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Gesturing at Nature:
The Rhetoric of Gestures, Rituals, and Memory in Cross-Cultural Perspective

This conference presents what is, for me, a rare and welcome opportunity to engage in dialogue with colleagues from the social and natural sciences, as well as from elsewhere within my own branch of study, the humanities. In recognition of the multidisciplinary nature of this symposium, I will try to articulate some general observations that bear directly on the question of whether, and to what extent, the semiotics of gesture ought to be regarded as a science or, alternatively, as a theory of rhetoric. There is no question of decisively answering this question at the present time. Moreover, it may turn out that there are at least two, equally valid and incommensurable perspectives on the study of gesture: one firmly grounded in scientific techniques of analysis and tending to reveal certain potentially universal truths, and another that demonstrates the very opposite: namely, that there are no such universal truths, but only culturally and historically specific techniques and meanings. On this matter I plead agnosticism, and welcome the opportunity to receive instruction from others with better knowledge. However, for purposes of advancing the discussion today, I will play the role of a skeptic, and argue against the proposition that a universal science of gesture is possible. The illustration of certain fallacies commonly perpetrated in earlier efforts to promote a science or technique of gesture should serve as a warning for those who would improve on such efforts. Skepticism may serve not merely a destructive (or deconstructive), but also, potentially, a constructive role, if it can help us to avoid certain pitfalls into which earlier prospective sciences of gesture have fallen.

The question of whether signs are natural or, on the other hand, arbitrary and instituted by cultures and/or individuals, continues to be one of the fundamental questions of semiotics. This

question was already proposed, if not fully disposed, in Plato's dialogue *Cratylus*, in which the debate was over whether language is based on nature (*physis*) or cultural laws (*nomos*). Ferdinand de Saussure's resolution of this question in favor of the arbitrariness of linguistic signs allowed him to arrive at the fundamental principles of a science of language.[1] Yet the role of (apparently) natural signs, and indeed their very existence, continues to be a subject of debate.[2] Although most scholars would allow the existence of a certain, more or less extensive class of natural, iconic, onomatopoetic, or "sound symbolic" words[3], the importance of these, as Roman Jakobson argued, still has not been recognized sufficiently.[4] In certain modes of cultural expression, including poetry, magic, and ritual as well as, of course, gesture, arguably "non-arbitrary" signs assume a greater proportion of the total. Signs of the types Charles Sanders Peirce termed "icons" and "indexes," which roughly correspond to the cognitive associations of resemblance and contiguity, respectively, are more common in these modes of expression.[5] These signs are, if not natural, at least contrasted with the wholly arbitrary and conventional signs Peirce called "symbols."

Observation of this fact often, especially from an emic perspective, reinforces the conviction that such modes as poetry, ritual, and gesture constitute what, borrowing from the *Cratylus*, we might call "natural languages," ones that possess a special ability to convey meaning or, in the case of magic, to influence reality.[6] However, this conviction stems from a basic fallacy, one we might term the "naturalistic fallacy." As I have shown in a detailed, comparative study of Sanskrit ritual texts, many signs that appear to be non-arbitrary are actually cultural responses to the fact of arbitrariness. Faced with a gap between our language and reality, we often seek to bridge this gap by means of rhetorical devices, which produce what Saussure called "relative motivation," as distinct from "absolute motivation" or natural significance.[7] The

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rhetorical function of such devices, especially in rituals of the magical variety, is patent. James Frazer's two types of sympathetic magic, based on similarity and contiguity, have been reinterpreted not only as Peirce's categories of icon and index, but also as Jakobson's categories of metaphor and metonymy, terms that were themselves borrowed from classical rhetoric.[8] The deeply rhetorical function of such signs advises greater caution when announcing the discovery of other, ostensibly "natural" signs, many of which are motivated only in relation to a linguistic or other cultural code, in terms of which resemblance may be constructed and communicated. This often appears to be the case with gesture as well.[9]

This does not mean that there are absolutely no natural gestures of any kind. Candidates that have often been proposed in this capacity include a distinction between the gestures of the right and left hands; and a distinction between gestures based on verticality or raising and those based on lowering. The seventeenth-century rhetorician John Bulwer (1606-56), whose work I will examine later, stated that "the right hand signifieth *liberality*, and for that cause [is] chosen to be the hieroglyphic of a most *beneficent* and *plentiful largesse*; whereas the left hand hath a contrary genius and is observed to be of a close and retired nature . . . of a skulking disposition affecting secrecy and the subtle leisure of a thrifty vacation."[10] Similarly regarding gestures of raising, Lord Kames (1696-1782) argued that "Joy, which produceth a cheerful elevation of mind, is expressed by an elevation of body. . . Pride, magnanimity, courage, and the whole tribe of elevating passions, are expressed by external gestures that are the same as to the circumstance of elevation . . . Hence it comes that an erect posture is a sign or expression of dignity."[11] Despite such assertions, Robert Hertz's famous essay on the sociocultural significance of right and left showed that these categories are, after all, overlaid with meanings that are anything but natural, and stem from a more basic social opposition between the sacred and the profane.[12] Barry

Schwartz, following Hertz's lead, has made a similar argument with respect to verticality.[13] Sociocultural demonstrations of the relativity of the meanings of these gestures or positions coordinate with the structuralist axiom that signs, being arbitrary, are often invested with significance through systems of binary opposition. "Right" has no meaning without "left"; and "high" has no meaning without "low." These oppositions are given additional, cultural meanings by being homologized with other, culturally selected oppositions. The demonization of the left hand, and the divinization of the right, are examples of such non-natural meanings which, although found cross-culturally, are by no means universal. (In the interest of full disclosure, I should state that I am a southpaw, a "lefty.") Neurological studies of the bilateral brain may shed further light on the tendency of such categories to carry particular meanings. However, if even such basic parameters of movement, not yet reduced to specific gestures, carry no absolutely natural significance, then what is the hope that one will ever be able to elaborate a universal science of gesture?

Following the writings of Hertz and Schwartz, such challenges to the possibility of a science of gesture might be thought to be well known. However, there is another, potentially even more difficult challenge: If the significance of gestures, or of any particular gesture, is natural, then why isn't this significance immediately apparent? Why should it need to recovered through study, and elaborated in words? It appears that gestures do not, after all, speak for themselves; for if they did, they would do so without our assistance. This recalls Isadora Duncan's famous response, when asked to explain the meaning of a dance performance: "If I could say it, I wouldn't have to dance it."[14] Actually, her response preserves the self-sufficiency of dance as a medium, at the price of any ability to communicate, in words, the message of that medium. Contrasting with her claim is any attempt to redescribe the meaning of gesture in words.

If gesture remains mute until it is glossed, then it cannot be regarded as a self-sufficient mode of communication, such as speech is. Gesture appears similar to the fashion system in which, according to Roland Barthes, changes in couture possess no meaning in themselves, and must therefore be given meaning through a caption or verbal gloss.[15] I acknowledge that such a conclusion is somewhat dissatisfying. Many, and perhaps all of us would regard dance as meaningful even were it not given a libretto. Moreover, we may believe that certain dances, like certain musical performances, are at least more appropriate to express certain meanings. Vivaldi's "Spring" seems more springlike, and his "Winter" more like that season, so that switching the titles would produce a discordant impression. But it may be impossible to explain the basis of this appropriateness.

With these preliminary, skeptical observations firmly in mind, I now propose to consider some specific examples of earlier efforts to arrive at a science or technique of gesture. My first examples are drawn from the Western rhetorical tradition. Later examples are taken from two distinct branches of Hindu culture: the dramatic arts (*nāṭya*), and the Tantric ritual tradition. Following the discussion of these examples, I will try to connect gesture with another topic of our symposium, namely, the relation between gesture and memory. To preview the conclusions of this analysis: First, there is no significant unanimity as to the meaning of gestures across these particular cultural systems. Second, the very attempt to construct a science of gesture is often a response to fundamental problems of communication that suggest the fruitlessness of this undertaking. This appears most starkly when the meaning of gesture is located not in gesture itself, but in nature, or in a lost classical tradition, or even in some primeval moment of revelation. The reason why we do not understand at present the meaning of gesture is that this meaning has somehow been misplaced, or displaced. We live in exile from the natural language

of gesture. Systems of gesture often are best understood as evidence, not for the existence of a natural language of gesture, but rather for the perennial human effort to overcome the gap between discourse and reality. Gesture appears as a potential substitute or supplement for the defects of our spoken and written languages.

The Western Rhetorical Tradition

The rhetorical tradition of classical Greece and Rome incorporated a theory of gesture, albeit one that was not well developed. Quintilian's *De Institutio Oratoria* includes some discussions of *chironomy* or the "law of gesture" (*lex gestus*), an art supposed to have been developed in Greece.[16] He also refers to this art as "action," which is the gestural counterpart of verbal "delivery."[17] As indicated by his use of the term "chironomy" to designate this art, he emphasizes the role of the hands, which he says "may almost be said to speak . . . In fact, though the peoples and nations of the earth speak a multitude of tongues, they share in common the universal language of the hands."[18]

Quintilian notes the importance of gesture in the art of imitation, which he distinguishes from oratory proper.[19] The question of the connection between imitation or pantomime and oratorical gesture has been a common theme within the rhetorical tradition. Bulwer took the term *chironomon*, meaning a master of rhetorical gesture, to be synonymous with *pantomime*.[20] Imitation of a certain sort, namely, the imitation of the speech and mannerisms of particular individuals, was recognized by Plato as a branch of rhetoric or sophistry.[21] Other arts as well employed imitation, including imitative gesture. Aristotle says that "Rhythm alone, without harmony, is the means in the dancer's imitations; for even he, by the rhythms of his attitudes, may represent men's characters, as well as what they do and suffer."[22] Some recent scholarship

even traces the concept of *mimesis* or imitation to ritual dance.[23] The close connection between gesture and imitation raises some difficult, and possible insoluble problems. In the case of certain gestures associated especially with pantomime, the nature of the imitation may be evident: indeed, this is the point. However, in the case of other forms of dance or music, it is difficult to see how the means of imitation employed, such as rhythm, represent anything in nature. Repetitive movements, or sounds, seem rather to be self-imitative and self-referential, which agrees to some extent with Jakobson's definition of poetry as "the set toward the MESSAGE as such."[24]

John Bulwer published in 1644 a treatise entitled *Chirologia: or the Natural Language of the Hand and Chironomia: or the Art of Manual Rhetoric*. As this title indicates, Bulwer both followed Quintilian's lead, and attempted to fill a major lacuna in the arts of rhetoric, the absence of a developed system of gesture. In this title there is also, I think, an allusion to Plato's *Cratylus*, or at least to the question of a natural language as framed in that dialogue. Bulwer's treatise is divided into two parts, which are really two self-contained books bound together. The first book, the *Chirologia*, is purely descriptive: it reconstructs the "natural language" of the hand. The second book, the *Chironomia*, is prescriptive: it teaches the art of gesture for the benefit of different classes of orators. The dependence of these two books on *logos* and *nomos*, respectively, replicates Plato's distinction between *physis* and *nomos*. That Bulwer probably has this earlier distinction in mind is further indicated by his statement in the *Chirologia* that

> The intendments of which demonstrative gestures (being natural signs) have no
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> dependence on any ordinance or statute of art which may be broken off or taken in hand,
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> as it is either repealed or stands in force. But these, being part of the unalterable laws and
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> institutes of nature, are by their own personal constitution and by a native consequence

significant.[25]

The bilateral structure of Bulwer's treatise simultaneously reveals and conceals a fundamental problem to which I have already alluded: If the language of gesture is natural, then why should it need to be learned? Many ritual and rhetorical practices are plagued by a basic contradiction that I have elsewhere referred to as the "scripting of spontaneity."[26] These practices are supposed to be spontaneous and "natural"; yet, despite this, facility in their use is something that can be acquired only through a long course of training. This contradiction coincides with a potentially even more basic problem in aesthetics, a problem that concerns the nature and function of imitation. Imitation, although supposed to be an imitation of nature, is actually a form of artifice. Hence, the art of imitation consists in a simulation or, especially in Plato's view, even a dissimulation of nature. Apart from reversing this conflation of art with nature, we have also to ask what additional work is done by imitation, whether in the way of persuasion, or catharsis, or otherwise, that explains its occurrence.

The gap between nature and art signaled in the bipartite structure of Bulwer's treatise is complemented by other gaps that serve to undermine his claim for a natural language of gesture. One such gap is disclosed by his manner of evidencing the natural significance of gestures. He adduces copious, and sometimes conflicting, quotations from classical authors and from scripture to demonstrate the meaning of each gesture. He argues that

History . . . is the most faithful guide to the exemplary knowledge of any matter of fact . . . and by reflection of her light, affords subsidiary precedents and patterns of significant actions to come. . . . For, this school-mistress of our discoursing gestures, contending with a high hand that no *chiramnestia* or act of oblivion should pass against nature, by transcripts out of her own chiridiographical observations, hath sufficiently testified the

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natural signification of this chiridiom, or proper form of speech . . .[27]

The amount of book-learning Bulwer assembles is truly prodigious, and amounts to a kind of textual empiricism. Yet it does not avoid the problem raised earlier, namely, that gestures are not shown to have the power to speak for themselves. Only through massive erudition is one enabled to, as it were, hear the speech of gesture. This directly contradicts the capacity of gesture to function as a universal language for, if only truly bookish savants are capable of understanding gestures before being instructed, then even were the meaning of gestures able to be ascertained in this way, it would still limit their use to a small group.

Apart from the gaps between nature and art, and between gesture and speech, implicit in Bulwer's system, there is another gap that further separates gestures from any natural meaning: namely, that between the present and the past. His appeal to classical and biblical authority exemplifies the mode of textual authority of his times. The ancients supposedly possessed all knowledge, which we have lost, and can now recover only by examining their remains. This reflects a still-common hermeneutical strategy of intellectuals to read the canon like a code in which, by digging under or perhaps on its surface, and by recombining and juxtaposing its words, we may, on an occasion eternally deferred, arrive at the final, revealed truth. For Bulwer, the key to the universal code is gesture itself, which is "the only speech and general language of human nature."[28] This is because speech itself is no longer able to serve as a universal language, due to the separation of tongues at the fall of the Tower of Babel.[29] As one of the poems dedicated to Bulwer's treatise states: "Chirologie redeems from Babel's doom,/ And is the universal idiom."[30] Bulwer himself connects his chirology with the work of redemption:

> And indeed it is a kind of knowledge that Adam partly lost with his innocency, yet might
> be repaired in us by a diligent observation and marking of the outward effects of the

inward and secret motions of beasts. This natural language of the hand as it had the

happiness to escape the curse at the confusion of Babel, so it hath since been sanctified

and made a holy language by the expressions of our Savior's hands whose gestures have

given a sacred allowance to the natural significations of ours.[31]

Bulwer here draws on several well-known scriptural themes. Adam, the original sinner, is

said in the *Book of Genesis* to have called the animals "by their own names" (*nominibus suis*).[32]

This had two possible meanings: either he established their names by convention, or he somehow

knew their true names. Interpreters often embraced the latter position, and held that Adam spoke

a perfect, natural language.[33] Bulwer does the same here, but with a twist I have not seen before.

Whereas most would attribute the loss of that primeval, natural language to the fall of the Tower

of Babel, he says that this language was already "partly lost" with Adam's fall into original sin.

Accordingly, he connects the recovery of the natural language of gesture to humanity's

redemption from sin. Bulwer's treatise is part of the ongoing work of salvation.

The historical context of Bulwer's treatise is important. Published during the civil wars in

England, it explicitly responded to Francis Bacon's statement of the necessity of a science of

gesture.[34] This is suggested also in the following passage: "Nor doth the hand in one speech or

kind of language serve to intimate and express our mind: it speaks all languages, and as an

universal character of reason, is generally understood and known by all nations among the formal

differences of their tongue."[35] The goal of a "real" or "universal character," inspired by Bacon[36],

was pursued by others during the seventeenth century including, notably, Bishop John Wilkins,

whose *Essay towards a Real Character, and a Philosophical Language*, published in 1668, was

the most ambitious such undertaking. A "character" differed from other types of language

precisely in that it was written. Wilkins's "real character" tried to link directly particular concepts

to particular written marks, which could then be put together so as to produce a written language that would be understood immediately by anyone reading it, whatever language that person spoke. Bulwer extended the term "character" to his manual language which, although not written, was, like writing, visible. Bulwer, Wilkins, and other seekers of a universal character also authored systems of sign language for the deaf.[37] Also within this tradition was John Locke's proposal for a dictionary that would illustrate words by picturing the real items to which they referred.[38]

Such efforts to institute a universal character acknowledged, at least implicitly, the impossibility of instituting a universal spoken language following the decline of Latin and the rise of the vernaculars. The hope was not only to promote a common medium of communication, but also to overcome the deleterious social consequences associated with the fragmentation of that medium. The lack of any standard for determining the meaning of words was blamed for theological disputes and consequent civil strife.[39] One of the poems dedicated to Bulwer's *Chironomia* notes the civil wars transpiring in England at the time.[40] In the midst of such conflict, one might be excused for escaping into a utopian vision of a harmony induced by better communication. Efforts to recover or construct a universal character were partly realistic, as they acknowledged the impossibility of reversing the variation in spoken languages; partly pragmatic, as they sought to improve communication and avoid violence; and, of course, partly nostalgic and utopian. Ultimately, the search for a universal character had no practical success. Even assuming one could produce a workable language of this sort, the effort involved in learning it would be sufficient to preclude its widespread adoption. This is the same problem that plagues Esperanto today. Although Esperanto drew extensively upon existing European languages, it was sufficiently unnatural that it constituted a new, conventional idiom that, like any such code, had

to be learned.

The analogy of a code is illuminating. Wilkins authored a treatise on cryptography, or the manner in which messages could be conveyed through a secret code.[41] Similarly, Bulwer's pictorial illustration of the gestures described in the *Chirologia* adds the caption that these "Gestures, besides their typicall significations, are so ordered to serve for privy cyphers for any secret intimation."[42] The analogous caption in the *Chironomia* adds that "This following Table doth not only serve to expresse the Rhetoricall postures of the *Fingers*; but may be used as Cyphers for private wayes of Discourse or Intelligence."[43] To refer to the cryptographic use of such gestures seems logical as, like any code, they had to be learned, and could serve as a medium of communication only among persons all of whom already knew the code. However, as applied to gestures that are supposedly natural, the analogy of a cipher exposes the contradiction that these gestures are anything but spontaneously self-communicating. Ultimately, this contradiction vitiates Bulwer's entire project.

Quite different, but still within the same tradition, is Gilbert Austin's *Chironomia: or a Treatise on Rhetorical Delivery*, published in 1806. We have no evidence that Austin knew of Bulwer's earlier work[44], and his ambition is much more limited. There is no more talk of reversing the curse of Babel, and producing a universal language of gesture. There is nothing corresponding to the *Chirologia* portion of Bulwer's work. Instead, Austin's more modest goal is simply to recover the art of delivery as a supplement to oratory. However, within these limitations he affirms something like a natural language of gesture. He argues that spoken language is arbitrary: "Language, which is so much the boast of rational beings, . . . derives all its significancy from compact only. And if men were limited in the expression of their wants and desires to the power of language alone, their communication would be extremely limited."[45]

Fortunately, nature "has furnished [man] with such external signs as indicate universally to his own species his most pressing wants, and his most interesting feelings."[46] Gestures are among such natural, external signs. Although gesture is natural, it needs to be perfected by art: "That nature without cultivation should suggest on the moment to every man all the gesture necessary to enforce his feelings, and to illustrate and grace his sentiments, cannot be maintained by any analogy from the assistance afforded by nature in the other parts of oratory, nor is found agreeable to fact."[47] Although some gestures are natural, others that purport to be imitative are really conventional:

> If the pantomime wish in the conduct of his fable to go beyond the bounds of these [natural] expressions, he is forced upon many awkward expedients, and obliged to invent a language of signs which is attended with the same inconvenience as every other language, that is, it is understood only so far as communicated to, admitted and studied by others. The gestures of the orator, on the contrary, are restrained within very narrow bounds as to imitation, and few of them comparatively are significant . . .[48]

Austin believes that the laws of rhetoric were brought to perfection by the classical writers, and remain the same, else "human nature itself must be changed."[49] However, the textual record has failed to preserve those laws, hence the need for his treatise. The "dead letter" of writing does not maintain an adequate record of the gestures and other aspects of delivery that accompany the speech of the orator.[50] Austin develops an elaborate system of notation that reduces to writing "every action of an orator throughout his speech, or of an actor throughout the whole drama, and record[s] them for posterity."[51] His examples of such notation added to the texts of particular speeches or poems suggest one possible series of techniques of delivery, rather than making this suggestion mandatory. Although Austin's system is more modest in ambition

than Bulwer's, it still succumbs to a milder form of the contradiction that vitiated the latter's. Gesture cannot speak for itself, but becomes mute when the words of an oration are written down and its gestural accompaniments are not recorded. Although words can evidently do without gestures, gestures cannot survive without being described in words, coordinated with language, and reduced to writing.

At this point, brief mention should be made of another well-known work on gesture by the eighteenth-century German philosopher Johann Jakob Engel (1741-1802), *Die Ideen zu einer Mimik*, published in 1785. Engel expresses serious doubts regarding the ability of pantomime to convey complex ideas. The stories of the ancient pantomimes communicating any idea and even, in one story, translating between parties who spoke different languages, he dismisses as fictions.[52] He sums up the issue as follows:

> If pantomime, elevating itself above such events as are taken from the ordinary and daily occurrences of life, is forced to treat of subjects anterior and well known, the most complete proof of the impuissance and dependance of its art will result from it; viz. that it appears not to have any need of the assistance of words, and yet to be incapable of proceeding *without them*.[53]

Engel admits the possibility of developing a complete language of gesture along the lines of spoken language, but emphasizes the improbability, in this age of linguistic diversity, of such a laborious undertaking.[54] On the whole, his seems a sober estimate of the topic, one moreover confirmed by the experience of intervening centuries.

Not all enthusiasts of gesture have succumbed to the rationalism of modernity. François Delsarte (1811-71) was a nineteenth-century French teacher of drama and the author of a famous system of oratory. Subject to nervous excess following a traumatic childhood, he found at last the

key to the meaning of gesture by examining nature. One of his first discoveries, made in a hospital morgue, was that the thumb of a corpse draws inward. This would not seem very significant, yet for Delsarte it was "the sign-language of death, the semeiotics of the dead."[55] He discovered that the thumb draws inward also in proportion as a person withdraws emotionally or attempts to conceal a deception.[56] By accumulating such "observations," he eventually elaborated a complete system of gesture. As one might expect, he argued that gesture is superior to spoken language; it is "the spirit of which speech is merely the letter."[57] Delsarte's pseudo-science was combined with an obsessive mysticism based on multiplication of the Christian Trinity: "Every truth is triangular, and no demonstration responds to its object save in virtue of a triply triple formula."[58] Any resemblance to Charles Sanders Peirce is purely coincidental.

Similar mysticism infects even more recent claims for a universal language of gesture. The forms that these claims assume naturally change with the times. Florence Adams in 1891 exuded a pure Romanticism: "All expression is but *the manifestation of the being by the body and its agents* . . . The student must develop the element of spontaneity as all manifestations of the being are spontaneous . . . Pantomimic expression is the language of the soul . . . Pantomime mimics the *cause*, of which speech is the *effect*. . . ."[59] A handbook of *Voice, Speech and Gesture* published in 1908 still used the ancient Hippocratic system of humors to classify types of human movement.[60] Charlotte Wolff, writing in early twentieth-century France, read gesture as, at once, universal, expressive of national culture, and indicative of individual psychology: "Spiritual unity . . . produces similar results to those of blood affinity."[61] This conflation allowed her to label the British, who supposedly employ few gestures, as "inhibited," "bizarre," and "lacking in social cohesion."[62]

Hindu Systems of Gesture

Hindu systems of gesture illustrate many of the issues already raised in connection with systems of rhetorical or dramatic gesture in Western traditions. The two principal traditions of gesture that have evolved in South Asia are that of the dramatic arts, or Nāṭya, and that of the religious movement known as Tantra. The use of gestures in drama and dance can be traced to the *Nāṭyaśāstra* composed by Bharata sometime between 200 BCE and 200 CE. Tantra arose at a later date, possibly around the sixth century CE, and developed its own system of gestures used for purposes of ritual worship and magic. Although the two traditions are independent, their gestures bear some resemblance to each other. Presumably, there may have been some reciprocal influence, especially by the existing dramatic tradition on the later Tantric tradition. Nāṭya uses the term *hasta* or "hand" for its gestures, whereas Tantra uses *mudrā*. This word has several meanings, especially that of a sign or seal. In later centuries, the term *mudrā* has come to be applied to dramatic gestures as well.[63] It should also be mentioned that *mudrās* have long played an important role in Buddhist iconography, and may be traced back to the still-disputed origins of that artistic tradition in the early centuries CE. I will not comment specifically on these Buddhist *mudrās*, although my comments on Hindu Tantric *mudrās* also largely apply to Tantric *mudrās* of the Buddhist variety.

The *Nāṭyaśāstra* or "Science of Drama" is the foundational, and undoubtedly most important text of the Indian aesthetic tradition. Dramatic gesture, together with other aspects of delivery, receives extensive treatment. The text elaborates basic sets of gestures (*abhinaya*) for the head, hands, and other limbs. The chapter on the basic sixty-four hand gestures (*hasta*) divides these into gestures for single hands, for both hands in combination, and for dance (*nṛtta*),

as opposed to drama (*nāṭya*).[64] This last distinction is of some importance, and will be revisited later. The names for the hand gestures are frequently iconic, as are their meanings. For example, in the gesture called "flag" (*patāka*) the fingers are extended. This can be used to represent numbers such as ten, one hundred, or one thousand. If the fingers are made to tremble or to move up and down, they can depict flames, waves, or a waterfall. The gesture called "half-moon" (*ardhacandra*) can, naturally enough, be used to represent the crescent moon. Similarly, a number of the gestures in the thirteenth-century *Abhinayadarpaṇa* or "Mirror of Gesture" have iconic meanings: for example, the *śivaliṅga* gesture, with the thumb sticking up, denotes the *liṅga* or phallus of the god Śiva.[65] However, apart from such iconic meanings, the *Nāṭyaśāstra* gives many that are conventional. The gesture called "clever" (*catura*) is supposed to represent not only such diverse qualities as merit (*guṇa*), demerit (*aguṇa*), and youth (*yauvana*), but even different colors.[66]

In general terms, the goal of Sanskrit drama is to convey certain sentiments (*rasa*: literally, "flavor") and emotions (*bhāva*). As the *Abhinayadarpaṇa* says: "Where the hand [of the dancer] goes, the eyes go. Where the eyes go, the mind goes. Where the mind goes, the emotion (*bhāva*) goes. Where there is the emotion, there the sentiment (*rasa*) arises."[67] How this communication of sentiments is achieved and, in particular, what gesture contributes to this achievement is, however, uncertain. The sentiments and emotions are exhaustively classified, as are the gestures. However, particular gestures are not generally correlated with particular sentiments or emotions. Instead, the *Nāṭyaśāstra* gives detailed verbal descriptions of how to perform the gestures, and of their different meanings. The tasks of choreography and composition are left to the dancer, who presumably relied upon both practical training and an oral tradition.

The concept of imitation (*anukaraṇa*) is important in the Nāṭya tradition, although less important than the theory of sentiments and emotions. The actor is supposed to imitate the actions of everyday life.[68] This, of course, is similar to the concept of imitation in the Western aesthetic tradition, in which art is supposed to be like life, only heightened. The various gestures and other accompaniments of art serve to produce this heightening effect. But the problem of imitation should be connected with another concept, that of representation. The *Nāṭyaśāstr*a distinguishes dance (*nṛtta*) from dramatic acting (*nāṭya*). Dance, unlike acting, is not representational, and does not convey meaning.[69] Bharata explains that the purpose of dance is instead to "produce beauty" (*śobhāṃ prajanayet*).[70] Therefore, we have the same conundrum posed by Western aesthetic traditions: apart from a few simple iconic gestures or pantomimic actions, how precisely do gestures signify?[71] The answer seems to be, once again, that gestures refer to a conventional code that purports to constitute a natural language. In the case of Indian drama, the very elaborateness and sophistication of this code contradict its ostensibly natural status. As the great Indian scholar of art Ananda Coomaraswamy stated:

> Excellent acting wears the air of perfect spontaneity, but that is the art which conceals art. It is exactly the same with painting. The Ajaṇṭā frescoes seem to show unstudied gestures and spontaneous pose, but actually there is hardly a position of the hands or of the body which has not a recognized name and a precise significance. The more deeply we penetrate the technique of any typical Oriental art, the more we find that what appears to be individual, impulsive, and "natural," is actually long-inherited, well-considered, and well-bred. Under these conditions life itself becomes a ritual.[72]

Indeed, the same could be said of any art. Yet in the case of Indian dance traditions, it is especially true. The more numerous and complex the gestures and other movements deployed,

and the more elaborate the cultural code required to interpret them, the more such traditions depart from nature. Phillip Zarrilli has made a similar observation concerning the later South Indian dance tradition called Kathakali: "For audience members, there is a great variety of levels for understanding *mudrās*, depending upon whether an individual has been 'initiated' into the intricacies of the gesture language. For the common man who does not 'read' the language, the generalized decorative use of gesture in pure dance can be appreciated for its own sake."[73] Zarrilli notes that an actor must be able to communicate every single word of the drama through *mudrās*. Even case-endings and other grammatical forms may be indicated through gesture.[74] This approaches the ideal of a true gestural language or character, yet it is, for that reason, anything but natural.

In many South Asian traditions, the origins of the arts and sciences are attributed to the gods or sages. The prototypes of all significant actions are given in a primordial moment of revelation. To revive Mircea Eliade's concept, ritual action refers to some event that occurred long ago, at the beginning of time, and is memorialized in myth.[75] The *Nāṭyaśāstra* is no exception to this rule. The four Vedas are ritual texts of the greatest antiquity and authority, if not present practical application, in Hinduism. The *Nāṭyaśāstra* explicitly declares itself a "fifth Veda" that combines elements of the original four.[76] Its first chapter relates that the creator god Brahmā taught the dramatic art to the sage Bharata.[77] The first performance enacted the victory of the gods over the demons, which displeased the latter greatly, so that they paralyzed the faculties of speech, action, and memory (*smṛti*) of the dancers.[78] The gods overcame this obstacle, yet henceforth every performance had to be protected by means of the proper ritual observances.

Such references to a primeval, divine creation of the arts, despite their mythological

status, have something in common with the more modern Western authors we examined. The "myth of origins" characterizes these systems as well, inasmuch as they refer the beginnings of the art of gesture to classical rhetoric or to some "nature" supposed to exist outside of culture. These are all attempts to establish the temporal, ontological, and semiological priority of gesture. Although they seek to secure foundations by placing them beyond the domain of the mundane and changeable, they actually disclose the gap that exists between an absent prototype and its present instantiation. They acknowledge, if only implicitly, the impossibility of grounding the significance of the gestures they describe. To this extent, they represent a latent awareness of the "arbitrariness of the sign" that has been brought explicitly to consciousness in modern semiotics. It is tempting to interpret the episode in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* in which the demons paralyze the dance as a kind of narrative admission of the arbitrariness of what are, after all, human institutions. However, this admission, if such it is, is immediately repressed. In modern times, in India as well, the claim of divine origins is no longer tenable. However, the claim that modern Indian dance traditions are perfectly congruent with the ancient *Nāṭyaśāstra* is frequently advanced.[79] Mandakranta Bose assures us that the link between these ancient and modern dance traditions is not one of unbroken continuity.[80] Yet the very claim of a pure, changeless tradition is, in a way, a perpetuation of the "myth of origins" found in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*.

Hindu Tantra employs numerous types of hand gestures called *mudrās*, together with the verbal formulas called *mantras*, to worship the gods and perform practical magic. Although the French Sanskritist André Padoux has indicated the desirability of a semiological study of the relation between ritual words and gestures in Tantra[81], this has not yet been done, and I can provide only a few preliminary indications at this time. *Mudrās*, which have been extensively developed in both Buddhist and Hindu Tantric traditions, sometimes have iconic or other natural

significance, although they are often assigned for particular deities or purposes in a manner that seems purely conventional. Their coordination with languages poses a particular problem, for between language and gesture there is no immediately obvious resemblance. However, semioticians know that resemblance may be produced even when there is no direct resemblance between qualities, by means of the devices called "diagrams" or "diagrammatic icons," which are like maps that arrange unlike items in similar patterns.[82] In the Tantric rites of *nyāsa* or "laying down," the syllables of the mantra are laid out on the body of the ritual practitioner. Often this is done in forward and reverse order, representing the cosmic cycle with its phases of creation (*sṛṣṭi*) and destruction (*saṃhāra*). This is one way that speech and gesture may be coordinated.

Although Tantra gives to speech the leading role in creation and in ritual, sometimes gesture appears to be equal, and even identical. The *yonimudrā* or "womb sign" is an iconic gesture produced by the complete interlocking of the hands, as if to duplicate the embrace of the womb. The use of this *mudrā* is one device for making *mantras* magically effective; others include especially the practice of *saṃpuṭa* or "enveloping" the syllables of the *mantra* with other syllables that are added in forward and reverse order.[83] There are associated forms of *yoga* or meditation in which this back-and-forth movement of the syllables is visualized as taking place within the body. As I have demonstrated elsewhere, all of these rites construct diagrams or iconic maps of the cycle of creation, including not only the cosmic cycle of creation and destruction, but also the cycle of sexual reproduction. This explains the reference to the womb in the *yonimudrā*.[84]

This may be an extreme case– ancient ritual traditions and magical practices seem extreme from our perspective– but it exhibits certain continuities with more modern systems of

gesture. In the first place, the *mudrā* or *mantra* is made to imitate nature. Yet this imitation is, of course, highly stylized and conventionalized, and depicts nature as Hindus conceive it: as a cycle of expansion and contraction, rather than a single "big bang." The reference to origins, which in this case is the creation of the world by the gods, is, as previously mentioned, not unique to ancient, mythological traditions. Ultimately, all such claims of naturalness, spontaneity, and temporal priority are forms of rhetoric designed precisely to cover up the fact that, after all, we cannot achieve salvation, or perform (real) magic, by manipulating syllables and digits. Nor, one might add, may we even presume to be successful in more mundane, interpersonal communications. The trope or, as I have elsewhere termed it, dream of a natural language is, as we see, a very powerful form of rhetoric, one that transcends any particular language or system of gesture. The danger is that this trope may continue to be applied in some modern systems that purport to be "scientific."[85]

Remembering Gesture, Gesturing at Memory

So far I have said little, at least explicitly, regarding an important theme of this symposium, namely the relation between memory and gesture, including the preservation and transmission of techniques of gesture across time and cultural boundaries. Let me now remedy this omission. The various systems of gesture summarized above demonstrate that much, if not all, of what has been taken as a natural language of gesture, is rather of cultural significance. The interpretation of gestures depends upon the knowledge of the appropriate cultural code, possession of which belongs to a group that may be coextensive with an entire culture, as in the case of basic gestures of greeting; or that may be limited to a subgroup of savants or even esoteric initiates, as in the case of the Hindu Tantric tradition. Thus, in connection with questions

of cultural memory and transmission, the first point is to establish the limits of the culture or subculture in question.

Another point to distinguish when we are considering gesture and memory is what, precisely, we mean by "memory." Do we mean the memory of a particular gesture, considered separately as a physical act, so that this gesture may be employed, presumably with limited variation, over time? Or do we mean the memory of what an individual gesture means? Forms of iconism or resemblance are, as we have seen, frequently used to connect gestures with their meanings. Resemblance or imitation evidently contribute to the function of recall: upon seeing a gesture that depicts in visible form some aspect of that to which it refers, the reference may be more easily called to mind. Aristotle already included similarity, together with contiguity and contrariness, among the relations that contribute to memory.[86] This is a question of the association of ideas, rather than of the recall of specific cultural techniques. It may be that the same devices that serve to bring the meaning of a gesture to mind, when that gesture is employed, may also produce certain associations that heighten the significance of the gesture so that its use becomes more frequent. However, these two types of memory must be taken as separate for purposes of analysis. Beyond this, I realize, is the further question of what techniques of gesture may contribute to the recall of other ideas or practices with which gestures are coordinated.

From the perspective of the social sciences, and possibly from that of the natural sciences as well (although I claim no competence on this question), the question of the transmission of cultural ideas and practices, to describe which Richard Dawkins's term "memes" has often been used, is a question of paramount importance.[87] Certain studies within this tradition have emphasized the mnemonic function of various rhetorical devices, including simple forms of

iconism such as repetition which, when the medium in question is linguistic, means primarily alliteration, rhyme, or verse.[88] The contribution of poetry to memory in an oral culture has been emphasized by, among others, the classicist Eric Havelock and the anthropologist Jack Goody.[89] We could adapt such explanations to the phenomenon of gesture, both by noting the occurrence of iconism across different semiotic modes, including the gestural and the verbal; and by accepting the oft-suggested status of gesture as a pre-verbal and, *a fortiori*, pre-written form of communication. I must confess that I am less than fully convinced by such explanations. One of their apparent virtues is that they avoid questions of meaning and focus exclusively on transmission, a phenomenon which is, in principle, susceptible of experimental proof. However, this avoidance of the engagement with messier questions of meaning can also become a vice. It appears to reduce the different rhetorical functions of gesture to just one function– the mnemonic– and to exclude from its consideration all of the others including, notably, the function of persuasion. In contrast, classical rhetoric included both the art of memory and the art of persuasion, and may serve as the model for a project that seeks to recover a sense of "communication" broader than that of transmission.

The example of the magical use of gestures in Hindu Tantra reveals the limitations of a standard theory of cultural memory and transmission as applied to gesture. In this case, the salient function of the "womb-gesture," as of its verbal analogues, is to create or, if you will, re-create a cosmos. This is supposed to have immediate present effects, such as killing your enemy or bringing rain from the sky. The form of iconism employed in this case, which, as earlier explained, is the diagrammatic and specifically palindromic representation of the cycle of creation, does not contribute to recall so much as it promotes the conviction of the accomplishment, in the immediate future, of the goal the ritual seeks to bring about. Iconism

reinforces the indexical connection with an idea that is prospective, rather than retrospective. The same is true of many other rituals, as I have elsewhere argued.[90] Thus, it is primarily a question, not of memory, but of persuasion: rhetorical devices evidently contribute to the conviction in the efficacy of the ritual. Of course, "persuasion" and "conviction" are not easily measured; yet we must, I think, infer their existence in order to account for the proliferation of various rhetorical devices in ritual.

A potential confusion arises from the fact that are two different senses of the phrase "ritual repetition."[91] Often this is taken to mean the repetition of a ritual on different occasions, a sense that accords with an older definition of ritual as an habitual ceremony perpetuated through force of tradition, or what E. B. Tylor called a "survival."[92] More recent studies have focused on the employment, within a single ritual event, of different forms of repetition, starting with poetry and extending to, as Maurice Bloch put it, "Symbols, Song, Dance and Features of Articulation."[93] An example from the Tantric context is when a single mantra has to be repeated many times in order to be effective, perhaps accompanied by gestures or other physical operations. Such forms of intra- as opposed to inter-ritual repetition, which strengthen the ritual as a sign of its goal, serve a persuasive rather than a mnemonic function. They call into question the identification of ritual repetition with the simple memory of traditional formulas.

There is one, very important sense in which memory is central to the systems of gesture analyzed previously. Each system was, if this is not too strong a word, obsessed with overcoming the gap between gestures and their meaning, a meaning that ostensibly reposed in nature, or in some lost tradition of the classical age, or even in mythic times. This displacement of meaning was, in most cases, a temporal one: the gap was between the present and the past, so that interpreting the language of gesture became an act of recall or remembrance, colored by the

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authority of tradition and the sentiment of nostalgia. Bulwer sought to return to a time before the

Tower of Babel fell, by substituting a language of the hand for the lost universal spoken

language. The Hindu Tantrics attempted a complete fusion between past and present, so that their

present ritual actions would attain the power of the cosmogony. Even my own recapitulation of

these earlier theories of gesture, were it not self-consciously skeptical, could perpetrate the same

fallacy. What is central to many of these theories is the idea that time's arrow points downward.

History is a devolution. Something is lost through time. The most that we may hope for is to

emulate the past in its own forms. The act of interpretation is an uphill battle to recall a meaning

that was present, in its fullness, at the beginning. The tropes of loss, and of the struggle of

memory against forgetfulness, link these systems of gesture with humanistic endeavor more

broadly. It appears that gesture may, after all, be more rhetoric than science.

Notes

1. Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966).

2. Thomas Sebeok, *The Sign & Its Masters* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979), 112-13, 115; Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), 191ff.; idem, *Kant and the Platypus: Essays on Language and Cognition*, trans. Alastair McEwen (New York: Harcourt Brace and Co., 2001), 338ff.

3. See, e.g., Leanne Hinton, Johanna Nichols, and John J. Ohala, eds., *Sound Symbolism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

4. Roman Jakobson and Linda Waugh, "The Spell of Speech Sounds," in *Roman Jakobson: Selected Writings*, ed. Stephen Rudy (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1962-88), 8: 181-234.

5. Robert A. Yelle, *Explaining Mantras: Ritual, Rhetoric, and the Dream of a Natural Language in Hindu Tantra* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 75.

6. *Id*., passim.

7. Saussure 131, 133. See discussion at Yelle 67.

8. Yelle 76.

9. Cf. Franz Boas, *Primitive Art* (New York: Dover, 1955), 347: "The number of organically determined gestures is very small. Most of them are culturally patterned."

10. John Bulwer, *Chirologia: or the Natural Language of the Hand and Chironomia: or the Art of Manual Rhetoric* (London, 1644), ed. James W. Cleary (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1974), 57; cf. 235. Cf. Johann Jakob Engel*, Ideen zu einer Mimik*, trans. by Henry Siddons as *Practical Illustrations of Rhetorical Gesture and Action*, 2d ed. (London, 1822), 197-98. Gilbert Austin, *Chironomia: or, a Treatise on Rhetorical Delivery* (London, 1806), ed. Mary Margaret Robb and Lester Thonssen (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1966), 398, 402, defending the use of the left hand in contravention of the rhetorical tradition.

11. Henry Home (Lord Kames), *Elements of Criticism*, quoted in Austin 470-71. Cf. Quintilian, *De Institutio Oratoria* XI.iii.83, trans. H. E. Butler (London: William Heinemann, 1921). Cf. Engel 7-8: "I conclude, therefore, that this sign is *natural* and *essential*, because it is *general*, and holds place with all people . . . I do not know of any one country on the face of the earth, any one class of men who would strive to express esteem, respect, or veneration, by lifting up their heads, or seeming to give additional height to their stature; as, on the contrary, I am inclined to believe taht there is no nation or body of men who do not express pride and contempt by a deportment exactly the reverse; that is to say, by an exaltation of the head, by a straightening of the back, and sometimes erecting themselves on their toes, to give an air more commanding and imposing to the general contour of the figure."

12. Robert Hertz, "The Pre-eminence of the Right Hand: A Study in Religious Polarity," in Rodney Needham, ed., *Right and Left: Essays on Dual Symbolic Classification* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 3-31.

13. Barry Schwartz, *Vertical Classification: A Study in Structuralism and the Sociology of Knowledge* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

14. Two versions of this quote, with different minor variations, have circulated: 1) "No, I can't explain the dance to you. If I could say it, I wouldn't have to dance it." 2) If I could tell you what it meant, there would be no point in dancing it."

15. Roland Barthes, *The Fashion System*, trans. Richard Howard and Matthew Ward (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

16. Quintilian, *De Institutio Oratoria* ("*IO*")I.xi.17.

17. *IO*, XI.iii.1.

18. *IO*, XI.iii.86-87.

19. *IO*, XI.iii.88.

20. Bulwer 163. However, cf. Austin's sharper distinction between the two arts, quoted below.

21. Plato, *Sophist* 267-68.

22. Aristotle, *Poetics* 1447a.

23. Hermann Koller, *Die Mimesis in der Antike* (Bern: A. Francke, 1954), 37.

24. Roman Jakobson, "Closing Statement" Linguistics and Poetics," in *Style in Language*, ed. Thomas Sebeok (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1960), 350-77 at 356.

25. Bulwer 16.

26. Yelle 55.

27. *Id.,* 21.

28. *Id.*, 6.

29. Umberto Eco, in *The Search for the Perfect Language*, trans. James Fentress (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), has documented the fertility of the Babel legend in spurring various projects for a perfect language.

30. Bulwer 10; cf. 11: "What Babel did deny/ To lips and ear, th'ast given the hand and eye;/ Hast reconciled the world, and its defect/ Supplied, by one unerring dialect."

31. *Id.*, 18-19.

32. *Genesis* 2:16-17 (Vulgate).

33. See Eco, *Perfect Language* 8; Russell Fraser, *The Language of Adam: On the Limits and Systems of Discourse* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977).

34. Bulwer 5, xiii.

35. *Id.*, 16.

36. Fraser 88; Mary M. Slaughter, *Universal Languages and Scientific Taxonomy in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 85; Brigitte Asbach-Schnitker, Introduction, pp. xiv-xv, in John Wilkins, *Mercury: On the Secret and Swift Messenger: Shewing how a Man may with Privacy and Speed communicate his Thoughts to a Friend at any Distance*, 3d ed. (London, 1707), reprint (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1984).

37. Macdonald Critchley, *Silent Language* (London: Butterworths, 1975), 56-57.

38. John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) (New York: Dover, 1959), 2: 163.

39. John Wilkins, *An Essay towards a Real Character, and a Philosophical Language* (1668), reprint (Menston: The Scolar Press, 1968), Dedicatory Epistle; Locke, 2: 130-31.

40. Bulwer 149.

41. Wilkins, *Mercury.*

42. Bulwer 114, 116.

43. *Id.*, 212.

44. Austin Xi.

45. *Id.*, 467.

46. *Id.*, 467-68.

47. *Id.*, 137-38.

48. *Id.*, 251-52.

49. *Id.*, 146.

50. *Id.*, 15, 149. The phrase "dead letter" appears at 24.

51. *Id.*, 274.

52. Engel 236-38, 259.

53. *Id.*, 250 (emphasis original).

54. *Id.*, 251ff.

55. François Delsarte, *System of Oratory*, 4th ed. (New York: Edgar S. Werner, 1893), 404. Delsarte's characterization of "semeiotics" occurs esp. at 460ff.

56. *Id.*, 409-10.

57. *Id.*, 467.

58. *Id.*, 454. Delsarte's elaboration of these trinities occurs at 454-58, 475, 480-83.

59. Florence A. Fowle Adams, *Gesture and Pantomimic Action* (New York: Edgar S. Werner, 1891), 8, 10.

60. Robert D. Blackman, ed., *Voice, Speech and Gesture* (Edinburgh: John Grant, 1908), 112.

61. Charlotte Wolff, *A Psychology of Gesture*, trans. Anne Tennant (London: Methuen, 1945), 10.

62. *Id.*, 2-3.

63. See Mandakranta Bose, *Movement and Mimesis: The Idea of Dance in the Sanskritic Tradition* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991), 18; *The Hastamuktāvalī of Subhankara Kavi*, ed. Maheswar Neog (Jorhat, Assam: Asam Sahitya-Sabha, 1980), 6. The use of *mudrā* to denote gestures in the modern Kathakali tradition is shown, e.g., in Phillip Zarrilli, *The Kathakali Complex* (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1984), 126ff.

64. *Nāṭyaśāstra*, ed. and trans. N. P. Unni (Delhi: Nag Publishers, 1998), vol. 2, ch. 9.

65. *Abhinayadarpaṇa*, ed. and trans. Manomohan Ghosh, 2d ed. (Calcutta: K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1957), v.186. For the date of this text, see Bose, *Movement and Mimesis* 28.

66. *Nāṭyaśāstra* 9: 97-98.

67. *Abhinayadarpaṇa* v.37 (I have modified the translation).

68. See *Nāṭyaśāstra* 1.112 and Mandakranta Bose, *Speaking of Dance: The Indian Critique* (New Delhi: D. K. Printworld, 2001), 75.

69. The later tradition also distinguishes a third type of patterned movement called *nṛtya*, which is supposed to be partly representational. Bose, *Movement and Mimesis* 28-29.

70. *Nāṭyaśāstra* 4.269.

71. See Mandakranta Bose's analysis of this problem in connection with *nṛtta*, in her *Speaking of Dance* 15.

72. Ananda Coomaraswamy and Gopala Kristnayya Duggirala, trans., *The Mirror of Gesture* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1970), 4.

73. Zarrilli 129.

74. *Id.*, 128-29. Note that this, admittedly unusual example directly contradicts Karl Bühler's statement that "[Wilhelm] Wundt is by no means blind to the factual lack of specific grammatical signs, even in the most developed gestural communication that is known. . . ." In Wilhelm Wundt, *The Language of Gestures* (The Hague: Mouton, 1973), 31.

75. Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 32, 410.

76. *Nāṭyaśāstra* 1.15.

77. *Nāṭyaśāstra* 1.19. Cf. the origins of the *tāṇḍava* dance in ch. 4.

78. *Nāṭyaśāstra* 1.66.

79. For an example of this interpretation, see, e.g., Premakumar, *The Language of Kathakali: A Guide to Mudras* (Allahabad and Karachi: Kitabistan, 1948), 18-19.

80. Bose, *Speaking of Dance* vii, 2, 33, 51.

81. "Contributions à l'étude du mantraṣāstra 2: Le *Nyāsa*, l'imposition rituelle des *mantra*," *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême Orient* 67 (1980): 59-102 at 62 n.1.

82. See Yelle 86-87.

83. *Abhinayadarpaṇa* 193 refers to a *hasta* by the name of *saṃpuṭa*. This is an iconic gesture that represents covering *(saṃpuṭa)*. This *hasta* is not in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, and I have previously encountered the term primarily in the Tantric context, which may have influenced the *Abhinayadarpaṇa*.

84. See Yelle, Ch. 2.

85. As the convener of this conference, Paul Bouissac, earlier warned: "A partir d'une typologie des procès descriptifs des comportements dynamiques corporels nous avons tenté de démontrer l'impossibilité d'atteindre la structure fondamentale de ces comportements par les procédés sémio-linguistiques "naturels"; les catégories dont disposent les sujets descripteurs relèvent d'un code culturel essentiellement a-scientifique." *La mesure des gestes: Prolégomènes à la sémiotique gestuelle* (The Hague: Mouton, 1973), 208.

86. Aristotle, *De Memoria et Reminiscentia* 451b.

87. See, e.g., Pascal Boyer, *The Naturalness of Religious Ideas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); idem, *Religion Explained: The Evolutionary Origins of Religious Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 2001).

88. David Rubin, *Memory in Oral Traditions: The Cognitive Psychology of Epic, Ballads, and Counting-Out Rhymes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

89. Eric Havelock, *Preface to Plato* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963); Jack Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

90. Yelle 104-05.

91. See *id.*, 117 for the distinction between intra- and inter-ritual repetition.

92. Edward B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 4th revised ed. (London: John Murray, 1903).

93. Maurice Bloch, "Symbols, Song, Dance and Features of Articulation: Is Religion an Extreme Form of Traditional Authority?", in *Ritual, History, and Power: Selected Papers in Anthropology* (London: Athlone Press, 1989), 19-45.