the gesture of overturning, of upheaval, and, finally, of rotation and reversal. A comparable search for the basic movement underlying cultural and historical phenomena is deployed by another contemporary thinker of gesture, Georges Didi-Huberman, in his presentation of the transdisciplinary exhibition *Soulèvement* [Uprising], which took place from October 8, 2016 to January 1, 2017 in the Paris gallery *Jeu de Paume*.²⁰ Grappling with collective emotions and mass movements, as the title suggests (including various public disorders, political agitations, upheavals, riots, and, of course, revolutions), Didi-Huberman muses: “What makes us rise up? It is *forces*: mental, physical, and social forces. Through these forces we transform immobility into movement, burden into energy, submission into revolt, renunciation into expansive joy. Uprisings occur as *gestures*” (2016).²¹

An uprising of a special kind, staged during the night of October 16, 2017, again in Paris, serves as a case study of a spectacular mise en geste. That night the Russian actionist Petr Pavlenskii and his partner Oksana Shalygina torched the office of Banque de France on the Place de la Bastille. By standing still in front of the entrance door, between blazing latticed windows, and looking straight forward without a hint of any emotion on his face, Pavlenskii completed the symmetry of his incendiary mise en scene (Fig. 4). This perfectly aligned scene of action rapidly turned into a crime scene when two French policemen arrived. After Pavlenskii ignored their verbal address, the policemen, perplexed by his reluctance either to flee or even to interact, timidly approached, and one of them tried to break the man’s impassive posture by apprehensively touching his arm. Since no resistance was offered, the still hesitant policemen forced down his rigid body, handcuffed him, and took him away (Fig. 5).

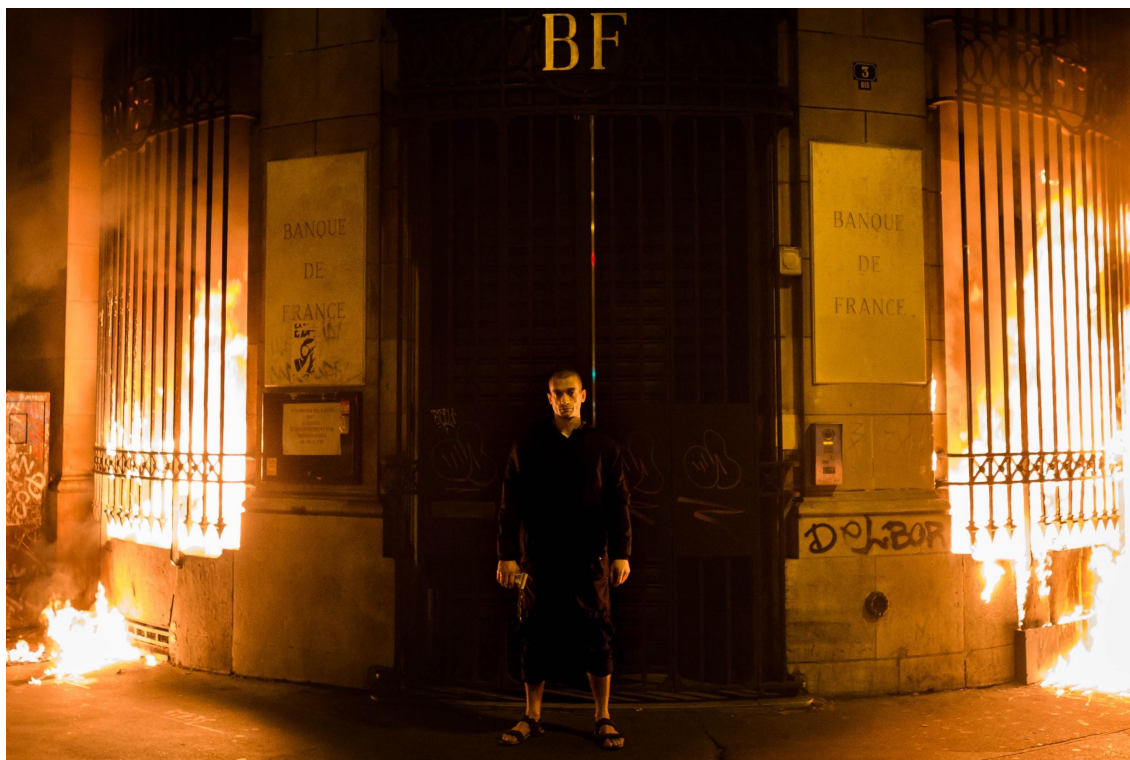


Fig. 4: Petr Pavlenskii in front of the the entrance of the Banque de France. *Éclairage* (October 16, 2017). © Capucine HENRY. Image courtesy of the author.



Fig. 5: *Éclairage* (2017). The arrest of Pavlenskii. © Capucine HENRY. Image courtesy of the author.

The details of Pavlenskii's flamboyant action, including photographs and videos, were immediately reported, streamed, and disseminated in various mass and social media (journalists and photographers had been informed beforehand and arrived at the location in time to witness and document the event). It is from the media coverage that we found out that the Paris action was an act of protest against the power of banks which had appropriated the symbolic cradle of revolution – the Bastille. Pavlenskii's act of rebellion was named *Éclairage / Osveshchenie / [Illumination]*, ironically alluding to the *Siècle des Lumières* that brought about the French Revolution, which, in turn, inspired the October Revolution of 1917, the centennial of which we are commemorating this year. What does the gesture that Pavlenskii performed on the Place de la Bastille actually illuminate? The gleam of the "fire of the revolution"? A reversion of the progressive "Russian light" – the first electric lamps introduced in the 1870s, by happenstance, in Paris as well (cf. Drubek 2012: 9f.) – a "barbaric" intrusion and destructivity, taunting and exposing the layman's inner fears of the Other? The irony of the laconic title is discarded in Pavlenskii's official statement, which, on the contrary, seems utterly candid in the reconstruction of Russia's and France's political and historical kinship. This unequivocal message reads as an expression of utmost earnestness if not naïveté: ²²

To set fire to the Bank of France means to illuminate the truth that the authorities forced us to forget. The Bastille was destroyed by a revolting people; the people destroyed it for being a symbol of despotism and power. On this same place, a new home of slavery was built: the bank, which betrayed the revolutionaries and sponsored the criminal Versailles. The Bank of France has taken the place of the Bastille, bankers have taken the place of monarchs. The great French Revolution made France a symbol of freedom for the rest of the world. In 1917, thanks to this symbol, the Russian set out for freedom. But a hundred years later, tyranny is reigning everywhere again. The renaissance of revolutionary France will trigger the world fire of revolutions. In this fire, Russia will begin its liberation. ²³

The success of Pavlenskii's act of revolt against the power of capital can neither be acclaimed nor contested before it is completed. The full extent of his project must be considered against the backdrop of legal persecution and its media coverage, which extends Pavlenskii's artistic and political gesture to courtrooms and mental institutions, as was the case with his homeland actions. The day after *Éclairage*, it was reported that Pavlenskii and his partner Shalygina were put in pre-trial detention, accused of "destruction of the property of others by means dangerous to other people" (Vitkine 2017). Pavlenskii, just as after his actions in Russia, had to undergo a psychiatric evaluation. Although later the bank dropped the charges, both still remain under arrest, and Pavlenskii is being kept in solitary confinement. ²⁴ In protest against the closed hearings announced by the court, Pavlenskii went on a dry hunger strike. His handwritten letter from the prison, expressing criticism of the French judicial system, has been circulating in the form of a photographed image in social media. All this provoked a wave of mockery and veritable schadenfreude in certain Russian mass and social media, especially because Pavlenskii and Shalygina had been granted political asylum in France earlier this year, exactly, it would seem, thanks to their protest art in Russia.

Through mediatisation of his provocative performances (in mass and social media, both hostile and sympathetic) Pavlenskii productively exploits their proper, mediating function. He calls attention to the workings of the media as the Fourth Estate, exposing its paradoxical ability to record and disseminate his artistic statement, while at the same time profiting from the hype and reasserting itself as a socio-political power. Whether as a passive,

voyeuristic audience or as active participants, media become entangled in the framework of his performances and thus turn into allies of the system of surveillance and punishment. In 2014 Pavlenskii claimed that

political art deals with [...] actual apparatuses of power, that is, with the instruments of power [...] – these are media, through which propaganda is articulated, ideology, the law enforcement system, the judicial system, fear. And the challenge [...] is to make these instruments work for the destruction of the stage set [dekoratsiia] behind which [...] the regime conceals what it actually is. [...] Usually power is an apparatus of violence, it constantly builds, restores, and completes this stage set [...] What I am precisely interested in is producing ruptures in this decoration.²⁵

What Pavlenskii's "political art" explicitly aims at is to unearth the extended network of impersonal branches of the state apparatus and their coordinated reproduction of scenes of subjection. "Why does the government call its agencies 'law enforcement bodies' [organy], 'legislative bodies'? The government speaks of the state like a body", queries Pavlenskii (cit. in Pomerantsev 2015). In an interview from 2013, he admits his eagerness to construct situations on the territory of power that would confuse, disrupt, and, ultimately, cause a deadlock within the state apparatus.²⁶

In this constructed scene, it is the artist's "docile" body that occupies the site of undecidability between coercion and self-determination, that "rupture in the decoration". In an outwardly (post-)Foucauldian sense, he reverses the practices of discipline and punishment by transforming "docility" into a willful act of defiance. Whereas the system turned subjects into objects, with their bodies "manipulated, shaped, trained", "subjected, used, transformed, and improved" (Foucault 1995: 136), Pavlenskii's art demonstrates how the body is manipulated, coerced, even mutilated by the subject himself. In other words, through a radical self-desubjectivisation producing a state of uncertainty (how to punish this docile, yet unbending body?), the artist demonstrates a "becoming-limb" of the state apparatus and thus undermines its flawless functioning.

All Pavlenskii's previous actions rely on this same tactic of re-enacted subjection, conveying a rather unambiguous message, while repeatedly returning to some basic aesthetic strategies (for instance, graphic postures, alignment of the action's elements). He sewed his lips together in support of *Pussy Riot* (action *Shov / Stich*, 2012, St. Petersburg). His naked body was wrapped in barbed wire and left in front of the Legislative Assembly as protest against infringements upon civil rights and in support of political prisoners (*Tusha* [Carcass], 2013, St. Petersburg). During his action against political apathy in Russia, sitting naked on the Red Square, he nailed his scrotum to the cobblestones (*Fiksatsiia* / [Fixation], 2013, Moscow) – replicating an actual radical practice among Russian prisoners of nailing parts of their bodies to their prison beds in protest against the arbitrariness of administration (cf. Pavlenskii 2013). Again naked, this time sitting on the entrance gate of the Serbskii Center for Psychiatry, he cut off a piece of his earlobe in protest against punitive psychiatry (*Otdelenie* / [Section], 2014, Moscow). The appropriation of the body by the state is turned around: "a policy of coercions that act upon the body, a calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, its behaviour" (Foucault 1995: 138) is undermined from within when the artist willingly lends his own biological body to the collective, social body in an act of humility and humiliation.²⁷ As Dmitrii Volchek ironically observes (2013), "Political art can barely stay serious, modest, edifying. It is much easier to become ridiculous [...] or recklessly vulgar." Yet Pavlenskii's deliberate self-coercion, self-abasement, and self-harm transfigures into a powerful social gesture of resistance and revolt. "I show these processes on my own body, for my body is a part of the large social body", he confirms (cit. in Volchek 2013).

Éclairage quite obviously echoes Pavlenskii's action in his homeland in 2015, titled *Ugroza* [Threat], when he set fire to the entrance door of the headquarters of the FSB (Federal security service, the successor of the KGB) on the Lubyanka Square in Moscow, another place of power. In his Bastille-performance, Pavlenskii seems to purposely mirror the geometry of *Ugroza* – the static posture, aloof gaze, flames in the background (Fig. 6). Hence the two performances can and probably should be read as complementary. Both state authoritarianism, or, as one calls today's Russia, the "guided democracy" (*upravliaemaia demokratiia*), and the European liberal democracy are for Pavlenskii of the same oppressive nature.²⁸ While the former relies on images in the execution of power, the latter testifies to "the commodity's last metamorphosis" – "the 'becoming-image' of capital" (Agamben 2000: 75).



Fig. 6: Petr Pavlenskii at the burning door of the FSB. *Ugroza* (2015, Moscow). Photographer: Il'ia Valamov. Source: <http://varlamov.ru/1507107.html>

Although neither *Ugroza* nor the latest action involved any self-harm or mutilation, Pavlenskii's signature style is recognisable: when the representatives of state power appear, the artist freezes in a static pose, and his immobile stance attests to resistance all the more powerfully the more impassive his posture is. In this regard, his most famed performance *Fiksatsiia* begets an ideal model for the radical nihilist gesture of political actionism orchestrated around immobility. While in *Fiksatsiia* the body is crouched in a fixed pose, in *Éclairage*, it straightens up along a vertical axis yielding the action's *mise en geste*, taken literally: staged, or placed (*mise*) in gesture (*en geste*). "Staging" derives from the Latin "stare" (to stand). Thus, standing, ironically enough, reveals itself as the underlying gesture of *mise en geste* itself. In addition, standing (*stoianie*) certainly alludes to the Russian Orthodox theological doctrine prescribing standing as a statutory "technique of the body" in liturgy (worshippers must remain standing), as well as in praxes of monastic austerity. Profoundly symbolic, this bodily stance acquires a metaphysical dimension: from a dramatic posture of stoic endurance, mirroring the Passion Christi, to the spiritual standing before God – "predstoianie", which, ultimately, defines the eschatological temporality of Eastern Christianity.²⁹

Agamben challenges Aristotle's distinction between "poiesis" (production) and "praxis" (action), enlists the Roman scholar Varro who suggested a third type of action and inscribed gesture in it. Varro argued that gesture can be neither "acting" (*agere*), nor "producing" (*facere*), but "carrying" (*gerere*). An actor acts but does not produce, while a poet produces without acting; and "carrying (on)" is reserved for sovereigns and for mimes. Agamben concludes: "nothing is being produced or acted, but rather something is being endured and supported" (2000: 56). That is to say: action is understood neither as a mechanical-manual activity nor as artistic-aesthetic praxis, but as the exhibition of endless possibilities – gesture as action can never be accomplished, it can only be sustained and incurred. Agamben tacitly implies the derivation of the "gesture" from the same Latin origin (*gero*) that produced in Roman languages a word family semantically linked to management and government (e.g. "gérer" and "gestion" in French, "gestire" in Italian, etc.) – to the concepts of politics and ethics. This alone automatically renders gesture political, and politics entails an art of making gestures as "the sphere of a pure and endless mediality" (*ibid.*: 59). If gesture is "the endurance and the exhibition of the media character of corporal movements" (*ibid.*: 69), Pavlenskii's gesture of simply standing amid two fires, eloquent and spectacular on its own, offers a "point of flight from aesthetics into ethics and politics" (Gustafsson, Grønstad 2014: loc. 259), where the gesture of standing arises as pure being-means, and where possibility and execution are not yet differentiated.³⁰

Eisenstein and, subsequently, Tsivian, drawing on the idea of rotation and reversion at the bottom of "revolutio", grasped revolution as an utterly dynamic concept.³¹ Following the tenets of dialectics, it presupposes a qualitative change, a transition to an entirely different state. This is how Eisenstein explains "ekstaz" (ecstasy) delving habitually into the origins of the word: *ex-stasis* – "standing outside oneself", out-of-stasis (Eizenshtein 1964: 61). His famous series of sketches *Ex-stasis* visualise the idea of explosion and rotations in every ecstatic movement from simple gestures to uprisings and revolutions (Fig. 7). "Stasis" (στάσις), in turn, essentially means "standing" in Old Greek.³² Conversely, Pavlenskii's revolutionary gesture is grounded in the idea of stasis, and, to some extent, seems to be closer to Didi-Huberman's notion of uprising (*vos-stanie*). This is to say, that "stoianie"

underlies the strategy of resistance (“protivo-stoianie”, counter-standing). Each confrontation with power produces a paralysing effect, immobilises the body, disables the will – and this pillar-like posture, a minimalist yet pointed whole-body gesture, brings to light the inaction (stasis) at the core of action and attests to “stoianie” as a “pure gesture” in Pavlenskii’s actionism.

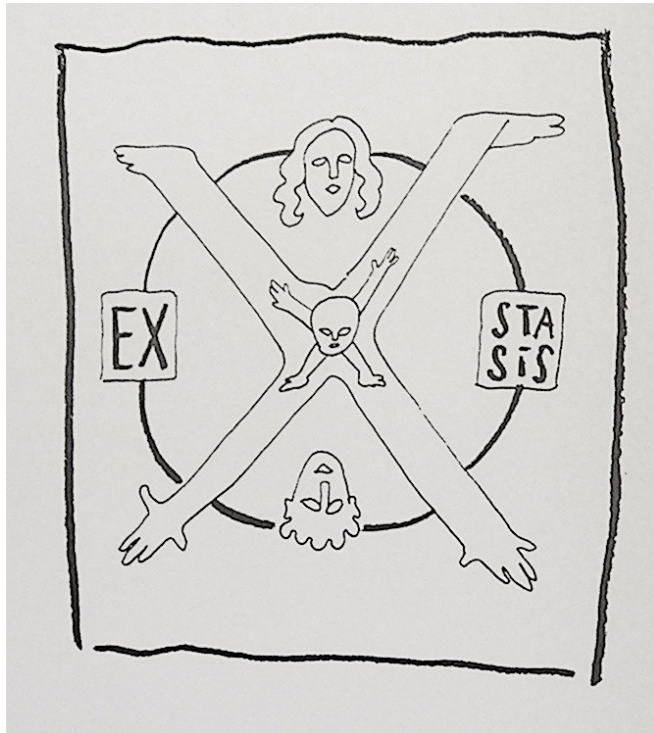


Fig. 7: Sergei Eisenstein. *Ex-stasis*. (1932). Source: *Neravnodusnaia priroda. Tom 2. O stroenii veshchei*, ed. by Naum Kleiman (Eizenshtein 2006: 2).

However, Pavlenskii’s gesture of resistance against the power of capital seems to have failed to resonate in France. The reaction to it has been rather reserved even among the French intelligentsia, historically prone to leftist radical mindsets; public enthusiasm has been scarce; information has been limited to neutral newspaper reports and Twitter entries. The closed court hearings have diminished the public attention Pavlenskii and Shalygina would otherwise receive. Even the current London exhibition *Art Riot: Post-Soviet Actionism* presenting post-communist contemporary conceptual and political art (among others Oleg Kulik, *Pussy Riot*, *Blue Noses* and Petr Pavlenskii himself) has not (yet) had any significant effect.³³ It seems as if more urgent issues and concerns have overwhelmed the media in France and, by extension, Europe (the migrant crisis, Brexit, the crisis in Catalonia, the rise of right-wing populism at the federal elections in Germany, and, generally, the advance of nationalist rhetoric, the radicalisation of society, and the threat of terrorism). Leaving aside the current geopolitical predicament, a Marxist-like critique of the fetish character of the commodity and the socio-economic power has been considered passé in the global European scene since the end of the 1960s.

The closest analogy to Pavlenskii’s protest art that comes to mind is the praxis of the Situationist International (SI), whose programme he seems to consciously implement. This applies, first, to the cornerstone of the SI’s artistic and political strategies – the creation of “situations” that expose societal relations as conditioned and mediated by images (cf. Debord 1967: thesis 4). Secondly, Pavlenskii makes use of the SI’s specific collage method, in which “preexisting artistic elements [are reused] in a new ensemble” (Debord 1959) for propaganda purposes. The strategy, labelled “détournement” (Debord 1956, 1959, 1967: theses 206-209), is unquestionably revolutionary: it gestures towards turning the hegemony of any (also theoretical and artistic) ideology against itself by means of that very ideology. Literally meaning “turnabout”, “reversal”, or “diversion”, *détournement* doubtlessly belongs to the gestural vocabulary of revolution. Pavlenskii is acutely aware of the representative (secondary, if one will) character of his art and his appropriation of the strategies of *détournement*. Thus, in *Stich* he “detourned” religious dogmatism by holding a poster with the following text: “The performance of *Pussy Riot* was a replay of Jesus Christ’s famous action (Matt. 21:12-13)”. In both of his arsonist actions, he explores the body language clichés of Hollywood blockbusters. “It is obviously in the realm of the cinema that *détournement* can attain its greatest efficacy, and undoubtedly, for those concerned with this aspect, its greatest beauty”, writes Debord (1956). Pavlenskii’s tranquil, “cool” stance in front of the raging fires, imitating cinematic heroic postures, unveils the inevitable commodification and iterability of every picturesque gesture: “The externality of the spectacle in relation to the active man appears in the fact that his own gestures are no longer his but those of another who represents them to him. This is why the spectator feels at home nowhere, because the spectacle is everywhere” (Debord 1967: thesis 30).

However unoriginal and trivial Pavlenskii's latest action might appear at first sight, it succeeds in creating a provocative situation (that deadlock he spoke of) in which the state apparatus risks falling victim to a performative contradiction: should Pavlenskii be found guilty of incendiarism – which would automatically mean the non-recognition of his action as an artistic gesture – then he can either face a long term in prison or be deported from the country exactly for the same reasons he was granted political asylum in the first place. Then his lurid act may gain a more profound dimension – namely to be seen as symptomatic of the impaired mechanisms of European migrant politics. Furthermore, *Éclairage* succeeds in revealing the triumph of the society of the spectacle – its totalising realisation both in East and West according to the scenario in which “the spectacular-democratic regime” “constitutes the completion of the state-form” (Agamben 2000: 85). As early as 1990, in *Marginal Notes on Commentaries on the Society of the Spectacle*, Agamben rightly observes that the “substantial unification of the concentrated spectacle (the Eastern people's democracies) and of the diffused spectacle (the Western democracies) into an integrated spectacle is, by now, trivial evidence” (2000: 79). The power of images can be fought only through and by images.³⁴

In *Gesten*, Vilém Flusser speculates about the gesture of destroying (Geste des Zerstörens) in its direct relation to ethics. Although he disapproves of such anti-creative gestures as evincing “a superficial, un-radical ‘disingenuous’ existence [unechtes Dasein]” (2014: 59) – and we must remember that gesture for Flusser is an “active being-in-the world” – he recognises in destruction a “frustrated revolution” and “frustrated search for freedom” (ibid.: 59, 60). A few years later, Flusser indirectly touches on a related topic, when he conceptualises his version of posthistoire (1997, 2013).³⁵ He defines the condition of modern society, incidentally, as “apparatus” (reminiscent of Foucault's and Agamben's eponymous notions). Flusser criticises the apparatic model of society as dehumanising, destined to fulfil impersonal “programmes” restricting the expression of free will (Flusser's focal concern throughout his writings). The only escape from the omnipotence of mechanical programmes would consist in strategies of sabotage, in absurd games with apparatuses – “the overturning the chessboard” (1997: 85) or “throwing sand into the mechanisms” (ibid.: 100). We can no longer be revolutionaries but only “saboteurs”, and every emancipatory movement can only move forward through sabotage, Flusser argues (ibid.). In his belief system, sabotage is the last refuge of human agency, and gesture is the ultimate residuum of freedom.

Pavlenskii, too, through his disturbing actions, sabotages the public discourse that draws a distinct line between reputedly authoritarian Russia and allegedly democratic France (and Western Europe in general). His action spotlights both their common revolutionary and ideological genealogy, as well as the shared mechanisms through which the individual is destined to be entangled in the dispositif. To put it differently, *Éclairage*, a gesture of destruction and of “frustrated search for freedom”, is simultaneously a gesture of exhibiting cultural and political blind spots characteristic of the newly revived antagonism between West and East. One of these blind spots is the oft-ignored limitations of agency and problems of self-determination in a world governed by images.

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19. In this part of the book, Tsivian discusses several related topics: from Eisenstein's montage to the concept “mirskontsa” (worldbackwards) of Russian futurist poetry. He also reminds that first mention of the expression “zhest revolutsii” belongs to Aleksei N. Tolstoi in his essay *Vozmozhnosti kino* [Potentials of Cinema] (1924) (Tsivian 2010: 147-150).

20. <http://soulevements.jeudepaume.org/>

21. http://www.jeudepaume.org/pdf/PetitJournal_Soulevements.pdf

22. On the discourse of sincerity in Russian culture after communism, see Rutten (2017).

23. Reconstructed from French and Russian. For the Russian version, see Sulim 2017; the French original was tweeted by the FEMEN-activist Inna Shevchenko (@feminnin, October, 16, 2017, 1:05 AM), two hours before the action began: « Mettre le feu dans [sic!] la Banque de France c'est mettre l'éclairage sur la vérité que les autorités nous ont forcé à oublier. La Bastille a été détruite par le peuple révolté; le peuple l'a détruite comme symbole du despotisme et du pouvoir. Sur ce même lieu un nouveau foyer d'esclavage a été bâti, la banque, qui trahit les révolutionnaires et qui sponsorisa le Versailles criminel. La Banque de France a pris la place de la Bastille, les banquiers ont pris la place des monarques. La grande Révolution Française a fait de la France un symbole de liberté pour le monde entier. En 1917, grâce à ce symbole, la Russie s'est élancée vers la liberté. Mais cent ans plus tard la tyrannie règne de nouveau, partout. La renaissance de la France révolutionnaire déclenchera l'incendie mondial des révolutions. Dans ce feu la Russie commencera sa libération. »

24. As his attorney stated at the beginning of December 2017, Pavlenskii and Shalygina are being kept in prison because they did not have a permanent residence in France. In the most recent interviews (Pavlenskii 2017a, 2017b), Pavlenskii confesses to have rejected social benefits and housing and to be squatting with his family. Now he is accused of “destructions, dégradations et

détériorations dangereuses pour les personnes” [destruction, defacement, and damage dangerous to other people] according to Article 322-5 of the French *Code Pénal*, and thus faces ten years in prison. On this and other details of Pavlenskii’s and Shalygina’s incarceration, see Borodikhin, Pestova (2017).

25. The transcription of Pavlenskii’s speech in Kharkiv National University, cit. in Pomerantsev (2015): «[...] политическое искусство работает [...] с самими аппаратами власти, то есть с тем, что является инструментами власти [...] – это СМИ, через которые идет пропаганда, это идеология, это правоохранительная система, судебная система, это страх. И задача в этом случае заставить эти инструменты работать на разрушение декорации, за которой власть, за которой режим скрывает то, чем она является, а как правило, власть – это аппарат насилия, она постоянно строит, реставрирует и достраивает эту декорацию [...] Я заинтересован в том, чтобы делать разрывы в декорации как раз».
26. «Было любопытно построить какую-то конструкцию на территории власти, которая бы ей не нравилась, но при этом власть не знала бы, что с тобой делать. А насчет власти – мне интересно, как она отреагирует, потому что мне важно создать ситуацию, при которой она бы оказалась в тупике» (Pavlenskii 2013).
27. For an analysis of Pavlenskii’s actionism in terms of the holy fool tradition, see Filippova (2016).
28. Interestingly, because of *Ugroza* Pavlenskii was, too, subsequently convicted in “destruction or or damage of cultural heritage or cultural valuables” according to the Criminal Code of Russian Federation (see Demchenko et al. 2017).
29. Natascha Drubek explores the meaning of the word “predstoianie” in her analysis of Nikita Mikhalkov’s film *Utomlennye solntsem 2 / Burnt by the Sun 2* (2010, Russia), particularly in its first part, titled *Predstoianie / Exodus*. She reads “predstoianie” in light of the iconological implications of deisis, the three-part icon composition (with Jesus as the central figure, and the Virgin Mary and St. John the Baptist at his sides) which conveys the mediating function of supplication (the actual etymological meaning of “deisis”). She observes: “In the two forms of the word *predstoyat’* two semantical cores (leading and praying) are present – both dissolving in the verbal noun *predstoyanie* which in this context has the meaning of ‘mediating’. The priest has special qualities (which place him high up in the hierarchy) and therefore he is able to be a mediator between God and man [...] The *pred-stoyatel’* stands before the people and at the same time in front of /under the Saints and God, praying for the people.” (Drubek 2013: 88).
30. Doris Schuhmacher-Chilla summarises pointedly Agamben’s ontological query about the relation of possibility and reality: his concept of “potentiation” permits thinking of possibility as a possibility “not to do”: “Das Nicht-Tun erscheint als Fähigkeit, als Vermögen” (2008: 121).
31. See Tsivian’s discussion of “reversed time” in early cinematography both as a regime of demonstration (reverse film projection utilised for comical effects in cinema theatres) and as an avangardist montage technique rooted in the philosophical and cultural debates on relativity of time characteristic of that epoch (Tsivian 2010: 164f.).
32. On the concept of revolution in Eisenstein and its philosophical and scientific implications, among others, “stasis”, see Drubek (2017), Manuscript, courtesy of the author.
33. The exhibition is curated by Marat Gelman and can be seen in Saatchi Gallery (16 November – 31 December 2017). <http://www.saatchigallery.com/art/art-riot.php>
34. Benjamin Noys elucidates “the deadly fusion” Agamben is trying to unpack “between Debord’s analysis of ‘the society of the spectacle’ and Foucault’s counter-proposal of ‘the society of surveillance,’ in which capitalism becomes an immense machine for the capture of life by images and the reduction of life to images.” (Noys 2014: loc. 2056-2064). Noys indicates in Agamben strategies of resistance the philosopher demarcates: “we have to perform an ambiguous un-working on the image, an act of profanation [...] If we are creatures of the image then it is only in the traversal of the image that we can release the fleeting potential of resistance” (ibid.: loc. 2071). On gesture of profanation in Agamben, see Schuhmacher-Chilla (2008).
35. The first version of the book was published as early as in 1983 in São Paulo, Brazil, under the title *Pós-história: vinte instantâneos e um modo de usar*.

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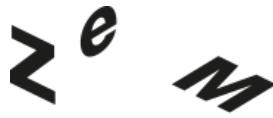
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