Contents

He is as unfamiliar to me as the back of my hand.
That's what you should say about someone whom you don't know.

—Viktor Shklovsky,
"Chaplin as Policeman," 1923

Introduction

1. Starting Point: Images of the Hand

Pointing, modelling, grasping, reaching, holding, throwing, catching, giving, stroking, writing, hitting, clutching, shaping, gripping, releasing, pushing, pressing, taking, pulling, drawing. . . . In the diversity of its motions, the hand shapes the relationship between the human being and the world. Its actions realize creative impulses; its sensory perceptions open up zones of experience and comprehension; its gestures form the foundation of social interaction. A tool of building and forming, an organon of knowledge, a medium of contact and communication—the hand unites body control, perception, and media use. Coordinating muscles and sensory stimuli, synchronizing motions of the fingers and palm, exercising gross and fine motor skills, we work, write, handle tools, and create tactile worlds.

This brief description merely touches the surface of human hand use. Beyond the handling and handiwork listed above, there are also numerous manipulative steps and procedures in which the hand determines the form and content of artworks in both the productive and the receptive process. The interplay of the left and the right hand must be mentioned, too, since the manual spectrum is significantly expanded by their interaction. Despite all this, the history of art and culture has rarely paid attention to the hand. This practical body part seems ill-suited for theoretic, let alone aesthetic, analysis. In constant competition with the eye as the primary organ of philosophical and aesthetical reflection, the hand has been leading a shadowy existence to the present day.[1] Cultural anthropology and media studies diagnose a constant regress of the hand while manual activities are being

1 Matthew Fulkerson's monograph *The First Sense. A Philosophical Study of Human Touch* (Cambridge, Mass., 2014) is a recent important exception. Fulkerson breaks ground for a new conceptual understanding and—finally—appreciation of touch.

outsourced to machines and technical apparatuses. Only the touch technologies of the twenty-first century have granted the hand a comeback of sorts. Under these conditions, the hand is and remains the great unknown, as proclaimed by Viktor Shklovsky in 1923 in the epigraph.

Against this backdrop, an attempt is made here to take a closer look at the hand in all its obscurity. The analyses in this book critique the established consensus that represents the avant-garde as a picture-book epoch of visual lust fueled by media technology and propaganda art. The historical configuration of the avant-garde in the context of the "hand at work" is complicated not merely by the intensity with which it conjures up and rejects the image of the hand. Rather, the continuous reference to the hand as an aesthetical model leads to a shift in the aesthetical system itself, a shift that is concealed rather than illuminated by the much-mentioned synesthesia of this epoch. With unprecedented perseverance, the Russian avant-garde explores manual practices and haptic forms of experience. It exploits the hand as a primary organ to make aesthetic and poetic procedures graspable as *poiesis*, that is, the operative use of materials, techniques and instruments from and with which texts are created. Here, the hand is a model of both aesthetical reflection and artistic practice.

In a demonstrative display, the working, forming, and creating hand thus becomes the central organ of art, emblematic of creative power and will, of productivity and manipulability. Almost all art forms use the palm and fingers to symbolize artistic self-reflection. This is particularly evident in the visual arts, where the motif of the hand—active or resting, pleading or refusing, giving or taking, tense or relaxed, clenched or opened—occupies a key position. Even a cursory glance at the iconography of that period suggests the dominance of this leitmotif, whose most complex visual formulation is arguably El Lissitzky's self-portrait *The Constructor* (1924) with its palimpsest of face, hand, curve diagram, and a pair of compasses serving as the icon of the modern artist's image.

More than a recurrent motif, the image of the hand suggests an aesthetic experience of difference in the haptic area, as enabled especially by the plastic arts. In 1914, Vladimir Tatlin programmatically demanded that in the future "the eye should be placed under the control of the haptic sense,"[2]

2 Vladimir Tatlin, "Nasha predstoiashchaia rabota" [1920], in *Mastera sovetskoi arkhitektury ob arkhitekture*, vol. 2 (Moscow, 1975), 76–77, qt. 77.

proposing to transfer this tactile sphere of experience into the other arts as well. Such border crossings are experimentally supported, for example, by studies that Mikhail Matyushin conducted in 1923–24 at the Department of Organic Culture (Leningrad Institute of Artistic Culture; INChUK). In order to research and train the faculty of art perception, he subjected the sense of touch to "intensive training." He went on to involve this training in the study of colors and the drawings of contours, exploring the skin and hand lines as papillary perceptors along with the muscle relaxation in hand motions.[3]

Such training programs go far beyond the scope of aesthetic experience expansion; they are geared to the physical reequipment of humankind. The psychotechnical discourse of the 1920s uses sophisticated performance and aptitude tests to optimize and finetune perceptual capacities, stereognostic skills, and the dexterity of the hand. These tests involve comparing sandpaper of different grain sizes and the structures of metal surfaces, sorting feathers and pieces of cardboard (according to their elasticity and thickness respectively) and detecting minimal differences in height by touch. One of the most active participants of this project, Alexei Gastev, subjected the hand to an elaborate training program and, in 1923, proposed to introduce an "exam of work motions" for all Soviet citizens. This exam was supposed to test two types of motion—powerful strikes and moderate pressure—for "one must be able to strike correctly and to press correctly."[4] This also applies to the arts, especially visual ones. After all, the cinema or "cine-eye" (*kino-glaz*), as Dziga Vertov envisages it, was supposed to "grope through the thicket of life," but also, as Sergei Eisenstein demands, polemically distancing himself from Vertov, to strike painfully as a "film fist" (*kino-kulak*).[5]

3 Mikhail Matiushin, "Arbeitsbericht vom Leiter der Abteilung für Organische Kultur am Leningrader INChUK, 1.10.1923–1.10.1924," in *Zwischen Revolutionskunst und Sozialistischem Realismus. Dokumente und Kommentare. Kunstdebatten in der Sowjetunion von 1917 bis 1934*, ed. Hubertus Gaßner and Eckhard Gillen (Cologne, 1979), 95–96, qt. 96.

4 Aleksei Gastev, "Trenazh" [1923], in his *Kak nado rabotat'. Prakticheskoe vvedenie v nauku organizatsii truda* (Moscow, 1966), 51–54, qt. 51f.

5 Dziga Vertov, "Nashe techenie nazyvaetsia 'kino-glaz'" [1924], in his *Iz naslediia*, vol. 2: *Stat'i i vystupleniia* (Moscow, 2008), 400–401, qt. 401; Sergei Eizenshtein "K voprosu o materialisticheskom podkhode k forme" [1925], in his *Izbrannye proizvedeniia v 6-i tomakh*, vol. 1 (Moscow, 1964), 110–117, qt. 117.

However, this powerful position of the hand remains to be contrasted with the hymnal celebration of the eye. We are talking about an epoch when the image learns to move and acquires a new status as a leading medium; an epoch when the drastically shrunken manual and tactile dimensions of experience prompt widespread haphephobia and sensual alienation. In this context, the loss of the hand seems paradigmatic for modernity. It marks the transition to a "push button culture," in which, as Hans Blumenberg stated, manual functionality is "homogenized and reduced to the ideal minimum of pressing a button" and "human actions become increasingly unspecific."[6] In this culture, "the regress of the hand is the price we pay for the progress of technology."[7]

Among all aesthetical currents of modernity, constructivism was arguably most consistent in promoting this logic. Its aggressive campaign for the artifact as a technofact continues a historically far-reaching polemic against the error-prone hand. Displaced into the niches of retro arts and craft practice, the deficient hand ekes out a shadowy creative existence—until the sharp invective against the Romantic passéism of handicrafts takes even this last refuge away.

Though the antagonism of the hand and the eye has discursively solidified in art and cultural history, a mere juxtaposition of haptic vs. visual arts proves to be strongly schematic. This applies not only to the visual arts but also, perhaps even more clearly, to literature. Oriented toward the eye, avant-garde poetics initially enthusiastically supported the oculocentrism of modernity. Shklovsky's canonical formula—the literary work of art as a means of "new seeing" (*novoe zrenie*) through defamiliarization (*ostranenie*)—expresses this unequivocally. At the same time, however, avant-garde poetics demands a manifold use of hands by focusing on the operative handling of texts, by drawing literature into manual letter play, and by stimulating the tactile dimension of text experience. Above all, the physical nature of writing and reading has been considered with regard to handwriting. According to Heidegger, it is the only form of notation in which "the word belongs to the hand"—a belonging shattered under the mechanical

6 Hans Blumenberg, "Lebenswelt und Technisierung," in his *Wirklichkeiten in denen wir leben* (Stuttgart, 1996), 7–54, qt. 36.

7 Bernhard Waldenfels, *Sinnesschwellen. Studien zur Phänomenologie des Fremden*, vol. 3 (Frankfurt/M., 1999), 100.

stroke of the typewriter.[8] Handwriting carries the burden and promise of presence and authenticity. The avant-garde treatment of letters in artists' books and densely textured autographs following the *samopis'mo* (literally, self-writing) style also draw on this capital. They emphatically stage the writing and reading processes as "material events,"[9] in which cognitive processes of deciphering are inherently embedded into an act of physical grasping. When the imagist Anatoli Marienhof says he feels a splinter in each verse, which is supposed to pierce the reader's hands, when OBERIU poets invite their optically distanced readers to "come closer" and touch the object of the text "with their fingers," then 'reading' literature implies a phenomenology of the text body as *corpus* and *opus*.[10]

A look at utilitarian poetics reveals that this handbound palpability of literature as an interaction of writers, texts and readers concerns not only haptic stimulation (be it tender or hurtful). It also touches upon praxeological questions, which revise the history of literature as the history of text usage. Utilitarian poetics approaches the hand in its own fashion. It meticulously measures the parameters of psychophysical book use, optimizes reading and writing techniques and thus develops an awareness for the operative use of literature. It turns the hand into a tool capable of closing the gap between literature and life, poetics and production. By bringing together the *organon* of the word and the *instrumentum* of the hand, the writer's hand explores the potential performativity of speech.

In their diversity, all these approaches aim to trace the hand's grip beyond the threshold of the text and into its center. Not only does the hand write—it also becomes a literary figure. Accordingly, the encounter with the hand is a key scene of literary self-reflection. Rilke's Malte finds himself uncannily confronted with his own hand while searching for a fallen pencil; the linguistic creator in Velimir Khlebnikov's experimental text *Ka* (1915) explains that there are "word hands" that can make things; in Konstantin

8 Martin Heidegger, *Parmenides*, in his *Gesamtausgabe*, section 2, vol. 54 (Frankfurt/M., 1982), 118f.

9 Elisabeth Strowick, "Lesen als *material event*. Materialität in Literatur und Literaturtheorie," in *Poetiken der Materie. Stoffe und ihre Qualitäten in der Literatur, Kunst und Philosophie*, ed. Thomas Strässle and Caroline Torra-Mattenklott (Freiburg i. Br., 2005), 77–93.

10 "Manifest Oberiu," in *Literaturnye manifesty ot simvolizma do nashikh dnei*, ed. S. B. Dzhimbinov (Moscow, 2000), 474–483, qt. 476.

Vaginov's *The Goat Song* (*Kozlinaia pesn'*, 1927), an unknown poet gratefully kisses his own crippled hand, the organic instrument of tragedy. In these and other scenes, the hand mutates from a writing implement into an eerie or sublime medium of literary inspiration. These texts deploy the hand as a *terminus medius* (Cassirer), transforming the literary work into a zone of contact, touch, action, and creation. This manual mediality of texts cannot be grasped with a "philology of the eye" (Stiegler); it requires a *philology of the hand*.

2. Hand Motions: A Manual

So what does a philology of the hand set out to do? It does not comb through texts looking for the keyword "hand"; neither does it record literary evidence of the hand as a body part or write a motif history. Rather, it follows the trace of the hand at work to conceptualize how it operates in the field of literature and the arts, how it negotiates relations to bodily life and sensory experience as an anthropological intermediary. It deals with the hand as a figure and a medial-discursive interface of both incorporation and emancipation. To systematically move away from a biologically oriented narrow focus—while also avoiding getting lost in abstractions—the following analyses are guided by a concept both metonymically and metaphorically related to the hand: the gesture. Tracing selected gestures, the next chapters consider key scenes in which the hand acts and works, forms and designs, formulates and designates. Yuri Tsivian recently introduced one of Nabokov's neologisms into scholarly discourse, using the word "carpalistics" for an aesthetical approach to and through gestures.[11] The present gestological (or carpalistic) approach places the interaction of hand and oeuvre on the threshold of physical palpability and symbolic action, thus rendering symbolic techniques and manual-material performative practices understandable in their mutual referencing. By capturing this interrelationship in motion (mostly, in the motion of the hand), the gesture accentuates its dynamic, processual character. Situated in space and

11 Iurii Tsiv'ian, *Na podstupakh k karpalistike. Dvizhenie i zhest v literature, iskusstve i kino* (Moscow, 2010).

time, gestures form flexible figures that are deictically vivid and somatically manifest—but also ephemeral, fleeting; indeed, fated to instantly disappear.

Established concepts of the gesture reach from instinctive muscle contractions to symbolically highly codified forms of expression—and thus oscillate between an organistic and a semiotic perspective, two views that cannot merge completely. However, disciplines such as biology, ethology, ethnology, psychology, linguistics, art, and theater studies offer an interliminal space between these perspectives. Here, the gesture is regarded as a designed form that has a high degree of artificiality and transformability but at the same time carries the memory of a natural, authentic, physical form. It is a stylized, socio-culturally transformable and standardizable body sign—and yet it is not altogether one of many decipherable symbolic acts. Situated between corporeality and symbolism, cultural intentionality and individual impulsiveness, the gesture merges the internal with the external.

In modernity, the multidisciplinary debate on the gesture has led to a gradual metaphorization of the term. From Darwin's studies on expression, Sittl's theories of the gesture in antiquity, Klages's "expressive motion" (*Ausdrucksbewegung*), Warburg's pathos formula, Eisenstein's cinematic gesture, and Eikhenbaum's word gesture to Mukařovský's semantic gesture—there is a multitude of gestural concepts that resist a strict typology. Still, attempts to typologize have been made. For instance, in the 1920s, the art historian Mikhail Fabrikant at the State Academy of Art Sciences (GAKhN) developed a systematic approach to gestological research that followed four strands. The first was the iconographic study of the gesture as a "permanent attribute." The second studied the affect gesture, that is, emotional expression. The third strand discussed form, distinguishing between the gesture as a way to fill space, the gesture as a contour, and the dimensionally stylized gesture in two- and three-dimensional space. Finally, the fourth strand was sociologically oriented and studied the gesture as an ideological symbol.[12] Though this system is clearly built on material from the visual arts, it can also be productive for other art forms. This applies to the dimensional dynamics of the gesture and especially to the issue of form.

12 M. I. Fabrikant, "Zhest," in *Slovar' khudozhestvennykh terminov. GAKhN. 1923–1929*, ed. I. M. Chubarov (Moscow, 2005), 156–157.

The gesture is arguably the perfect point of departure for a discussion of form as a dynamic, processual phenomen. While moving motorically, the gesture also semiotically initiates a sign motion. In an interliminal space, it forms an authentic figure of transition. And it is precisely this transitory and transfigurative aspect of the gesture that determines its well-known openness. Giorgio Agamben has described this openness as an oscillation between act and potency, between a means and an end. This intermediate state enables to grasp the mediality of the gesture: instead of communicating a clear message or producing a practical result, it "makes visible the means as such."[13] The gesture remains in limbo—beyond a stringently regulated process of transmission, no longer embedded in the kinesthetic continuum of communication—neither clearly signifying nor completely appropriable. Brian Rotman introduced the term "gesturo-haptic" for this suspension of the alphabetical body. This term marks "a mediating technology that escapes the bounds of coded signification by operating within interactive, participatory, and immersive regimes. In other words, the gesturo-haptic doesn't communicate in the accepted sense—source A sends signifying item B to a recipient C—it doesn't convey messages, send information, transmit meanings, or bear significations which exist and are determined in advance of its action."[14] Gestures here mark a motion, an action, an event, a point in time, a stage or a plane of observation on the boundary. This is true not only in regard to language, which stands in a particularly complex supplementary relationship to the gesture. In his phenomenology of gestures, Flusser also locates the gesture at the boundary to facts and artefacts that do not, at first glance, seem gestural—such as listening to music or planting—and also to the act of love, which is associated with an almost unlimited number of gestures.[15] Flusser's approach has led him to include all this in his catalogue of gestures as expressions of liberty.

The present study, too, makes a selection that breaks the narrow definition of "gesture=expressive hand motion." In addition to the gestures

13 Giorgio Agamben, "Noten zur Geste," in *Postmoderne und Politik*, ed. Jutta Georg-Lauer (Tübingen, 1992), 97–107, qt. 103.

14 Brian Rotman, *Becoming Beside Ourselves. The Alphabet, Ghosts, and the Distributed Human Being* (London, 2008), 51.

15 Vilém Flusser, *Gesten. Versuch einer Phänomenologie* (Frankfurt/M., 1994).

of speaking, writing, and showing, which are closely related to literature, it also addresses practices of working, acting, giving, and touching, thus significantly expanding the poetological definition of the gesture. These fields represent vastly different actions with diverse scripts and sceneries, which use gestures in highly heterogeneous ways. What unites them is their focus on the transformative practice and the symbolism of motion forms, which show how the hand and its handling intervene in the poetic process. They are centered around acts in which construction and meaning intertwine or diverge, opening up a multifaceted view of avant-garde *poetics* as *poiesis*.

3. Discourses: Operativity, Rhetoric, Phenomenology

In the image of the hand, the artist is represented both as *homo significans* and *homo faber*. The Aristotelian characterization of the hand as a "tool of tools" remains largely unchallenged throughout cultural history. In the late nineteenth century, philosophy of technology developed a far-reaching theory of organ projection proceeding from the "innate tool" (Kapp)—the hand. In the twenty-first century, the hand is still celebrated as the "master instrument of the Masters of the Universe." This technical grandeur is underpinned by physiological findings that praise the unique flexibility of the chiro-digital musculoskeletal system as well as by paleo-ontological and neurobiological studies that link the development of manual dexterity and the growth of brain mass. Moreover, anthropological treatises consider manual manipulation the "dominant aspect of our biological and cultural adaptation," thus classifying the hand as the number one cultural tool. Freed by the upright posture, the hand has a guiding function in modelling the human being as *animal laborans* and *animal symbolicum*. The *homo erectus* rebels against gravity, stands apart from most other animals, and rises above nature. Expressions like "being upright" and "having a backbone" draw considerable symbolic capital from this superiority pose. The upright walk is a "leitmotif in the formation of the human organism," which determines its anatomical shape from head to toe. Moreover, the position of the upright body and the upright gait establish a specific relation to the world, a mode of experiencing: "Upright we are, and we experience ourselves in this specific relation to the world. . . . Upright posture pre-establishes

a definite attitude toward the world; it is a specific mode of being-in-the-world."[16]

This mode of being is characterized by distance—not just detachment from the ground but the distancing resulting from the changed perspective, the view from above. It is here that Erwin Straus pinpoints the transition from the earth-bound necessity of touching everything (as can be observed in crawling babies) to an expanded field of remote perception, which makes the eye the primary organ and the remote sense of vision the primary sense. The development from the earth-bound grasping reflex to the distant view, from direct gripping to mediatized, indexical pointing, is a vertical motion within a horizontal space of perception.

What happens to the hand in this process of verticalization and distancing? Released from the task of carrying the body, the front extremities develop into arms and hands. "In upright posture, the hand becomes an organ of active gnostic touching—the epicritic, discriminative instrument par excellence. As such, the hand now ranks with the eye and the ear."[17] This suggests not only an innate entanglement between touch and cognition but also an epistemic hiatus: cognition does not strive for identity with the objects it grasps but neutralizes them.

The reconfiguration of the hand as an intellectual instrument and its function for the emergence of semiotic systems needs to be understood in the combination of action and meaning. Symbolic worlds are rooted in action. According to Cassirer, this origin shapes the human approach to the world—and it is clearly expressed in manual signals. Ritual practices—such as blessing, healing, administering justice, promising, vowing, protecting, conjuring, greeting, affirming, and proving—fuse body and sign in the motions and shapes of the hand. As a symbolically overdetermined body part, the hand (and its distinction between right and left) has a rich tradition in myths, legends, and superstitions. Tom Thumb and Thumbelina live on in cultural history; chopped off hands serve as fetish and remedy; itchy fingertips mean deceit; injured hands signal grief; numb phalanges prove guilt, malformed hands announce misfortune, and so on.[18]

16 Erwin W. Straus, *Phenomenological Psychology* (New York, 1966), 139.

17 Ibid., 150.

18 Lewis Dayton Burdick, *The Hand. A Survey of Facts, Legends, and Beliefs pertaining to Manual Ceremonies, Covenants, and Symbols* (Oxford, 1905 [reprint Purdue, 2002]).

In this intersection of operativity and symbolism, we can discover areas where aesthetic objects exhibit themselves as formed, manufactured, made artefacts—and where, by profiling the hand as a medium of manipulation and construction, the work of art projects itself from the aesthetic sphere into instrumental and technological ones. The fact that Greek antiquity did not distinguish between craftsmanship and the arts, combining both in the word *techné*, has been noted often enough but rarely considered in depth. In the grey area between the aesthetic and the technical, the hand leads a mostly skeptically viewed existence as an object that participates in the discourse of beauty and yet remains a foreign body in it.

In addition to these operational aspects, rhetorical discourse is addressed here: the hand can only be the "master tool" when it usurps a skill usually reserved for the mouth—when it speaks. Gestures accompany the verbal act and supplement acoustics with visual expressiveness. Moreover, the hand forms its own language, independent of the mouth. Already the ancient *actio* teachings deal with this double function of the hand gesture: translating what is being said into what is being shown vs. creating complex kinetic systems, which have no direct equivalent in spoken language. Still, both forms of the oratorical gesture, the derivative as well as the autonomous manual motion, transform the body, especially the hand, into a sign that oscillates between a seemingly primordial, natural mode of expression and a highly artificial, culturally codified one. The gesture of embodied speech renders the separation of the physical from the symbolic impossible.

Not only rhetorical declamation and sign language derive from this close coordination of hand and word. It is also the basis for a performative use of language, which unites word and deed. Moreover, it manifests itself in the deictic competence of language, which Karl Bühler defined as evoking a space of perception and experience by verbal means.[19] These possibilities show: not only can the hand accompany or substitute speech but also vice versa—language can complement and supplement the hand by creating spaces for verbal action. In the figure of the hand, language transcends the "mere" rhetoric of the word, so often perceived as empty, and leaves the world of signs for the world of things. The conceptual conjunction of word and deed involves a dimension of linguistic behavior in which

19 Karl Bühler, *Sprachtheorie. Die Darstellungsfunktion der Sprache* (Stuttgart and New York, 1982).

verbal utterances become effective in reality. Linguistics tends to limit this mode to performative speech acts. However, this kind of language use goes far beyond such speech acts as promising, marrying, vowing, and naming. It characterizes a mode of language use that turns words into agents of the body by means of the hand, thus morphing the classical *manus loquens* into a *manus agens*.

In addition to the operative and rhetorical dimensions, we must consider the hand's phenomenal function in the structure of perception and in sensorially based cognitive processes. In the history of the senses, a powerful position was almost continuously attributed to the theoretically inclined eye (as evident, for instance, in its metaphorical ennoblement as *oculus spiritualis*), while hands-on experience was given a subservient role. However, in the history of science, there is also a strong tradition of picturing the hand as an organ of powerful experience and consciousness. In this discourse, the haptic becomes a metaphor for comprehension, as in the well-worn metaphor of grasping an idea. Herder, the model philosopher of tactilism, ties his privileged treatment of the hand to the epistemic function of haptics, since the "ophthalmic human being with a thousand eyes but without feeling, without a sensing hand . . . would remain in Plato's cave all his life, without clearly conceptualizing any physical property. . . . But the more he grasps and possesses the body qua body rather than gazing at it and dreaming of it, the more alive do his senses become." He goes on to point out that the German word *Begriff* (concept) is derived from *greifen* (grasping).[20] What Herder has claimed for sculpture also holds true for the perception of less obviously three-dimensional aesthetic objects as an intrusive, sometimes painful bodily experience. After all, literature—which tends to draw heavily on the tactile metaphor of texture in all its interweavings—uses haptic experiments and physical presence to shape the act of reading into a phenomenological approach to the body of the text.

At the intersection of the three discourses, a central problem of aesthetic theory comes into the focus: the relationship between poiesis and manipulation. Through the figure of the hand, a work (of art) can be grasped as a medium of manipulation. Here, the term *manipulation* actualizes both its meanings: that of manually using, producing and manufacturing ob-

20 Johann Gottfried Herder, "Plastik. Einige Wahrnehmungen über Form und Gestalt aus Pygmalions bildendem Traum" [1778], in *Herders Werke*, ed. Hans Lambel, part 3, section 2 (Stuttgart, 1890), 273–357, qt. 279.

jects—as well as that of subtly changing, subordinating, deceiving, making subservient, objectifying, controlling, appropriating, taming, arranging and (technically) transforming. In his 1926 study "The Nature of Aesthetic Experience," George H. Mead defines the human being as a subject who must experience and generate meaning in direct physical manipulation.[21] It is the "compulsion to manipulate" that enables the essence of aesthetic experience. When one hand presses against the other, Mead writes, one feels the pressure *of* the hand as well as pressure *against* the hand; things and their tactile handling constitute the meaning and the world.

By means of manipulation, the hand offers itself for a poetics of poiesis in several ways. It figures as a tool that affects body and media control in equal measure. It mediates between the poles of artistic creation and technology, aesthetics and technics, artistry and mechanics. It creates a space in which aesthetic experience emerges in its sensory resistiveness and affective range. Tracing and working out concepts of a poetics of poiesis thus means exploring the genesis, use and form of artworks via the hand.

The readings in the present monograph explore poetologies of touch through basic procedures of "handling." In individual chapters, they examine the gestural complexes of speaking, writing, showing, working, acting, giving, and touching. Through its gestural leitmotif, each of these chapters analyses a specific poetological problem that is particularly contentious in the avant-garde and predominantly manifested in a specific gesture. Thus, the chapter on giving focuses on the question of literature's claim to life; the chapter on touching explores the literary desire for evidence between image and touch; the one on working deals with the possibilities of a poetics of practice; and the one on showing discusses the theatrical dispositive of the gesture as representation and experience.

It is to be hoped that this selection will also prevent misunderstandings: the present study neither sets out to catalogue early Soviet gestures and their iconography, nor does it provide an inventory of emblematic 1910s and 1920s gestures or a "handy" dictionary of the avant-garde. Rather, the systematics of the study are designed to negotiate central questions of poetics in the light of specific gestures. Uncovering the "invisible hand" in the

21 George Herbert Mead, "The Nature of Aesthetic Experience," *International Journal of Ethics* 36, no. 4 (1926): 382–392.

poetics of the avant-garde in every chapter, the study aims to rediscover it as an epoch of new sensing rather than new seeing.

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