Giovanni Maddalena, Fabio Ferrucci, Michela Bella,
and Matteo Santarelli

Introduction

What do we mean precisely by "gesture?" The Merriam-Webster online dictionary presents at least three different meanings of this term: a movement usually of the body or limbs that expresses or emphasizes an idea, sentiment, or attitude; the use of motions of the limbs or body as a means of expression; something said or done by way of formality or courtesy, as a symbol or token, or for its effect on the attitudes of others.[1] Although in different meanings, these three main senses suggest a close connection between gesture and communication. Unlike purely random body movements, gestures communicate something in some sense. Not all bodily movements, therefore, are endowed with gestural dignity, as in Clifford Geertz' expression: "That's all there is to it: a speck of behavior, a fleck of culture, and—*voilà!*—a gesture" (1973, 6).

The type of communication involved in the gesture remains unclear in these commonsensical meanings. In some languages, the gesture seems to be accompanied by a basic, para-verbal form of communication. Let us consider the Italian verb "gesticolare." A person "gesticulates" when he or she accompanies his or her verbal utterances with gestures-nonverbal gestures that have the function of emphasizing what is being said or when he or she replaces verbal expression with intense, broad, and sometimes "odd and frantic" body gestures. This suggests that gestures are to be placed in an intermediate position in the hierarchical ranking of communicative acts.

On the one hand, they have communicative value differently from purely random body movements. On the other hand, they are poor relatives of higher and more dignified ways and styles of communication. One cannot pantomime a poem without yielding a debasing and comic effect with respect to the original composition.

Nevertheless, the etymology and history of the term suggest caution against such a debasing and derogatory conception of the gesture. The word gesture

1 https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/gesture, last accessed March 6, 2024.

Giovanni Maddalena, University of Molise, Campobasso, Italy, e-mail: maddalena@unimol.it
Fabio Ferrucci, University of Molise, Campobasso, Italy, e-mail: ferrucci@unimol.it
Michela Bella, University of Molise, Campobasso, Italy,
e-mail: michela.bella@unimol.it
Matteo Santarelli, University of Bologna, Bologna, Italy, e-mail: matteo.santarelli4@unibo.it

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comes from the Latin word *gero*, meaning to carry, and is also found at the origin of the term "*gesta*," a term describing heroic deeds. In this context, one might think of the famous "Chansons de geste," narrative poems based on legendary episodes or real events concerning the heroic gestures and deeds in France at the times of Charles Martel, Charlemagne, and Louis the Pious.[2] In a different sphere, the term "gesture" characterizes a type of action characterized by a high level of symbolic complexity—a sense that echoes the third meaning presented by Merriam-Webster's dictionary. In some dialectal idioms of central Italy, the expression "fare il gesto" ("doing the gesture") is found. When one "does the gesture," she means to express the intention to make a gesture that she knows will likely never be performed. The classic example is when we are invited to lunch and know the person inviting us will pay for the meal. While we are sure of this, once the meal is over and we go towards the cashier, we will reach into our wallet and take the money. The person inviting us will interrupt us and make explicit that the meal is on her while appreciating that we "did the gesture" of paying. That is how sophisticated gestures can be.

The scientific literature on the subject reflects this ambiguity in the treatment of gestures. On the one hand, a long-standing and prestigious scholarly stream adopts a parallelist conception of gestures (Quintiliano 2001; Bonifacio 1616; Bulwer 1644; De L'Epée 1776; Condillac 1746; Rousseau 1755; De Jorio 1832; and Wundt 1912). According to the various versions of this conception, gestures are understood as an expression of thought parallel to verbal or written language. Gestures can translate the sophistications of verbal language in elementary and inadequate ways, they can struggle to replace words in contexts that make it necessary, they can anticipate discursive communication in the ontogenetic development of the individual, and they can reinforce the emotional and pragmatic components of what we say. In each case, the bias toward the restricted and secondary communicative capabilities of gestural communication is retained.

As an alternative to such a parallelist paradigm, however, a continuist paradigm has emerged since the 19th century, with some ingenious anticipations in the 18th century (Vico 1744). This paradigm emphasizes the continuity between the bodily and pragmatic dimensions of communication and its intellectual and cognitive dimensions. The dichotomy between nonverbal gesture and verbal communication is thus overcome, asserting that communication is always, to some extent, embodied and enacted.

2 On the working hypothesis of linking "gesture" to the Greek word γόρον-ου (meaning) and identifying in it the object of this bringing, see Molfetta (2023).

Such a continuist position finds a paradigmatic exponent in George Herbert Mead. In a series of articles and the collection of lectures published under the name *Mind, Self, and Society* (1934/2015), Mead adopts the concept of gesture as central to his theory of human action and communication. Instead of identifying gestures as a communicative current parallel to the verbal flow, Mead analyzes the genesis and development of reflective thinking and symbolic capacity from the social practice of the conversation of gestures. In this sense, human specificity is not identified in non-gestural, disembodied verbal language but rather in the ability to employ and understand symbolic and significant gestures. The focus on continuity promises an overcoming of hyper-intellectualist conceptions of the human being, and its ascendancy has reaffirmed the importance of the pragmatic, relational dimension in human experience and cognitive processes. Mead's insights—and pragmatism more generally—thus anticipate recent developments in so-called 4EA cognition (see Madzia-Jung 2016; Madzia-Santarelli 2017; and Baggio 2021 and 2023).

The contemporary new wave of gesture studies includes both parallelist and continuistic approaches. The contemporary focus on the concept has developed either by explicitly employing the vocabulary of gestures (Kendon 2004; McNeill 1992 and 2005; Sennett 2009; Maddalena 2015 and 2021; Agamben 2017; and Tversky 2019) or by means of alternative terminological choices that are theoretically consistent with the same conceptual framework (Deacon 1997; Archer 2000; Rizzolatti-Sinigaglia 2008; Tomasello 2008; Sennett 2009; Donati 2010; Ingold 2010; and Ferraris 2017).

The theoretical and practical implications of this new centrality of gestures have yet to be assessed, especially if we consider gesture as being involved in the cognitive, pedagogical, and sociological paths forged by the digital revolution. The absence of such an assessment is unfortunate in light of the fact that the concept of gesture might be crucial for understanding the forms of knowledge being created and the transitions of meaning occurring in this new cultural landscape. More in general, many questions arise from various points of view when we focus on the cognitive role of gesture. Does gesture entail highlighting the preeminence of bodily experiences at the expense of intellectual and rational processes? Does the focus on gesture lead to the thinning of the distinction between humans and nonhuman animals, or do gestures help us to rethink and reconceptualize the allegedly higher human capacities without reducing them to the epiphenomena of underlying biological and neural processes? Does the gesture involve reasoning? Does it have a meaning in itself, or is it merely a means of conveying meaning? Is it a purely external action, or are there also internal gestures? Does it serve to communicate, or is all communication a form of gesture? What kind of

pedagogy is connected to gesture? What kinds of relationships does gesture require? What kind of social relations are involved in the concept of gesture?

The book explores the potential and challenges of a philosophical approach to gestures from a multidisciplinary perspective.[3] Many of the contributions argue for a pragmatist approach to gestures and engage in a conversation with Giovanni Maddalena's philosophy of gesture (2015). According to Maddalena's view, which is inspired by pragmatism and particularly by Charles S. Peirce's theories of continuum and existential graphs, gesture is a conceptual tool that helps us overcome traditional philosophical dualisms (e.g., analytic/synthetic, mind/body, theory/practice, knowledge/communication) and emphasizes the dynamic, processual, and embodied character of knowledge. Other contributions use different philosophical traditions to reformulate the above questions and provide answers. Furthermore, some contributions provide theoretical insights and reflections from the practice of gesture.

The structure of the book reflects its aim to provide a contemporary multidisciplinary overview of gestures, and consider their potential developments. The book is divided into four parts: I) Gestures in Philosophy, II) Gestures in the Social Sciences, III) Gestures in Psychology and the Cognitive Sciences, and IV) Gestures in Anthropology, Aesthetics, and Arts. Giovanni Maddalena's "Communication and Knowledge: A Proof of Completeness" opens the philosophical section of the book. Maddalena investigates the relationship between knowledge and communication. His inquiry involves two different moments. In the first part of the chapter, Maddalena analyzes the pragmatist thesis that cognitive processes are communicative in nature. In the second part, the author delves instead into a thesis not fully developed by classical pragmatist authors, namely, the idea that communication is always knowledge. To this end, Maddalena introduces his conception of synthesis as action, already developed in his 2015 volume *The Philosophy of Gestures*.

Mathias Girel's chapter "Are There Ambiguous Gestures?" aims to propose an account of ambiguous gestures. Girel analyzes several possible causes of this ambiguity—specifically, metaphysical causes and contextual causes. In the latter

3 Over the last ten years, a vast literature on gestures spread out. Most of these works consider artistic and anthropological gestures, political gestures, and gestures within the phenomenological tradition (see, among many others, Ferencz-Flatz, Popa (2022); Ciocan (2022); Franko (2022); Ruprecht (2019); Moran (2018); Crowther (2017); Manning (2016); Flusser (2014); Kendon (2013); Malafouris (2012); and Noland (2009)). On the connections between gestures and the philosophy of mathematics, see Maddalena, Zalamea (2012); Zalamea (2012); Longo (2021); and La Mantia, Alunni, Zalamea (2023). The classic literature on gestures in psycholinguistics is extremely vast; see, among many others, Alibali, Kita, Young (2000); de Ruiter (2000); Talmy (2000); Wagner, Nusbaum, Goldin-Meadow (2004); Hostetter, Alibali (2008); and Müller (2008).

case, ambiguity stems from the dependence of gesture meaning on the absence of other social actors. Through a dialogue between pragmatism and authors such as Austin and Anscombe, the author highlights the decisive importance of background conditions in determining the completeness and meaning of a gesture.

In "Between Saying and Doing: What Logic for Gestures?" Maria Regina Brioschi tackles the issue of the relation between gestures and logic. The author starts by constructing a minimal definition of gesture and then questions the role that gestures play in logic. The point of reference is Charles Sanders Peirce, with particular attention to his analysis of proposition. The discussion of Peirce's logic leads Brioschi to two conclusions: not only the subject but also the predicate of a proposition can be understood in a gestural sense; recognizing gestures as synthetic reasoning helps to understand how the essence of reasoning should be thought of in terms of implication, not identity.

Marco Stango's contribution "Transcendental Gestures" adopts a perspective at the intersection of philosophy and theology. Stango analyzes the concept of transcendental gesture, drawing inspiration on the one hand from the pragmatist conception of gesture and on the other from Balthasar's "dramatic" idea that the very possibility of meaningfulness in individual life is made possible by fundamental gestures—e.g., the caregiver's smile to the newborn. This involves an overcoming of the Kantian perspective and the affirmation of a virtuous circularity between transcendental and experience.

Anna Donise's "Understanding Others: Theodor Lipps as Philosopher of Gestures" is a discussion of Theodor Lipps' classic contribution to the phenomenological understanding of gesture. After reconstructing Lipps' theory of gesture, Donise shows how it makes possible an original understanding of the relationship between self and other. From Lipps' perspective, gestural interaction participates in the potential constitution of a vague and fusional dimension. This dimension, often relegated to a mere regressive if not pathological phenomenon, is decisive for developing the relationship between self and other.

The second part of the book enlightens current understanding of gestures in the social sciences. In his "Gestures, Habits, and Cultural Transmission: From "Organic Memory" to the Social Sciences," Tullio Viola analyzes the role of gestures and habits in a phenomenon that affects broad areas of contemporary social sciences, i.e., cultural transmission. Through a historical overview, Viola shows how there has been during the 20th century a clear paradigm shift in the understanding of the role of habits and gestures in cultural transmission—i.e., the shift from a biological to a sociological understanding of the phenomenon. In the final section of the chapter, the author presents Connerton's work and his attempt to ana-

lyze both the role of memory in cultural transmission and the centrality of the ritual dimension in memory as recollection.

Pierpaolo Donati's "A Relational Reading of Gesture" proposes to place gesture theory within a relational paradigm. On the one hand, this involves an appreciation of the idea of complete gesture presented by Giovanni Maddalena and, on the other hand, a critique of the pragmatist perspective. This perspective—especially in its Peircean version—would be incapable of articulating a version convincingly of realism. To this end, Donati deems that a movement toward relational sociology and critical realism—as championed by authors like Roy Bhaskar and Margaret Archer—is necessary.

In "The Problem of Museum Accessibility: A New Perspective from Relational Sociology and Communicative Gesture," Fabio Ferrucci offers an inclusive rethinking of the conception of museum accessibility as a property of the visiting experience. Drawing on disability and visitor studies, gesture philosophy, and relational sociology, the author proposes a new perspective on museum accessibility that wishes to "make sense" of the exhibition routes and cultural objects visitors encounter, making them effectively accessible.

Pier Paolo Bellini discusses "The Socio-Relational Roots of the Creative Gesture." From the author's perspective, creativity is not about the isolated act of a genius. On the contrary, it should be understood as a universal potentiality of human action. As a capacity specific to human beings, creativity thus concerns the ability to generate meaning in everyday interactions and everyday life. In order to develop his thesis, Bellini investigates the relationship between creativity, incompleteness, motivation and trust, thus highlighting the deeply humanistic character of creative gestures.

Giorgio Borrelli's "Gesture, Labor, and Semiosis: Some Research Hypotheses for a Theoretical Convergence between Semiotics and Dialectics" walks at the intersection of semiotics and dialectical theory. The core of his essay is the concept of labor. Beginning by analyzing the convergence between Hegelian-Marxian and Pragmatist understandings of gesture, Borrelli introduces an original comparison between Charles Sanders Peirce and Ernst Bloch. This comparison hinges on Bloch's theory of knowledge, which tightly holds together the cognitive, phenomenological, and pragmatic dimensions of gesture.

The third part of the book collects contributions to philosophy of psychology, psychoanalysis and the cognitive sciences. Michela Bella's "Toward a Psychology of Gestures" attempts to bridge Maddalena's Peircean-informed understanding of gesture with the psychological perspective leaning on William James. Bella highlights the limits of a semiotic perspective in which symbolicity plays a major role and introduces the role of significant others in the recognition of personal iden-

tity. In her reading, foregrounding perception's sensational and relational elements can benefit the development of a pragmatist psychology of gesture.

In "Psychoanalysis as a Science of Incomplete Gestures," Matteo Santarelli aims to affirm the centrality of the pragmatic dimension against overly intellectualistic interpretations of psychoanalysis. Specifically, Santarelli asserts the centrality of the gestural dimension in Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic thought and practice. Thus, at the center of chapter the author develops a gestural analysis of the Freudian concept of transference. In the final part, Santarelli proposes an attempt to understand the role of vague gestures in psychoanalysis.

Guido Baggio contributes to the current debate on enactive languaging in the cognitive sciences with his enactive interpretation of meaning informed by George H. Mead's pragmatism. In his "Gesturing Language," the author refers to Mead to support the hypothesis of the phylogenesis of languaging from gestural conversations based on bio-social processes. Baggio argues that Mead's theory can mediate between recognizing an essential biological process that could generate languaging and the more recent enactivist conception of the linguistic sense-making process.

Francesco Fanti Rovetta's contribution, "Two Kinds of Perspectival Representations and the Role of Gestures in Perceptually Anchoring Inner Speech," focuses on the relationship between inner speech and gestures. While the role of gestures in interacting with others is well understood, the gestural dimension of speech with oneself may appear less intuitive. On the contrary, the author shows how in the context of inner speech, gestures not only allow for encoding different information relevant in that domain. They also allow for the representation and manipulation of linguistic-attitudinal and sensorimotor perspectives. Moreover, gestures might also play an important role in the perceptual anchoring of inner speech.

Laura Sparaci and Shaun Gallagher's "Continuity through Change: How Gestures Inform Current Debates on the Ontogeny of Embodied Narrative" addresses the controversial topic of embodied narrative in the development of social cognition. The work focuses on the relationship between actions and language to account for the critical shift from nonrepresentational to representational processes in the structural continuity claimed by the authors. Gestures play a significant role in Sparaci and Gallagher's analysis by suggesting continuity through changes in the transition from action to narration.

The fourth part of the book gathers contributions from anthropology, aesthetics, and the arts. Antonis Iliopoulos' chapter "Gesture and Things: A Working Definition and Material Engagement" offers a radically multidisciplinary perspective on the nature of the gesture. Such a perspective challenges overly intellectualist and cognitivist conceptions of gesture, summoning a wide range of authors from Dewey to Agamben. In continuity with the theory of material engagement intro-

duced and developed by Lambros Malafouris, Iliopoulos thus provides a pragmatic non-reductivist understanding of gestures anchored in the ongoing mind-matter interaction. This involves a fresh perspective on the creative and autopoietic character of human gestures.

Roberta Dreon's "Reason, Language, and Life: Frank Lorimer's Critical Development of Dewey's Approach" offers a detailed analysis of the work of Frank Lorimer, an author whose role in the history of pragmatism tends to be neglected. Lorimer's perspective offers, according to Dreon, a valuable perspective on the discontinuous relations between humans and nonhuman animals. Central to that perspective is a multifaceted analysis of the genesis of human language in its multifaceted dimensions and his concept of organic intelligence. Lorimer's analysis might productively contribute to contemporary debates on naturalism.

Barbara Formis' "Handling Things Together: Artistic Practice of Research" works at the crossroads between philosophical reflection and artistic performance. This perspective tightly connects the philosophical work of pragmatists such as John Dewey and Richard Shusterman with its influence on artistic practices. Specifically, the author deals with Allan Kaprow's work and her direct experience as co-director of the *Laboratoire du Geste*. This integrated approach provides an original and rephrasing perspective on understanding gestures and their aesthetic value.

Daniele Goldoni shifts the discussion to a completely different area. In "Indeterminacy and Vagueness in Improvisation and in Experimental Music," Goldoni addresses topics of great importance in 20thcentury and contemporary aesthetics and musicology, namely, improvisation and experimental music. Despite their differences, these fields share a kind of dilemma consisting of the dialectical coexistence between reproducibility and a necessary element of unpredictability and surprise. Goldoni's contribution adopts these problematic issues as a starting point for reflecting on incomplete and complete gestures and vagueness.

Kelly Shoina's "The Self as Multiplicity in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*: Tracing Identity by Way of Pragmatism" makes a case study on the emergence of personal identity through the writing gesture. Schoina relies upon Maddalena's *complete gesture* to understand the synthetic process of forming evolving identities without losing the unity of the self. The author reads Orlando's writing of the *Oak Tree* poem—and Woolf and her writing of *Orlando*—as a complete gesture that enables them to recognize their identity through the changes they had been subjected to over the centuries.

The volume provides a rich overview of current research on gesture, including its redefinitions, disciplinary hybridizations, possible uses, and developments. It aims to design a multidisciplinary *vademecum* for scholars interested in ap-

proaching gestures from various research areas, especially philosophy, social sciences, psychology and cognitive sciences, anthropology, aesthetics, and the arts.

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